



**national
healthy marriage
resource center**

NHMRC April Webinar Transcript
Research Update: Cohabitation -- What Can We Learn
From the Latest Research Findings

Moderator: Patrick Patterson

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Operator: Ladies and gentlemen thank you for standing by. Welcome to the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center April 2008 Webinar. During the presentation all participants will be in a listen only mode. As a reminder this conference is being recorded Wednesday, April 23, 2008. If at anytime during the conference you need to reach an operator, please press star 0.

It is now my pleasure to turn the conference over to Patrick Patterson, Project Manager for the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center. Please go ahead Sir.

Patrick Patterson: Thank you (Simity). Good afternoon and welcome to The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center's April Webinar entitled "Research Update - Cohabitation What Can We Learn from the Latest Research Findings". We're delighted to have two National Researchers who have been leaders in the field for some time to share with us today during this webinar.

Before we get started I'd like to introduce and have welcome from our Federal Project Officer, Ms. Michelle Clune. Michelle?

(Michelle Clune): Thank you Patrick. This is Michelle Clune as Patrick said. Welcome to everybody that's on the line and we hope that these research findings from our two scholars will prove to be useful to you in to you and you're day-to-day activities with your participants as you serve them with marriage education. So I'll turn it back to you Patrick.

Patrick Patterson: Thanks Michelle. One of the things that we have tried to make sure we did at the end of last calendar year in December, we did a national survey based on last years webinar series and asked folks, what kind of things would you like to hear during our fiscal year 2008 series? And resounding we heard from grantees, programs, those are just community leaders (unintelligible) the marriage they want more cutting edge research. And so we're feeding you what you've asked to be fed.

So again, I'm really delighted to have two of the national scholars in the field that will be sharing with us today. Our presenters for today are, Dr. Wendy Manning, Professor of Sociology at Boulder State University, Director for the Center and Family of Demographic Research and Co-Director of the National Center for Marriage Research.

Our second presenter is Dr. Scott Stanley, Research Professor and Co-Director of The Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver. Again, we're delighted to have them with us today. I look forward to a very rich webinar today.

A few housekeeping notes for those of you that are on the line. If you're like me, I'm a person that when I'm in a classroom or in a training, I take notes pretty much throughout the entire time. For those purposes, for those that are writing, you may want to relax if you want to; we are actually recording today's webinar. As a follow-up to today's webinar, we're going to post all of the materials that you'll see are (virtually) during this presentation and then secondly the recording of today's webinar will be posted on the resource center Web site. If you have or have not been there our Web site address is www.healthymarriageinfo.com, i-n-f-o-o-r-g. So everything that you'll see today will be posted on our Web site seven to nine business days after today's webinar.

A final resource that we'll give you guys after today's webinar will be an FAQ, Frequently Asked Questions. During the webinar today you'll be able to ask questions. We're going to try to answer as many as we can and for those who were not able to alone with those that are fairly common that are included on FAQ, they'll be posted on the Web site as well.

So regarding questions, one of the things we've decided about using webinars it's very cost effective and its new technology. You're able to actually ask questions during the webinar and so for a brief 101 on asking questions using the webinar technology, I'd like to turn it over to my colleague Stephanie Wofford. Stephanie?

Stephanie Wofford:

Thank you Patrick. If I could direct everyone's attention to the slide on the screen currently. If you at anytime during the presentation if you would like to ask a question, please type your question in the question box being highlighted here, and next to it is an ask button by the yellow arrow, click that ask. At that time you will receive an automated reply that thanks you for your question and lets you know that it has been forwarded to facilitator. This frees up your console so that you can ask another question if you so choose. And we do encourage you to ask questions throughout the presentation. Thank you Patrick.

Patrick Patterson:

Thanks Stephanie. We do encourage that throughout. So don't feel anyway reluctant to ask questions while they're presenting. Once each presenter concludes their presentation I'm going to facilitate a specific Q & A based on the previous presentation. At the end of both presentations, I'll do a general Q & A where we'll try to answer as many of the questions that were submitted via the webinar technology. We talked about that, if you have questions you can also send them to Stephanie regarding submitting a question if you have those at all.

Our webinar has three objectives. We try to make sure that we're specific of what we want to give you guys today so there's three fold objectives here today. By the end of this webinar we're hopeful that webinar participants will better understand the current findings from that have emerged from cohabitation research, this is on a National basis, implications for cohabitation research for marriage education programming and finally the complex relationship between cohabitation and marital and child well being helping them to avoid, and I say them meaning webinar participants, mis-interpreting these findings when sharing them with the public.

So, to not delay any further, I want to introduce you to our first presenter, Dr. Wendy Manning. She is again a Professor of Sociology at Bowling Green State University, Director of the Center for Marriage and Family and Demographic Research and Co-Director of the National Center for Marriage Research. She's a family demographer - demographer, excuse me and her research focuses on relationship among adolescents as well as adults. Her work examines the pathways to family formation, specifically child wellbeing and marriage (unintelligible) among cohabiters. She's analyzing a longitudinal data collection as teens as they move into young adulthood and recently collected qualitative data from dating, cohabiting and married couples.

With that, I am privileged to turn it over to Dr. Wendy Manning.

Wendy Manning:

Well thank you for the kind introduction and good afternoon everybody. I'm just going to begin by sharing with you some basic levels and trends in marriage and cohabita-

tion and I look forward to questions at the end that you all will be having an opportunity to include. So I want to encourage you and invite you to ask questions.

So just to begin, there's been and you're probably all aware, there's an increase in the average age, the median age of first marriage in the United States. The blue line is for men and the pink line is for women. And what you can see from that is we're at a historic high point in the age at first marriage and even though most Americans eventually get married, what's happening is they're getting married at older and older ages.

And what happens then is that there's more time in early adult hood for these other kinds of unions such as cohabitation and if the age of marriage was quite young, like it was in 1950's, where it was about age 20, we probably would have much lower levels of cohabitation. So this has permitted an increase of cohabitation because we have more sort - we call it life course space for it to occur. And so there's lots of opportunities for young adults to start and end a series of relationships before they actually move into marriage.

At the same time, there's been an increase of the age at motherhood. And one of the reasons that people are interested in cohabitation and marriage is thinking about child bearing outside of marriage. And so I wanted to include this overhead just to showcase that the age of marriage has increased so the age at having a child and the first birth has increased and also these are quite high levels and I think the average age at first birth is approaching 25 in the United States. So people are on average the (unintelligible) range being on motherhood and the same time the (unintelligible) age on cohabitation. And we'll talk a little bit about family formation in cohabitation but for now, I'll just save that for later.

Something I wanted to share with you is even that most Americans get married eventually and its that - you can tell that by interviewing folks to our at older ages and you can look at the proportion who've ever been married but at any one given point and time about half the popu - about half the adults in the United States are married. And you can see that there's an a fairly since the last, you know, sixteen years at 59, 56, 55 percent so there is a decline from the 1950's and 60's but that's also when we had a really young age at first marriage. So you can see that about half - half of adults are married.

And I thought this group might be interested in this map. I don't know if you want to look at the particular area in which you live, but just this is something the Census Bureau produces that shows you where married couples are living and I think this - this is interesting for a few reasons. Just that there is some geographic basis to marriage so people are very interested in that but also, that there is - there could be something about a social context for marriage and that some communities where they have high marriage rates there might be different expectations or patterns of marriage then communities where there's lower marriage rates. So this sort of is something we can talk about in Q & A if it comes up.

So I've talked a little bit about marriage but - what we have seen and why we have this webinar today is really that there's really been an increase and growth in cohabitation. And some of the latest national statistics indicate that there's over five million cohabiter - cohabiting couple households in the United States. And you can

see that that's the line on top, there's been a steady growth since 1980. And about 40% involve children. That doesn't necessarily mean they're the biological children are the result of that union but these include children living in that household. And again I'll come to that point a little bit later but just - that there's just been this overall increase in cohabitation and so there lot of research has been trying to focus on what this actually means and how does this fit into the American family system, how does cohabitation fit into the American family system.

And something - just another way demog - I'm a demographer and we love to show the same kind of ideas several different ways so in case the last slide didn't resonate with you this one is just saying if you just look at women who are 35 to 39 in the United States and you ask, have you ever lived with somebody, you can see that in 2002 3/5 or 61% of women have lived with somebody. If you ask that same question in 1988, or about 14 years ago only half that level, only 30% of women had said they had ever lived together. So its just further evidence that shows you that there's an increase in the proportion of the population who have spent some time in cohabiting unions.

And again just to help visualize this and that you know that its not uniform so I think some people think this occurs the same across entire United States that this is another map that's produced by the Census Bureau that showcases by county what is the level of unmarried partner households or cohabitation in the US. And you can see the places with the more - the more blue, the higher the level so you can see there's some places out in California, the West Coast and some in Maine, the Northeast and then some there in the Southeast where we have - you see a lot of blue and what's interesting in Florida those blue is some elderly - some cohabitation among the elderly which is actually a growing family pattern. I'm not going to talk about that today but you can see - see these, there are differences and that could have a lot to do with social policy, it could have a lot to do with norms and attitudes about cohabitation.

So something that I've done a fair amount of research is trying to understand this question about why live together. And we're looking at transitions in to cohabitation. And one of the things that my colleague (Pam Smock) and I found in some recent qualitative research is that cohabitation is not always a deliberate decision. That often we are thinking about it as a slide into cohabitation or a gradual entry into cohabitation and there's evidence of this because as you all know unlike marriage, you don't have to apply for a license, there's not a special event, you don't have a wedding, there's not legal status associated with cohabitation and so often people sort of end up cohabiting. And I think this is what Dr. Stanley is going to talk a lot about is thinking about what are some of the implications of that in terms of later marital stability and transitions out of cohabitation.

But generally just something to keep in mind is that what many people decide to cohabit and sometimes what might seem as sort of a hap-hazard way, sometimes they just start spending a couple nights and they end up living there, sometimes its just sort of a last minute decision - I needed to move out and I wasn't sure where to go so I just went to my girlfriends house - and so it's often a gradual - a gradual decision. And that could have implications for who cohabits and some of the reasons why and what are the implications for child and adult well-being.

Patrick Patterson:

Wendy?

Wendy Manning: Yes.

Patrick Patterson: I'm sorry, this is Patrick. I just want to make a quick announcement. We've had a few emails and questions submitted via the webinar, folks who have had challenges logging on the webinar.

Wendy Manning: Oh, okay.

Patrick Patterson: And so I just want to announce that we are resending - we just resent a live link to the entire (unintelligible) and so for those of you that are hearing us, you can now go to your computers and log on and should be able to join us. If you have any other issues please continue to submit those questions via the webinar. Thanks, sorry about that Wendy.

Wendy Manning: Oh, I'm sorry. So welcome to people who are just joining.

Patrick Patterson: Yeah.

Wendy Manning: So, I'm just talking about some of the - how people get into cohabitation. And sometimes when you think about this you have to think about in contrast to what. So this is something we've discovered in our researches. You can't just say well why cohabit, you want - you have to think about what - what's your other option. So why would you live together rather than remaining single. And so we asked people directly these kinds of questions and these are all things that kind of - you know, that you might all know from your own experience and working - working with healthy marriage programs but just so you can see a more general sense of some of the answers are that people really want to live together because they want to spend more time together.

Sometimes it's a way of saving money so they can pool their income, they can save money on rent if they're going to spend all their time together anyway. A lot of people refer to this taking the relationship to the next level and sometimes they're not always 100% sure what the next level is but I think it's a way of sort of solidifying the relationship showing a higher level of commitment. Some people view - they decide they want to live together as its just part of the pathway to marriage. Is that they want to move in together so that they can - its just part of the road to marriage.

And that's a more common cap in the marriage is actually through cohabitation and then some people, one of the partner is pregnant, the woman is pregnant and they might say that well this is why I want to live together so we can be a two parent family and I can help raise my child and so they're stepping up and taking responsibility for their family. And so those are some reasons why people say they want to live together rather than remain single and just dating or having some other kind of relationship.

And then we asked young adults why wouldn't you want to cohabit rather than just staying single. You know, why not cohabit? And some people just said they weren't ready in there - in there - the relationship just wasn't at that point yet where they were ready to make that kind of commitment by sharing a residence. Some people couldn't afford that and these are often people who are living with their parents or other relatives as they need a certain amount of money to get an apartment and they just don't have that and so they can't - they would like to cohabit but they have economic barriers to it.

Some people have religious reasons or what I'm also referring to is social networks so sometimes there were family members who disapproved of cohabitation or there were religious reasons where their religion did not support cohabitation outside - cohabitation outside of marriage just because it would indicate there were sexual relationships outside of marriage and so they felt - and then some people just had very clear vision that they wanted to not live together and they want to move directly into marriage. And then other folks were just not sure they wanted to be that inter-dependent. They want to maintain their independence and they didn't want to become enmeshed in someone else's life that much. Especially sometimes if there were children involved and also sometimes if there were financial - financial issues.

And then the other side of the question is well why not just get married so why even - and so when you think about well what's the other comparison group. You're dating somebody, I could stay single or I could get married or I could live together. And so we wanted to consider that other option of well - well why not just go right into marriage. Why even - why cohabit. And this first provides some reasons about why not cohab - cohabit. Some people didn't want to because they have children, they just wanted to - they wanted to move right into marriage and have make sure that their children were born and raised in a married two biological family.

Similarly in terms of social network that their families would not support their decisions to cohabit and also religious beliefs. So those are some of the same reasons we heard in terms of not cohabiting versus remaining single and then in terms of why would you cohabit, why not just move right into marriage? And a common idea that people say is that they want to ensure they're compatible for marriage. They want to test out the relationship and so in a sense they feel like they're being savvy and making decisions about their relationship, making sure everything will be - that the relationship is on steady ground before they move into marriage. Some people don't want to move right into marriage because they're not sure about their commitment and they just want to - they've taken their relationship to the next level but its not that level of marriage yet and so they don't have that level of commitment and so they're some - somewhat uncertain about that.

Some people talk about an economic bar so that they don't have the resources yet to get married and so sometimes folks will talk about wanting a certain amount of money to have a cert - a particular type of wedding. They want to have - make sure they have a house, they want to make sure their finances are in order before they get married so that is a common reason why people will say they want to cohabit rather than marry. And also related to this is sometimes timing issues related to jobs and school. And so some people wanted to wait until they were done with their education and this could mean a two year community college degree as well as higher levels of education.

And then the final reason that I thought - that sort of emerged out of the qualitative data that I think is kind of new is just thinking about ways to avoid divorce. And I think Dr. Stanley is going to talk about this in more detail about what actually happens but from the cohabiter's perspective, they feel that by living together they might avoiding divorce. That they might be able to weed out the poor marriage prospects and make better decisions about marriage. And another thing is this is a generation - young adults today are a generation who grew up with some of the highest divorce rates in American history. And so they have lived or seen their friends and family live through

divorce and they know they don't want to - they don't want to do that. And so for some sort of fear of divorce, if I never get married then I don't have to worry about getting divorced and so I think that - that's a reason we're hearing a lot.

What we do see is that most people who are cohabiting actually expect to marry so about 3/4 of those men and women have - have a very positive views of their future together. Half of each group are very certain they're going to marry. Other research has shown these expectations are not always achieved and sometimes one partner expects to marry and the other one doesn't expect to marry and you can imagine that those are the couples that actually don't end up getting married. But I think that most cohabiters have some sense that they're going - they're going to move - move into marriage and cohabitation really is the most common pathway in a marriage now.

And this graph is just showing you what we call marriage cohorts which are really just different years where people got married. So if you look on the far left among people who got married between 1965 and 1974, 11% lived together before they got married. If you look at the far right, among more recent marriages, we see that 65% or 2/3 of married men and women have cohabited before they actually got married. So you can see there's been a dramatic change there and that cohabitation really is the typical way that people enter marriage.

And so what's becoming an interesting research question is who doesn't cohabit? Who doesn't follow this pathway - pathway into marriage? And because we've seen this growth that the people that decide to live together are actually more diverse than they used to be and it's harder to classify or understand them, so we need to think about differences among that group of people who are living together based on their socioeconomic status, based on their expectations for marriage, based on their fertility - fertility patterns and how many children they have.

Something else that I wanted just to point out to this group is that most people who marry have only lived with one person so there's a - in the field people are talking about serial cohabitation - and people who live with many, many people before they get married. And among recently married women I was just telling you that most - most have spent some time living together and you can see that half have lived with one person, 12% with two or more.

And so that's really - it's not the proportion who have - the proportion of young adults who have many cohabiting partners before they get married is pretty small and we estimated some similar statistics looking at single women and we saw some of these are quite young and they haven't lived together but I think what might be happening is were going to see more people in the future are going to have more cohabiting unions before they move into marriage, or if they even move into marriage but were - we see that among the single women among those who actually have lived together that one or two or more but 1/4 have lived with - have had serial cohabitation.

So I just think that might be something we're trending towards and something to think about when - when trying to counsel people about transitions - transitions into marriage and considering what their relationship histories are.

Now when people enter cohabitation then they have a couple ways in which cohabitations can end. So they can stay cohabiting, they can break up or they can marry.

And some of these categories aren't as clear as they sound. So there's some people who stay together but they break up and they get back together and so some of - and they're some people who separate but actually they're going to get back together eventually. So sometimes these categories are a little bit fuzzy.

But based on some of our best estimates, these are the proportion who end up in these different categories after living together for five years. So after five years 14% have - are still together. So those are stable cohabiters. Thirty seven per - 37 broke up so they moved on, they ended the relationship and about half have moved into marriage. And what we've seen over time is there's been a decline in the proportion of cohabitation that end up - that lead to marriage. And but still about - still about half - half move into marriage.

And I put under there are just some reasons and some of our research about why people say they change - they change statuses so some folks who stay cohabiting for these long periods of time, they just think cohabitation is the same as marriage. Those are the people who say, marriage is just a piece of paper. Some people are still trying to finish school or whatever they think they need to do before they're ready for marriage and some people still say they're testing out the relationship. And the longer they live together the odds of actually moving into marriage are probably pretty - pretty low.

In terms of separation a big issue are issues related to fidelity and trust and then in terms of why people move into marriage often there's economic factors that they feel like they're ready to get married, they have achieved whatever level of income or education they think is appropriate for marriage, they decided they want to raise their children in marriage and also they feel psychologically ready. So when I have that under maturity, they've decided to maybe stop a party lifestyle and follow a more traditional life course and they might have completed everything they think they need to do in the early - the early years.

I need to probably speed up a little bit here. Cohabitation increasingly includes, children in 1982 only about 30% had children present and in recent years we have about half of children present and some recent data indicates that about 2/5 or 40% of children in the United States are expected - are expected to live with cohabiting parents by the age of 16.

So this has become a family context in which children are raised and spend time. They often don't spend long periods of time in cohabiting relationships, those - they're either break up with that partner or they actually move to a more stable relationship through marriage but still a large proportion of children are going to spend time with cohabiting parents.

This overhead is just showing you the increase of and the percentage of births to unmarried women so I think we have close to 40% in 2005 as opposed to only about 5% of children were born to unmarried mothers but the point I want to make in this next overhead is that a large portion of the children born to unmarried mothers are actually born to cohabiting parents. So when we talk about oh children are born to single mothers some of those are cohabiting parents and actually those are two biological parent families.

And so just to think about a little bit more of what we're thinking about when we talk about unwed motherhood in some cases we're thinking about a family form which is two biological parents. And most of the increase that's occurred in unwed or births outside of marriage are due to increases in verse in cohabit - in cohabiting unions.

And just when we think about children's experience in cohabiting parent families something I like to point out is that there's two biological cohabiting parent families so there being raised by two parents. There's also cohabiting step parent families and these are families in which the children are living typically with the mother and the mother's cohabiting partner. And about equal numbers of children reside in these types of cohabiting parent families. So we just like we have two biological married parent families and married step families we have the similar parallel nature of cohabiting families. And implications for children and adults probably depend on whether their biological or step parent families.

And I think, I'm almost to the end here. When we try to understand the wellbeing of children in cohabiting parent families we focus on one issue we're concerned about is the stability of cohabiting parent families and some recent analysis we found that among those children that were born to married parents about 11% break up within three years. Among children who are born to cohabiting parents about half had broken up by three years - by age three.

So children born to different kinds of families are going to experience different levels in stability and some of reasons why are the cohabiting parents have lower economic status so they might have more stress about money and financial issues, they have lower levels of education, cohabiting parents have lower levels of family support, there's research that indicates that the relationship quality is lower and also cohabiting parents bring to the more complex family arrangement. So they're more likely to have children from prior partners that that then can create some stress in their new relationships.

And then when we think about the well-being of children based on family structure the research indicates that children residing outside of two biological married parent families that have lower levels of - generally have lower levels of well-being. Those children in married step families usually seem to fair similarly to those in single mother families.

In the literature about cohabiting families is a little less clear. If you compare them to those of single mothers or you compare them to married step families in most cases they're similar and some cases say fairer - they fair worst and so when we try to understand the influence of family structure we need to realize that they're - we talking about different kinds of families and there's a fair amount of complexity when trying to understand cohabiting parent families just as there is when we're trying to understand married couple families.

And I think that's my last slide. So thank you.

Patrick Patterson:

Thank you Wendy. It was a great presentation. I know we had a number of comments and questions that came in.

Wendy Manning:

Okay.

Patrick Patterson: Before we introduce Scott, I want to try to give you at least three or four of those maybe of few of those questions but before I did that we did have a chance to troubleshoot the log-in information or ...

Wendy Manning: Oh, good.

Patrick Patterson: I wanted to ask Stephanie Wofford if she would give folks guidance around what they should do to log on quicker.

Stephanie Wofford: For those on the phones we have not yet received your list or message announcing the new link. Your old link will work if you click on it and when your browser window opens remove one of the W's. There was an extra W so instead of www. for the address, there were four W's. If you just remove one of the W's you should be able to link right in.

Thank you Patrick.

Patrick Patterson: Thanks Stephanie. We apologize for any inconvenience. Technology is great, especially when it works. So thanks again.

Wendy, I'm going to field a few questions for you and then we'll turn it over to Scott.

Wendy Manning: Okay.

Patrick Patterson: One of the first questions that came in a couple different ways, was how large were your (unintelligible) and then how many folks did you interview during your research?

Wendy Manning: Okay, so the different - I tried to summarize a lot of different research projects at the same time so but if someone - if the question is really about some of the work on the transitions and the cohabitation for that study that was based on qualitated interviews that lasted on average of about 90 minutes and we interviewed 115 respondents.

And I think certainly - I would - and I have successfully got some additional questions on some larger surveys so I recognize that there could be some (samlifised) issues. Some of the other statistics that were reported such as expectations to marriage, that's based on thousands of respondents so it just depends on the qualitative rather than the quantitative studies I used.

Patrick Patterson: That's great. Is this research the things that you shared during your presentation are they available any place or should folks just (unintelligible).

Wendy Manning: Yeah, I think a lot of it is available. Some of the work about transitions into cohabitation is available in the Journal of Marriage and Family and I think if you googled my name and Journal of Marriage and Family some of those articles would appear. They're also - I work at the Center for Family and Demographic Research and we have - if you just google Center for Family and Demographic Research, we have a series of working papers and a lot of these ideas and findings are presented in working papers and actually there might be other papers on there that this audience would be interested in.

Patrick Patterson: Wow, that's great. Were there - based on the research that you guys conducted,

were there any indications that cohabiters want to be treated as married couples versus individuals? Was there a preference based on your research?

Wendy Manning:

Well, something that we did find is that some couples with children felt especially as their children got older they felt some pressure to get married largely because of their interactions with the school so I think some folks with younger children might not necessarily feel pressure to get married in the same way as when they faced some of these social institutions like schools and then they felt like their children maybe older and asking questions about why they weren't married and asking questions about - and interacting with teachers or other parents and so I think in that context that - and with sometimes children step - cohabiting step families sometimes the partner who wasn't the biological parent wanted marriage because that would help give them some stronger basis in the family and allow them a little more leverage in terms of maybe disciplining the children or a little more leverage in terms of interacting with social institutions too so they could more easily define the relationship with their child specifically - and - I'm not sure that answers the question but that's the path I went down.

Patrick Patterson:

One last question before we turn it over to Scott, for folks who are doing healthy marriage working with couples trying to help folks strengthen their relationship, marriage, engagement or otherwise, this might not seem to be the most promising news on a trend with cohabiters, is there any good news to take away from this regarding - what is the good news that folks should take away from at least the facts that we just heard?

Wendy Manning: I think that - I think that people generally that are involved in healthy marriage programs are also thinking more broadly about healthy relationships and so I think one thing is to just help - I think there might be a group of people, people who are cohabiters are really those who are really closest to marriage as opposed to just couple who are dating somebody on and off and that they have a lot of them have high expectations to get married. And I think just helping them work on their relationship will then maybe naturally allow them to move into marriage.

I mean, some of the barriers are things that programs can't really overcome such as issues related to jobs and economic issues but certainly in some of the other work I've done in helping evaluate some healthy relationship programs, was there was a lot to be gained in terms of communication skills and I think in my work those are really important in terms of any kind of relationship and that maybe with some extra care these couples would feel comfortable moving into marriage as long as they had - but also some cohabiting couples we saw, they didn't know a lot of people that had healthy relationships or marriages around them and so I think that's another venue where I think these programs are really helpful.

It's not to say it's not - all relation - all relationships are kind of difficult and challenging even marriages but you can work them and so I think creating - exposing people to some different kinds of healthy relationships and they might not have grown up - they might not have grown up in an environment where they've seen those so I think that can be very powerful too.

Patrick Patterson:

That is a bit of good news to take away.

Wendy Manning: Yeah. Try and have a (little fun time) here.

Patrick Patterson: Yeah, well I think it's - it's pretty revealing when we think about, you know, what was forty years ago and what is today regarding relationships so this is, I think, all very fascinating and I know that there's some application at programs and if not, they're funded - if they're not funded programs can take away in terms on how they would approach the whole healthy marriage relationship engagement process, so...

Thanks Wendy, we'll be back to you at the end of the last presentation to have a general Q & A so I just want to say thank you again for that.

Our second presenter is Dr. Scott Stanley. Dr. Stanley is a Research Professor and Co-Director of the Center of Marriage and Family Studies at the University of Denver. He's published widely in terms of journals, medicals and book chapters for the research interest including commitment, communication, conflict, confidence, risk factors for divorce, the prevention of marital distress and couple development including numerous studies on the subject of cohabitation. Dr. Stanley, (Dr. Rhodes and Dr. Markman) are currently conducting a large sample longitudinal study on cohabitation and couple development funded by NICHD another study funded by NICHD are relationship and marriage education outcome.

We are again delighted to have Dr. Stanley present and with that I'll turn it over to Dr. Stanley.

Scott Stanley: Thank you very much Patrick. The first panel up here is a little commercial for NICHD which funds a lot of the research that I and Dr. Manning do and in fact we increasingly talk about the (unintelligible) and (unintelligible) work. And a little later in this presentation you'll see a really nice place where her work with (Pam Smock) and our work has interstructed and is pretty cool. We like to think (kinda way).

What I'm going to focus on, Wendy has really focused on the - the patterns and the trends of cohabitation and issues related to the demographics of it in the country, I'm going to focus in on what we have really looked at most and what we do is called the cohabitation effect. And the cohabitation effect is this paradoxical finding that is reg - regularly found that those who live together prior to marriage are generally at greater risk for marital break up and lower marital quality.

I said paradoxical because its so much not what people think about the way that it would work or the way that it should work, and in fact, you know, generally survey's show at this point that the number one thing that young people seem to believe most is going to help them with their anxieties about the odds of marriage failing is to live together first. Yet no study has actually shown a lower risk to living together before marriage and most all studies in this area show associated high risk.

And occasionally that pops along that doesn't get the effect but even in recent samples as I'll describe a little bit that we and others have been doing the effect with and - what we try to do from a more psychological perspective is kind of explain what's going on in the guts of these relationships and how these things work. And if there's - if there's an increased risk what kinds of things is it due to or might it be due to and which of those things matter in terms of how we might try to help couples.

I want to give a caveat at the start and just to say that even though there's so many published studies on this now, (gravitation) in general and trends and also this cohabitation effect in terms of risk, there's still plenty we don't know because even when you have a lot of studies with lots of large samples that doesn't mean we've done all the work that could be done to identify different groups and is it true for this group or this group in terms of income, region, race, culture, you know, all these kinds of differences could vary the level of risk.

But what I'm going to try to present as sort of a generalized risk model of why we think a certain kind of cohabitation in particular are like whether it be especially risky adults and children regardless of the background, again, though that part remains to be demonstrated.

So just a - I'm not going to belabor this point because I actually want to get much more onto some thoughts about how to explain these things but just to give a brief highlight of the kind of findings we see. The - in many different studies over several decades now cohabitation prior to marriage is associated with more negative communication in marriage, lower levels of satisfaction in marriage, higher perceived marital instability meaning divorce, greater likelihood of marital aggression and there I really mean that the couple that have lived together prior to marriage are a little more likely in marriage to report having incidence of, you know, pushing, shoving, slapping which there are a lot of different complexity and different models of marital aggression at this point so we won't really go down that path at this time at this presentation.

But we just see that in terms of what we're measuring here and what we've done and what we think others have done its just part and parcel of just the lower quality of marriage that's associated with cohabitation.

Lower level of men's commitment to their spouse and I'm going to really key in on that because that's an area that's sparked a lot of thought in our group and as I said -- that's sort of on there twice greater likelihood of divorce -- oh, so the third bullet is greater perceived likelihood that they're going to break up in the future and know it's full of (bears) about actual greater likelihood (unintelligible).

This effect has recently in a study it was recently published, I can't pronounce the name but in a study recently published in the JMF, Journal of Marriage and Family a year and a half ago, the success was also a sort of a pretty robust analysis and large data sets in second marriages as well as first, which actually even surprised me a little bit, that nobody really studied that very clearly at this point. So on to the really kind of question, if this risk is thin for it is so routinely found what explains it? And the key kind of argument in the field among social scientists and I say argument it's really more of a discussion point although at times it becomes some level of argument, is sort of what's causal, is cohabitation actually adding to the risk for anybody and that's really in this panel you see here that's what we mean by experience.

So is the experience of cohabiting or going down that path somehow making a given couple more at risk in some way or is it all what we would call in social science a matter of selection effects. And what selection effects are differences that already exist for a given group that explain why that - why something else tend to be true to that group later that may have little to do with the actual, in this case, experience at

cohabitation. So for example, we've known for a long time that people that are less likely to cohabit are -- let me say this differently -- historically the people are more likely to cohabit are less traditional in their beliefs and values about marriage and (less religious).

And those things in turn would make it more likely that somebody might reach for divorce a little sooner when they're struggling in their marriage and so those of selection effect who believed to really explain all of this risk from living together prior to marriage.

Wendy said something very important a little bit ago that - that as its become more normative - more normal for people to cohabit prior to marriage in some ways its - it puts now to where its become more reasonable to talk about the - the people that aren't cohabiting are sort of the unusual group now and in from what we see generally speaking at this point if you find people strongly not wanting to cohabit prior to marriage you'll generally find these people that are more traditionally religious at this point.

So here's a key point that we would make. This issue about selection effects is very complicated and it's even more complicated when you look across different disciplines. So I was just reading a paper by an economist that's doing analysis on these and different researchers in different traditions in research will look at different sort of selection factors and so there's a lot to be sort of unpacked there.

But a point that I and my colleague (Galena Rhodes) regularly make and some other colleagues in the field is that there's a number of really good studies out there now who in various ways control for selection effects and you still get the risks associated with living together prior to marriage. Now there is some other studies historically that show that once you account for the selection factor statistically you get rid of this risk and that sort of suggests that the risk is just related to selection that only explains the cohabitation. But we think its not worthy there's plenty of pretty good studies out now that show it's pretty hard to make this risk model or risk pattern go away just by accounting for the selection factors.

So let's talk - what I have for the rest of the time if experience is part of what's increasing the risk so if there is some sort of causal quasi causal kind of element of living together prior to marriage, you know, what is the candidates for what that could be because that would be some of the action and points for preventative work or relationship education work that of course many of you are all doing, and one of the findings that's been fairly clear by a couple of - there's a couple of different publications, both by a researcher named (Axen) and with different colleagues that living together prior to marriage is associated with the erosion of positive views of marriage and child rearing.

So what (Axen) and the colleagues find is that the sort of the more people live together prior to marriage in terms of either duration or with more partners you see as over the course of time within those samples an eroding in the belief that marriage is special or that child rearing and child - raising children is a particularly valuable thing to do in life. So (Axen) would say that one of the things that's going on experientially is that some of the values and attitudes that tend to be supportive of marriages making it and of raising children together actually seem to get eroded by the experience

of cohabiting.

And there are other studies that show that those values and attitudes tend to be fairly reliably associated with increased odds of marital success.

Now what we focus on and this is - I'm going to focus on the rest of our talk, the big studies that we're doing now, funded by NICHD, is really a long term longitudinal sample of people that are either cohabitating or right around the time in life that people start to cohabit what we're really interested in following them over a period of time and seeing what's happened.

So we've recruited 1,500 people now that we plan to follow for as long as possible and we're right at this time in life within the age of 18 to 34 in serious relationships, some of them living together already, some are not and we're really interested in watching them over time. And what we're focused on and it'll probably become more focused on than the subject of cohabitation per se is the whole issue of how people make important transitions in relationships.

So I'm going to come back to that and I want to give a little foundation for this in terms of a psychological perspective on how commitment develops because that'll allow me to describe how certain kinds of things might be pretty important in terms of how these people make these transitions.

Basically, if you think about any couple that's been together for a while and wants to be together somehow they met and - and maybe with the internet these days people can be together and kind of never meet but, you know, most of the couples we're all talking about have met and they like each other and that's still a pretty mysterious, you know, box to explain in the circle there on my drawing, in terms of what researchers could understand about the mix of attraction but what tends to happen and what we most all of us can remember this or can relate to it.

And some people listening to this may be right in the mist of this right now in terms of your life is you get to a certain place in a relationship where you really have an attachment to this person and then you start to get anxious about something and this is a very - this is not normal attachment and you value it as no I'm not normal, it's not abnormal attachment anxiety like a developmental psychologist would talk about a child's developing - it's a normal developmental anxiety that's happening in a relationship that comes from the question do you want to stay with me. Will you be with me, I'm really attached to you, will you be with me?

And in this way of thinking, any kinds of commitment you could think about developed to really secure the attachment. As if - there all - they're ways and marriage is a preeminent symbol of this - but there ways that two people kind of negotiate an agreement that you can calm down about me and I can calm down about you and we're planning to be together. Now in contrast to this sort of really clear formation of a commitment that's historically culminated in a marital commitment for many couples, I think it's arguable now that we live in a time where there's much more increased attachment and security of this adult romantic attachment and security attachment.

I'm talking about now, because there's more people than ever before that have experienced the break up of their family whether that's from divorce or if there parents

never coming together in the first place or whatever, people are much more rattled now that instability and the likelihood that a relationship is not working out and I think the confluence here is what's happened is that we have this increased insecurity about relationships but we also have an increased sort of sense of maybe I do kind of commitment and relationships instead of really clearly formed an identified commitment between two partners.

Now a concept that's very important on our team and I want to explain the history of it and then get down to the nitty gritty for the implications of this is what I call inertia and I cancelled this idea in '96 looking at some data that we finally got published in 2004 but the basic idea - inertia in physics is the idea that it takes a certain amount of energy to move an object from where it is now either at rest or if it's moving it takes a certain amount of energy to ex - get it to move a different direction than the direction it's already moving in.

So that's the idea of inertia and I want to explain briefly where this idea came from and then I (Galena and Howard) and colleagues have been doing with it, because I think that's where again where some of the implications might be related to the relationship education. If you don't like looking at data or graphs, I'll tell you what this says. But this is a signing that we had back in the mid 90's from a nationwide random phone survey and one of things we do - we did and a number of things with this data - but here looking at people who had been married I think under 10 year or 5 years I forget what, which looking at whether or not they said they cohabited prior to marriage or not and looking at the level of dedication commitment between the partners so how devoted, how into you am I, how dedicated to you am I, how dedicated am I to you want a future with you, willing to sacrifice for you, that's what I mean by dedication commitment and I'll just refer to that as commitment now for the rest of my time.

And what - what this pattern shows here this is one of my - my measures of dedication commitments so don't worry about the scaling so much but this is what we call a pretty big effects (guide) so there's a pretty big difference - the difference between the women there who cohabited or didn't cohabit is not specifically significant particularly on a much, much larger (standpoint) that it likely would be but and then it would be interesting to explain but the difference I really want to key in on here is the difference between the two males.

And what of the male groups. The men in a relationship or the men who have cohabited with their wives prior to marriage even into marriage now, were (unintelligible) to say were significantly less committed to their wives than men who hadn't committed with their wives prior to marriage. So this changed - I thought a lot about this.

Well what could explain this, what could possibly account for this and I had this idea that I think that some of these guys in their relationships where they cohabited who never were dedicated to their wives and the other guys were and they ended up marrying them because they were living together. The basic idea being and it comes from a lot of theoretical work that I and others have done in the area of commitment, that another very important type of commitment is what we call constraint commitment.

And constraint is the kind of commitment that can keep somebody together one they

may not want to stay together. They may want to stay together, they may not want to stay together but constraints are can keep you on a path that you committed to at some point or you've gotten on just because it's more costly to leave.

So the insight of this inertia idea was essentially this, it's harder to break up when you're living together than if you just stayed (single). Which you see, very precise about a point that doesn't change the point that cohabiting relationships are more likely to - are pretty likely to break up and they're more likely to break up than marriage as Wendy showed, but they're also harder to break up than dating relationships because people start to buy things, they're sort of getting rootedness, my stuffs here, maybe our names on a lease together or our growing the constraint now for a lot of these couples are having a child together as Wendy showed is increasingly common.

So think about this idea because what it says is there might be a subgroup of people who cohabit prior to marriage. Not everybody who cohabits prior to marriage, but there may be a group in there where if they hadn't been cohabiting they may have never actually married. That the inertia of cohabiting and the growing constraints may have actually added to their livelihood of staying together is for reasons that didn't have as much to do with a sort of freely formed decision to choose this person for life when I still have all my options to choose.

Now if you think about that inertia predicts a number of interesting things and one of them is very straightforward and it's this. If I'm already really sure about you and wanting to be married to you and you're sure about me and we've clarified this in terms of the future, at the time we start living together that couple isn't going to land in this inertia with the group.

Because they've already clarified the question before they started to live together. So that's a really important distinction here. And what that means is that there's some things we can test if we have the data to test it. And many samples in this literature we don't have this data but in some we do and so for example, one of the predictions of inertia is those who are already engaged when they start to live together are likely going to be lower risk than those who aren't engaged on average because they've already clarified this key question before the constraints of cohabiting starts to grow.

Now in a study (Galena) (unintelligible) that we published in 2004, these are so small to read the letters, but basically what we found in a long term sample that we have of about a couple hundred couples were we follow them before marriage and then into marriage is exactly what inertia predicts is what we get.

Those who are already engaged are at a much less risk on average on everything we measure in this sample than those who weren't engaged at the time they started cohabiting. And in fact those who are already engaged aren't statistically different even though these bars look like they might be a little different on some measures, but generally statistically they weren't significantly different statistically from waited to marriage before they lived together.

So wanting to go a different way just to get the highlights out and then I'm going to move on to this transition model related to risk. The couples that have already clarified their future and commitment and their interest in being together in the future before they've increased the constraints of staying together by living together didn't

look to be a greater risk from cohabiting greater - before marriage than those that waited until marriage.

But those who didn't, and here's I think about the subgroup, it's not that the couples who weren't already clear about engagement or their future marriage together at the time they started living together, it's not that all those couples are doomed or anything it's just that group seems to be at substantially greater risk and they have this finding now and every sample eventually we can lay our hands on what we can measure both cohabiting before marriage and more engagement around the time of cohabiting we get the results including some data that is in the survey we just collected this year as part of this new project that's already up for review with one of the journals.

And I would also note just on this middle bullet here that in one of the samples that we're analyzing right now we also still get a bit of a risk (unintelligible) that wait all the way till marriage appearing the lowest risk of all, but still the big story here is between those that are already clear about their commitment together at the time they start to living together versus those who aren't clear.

Now, let me go on to like my favorite line or statement in a few words of - of my whole career and lands right in the confluence of the work that we do and the work that Wendy Manning and her colleague (Pam Smock) does, one of the things that Wendy and (Pam) found in their (teletative) study interviewing those 115 people in depth about their cohabiting experiences is that and also it is exactly nobody or virtually nobody, Wendy can clarify this in a few minutes, but almost no one says it was a deliberate to start living together.

That it was almost always sort of a process of sort of slid into it and which it sort of gradually grew that, you know, he's over there a couple nights a week, and then five nights a week and then eventually the lease is up and before we know it we're living together and its not like a decisive kind of commitment point or even a discussion between the couples about what we're doing it kind of happens to them and they're in it before they sort of really know what that their in it. And it has a really important implication because one of the things to think about related to commitment, is commitment always is making a choice to give up other choices.

There's no commitment in life that we make that doesn't really follow that simple sentence whether that's to career or partner or whatever, which means that clear commitments require clear decision. So if couples are tending to slide into cohabitation that means one of the risk areas here is that people are essentially sliding versus deciding when they are some other models that we've been developing for some time now, the risk of sliding is that people get on this sort of set of tracks with inertia building down a path that they didn't exactly even choose. So that the momentum to stay on this path in life and the difficulties of getting off it start to increase before people sort of really even realize that they've moved themselves on to this path.

I'll take just a couple more minutes, I want to explain -- I hope this shows up okay on peoples screens -- I want to explain something for a couple of minutes that I'm pretty excited about as a general risk model and then we'll just go to any other questions that we want to have altogether here, but here's a very common sort of low risk sequence in many areas in life.

We're obviously talking about important relationship transitions here, where somebody gets information about the partner, about the relationship so you can see just some of the things I put in that box about the kinds of information that one might want to help them make a better decision about is this a good transition for me to make in life and then based on that information make a decision which is essentially a type of commitment and then they go through the transition and I've just put a number of different kinds of very important major relationship transitions in that box, and then constraints come.

Now let me make - before we go to the next panel I want to highlight something, I think the constraints are almost always increased in a person's life after going through these transitions. I'm sure there are exceptions to where that's not the case but that all of these transitions are potentially life altering and many of these transitions have some - they have some type of the limit to a persons options after they've fallen through the transition compared to what they had before they went into the transition.

And the next panel I want to highlight is how I actually think most relationship transitions happen now and our society. Which is the sliding happens through the transition and as I at least would argue and said a minute ago, the constraints come after the transition regardless of whether somebody's aware or making a clear commitment or decision about the transition, the constraints are going to increase so my options are lower or I have fewer options after the transition. Which is fine if it's the transition that I've really chosen and I really wanted to make but from further sliding through it, I think what the big sort of new risk pattern in relationships now is people are tending now to get all the most important information about risk with a particular partner after they have all their options open to do the most (unintelligible) information.

So essentially people get this really intense amount of information about whether it's a healthy relationship, a safe relationship or just a good fit for life after it's hard to get up and go the other direction if they decide it's not a good fit. It's not that people can't do that, people certainly can and do but what I think happened comparing these two sort of models, is that the transitions are happening now for folks before they even sort of realize they're going through them and that that has a function of limiting some of the options and increasing risk where as the process of really getting information first and thinking about who I am and what I'm doing and who this person is would be much more protective for most people.

So I am going to stop at that point. Maybe I'll make one other quick comment. If you look at these - this box on my panel here that I've labeled transition, it's interesting that a lot of the kind of social, philosophical and religious arguments that we have in the culture about sequence happen and the things down that list, so sort of down the vertical direction, we have a lot of arguments about what's the right way to do that sort of list of things in society. What I've not seen which is kind of gratifying is no one I found wants to argue that it's wise to get the most relevant information about whether you're in a good relationship after its harder to do whatever you need to do with that information. So, I'll stop there.

Patrick Patterson:

Thank you Scott. Another rich presentation on account of the data but also things that can be applied to any program of the folks working with engagement or married

couples.

A number of questions came in so we're trying to field as many of those as we can to Scott and then we'll turn to the open TA forum.

The first question, is there anything that points to this and one of your slides you have the maybe I do phase, is there anything - has there been any information or data that suggests what leads to that phase and the second part of that question is is this fairly new, the maybe I do period or is this something that's been around for awhile.

Scott Stanley:

I think the maybe I do thing has always been around, I mean, you could - one of the interesting things in this whole literature is prior to really recently its - its tended to be the case in sociology and economics when people think about commitment and marriage they're most often measuring it as marriage or not is what commitment is.

You get a lot more interesting things when you measure commitment more the way we tend to do in terms of how dedicated am I to this person. That's where you get the really interesting things showing up so in some ways the idea of maybe I do is based on this idea of a fragile or a less robust sense of how much I'm really committing myself to you, my partner, and one of the difficulties this is going backwards in the literature, that's just really measured in these large sample studies looking at these trends, but what we find in particular what (Galena) and I've been finding all over the place is whenever you have a sample where it's measured or anything that's approximately close to it you get the really most fascinating differences related to risk about these transitions and moving into cohabitation.

I do think the maybe I do kind of marriages are likely more and more common because for the very reason we have people sliding through so many transitions I do think there's a lot of people now, I mean this may sound odd, but that the sort of are all the way into marriage without ever having fully, freely answered the question, am I choosing you for life.

Patrick Patterson:

That's great. I think a lot of folks are thinking back to years past whether or not this is somewhat common or new so that was a great response.

There are a couple other questions I want to ask before we move to the general forum. How can the research that you presented on risk sequence and insecurities influencing commitment inform marriage education programs?

I'll repeat the question. How can research that you presented on risk sequence and insecurity influencing commitment inform marriage information programs?

Scott Stanley:

Great, let me put that up the panel that's a little easier to read here about this and this will allow me to make a pretty culturally nuance point. Everybody listening to this webinar and all of us on the phone here, they're a variety different reasons, background, culture, religion and especially have different views of sequence issues related to the stuff in that transition box. So for example, I'm relatively more religious than a lot of social scientists. What I want to teach my sons in that box is different than what some other folks listening to this may want to teach their kids or maybe different than what they want to teach their kids in general. So there's a lot of variance within that. But

the good news of this model is we don't all have to agree on the end result of a discussion about sequence within that box.

Because the fact is we don't all agree and I don't think as we all probably realize is, you know, society's not likely to come to any big agreements on that stuff anytime soon. Although I would bet by the way that people are closest to being all on the same page if they're talking about their own children. But having said that, anybody can work this other angle horizontally across this model. If you buy this basic idea wherever somebody's at on the - the cultural sort of differences and beliefs and values, its easy to say that anybody, you know, maybe you should get some more information before you reduce your options. So and - and here's a great example.

If you take a young person, I - I know of a case once where this 19 to 20-year old came to his parents and said hey I'm thinking of moving in with Suzy or whoever, you know, in the next few weeks and - and this person, the parents knew about this whole - this inertia idea and they said, you know, that's interesting but, you know, have you thought about the fact that its harder to break up once you start living together so how sure are you that this is the one. You know, how sure are you that this is the person?

And that was like all that they had to say, it was like this little relationship education moment that just said, you know, I know you think this is going to help you figure out if this is the right person, but the sort of punch line I sometimes use with younger audiences is like taking the course and to see if you really like that defining that you're failing the test and then discover that its actually harder to drop the course than you thought it was.

That little idea which is easy to convey in education, which is non-judgmental, its not any big heavy sort of moral message or something that tends to turn the young folks off, its just saying, you know, maybe you want to get as much information as possible about whether this is a good fit and the right relationship for you before you do anything that makes it harder to move on to a different relationship.

And in some ways that even turns around and becomes on of the best arguments for a lot of younger couples to do relationship education way before their making a decision about cohabitation. You know, just to think about learning more about each other and is this a good fit, and how do you view the world and that could be a very great way to help reduce the risks for some folks. Give them ways that don't limit their options to find out more about whether it's a good choice.

Patrick Patterson:

There's something I've got to ask Scott, if you could go back to slide number 20 that you presented. It was regarding the pre-marriage commitment or cohabitation status as well as after. And I think you said something around, I'm translating this, there have been a few questions about this, does it suggest a commitment level prior to marriage if you are cohabitating does not increase if it was not there previously after the rings are put on folks fingers. Does that make any sense, the question?

Scott Stanley:

You know, I didn't put this panel in this presentation, Wendy and our colleagues have certainly seen it, I published this data. A follow-up study of this claim at (all one) which is now a - is a (road) (unintelligible) and because (Galena) changed her last name because she got married. We took this same sample but we followed them

much further out. And it is true; this is one of the sadder (unintelligible) data I've seen in a while.

But those in the before engagement group not only do they have men that are less dedicated to their wives on average, again there'd be exceptions in that group hopefully but, they have men that are less dedicated to their wives on average than those that didn't cohabit or waited until after engagement, those - the dedication level of those males never catches up years into marriage. So there's no evidence in that very in-depth measurement launched (trigonal) sample that going through the transition of marriage closes the gap - the gap doesn't close.

Patrick Patterson: Wow. Wow, that's a deep take away when we think about the couple that we're working with. In terms of where they are previous...

Scott Stanley: It lands smack dab in the middle of what I thought - what I think is actually a pretty brilliant book, he's just not that into you, because there are a lot of people male or female that think if I could just get this partner over the next hurdle or, you know, over the long line into marriage everything will be fine in terms of our commitment together in life and I don't see data that tells me, I'm sure that's true for some folks and...

Patrick Patterson: Yeah.

Scott Stanley: then that that works fine but I've also said to a lot of people in a more educational environment, look if you have to drag the person to the alter that may just be a sign of a lot of draggings to come.

Patrick Patterson: As my mother would say, duh. That's interest - that's very fascinating, that's very fascinating, I mean especially when we think about how folks engage or at least think about marriage and if there is a partner who is deciding this might not be the best thing but I'm going to go ahead and do it, I mean, it may be a predictor for another life in some cases.

Scott Stanley: Yeah and this other way of thinking if somebody's got to chase their partner down to go to another step of increased level of commitment, the irony there is they may succeed in chasing their partner down but what they're actually not noticing is that that was some of the best information they possibly could have been giving about whether this was a good place for them to be.

Patrick Patterson: This is fascinating. A couple questions during our general Q & A and Wendy I'll bring you back to the table now, we have a number of questions I'll try to go through as many of those as I can before we actually close out.

One of them for both of you to respond to is you both address the effect of the level of commitment in cohabitive relationships. Do children of couples in highly committed cohabitive relationships, i.e., common law marriages have similar results as married couples? Wendy?

Wendy Manning: I'm not 100% sure but different states have different laws about common law marriage so I'm not 100% sure what that means. In the State of Ohio, we don't have common law marriage even though we've done a lot of interviews and people will say well I have common law marriage, our interviewer tells them that you might think

you do but actually legally you don't. And so I think there's some misconception about common law marriage in the United States and I'm not sure about every state but I know in Ohio we don't have a common law marriage.

I know in Europe, there's different kinds of cohabitation with different kinds of registration and legalization but I'm not familiar with any research about common law and I thought common law used to be defined largely by duration and sometimes the longer lived cohabitations are really not always the highest quality cohabitations and there's some research on that that - because they - they last a long time. And sometimes there's a - there is a small subgroup of people who sort of reject marriage and say that I want to now have the state involved in my relationship and I just want to live together but that's a relatively rare - rare group of folks.

Patrick Patterson: Okay.

Scott Stanley: Yeah and I would just add a little bit to - like Wendy said, I think that the laws about common law marriage vary. Many states have it, many states don't. And I think in some of the states that still have it one of the interesting things about it is you have to actually present yourself as a married couple - couple equates to be considered to be common law marriage and I think this is very - and in fact it is a legal marriage then in that sense and there's enforceable rights with states that have legal common law marriage. If the couple's presented themselves as married to the community they've moved over the line and their functionally married in terms of the legal and social system.

The answer that I would give to the more basic question is, like Wendy said, I don't think we actually know in terms of any good samples that try to measure common law because its such a murky area, but its certainly thought for some time and I got to this a different way but if - you can tell from how we're thinking a whole lot of the publicness of the declaration of commitment is going to be a big factor in what's protective or not.

So wherever you have a couple who's sort of publicly portrayed, displayed, conveyed to others descents that we're married, we're us, we're the future, they may not be legal married so for example you have a lot of immigrants, Latino immigrants in the U.S. where they may even not want to be sort of on the grid in terms of the legal system but they have what's called in union which is really culturally and functionally in the social network, it' marriage and I have a sense that wherever you have two people that have the sense that it's me and you for life and we're conveying that to other people that we're a married couple whatever the actual legal status is you're going to see similar benefits as, you know, just regular marriage.

Patrick Patterson: So is that to say that those kids fair, (unintelligible) with any data but does that say do those kids in those - I'm going to say stable, healthy common law, however you regard those relationships, fair equally or at least a decent in those relationships as those children raised in married families?

Scott Stanley: I'm just predicting they would because from my way of thinking they have all the ingredients that are probably producing those effects in the literature anyway. Does that make sense to you Wendy?

Wendy Manning: Yeah, it does. There is some comparisons of research - couples that are two biological cohabiting parent families and two biological married couple families and those - the cohabiting couples those children fair slightly worse even though they're two biological but that's not that there not presenting themselves as married and all the things that Scott says, so I think - I think there is something to be said for that.

Patrick Patterson: Oh. Another question came in. Is there any data from your research or any findings from your research that suggest cohabitation somehow increases the risk of violence between the partners and/or the children?

Scott Stanley: I'll answer that first and Wendy may have a different answer, more to add. I don't actually have any reason to believe that it increases the risk of violence. What we're suggesting, I mean, it could or it could not in some very complex ways but what our risk model is really suggesting is what cohabitation does is it might be causal above and beyond the sel - the selection factors absolutely govern a lot about who cohabits and who doesn't.

But what cohabitation - the experience is that may be adding to the package is that it's making couples with greater risk more likely to stay together than they might otherwise have been had they not been cohabiting in terms of the paths their on and so I would sound more like the selection effect sort of way of thinking when I get around to that answer. I don't reasonable the actual experiences - it's adding to the risk, its making it more likely that a risky relationship continues.

Patrick Patterson: Any thoughts Wendy?

Wendy Manning: I would agree with that and I would just really agree.

Patrick Patterson: Last couple questions that we have time for. In either of your research was there - are there any trends that emerged regarding racial or ethnic minorities. Any different trends regarding racial, ethnic minorities regarding cohabitation and commitment rates?

Wendy Manning: There is definitely racial and ethnic differences and patterns of all family formation not just cohabitation. So, in terms of aged - aged marriage, in terms of divorce and in terms of unwed births born outside of married and births born in cohabiters, we often see race and ethnic as well as nativity status differences so we're very sensitive - sensitive to that. And there's some research that indicates that I've been involved in that cohabitation might have different meanings for different social economic groups and so then that plays over into class.

So people who are more disadvantaged might have fewer opportunities for marriage and face more barriers to marriage and so for them cohabitation might actually be sort of an alternative form of marriage as opposed to people who are better off who might have all the employment and education things in place and so I think there are a lot of - there are a lot of differences and some of them are - some of them are based on socioeconomic differences, some of them are based on cultural - I would argue cultural differences as well.

Patrick Patterson: Any thoughts Scott?

Scott Stanley:

Well I would totally agree and Wendy's like the expert in the world on that very question so, I don't have much to add except I would even go so far as to say, when it comes to studies really teasing their parts and nuances of this risk of cohabiting prior to marriage, I think we don't even know very (quiver) yet or have exactly big enough or the right enough samples to actually look at that risk by different racial, ethnic or cultural groups. Although I do generally believe that it's a more general transition risk model is going to hold everywhere but, you know, that remains to be seen. It just seems to me that any - any group, anybody, anywhere getting more information before you reduce your options is got to be better than getting information after you reduce your options.

Patrick Patterson:

Thank you Scott. As we come to a close I'd love to extend again, thanks to both Dr. Manning and Dr. Stanley for these presentations and having the time, taking the time to share kindest latest research on cohabitation. Again, a lot of programs have been asking about data that they can be armed with as either their engaging partners or thinking about it how they might reorganize or reprogram their efforts with couples in the community. So again, I just want to extend thanks to them.

As we close there are a few things I want to go through. Particularly evaluation piece of today's webinar. We'd love to hear your feedback; want to get thoughts on how we might do things differently than before.

So the next few slides I want to bring up on the screen are web pro questions. To ask your feedback on today's webinar. Now the answers you provide for today will help us know what you've gained and what we might change things in the future for webinars going forward.

Just so you know, no other participant will be able to see how you answered your questions. While the screen is up you can change your answer, once the screen is gone obviously you can't go back. And so I'll read through each question and give time for each person to respond and then we'll move forward.

On each screen you'll see the same five options for you to vote and then we'll move to the next question.

For the first question, I have a better understanding of the findings that have emerged from cohabitation research. I have a better understanding of the findings that have emerged from cohabitation research.

Next question, from marriage education practitioners I will be able to use information presented at today's webinar to inform our marriage education program. For marriage education practitioners, I will be able to use information presented in today's webinar to inform our marriage education program.

Third question. I better understand the relationship between cohabitation, marital and child well being. I better understand the relationship between cohabitation, marital and child well being.

And the fourth question. I found today's webinar to be informative and useful. I found today's webinar to be informative and useful.\

Finally, I'd like to say this is the way we collected our quantitative research from folks. If you have qualitative any other comments that you'd like to suggest regarding today's webinar or future webinars that the NHMRC will be conducting, I request that you would send that directly to me, Patrick Patterson, at infor@healthymarriageinfo.org. Again the email address to send that to is info@healthymarriageinfo.org.

A few reminders. The new and current healthy marriage program resource information, please visit the resource center Web site. Our resource center Web site is www.healthymarriageinfo.org. A host of information and resources on the Web site for programs along with folks who are actually in the community doing the work with couples and individuals.

Webinars are the fourth Wednesday of each month unless otherwise noted. We've excited about next month's webinar. We'll be sending out information regarding that in the next couple weeks.

And last but not least, all the materials from today's web...

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