

THE INFLUENCE OF PAST ABUSE ON HETEROSEXUAL COHABITING
COUPLES' RELATIONSHIP TYPES

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of past witnessed or experienced abuse on heterosexual cohabiting couples' Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation for Cohabiting Couples (PREPARE-CC) couple relationship types. The researcher utilized preexisting data from 5,000 cohabiting couples who had previously participated in the PREPARE marriage preparation program and had completed the PREPARE-CC inventory including a demographic section that elicited information about past abuse. Discriminant analysis was conducted in SPSS to answer the question of whether the presence of past witnessed or experienced abuse could successfully predict relationship type among cohabiting couples.

Results of the discriminant analysis yielded no significant ability to classify cohabiting couples by individuals' experience of past abuse, however, isolating females and males with the highest frequencies of past abuse indicated that males abused "very often" had a higher frequency of higher-satisfaction relationship types than the general sample consisting mostly of individuals with little or no history of abuse. Females reporting abuse "very often" did not follow this same pattern. Recommendations were made for future longitudinal studies and for strength-based research on healthy heterosexual cohabiting couples in an effort to understand what contributes to these couples' success.

This work is lovingly dedicated to God, for without His love, patience, and immense blessings, none of my accomplishments would be possible.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Enriching Relationship Issues, Communication, and Happiness (ENRICH)

Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study (FOCCUS)

Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation (PREPARE)

Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation for Cohabiting Couples (PREPARE-
CC)

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Rates of heterosexual couples choosing to live together intimately outside of marriage, or cohabit, in the United States are currently climbing as cohabitation becomes an increasingly popular form of living. In 1990, there were 3.2 million individuals cohabiting, and by 2000, the number of individuals had risen to 5.5 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Much is known and has been published about the negative effects of cohabitation (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Seltzer, 2000; Stafford, Kline, & Rankin, 2004; Thomson & Colella, 1992; Wu, 1995) and the negative characteristics of cohabiters' relationships (Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Brown & Booth, 1996; Brownridge & Halli, 2000; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991; DeMaris, 2000; Manning & Smock, 1994; Newcomb, 1987; Nock, 1995; Schoen, 1992; Seltzer, 2000; Stafford, Kline, & Rankin, 2004; Stets, 1991; Teachman, 2002; Thomson & Colella, 1992). There are very few studies finding positive effects of cohabiting or asserting that cohabiting couples can have relationships with high satisfaction and stability. Counselors utilizing the Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation (PREPARE) program are finding that cohabiting couples are falling into two distinct groups (D. H. Olson, personal communication, May, 2004). The first contains a large percentage of cohabiting couples' relationships scoring highly on the relationship scales, indicating many relationship strengths and few areas for growth. The second group is comprised of cohabiting couples scoring in the lower relationship categories, thereby indicating relationships characterized

by numerous weaknesses and few relationship strengths. These latter couples follow researchers' expectations, whereas, the former category of couples are less understood.

What differentiates these two groups of cohabiting couples from one another?

Contributing to the task of examining the differences between these two groups of cohabiting couples, the current study investigated the influence of individuals' past abuse on their relationship satisfaction and stability. Researchers have found that witnessing and experiencing abuse can significantly affect an individual's ability to interact with others and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships (Coleman & Widom, 2004; Kessler, Nelson, Jurich, & White, 2004). Individuals with past histories of intrafamilial abuse may be more likely to marry at a young age in order to leave the home as early as possible (Arata & Lindman, 2002), and researchers have found that abused individuals' relationships are often characterized by distrust (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000), lower marital involvement (Bagley & Ramsay, 1986; Bifulco, Brown, & Adler, 1991), marital dissatisfaction (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1989; Fleming, Mullen, Sibthorpe, & Bammer, 1999), and marital disruption (Felitti, 1991; Fleming, Mullen, Sibthorpe, & Bammer, 1999; Mullen, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Herbison, 1994) when compared to individuals that have not experienced abuse. These individuals also have a higher rate of cohabiting with partners than nonabused individuals (Coleman & Widom, 2004) as well as a higher prevalence of domestic violence in their relationships (Clarke, Stein, Sobota, Marisi, & Hanna, 1999; White & Widom, 2003). The focus of the present study was to investigate whether the reported presence of past abuse and/or a history of

witnessing abuse among parents predicted PREPARE-CC couple relationship category, or couple type, among cohabiting couples preparing for marriage.

Rationale of the Study

Little is known about what, specifically, contributes to a healthy cohabiting relationship. Because the rate of couple cohabitation is increasing each year, understanding this population is of high importance if relationship researchers and clinicians are to effectively work with American families (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Many researchers have established that cohabitation prior to marriage is, at best, not beneficial to relationships' quality nor stability, however, the trend is persisting, and there appears to be a paucity of research focused on identifying methods for helping these disadvantaged relationships to become stronger. Looking for background variables, such as abuse, that significantly affect relationship satisfaction for cohabiting couples will contribute to overall knowledge of the population and can lead to the development of interventions for therapists to use when working with these couples.

The tenets of attachment theory suggest that experiencing childhood abuse and witnessing abuse among parents negatively affects the quality of subsequent adult interpersonal relationships (Coleman & Widom, 2004; Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989; Reder & Duncan, 2001). Attachment theory describes an innate dynamic in which a child will seek closeness to a reliable parental figure when experiencing internal or external stress (Reder & Duncan, 2001). The parental figure is expected to provide a safe and secure base from which the child can explore the world. When, instead, the child

experiences rejection and hostility, he or she may experience anxiety and an internal working model of others being unreliable, hostile, rejecting, or frightening (Reder & Duncan, 2001). Although Bowlby, a strong proponent of attachment theory, did not specifically address child abuse, he did make reference to abusive relationships in his later writings (Bowlby, 1988). Bowlby described care-seeking behavior as being linked to anger in abusive relationships leading to an attachment dynamic in which anxiety and anger are considered natural responses to the risk of loss (Bowlby, 1988, Reder & Duncan, 2001). Researchers have found that adverse parenting in the beginning years of a person's life can lead to various forms of insecure attachment negatively affecting how people relate with others and the world around them (Carlson, Cicchetti, Barnett, & Braunwald, 1989; Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989; Dutton, 1998; George & Solomon, 1999; Holmes, 1986; Holmes, 1999; Howe, Brandon, Hinings, & Schofield, 1999).

Likewise, social learning theory suggests that children learn how to interact in adult interpersonal relationships by observing significant others as role models (Coleman & Widom, 2004). Whether or not the individual will imitate the behaviors of significant others is affected by the models' characteristics, the acts observed, and the observed consequences of the actions (Akers, 2000). Another process depicted by social learning theory is the way in which individuals create their definitions, or their attitudes and meanings that are attached to particular behaviors (Akers, 2000). These definitions refer to an individual's orientations, rationalizations, and other evaluative and moral attitudes that determine whether acts are right or wrong. If children consistently witness abusive behaviors in their parents' relationships, they may allow this modeling to shape their

definitions of a desirable and satisfying relationship, leading individuals to contribute unhealthy characteristics to their marital or cohabiting unions. Similarly, if children are the recipients of abuse by those in a position to nurture and support them, they may learn to define the role of parent or spouse in unsupportive and non-nurturing terms.

On the other hand, social learning theory can support the opposite occurrence as well. Abused children are exposed to many individuals that they may choose to imitate as a role model. Additionally, because acquiring definitions is partially dependent upon the observed consequences of the acts, the observed consequences of the abusive behavior may render the abuser unworthy of imitation. This study is a unique opportunity to investigate whether the abuse cohabiting individuals witnessed or experienced had a lasting effect that predicts an increased likelihood of specific relationship types with their partners.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the reported presence of previous abuse, at any age, can predict PREPARE couple type among cohabiting couples preparing for marriage. In addition, this study examined whether previously witnessing verbal, physical, or emotional abuse between parents is predictive of PREPARE couple type. This study investigated the following question: Which, if any, of the abuse-related background variables can successfully predict PREPARE couple type?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis is presented: A linear combination of the abuse-related background variables can successfully predict PREPARE couple type among cohabiting couples preparing for marriage.

Definitions of Terms

Cohabiting Couple: For this study, cohabiting couple is defined as a heterosexual couple that lives together as intimate partners but are not married to each other (Seltzer, 2000).

Couple Type: In this study, couple type refers to the typology of couples empirically derived by Fowers and Olson (1992) that is based on couples' relationship patterns, including relationship satisfaction and stability (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996). The four couple types are, in order of decreasing marital satisfaction, Vitalized, Harmonious, Traditional, and Conflicted. Additional information on these couple types is available in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

Relationship Satisfaction: Relationship satisfaction is a subjective global measure of happiness regarding an individual's relationship. For the use of this study and the PREPARE program, relationship satisfaction is measured by surveying ten major areas of a couple's relationship: personality characteristics, role responsibilities, communication, conflict resolution, financial concerns, management of leisure time, sexuality, parental responsibilities, relationships with family and friends, and spiritual beliefs (Olson, 2002).

Relationship Stability: Relationship stability is defined as the perceived risk of separation (DeMaris & MacDonald, 1993).

Methodology

This study utilized data collected from 5,000 cohabiting couples participating in the PREPARE premarital program and completing the PREPARE-CC inventory, which was archived and provided by Life Innovations, Inc. The supplied data included information on each individual's answers to a background section, including history of abuse, a breakdown of how each member of the couple answered questions pertaining to relationship satisfaction and stability, and the assigned couple type. Discriminant analysis was utilized to determine to what degree of certainty couple type can be predicted when only an individual's abuse-related background variables are known.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following:

1. The subjects' degree of honesty in their responses on the PREPARE-CC inventory may affect the validity of the results.
2. Lack of control over the setting and structure in which subjects completed the PREPARE-CC inventory may narrow the generalizability of the data.
3. Abuse-related items on the PREPARE-CC inventory are Likert scale questions involving an unknown degree of subjectivity and may affect the validity of the results.
4. The lack of diversity of subjects will narrow the generalizability of the data.

Organization of the Remainder of the Dissertation

Chapter two provides a thorough literature review of cohabiting couple relationships and the effects of abuse on interpersonal relationships. Chapter three describes, in detail, the methodology of the study, including the research hypotheses, a description of participants, sampling procedures, and sample size. Additionally, chapter three explores instrumentation, a description of couple types, data collection procedures, and data analysis. Chapter four presents the results of the study. Finally, chapter five addresses a summary of the study, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. This chapter also addresses any limitations as well as future areas of study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study investigated the ability of abuse-related background variables to accurately predict cohabiting couples' PREPARE couple relationship types. It was hypothesized that (1) a linear combination of females' abuse-related background variables could successfully predict cohabiting couples' relationship types, and that (2) a linear combination of males' abuse-related background variables could accurately predict cohabiting couples' relationship types.

Chapter two addresses a review of the related literature and is divided into three sections. The first two sections discuss cohabitation. Section one explores what is currently known about the population of cohabiting couples, including the definition and characteristics of cohabitation and the trend toward cohabitation in America. The second section discusses the effects that cohabitation has had on the American family. Finally, the third section explores the established interpersonal effects of childhood abuse on adults.

The Definition and Characteristics of Cohabitation

The definition of American cohabitation has continually evolved over the last four decades. Once seen as a step along the path to marriage for heterosexual couples, researchers now argue that cohabitation is often the starting point of a formal union (Manning, 2001; Seltzer, 2000; Smock, 2000) especially when it involves childrearing (Seltzer, 2000). About half of all cohabiters experience this relationship as one that ends,

either through marriage or dissolution, within two years (Brown & Booth, 1996). For others it is seen as a precursor to marriage, and for an increasing number of couples, cohabiting is a long-term relationship that rarely ends in marriage (Manning & Smock, 2000; Smock & Gupta, 2002). When studying and describing cohabitation, researchers often compare cohabiting relationships to first marriages either by examining current differences between cohabiting couples' relationships and the relationships of couples in their first marriages or by comparing groups of couples who are currently married and either did or did not cohabit prior to marriage.

Similar to marriage, cohabitation often involves an intimate relationship, shared living space, and established patterns of behavior (Brown & Booth, 1996). There is evidence that both married and cohabiting individuals have higher levels of wellness than those not involved in a relationship at all (Ross, 1995; Smock & Gupta, 2002).

Additionally, the number of cohabiting couples bringing children into this form of union is increasing, therefore, marriage and cohabitation may both involve bearing children or raising children from previous relationships (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Raley, 2000). Some contend that cohabitation is very much a family status, but one in which there is less certainty about the relationship than there is in marriage (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991).

Unlike marriage, cohabitation is thought to involve less commitment and greater individual autonomy and has been described by some scholars as having distinctly different goals, norms, and behaviors from marriage (Thornton, Axinn, & Teachman, 1995). Cohabitors are more like single, rather than married, individuals regarding

education and legal status (Rindfuss & VandenHeuvel, 1990). Cohabiting couples also tend to have less education, less income, and belong to a lower socioeconomic status than do married couples (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Clarkberg, 1999; Manning & Smock, 2000; Seltzer, 2000; Smock & Gupta, 2002). Researchers have discovered differences in the way cohabiters and married couples generally pool their finances (Landale, Oropesa, & Gorman, 2000). Among cohabiting couples, finances are most often kept separate with females more likely to get an “allowance” or an occasional purchase or expense payment from their partners, whereas, married couples are more likely to pool all income into one account from which household expenses are paid.

There are large cultural differences within the practice and characteristics of cohabitation. When looking at racial differences among those who choose to cohabit, researchers have found cohabitation to be more common among African American than Caucasian couples (Brown & Booth, 1996). When studies have examined the influence of race on marital expectations, researchers have determined that cohabiting is more often an alternative form of marriage for African American, Hispanic, and mainland Puerto Rican women and is more readily a step toward marriage for Caucasian women (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Landale & Fennelly, 1992; Loomis & Landale, 1994; Manning, 1995; Manning, 2001; Manning & Smock, 1995; Manning & Smock, 2000; Smock, 2000). Caucasian women are also more likely than African American women to get married if they become pregnant during cohabitation (Manning & Smock, 1995). Economic factors alone do not explain the racial differences in union formation (Seltzer, 2000), although they are thought to play an important role in the decision of whether to

transition from cohabiting to marriage or not (Manning & Smock, 2000). Culture also accounts for some differences in marriage rates. For example, in many Latin American countries, it is socially acceptable and common for couples to choose cohabitation rather than marriage as a formal union whether the relationship involves children or not (Seltzer, 2000), therefore, it follows that Hispanic individuals from these cultures would be less likely to transition into marriage than Caucasian and African American couples (Manning, 2002). Minority cohabiting couple households are more likely to have children present than Caucasian cohabiting households (McLanahan & Casper, 1995), and Manning (2002) estimated that about half of African American children (55%), 40% of Hispanic children, and 30% of Caucasian children are expected to experience either their biological parents cohabiting or one parent cohabiting with a partner during their childhood.

Scholars have examined other cultures' and nations' development of cohabitation in an effort to understand what the future may hold for America regarding cohabitation and its effects on society (Kiernan, 2002). The Swedish population has gone furthest in its development of cohabitation, and from their history, a stage theory has been derived (Hoem & Hoem, 1988). In a simplified version of the theory, the first stage consists of cohabitation emerging as a deviant phenomenon practiced by a small group of single individuals while most of the population marries directly. In the second stage, cohabitation functions primarily as a preliminary step to marriage where the strength of the relationship can be tested prior to a final commitment, and this phase generally does not involve children. During the third stage, cohabitation is considered socially

acceptable as an alternative to marriage, and it is not uncommon to have children in the cohabiting relationship. In the final stage, cohabitation and marriage become indistinguishable with children being born and raised within both institutions. Sweden and Denmark have both made the final transition to the fourth stage, however even in these countries, cohabiting relationships do not reach the level of stability that marriages do. Although the time spent in each phase may vary by society, researchers assert that it is unlikely that there will be a return to an earlier phase once a society has begun progressing through the stages (Kiernan, 2002). Based on the current literature, the United States appears to be in the process of transitioning to the third stage. Scholars have analyzed data from the United States (Raley, 2000) and the 15-member States of the European Union (Kiernan, 2000) to determine the current incidence of cohabitation and marriage across a range of nations. Nations were divided into three levels of cohabitation, with Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and France having high levels, the United States, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Britain, West and East Germany, and Austria having middle levels, and Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Italy having low levels of cohabitation outside of marriage.

The Effects of Cohabitation

Increasing cohabitation rates have raised issues regarding the evolving definition of family and cohabitation's effects on relationships and family life. These issues have become integral to marriage and family researchers because the effects of the trend toward cohabitation extend into multiple marriage and family realms. During the time

that a couple lives together nonmaritally, cohabitation has been found to affect individuals' attitudes toward marriage and divorce (Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Stafford, Kline, & Rankin, 2004; Thomson & Colella, 1992; Wu, 1995) and has been associated with lower levels of relationship quality (Nock, 1995), happiness (Brown & Booth, 1996) and stability (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Seltzer, 2000) when compared to married couples. Studies show that cohabiting individuals are more likely to be depressed, unemployed, to have alcohol and drug problems (Stets, 1991), have low self-esteem (Newcomb, 1987), and experience higher rates of domestic violence (Brown & Booth, 1996; DeMaris, 2000; Stafford, Kline, & Rankin, 2004) than married individuals.

Relationship satisfaction and stability are the most commonly studied outcomes in marital research (Stafford, Kline, & Rankin, 2004) and, similarly, these relationship dimensions are a focus for cohabiting couples as well. Brown and Booth (1996) performed a study with the purpose of comparing the relationship quality and satisfaction of cohabitation and marriage among African American and Caucasian Americans aged 19 to 48 years. Controlling for relationship duration and demographic characteristics, Brown and Booth found that cohabiters generally reported poorer relationship quality than married couples. Specifically, in addition to lower levels of happiness, cohabiters reported more frequent disagreements and violence as well as lower levels of fairness in their relationships than married couples did.

Many researchers suggest that children born to parents in a nonmarital relationship are at a disadvantage regarding multiple educational, economic, and social outcomes (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; McLanahan & Sandefur,

1994; Seltzer, 2000). Manning (2002) contends that these children are only at a disadvantage if it is assumed that cohabitation is qualitatively different from marriage, and she believes that this question has yet to be adequately answered. Using the National Survey of American Families, however, Brown (2002) found that, overall, cohabiting parents are more likely to live in poverty, to be psychologically distressed, and to experience more parenting aggravations than married parents. In an earlier study, Brown (2000) also found that the presence of children in married unions was associated with lower levels of parental depression, yet adding children to cohabiting unions was associated with higher levels of parental depression. The rate of children born into cohabiting families increased from 29% to 39% between the period of 1980-1984 to 1990-1994 (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Raley (2000) found that single women are currently almost as likely to cohabit as they are to marry if they become pregnant during a nonmarital relationship, and it is estimated that approximately 40 percent of children born to supposedly single mothers are actually being born to cohabiting parents (Bumpass & Lu, 2000).

While studying the relationships of married couples who cohabited prior to marriage, researchers have found lower quality marriages (Thomson & Colella, 1992), lower levels of marital interaction (Booth & Johnson, 1988), a higher probability of divorce (Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991; Manning & Smock, 1994; Schoen, 1992; Teachman, 2002; Thomson & Colella, 1992), and a lower commitment to the institution of marriage (Thomson & Colella, 1992) than those who did not cohabit. Thomson and Colella

studied data from the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Households in order to compare the relationship quality of couples that had and had not chosen to cohabit prior to marriage. The negative effects of cohabiting were positively correlated with a longer duration of premarital cohabitation. They found that the married individuals who had cohabited exhibited poorer communication and less healthy methods of conflict resolution. Likewise, Brownridge and Halli (2000) found that married couples with a history of cohabitation had a significantly greater chance of experiencing domestic violence than couples that did not live together prior to marriage. Nonetheless, there is a persistent and growing trend toward couples cohabiting prior to, or in place of, marriage. Each recent birth cohort in America has been more likely to cohabit than the cohorts before it leading researchers to believe that the process of cohort replacement will continue the trend (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; Seltzer, 2000).

Although the American divorce rate has remained fairly constant for the past two decades, it is still the highest in the world, affecting over half of all new marriages (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Goldstein, 1999). In the 1960s, many family demographers assumed that couples cohabiting would lower the divorce rate because, in some cases, cohabiting would allow individuals to recognize partner incompatibility, thereby “weeding out” many marriages that would have eventually failed (Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; DeMaris, 2001). Conversely, scholars theorized that stronger couples could use the cohabitation period as a time to strengthen their relationships without the responsibility of children and marriage (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). However, within five years, more than half of the unions begun by

cohabitation have ended, regardless of whether the couple went on to marry in that time or not (Bumpass & Lu, 2000).

Theories have been posited in an attempt to explain why cohabiting couples are more likely to experience divorce than their noncohabiting counterparts. The two most widely supported by research are those of selectivity and the belief that the cohabitation experience produces attitudes and values that increase the probability of future divorce. The selectivity hypothesis focuses on explaining differences between individuals who cohabit and those who enter directly into marriage (Stafford, Kline, & Rankin, 2004). Proponents of the selectivity theory maintain that cohabitation is selective of individuals who are already more prone to divorce (Axinn & Thornton, 1992; DeMaris & MacDonald, 1993; Stafford, Kline, & Rankin, 2004; Schoen, 1992; Seltzer, 2000; Wu, 1995). Young adults with more liberal gender-role attitudes are more likely to cohabit than to marry (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, & Waite, 1995). Similarly, individuals with more negative attitudes toward marriage and more accepting attitudes of divorce are more likely to cohabit than to marry (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). Childhood background characteristics, such as the presence of parental divorce (Thornton, 1991), parental cohabitation (Thornton, 1991), and childhood abuse (Coleman & Widom, 2004), have also been found to affect whether an individual will choose to cohabit.

While cohabitation is selective of those who have less conventional attitudes regarding marriage (Stafford, Kline, & Rankin, 2004), longitudinal research suggests that cohabitation itself may have a negative impact on marriage (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). The experience of cohabitation is thought to have a direct negative influence on marital

stability by producing relationships, attitudes, or values that increase couples' susceptibility to divorce. Using data from a 23-year, seven-wave study, Axinn and Thornton (1992) found that peoples' tolerance of divorce increased during the time that they cohabited no matter what their original beliefs were.

Overall, there is evidence of cohabiting couples' relationships becoming increasingly unstable (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Hoelter & Stauffer, 2002). However, Olson (personal communication, May, 2004), founder of the Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation (PREPARE) program, has observed a dichotomy among the cohabiting couples choosing to marry and participate in the PREPARE program. One group of these cohabiters consists of couples with few relationship strengths, many weaknesses, and a low level of relationship stability, while the other is characterized by numerous strengths, high stability, and few measured relationship weaknesses. Recent studies have found that cohabiting couples' marital intentions may influence the degree to which cohabitation negatively affects relationship characteristics (Brown & Booth, 1996; Manning & Smock, 2000). When Brown and Booth limited their comparison of married and cohabiting couples to only those cohabiting couples with plans to marry in the future, they found that cohabiters with intentions to marry did not differ qualitatively from married couples. Furthermore, the addition of biological children to these cohabiting relationships affected the relationship in the same manner as it affected marital unions. All of Olson's cohabiting couples intend to marry, yet there is a significant divergence in the characteristics of the relationships. The presence of past abuse is shown to increase an individual's likelihood to cohabit (Coleman & Widom, 2004). Keeping this in mind, the

present study attempted to examine Olson's two cohabiting groups in an effort to determine whether the presence of past, experienced or witnessed, abuse determines the type of relationship a cohabiting individual will experience with his or her partner.

Abuse and Interpersonal Relationships

Childhood abuse often has far-reaching effects on both children's (Benda & Corwyn, 2002; Cunningham & Page, 2001) and adults' (Arata & Lindman, 2002; Coleman & Widom, 2004; Kessler, Nelson, Jurich, & White, 2004; Reder & Duncan, 2001) ability to function in interpersonal relationships. Maltreated children and young adolescents are more aggressive and violent than their non-maltreated peers (Benda & Corwyn, 2002; Bolger, Patterson, & Kupersmidt, 1998; Trickett & McBride-Chang, 1995) and often avoid or withdraw from social interactions (Haskett & Kistner, 1991). Children with abuse histories experience less intimacy and more conflict when interacting with friends (Parker & Herrera, 1996), and they are more likely than non-abused children to describe interpersonal relationships as painful and threatening (Ornduff, 2000; Ornduff & Kelsey, 1996). Pertinent to the present study, scholars have found that even when children are not necessarily the recipient of abuse, witnessing parental conflict, abuse, and divorce will negatively impact children's expectations and experiences of intimate relationships (Cherlin, Chase-Landsale, & McRae, 1998; Coleman & Widom, 2004), although at least two-thirds of the time, if there is abuse among parents, children are the recipients as well (Giles-Sims, 1985; Ross, 1996).

The lasting effects of abuse on interpersonal functioning have been largely unexamined until more recently. Researchers have found that women with a history of childhood sexual abuse report feeling more socially isolated (Harter, Alexander, & Neimeyer, 1988) and distrustful of others (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Roche, Runtz & Hunter, 1999) than non-sexually abused women. When women with sexually abusive pasts form relationships, they are more likely than non-abused women to report dissatisfaction (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1989; Fleming, Mullen, Sibthorpe, & Bammer, 1999; Mullen, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Herbison, 1994) and to experience separation or divorce (Fleming, Mullen, Sibthorpe, & Bammer, 1999; Mullen, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Herbison, 1994). Adult males with histories of sexual or physical abuse are more likely to engage in violence toward intimate partners and family members than non-abused men (Alexander, Moore, & Alexander, 1991; Bevans & Higgins, 2002; Dutton, 2000; Mejia, 2005; White & Widom, 2003). Similarly, women with abusive histories are more likely than non-abused women to both commit (Clarke, Stein, Sobota, Marisi, & Hanna, 1999; White & Widom, 2003) and receive (White & Widom, 2003) partner violence.

Coleman and Widom (2004) drew upon data from a large, prospective study of childhood maltreatment to examine the assumption that individuals maltreated in childhood continue to experience interpersonal relationship problems into adulthood. The sample for Coleman and Widom's study was established between 1967-1971 when a cohort design study was created to follow the effects of abuse on individuals into young adulthood. At that time, the study consisted of a sample of children 11 years of age or

younger that had court substantiated cases of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and/or neglect in the Midwest. These children were matched with a control group of children who lived within approximately 5 blocks of one another and were matched on age, sex, race, and approximate social class. Coleman and Widom report on the findings of the phase of the study approximately 25 years after it was first designed. Between 1989 and 1995, abused and neglected individuals and matched controls were contacted and asked to participate in a 2-hour in-person interview. Interviewers were blind to the group membership of the individuals and both interviewers and participants were blind to the purpose of the study. Of the original sample of 1,575, 1,292 participants (82%) were located and 1,196 (76%) agreed to participate. There was an overall refusal rate of 3%. Comparisons of the follow up with the original sample indicated comparable gender, race, abused/neglected, social class, and mean current age. However, the follow up sample was significantly more likely to have an official criminal arrest record (50% versus 45%) than the original sample. The researchers controlled for parents' marital status and receipt of welfare to separate the impact of childhood maltreatment on adult intimate relationships from those of associated risk factors.

Examining males and females separately, Coleman and Widom conducted logistic regression to estimate the odds ratio of experiencing a given dichotomous outcome variable among participants with histories of child victimization, family disruption, and parents' receipt of welfare, relative to participants without such histories. In addition, multiple regression analyses were used to examine the unadjusted and adjusted impact of

childhood victimization on participants' perceptions of the quality of their current romantic relationship.

The researchers found that the relationships of adults with histories of childhood neglect, physical abuse, or sexual abuse differ from non-maltreated adults in both stability and quality. Both abused men and women were found to have higher rates of relationship disruption and previous or current cohabitation and were less likely to be in a relationship at the time of the study than the control group without a history of abuse. Abused women had a higher experience of intimacy-related difficulties such as relationship dissatisfaction, sexual unfaithfulness, and infidelity, within their on-going romantic relationships, whereas males did not exhibit this same finding. Abused males had significantly lower relationship stability than non-abused males, however, when compared to abused females, the problem areas of their interpersonal relationships differed, possibly indicating that a history of abuse can affect males' and females' interpersonal relationships negatively, but in different manners. A unique aspect of Coleman and Widom's study is that the authors examined neglect, physical, and sexual abuse separately. Their findings indicated that the interpersonal effects of physical and sexual abuse were indistinguishable from one another.

In summary, researchers have determined that the experience of witnessing or receiving abuse in an adult's past can negatively affect the subsequent interpersonal relationships and that many of these individuals end up in cohabiting relationships. Although the negative characteristics of cohabitation have been given much attention in research and literature, there exists a paucity of research in examining healthy cohabiting

relationships. More than half of all cohabiting relationships end in divorce or separation, however, there is another group of cohabiting couples that maintain their union. Taking these findings into account, the present study attempted to examine cohabiting couples possessing either high or low levels of relationship satisfaction in an effort to determine whether the presence of past witnessed or experienced abuse predicted relationship satisfaction and stability, depicted by relationship type.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to determine how well an individual's past experience of abuse functions to classify him or her as a member of a Vitalized, Harmonious, Traditional, or Conflicted couple type. Chapter three is devoted to the methodology applied to test the research hypotheses. Specifically, this chapter will describe the general research hypotheses, research participants, sampling procedures, sample size, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

General Research Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis

A linear combination of the abuse-related background variables can not successfully predict PREPARE couple type among cohabiting males or females preparing for marriage.

Hypothesis One

A linear combination of the abuse-related background variables can successfully predict PREPARE couple type among cohabiting females preparing for marriage.

Hypothesis Two

A linear combination of the abuse-related background variables can successfully predict PREPARE couple type among cohabiting males preparing for marriage.

Participants

This study utilized archival data collected by Life Innovations, Incorporated, between the years of 2001 and 2004. The study participants are members of couples that elected to participate in the Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation (PREPARE) program in preparation for marriage. All members of the sample cohabited with their partner at the time they completed the study instrument and data was collected. These individuals were randomly selected from the Life Innovations' database because they represent a population of interest and information on their past experience of abuse was readily available.

Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

Life Innovations, Inc. supplied a random sample of 5,000 cohabiting heterosexual couples, or 10,000 individuals, utilizing a table of random numbers. The provided database included information on 30 background demographic and abuse-related variables, as well as the couples' types, and a breakdown of how the individuals answered questions pertinent to relationship satisfaction and stability. Additionally, the categorical responses of both members of a couple were correlated to show the level of couple agreement in these areas indicating agreed relationship satisfaction and stability.

Instrumentation

This study utilized the Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation for Cohabiting Couples (PREPARE-CC). In use since 2001, PREPARE-CC was developed

by Olson and Fournier with the goal of helping members of cohabiting couples, with or without children, to better understand themselves, their partners, and their relationships. The PREPARE-CC instrument contains 30 background demographic and abuse-related questions and 165 additional items. Based on the Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation (PREPARE) inventory, originally developed in 1977, PREPARE-CC includes 54 new or revised items and a new category entitled Cohabitation Issues. In addition to the relationship areas addressed by PREPARE (i.e., Idealistic Distortion, Marriage Expectations, Personality Issues, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Financial Management, Leisure Activities, Sexual Expectations, Children and Parenting, Family and Friends, Role Relationship, Spiritual Beliefs, Family Closeness, and Family Flexibility), PREPARE-CC is meant to help couples develop a shared understanding of what the experience of cohabitation has meant in their relationship, explore how cohabitation has affected their marital expectations, and evaluate several key relationship areas from the perspective of a cohabiting couple (Olson, 2002). Being a relatively new instrument, few research studies have been performed using PREPARE-CC to date. In 2002, based on 7,706 couples, Olson found that PREPARE-CC had an internal consistency of .78, when averaged across the fifteen scales of the previously listed relationship areas. The reliability alphas of the individual scales ranged from .70 (Children and Parenting) to .85 (Family Closeness).

In contrast, the PREPARE instrument, from which PREPARE-CC was derived, has had extensive reliability and validity research published. PREPARE is intended to provide a comprehensive assessment of relationship functioning. According to Olson

(2002), content or face validity for PREPARE was established by, first, conducting an extensive literature review to determine which areas were most often found to be problematic for couples. Subsequently, scales were developed to measure the identified categories. The completed inventory was submitted to a panel of clinicians who rated the relevance of the items for each of the subscales.

Regarding concurrent validity, Fournier (1979) found significant correlations between subscales of PREPARE and measures related to conflict, self-esteem, communication, empathy, equalitarianism, assertion, temperament, cohesion, and independence. PREPARE also correlated significantly for all twelve subscales, the number of subscales created at that time, with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale, used as a measure of marital satisfaction. Fournier performed a factor analysis to examine PREPARE's construct validity, revealing eleven unique factors among the twelve assessed dimensions. Because Personality Issues and Communication combined to form one factor, subsequent revisions were made to strengthen the instrument.

Two separate studies have evaluated PREPARE's predictive validity, examining whether it is able to predict future marital happiness and stability. Fowers and Olson (1986) utilized a sample of 164 couples that had previously completed the PREPARE instrument. The couples were divided into four groups based upon marital status and marital satisfaction (i.e., married satisfied, married dissatisfied, cancelled marriage plans, and divorced/separated). Using discriminant analysis, it was found that PREPARE correctly discriminated between the married satisfied group and the other groups in 80% to 90% of the cases. Specifically, the results were as follows: separated/divorced – 91%,

married dissatisfied – 88%, and cancelled/delayed – 84%. Larsen and Olson (1989) replicated this study with 179 couples divided into the same groups and also found that PREPARE could distinguish between the married satisfied group and the other groups in over 80% of the cases.

Alpha coefficients ranging from .76 to .87, with an average alpha of .80 across scales, has been reported by Olson (2002) in a sample of 158,406 couples. The test-retest reliability of PREPARE was also examined using a sample of 693 couples in which the average alpha coefficient was .81. The fifteen relationship scales ranged from alphas of .74 (Sexual Relationship) to .93 (Spiritual Beliefs).

Couple Types

Fowers and Olson (1992) identified four premarital couple types by using positive couple agreement scores from PREPARE in a sample of 5,030 couples. The couple type with the highest relationship satisfaction was named Vitalized. These couples had a very high level of positive couple agreement on all 11 dimensions assessed, however, they appeared to be somewhat unrealistic about their expectations for marriage. Vitalized couples enjoyed the highest percentage of parental (73%) and friend (75%) support for the relationship, and they experienced low rates of premarital cohabitation (22%).

The premarital couple type experiencing the next highest level of relationship satisfaction was Harmonious (Fowers & Olson, 1992). These couples had moderate to high relationship satisfaction across most of the scales, however, they scored lower in Realistic Expectations, Children and Parenting, and Religious Orientation. Harmonious

couples reported feeling satisfied with one another's personality and habits, felt understood by their partner, felt comfortable sharing feelings with one another, felt capable of solving differences, and were happy with their sexual relationships. They were satisfied with how they spent their free time and the manner in which they expressed affection to one another. Thirty-three percent of the Harmonious type had cohabited premaritally.

The third premarital couple type identified was Traditional, which is also third in order of relationship satisfaction (Fowers & Olson, 1992). These couples had lower scores on Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Financial Management, high scores on Realistic Expectations, Children and Parenting, Family and Friends, and Religious Orientation, and were characterized by more traditional relationship roles. Traditional couples tended to be unhappy with their partner's habits and were uncomfortable discussing their feelings and dealing with conflict. They were also not entirely happy with their use of free time and sexual relationship. Characteristic of being more traditional, this couple type also had only 22% of participants cohabiting premaritally.

The final and least satisfied couple type was that of Conflicted couples (Fowers & Olson, 1992). These couples had the lowest positive couple agreement scores across all categories, but were particularly low in the intrarelational measures of Personality Issues, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Leisure Activities, and Sexual Relationship. Only approximately 47% of these couples had parental consent to their relationship along with 40% of their friends' support. This type also had the highest level of premarital cohabitation at 35%.

When Fowers, Montel, and Olson (1996) followed 328 couples for three years, they found that 60% of the vitalized couples considered themselves happily married, as opposed to 46% of Harmonious, 34% of Traditional, and 17% of Conflicted. Conversely, 17% of the Vitalized, 25% of the Harmonious, 16% of the Traditional, and 53% of the Conflicted couples had separated or divorced. Conflicted couples were found to be the most common type to seek marital therapy.

Data Collection Procedures

As stated above, the data for the present study was previously collected and archived by Life Innovations, Inc. To administer the PREPARE-CC instrument, individuals must be trained in the PREPARE/ENRICH program, ENRICH (Enriching Relationship Issues, Communication, and Happiness) being pertinent to couples already married and seeking enrichment. PREPARE-CC is administered most often by trained counselors and clergy, and can be administered in both the individual and group settings. Administrators of PREPARE-CC are instructed to have the members of the couple answer their questionnaires apart from one another. The present researcher has been trained as a PREPARE/ENRICH counselor and is also trained in Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study (FOCCUS), a competing marriage preparation model.

Data Analysis

Because it was established by factor analysis that the abuse-related background

variables correlate, data for males and females were analyzed separately using discriminant analysis in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program to answer the question of whether a linear combination of the abuse-related variables could successfully predict PREPARE-CC couple type. Fowers and Olson (1986) and Larsen and Olson (1989) utilized this type of analysis to determine how well the PREPARE instrument could predict group membership among the following groups: married satisfied, married dissatisfied, cancelled marriage plans, and divorced/separated. The present study, specifically, looked at whether a combination of the abuse-related variables (i.e., observing abuse between parents; experiencing verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse by parents; experiencing verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse by partner; experiencing verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse by anyone else) could successfully predict PREPARE couple type (i.e., Vitalized, Harmonious, Traditional, Conflicted) for either males or females.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This study investigated the ability of abuse-related background variables to accurately predict cohabiting couples' PREPARE couple relationship types. It was hypothesized that (1) a linear combination of females' abuse-related background variables could successfully predict cohabiting couples' relationship types, and that (2) a linear combination of males' abuse-related background variables could accurately predict cohabiting couples' relationship types. The preceding chapter outlined the study methodology, while chapter four presents the results of the data analysis and research hypotheses. First, the results of the statistical analyses for each of the research hypotheses are addressed, followed by a description of secondary findings. Finally, a demographic profile of participants is provided for both couples and, individually, for females and males.

Statistical Analysis

The purpose of this investigation was to determine how well the presence of abuse-related background variables functioned to classify individuals as Vitalized, Harmonious, Traditional, or Conflicted couples. Because it was established that reported abuse between parents, abuse by parents, abuse by partner, and abuse by anyone else are correlated, discriminant analysis was used to observe how well the presence of past abuse classified the couples. With four couple types in which couples may classify (g), the discriminant analysis procedure estimated three classification functions for evaluation (g -

1). Each of these functions was considered as a new variable that was created by combining the other variables mathematically according to the size of the correlations each variable shared with other variables determining its overall importance. Because the covariance matrices across groups were different for both females (Table 1) and males (Table 2) to a statistically significant degree, a quadratic function was estimated from separate group covariance matrices for the results (Johnson & Wichern, 1988).

Table 1: Box's test of equality of covariance matrices - females

Box's M	52.346
F	1.742
df1	42
df2	2.8E+07
Sig.	.007

Table 2: Box's test of equality of covariance matrices - males

Box's M	89.389
F	2.974
df1	30
df2	2.8E+07
Sig.	.000

Next, the females and males reporting abuse “very often” were isolated from the overall sample creating smaller samples of individuals experiencing the highest frequencies of past abuse. The frequencies of couple types for these abused samples were then compared to the couple type frequencies for the overall sample.

Can a combination of the abuse-related background variables successfully predict couple type for females?

A review of the squared canonical correlations suggested that function 1 contributed little to the successful classification, explaining 0.2% of the variation in couple type. This result was not statistically significant, Wilk’s Lambda = .998, Chi-square (12) = 11.410, $p < .494$, and therefore, will not be reviewed further.

An examination of the squared canonical correlations, likewise, suggested that function 2 contributed somewhat to successful classification, explaining 0.6% of the variation in couple type. This result was also not statistically significant, Wilk’s Lambda = .999, Chi-square (6) = 3.786, $p < .706$, and therefore, will not be reviewed further.

Finally, an examination of the squared canonical correlations suggested that function 3 contributed little to successful classification, explaining .02% of the variation in couple type. This result was not statistically significant, Wilk’s Lambda = 1.000, Chi-square (2) = .846, $p < .655$, and therefore, will not be reviewed further.

Table 3 shows the comparison of couple type frequencies between the most frequently abused females and the overall sample of 5,000 couples. For those who witnessed abuse between parents very often ($n = 293$), there was a slightly lower

percentage of Conflicted and Traditional couples and a somewhat higher percentage of Harmonious and Vitalized couples than the overall sample. Among females experiencing abuse by parents very often (n = 133), there was a higher percentage of Conflicted, equal percentage of Traditional, a slightly higher percentage of Harmonious and lower percentage of Conflicted couples than the overall sample. For the 14 females experiencing abuse by a partner very often, there were no Conflicted couples, a slightly lower percentage of Traditional, and a much higher percentage of Harmonious and Vitalized couples than the overall sample. Finally, among the 145 females experiencing abuse by anyone else very often, there was a higher percentage of Conflicted couples, a slightly higher percentage of Traditional, and a lower percentage of Harmonious and Vitalized couples than the overall sample.

Table 3: Couple types of females experiencing abuse very often (valid percent)

Couple Type	Abuse between parents n = 293	Abuse by parents n = 133	Abuse by partner n = 14	Abuse by anyone else n = 145	Overall sample n = 5000
Conflicted	14.3	15.8	0.0	17.2	14.7
Traditional	20.8	22.6	14.3	22.8	22.6
Harmonious	15.4	18.8	28.6	17.2	17.3
Vitalized	49.5	42.9	57.1	42.8	45.4

Can a combination of the abuse-related background variables successfully predict couple type for males?

A review of the squared canonical correlations suggested that the optimal linear combination of the abuse variables (function 1) contributed little to the successful classification, explaining 0.2% of the variation in couple type. This result was not statistically significant, Wilk's Lambda = .997, Chi-square (12) = 15.244, $p < .228$, and therefore, will not be reviewed further.

An examination of the squared canonical correlations, likewise, suggested that function 2 contributed somewhat to successful classification, explaining 0.09% of the variation in couple type. This result was also not statistically significant, Wilk's Lambda = .999, Chi-square (6) = 4.528, $p < .606$, and therefore, will not be reviewed further.

Finally, an examination of the squared canonical correlations suggested that function 3 contributed little to successful classification, explaining .002% of the variation in couple type. This result was not statistically significant, Wilk's Lambda = 1.000, Chi-square (2) = .076, $p < .962$, and therefore, will not be reviewed further.

Table 4 shows the comparison of couple type frequencies of males reporting the most abuse and the overall sample. Of the 130 males reporting abuse between parents very often, there was a lower percentage of Conflicted couples, similar Traditional and Harmonious, and a higher percentage of Vitalized couples than the overall sample. Among the 48 males reporting abuse by parents very often, there was a lower percentage of Conflicted couples and a higher percentage of Traditional, Harmonious, and Vitalized couples than the overall sample. Of the five males who reported abuse by a partner very

often, there were no Conflicted couples, and three were Vitalized couples. Of the 21 males reporting abuse by anyone else very often, there was a much lower percentage of Conflicted and Traditional couples and a much higher percentage of Harmonious and Vitalized couples than the overall sample.

Table 4: Couple types of males experiencing abuse very often (valid percent)

Couple Type	Abuse between parents n = 130	Abuse by parents n = 48	Abuse by partner n = 5	Abuse by anyone else n = 21	Overall sample n = 5000
Conflicted	10.0	10.4	0.0	4.8	14.7
Traditional	22.3	25.0	20.0	9.5	22.6
Harmonious	16.9	20.8	20.0	28.6	17.3
Vitalized	50.8	43.8	60.0	57.1	45.4

Secondary Findings

A maximum likelihood factor analysis was performed with the purpose of exploring how many latent factors underlie the set of variable scores. In other words, are the four background variables in this study correlated and measuring the factor of abuse? By performing a factor analysis of the four abuse-related background variables, only one factor was extracted with an Eigenvalue of 1.0 or higher for both females and males. Tables 3 and 4 depict the factor loading on the one factor labeled abuse for females and males, respectively. Because it is established that witnessing abuse between parents,

experiencing abuse by parents, by a partner, and by anyone else are all correlated, discriminant analysis was able to be utilized for this study.

Table 5: Factor matrix – females

Variables	Factor
	1
Abuse by parents	.89
Abuse between parents	.71
Abuse by anyone else	.35
Abuse by partner	.26

Table 6: Factor matrix – males

Variables	Factor
	1
Abuse by parents	.84
Abuse between parents	.69
Abuse by anyone else	.40
Abuse by partner	.35

Sample Demographic Profile

Couples

The present study utilized a sample of 5,000 females and 5,000 males who were in heterosexual cohabiting premarital relationships between the years of 2001 and 2004. All couples of the sample were in the marriage preparation process, and 4,959 couples reported the number of months until their wedding (Table 7). The majority of couples in this study planned to marry their partner within 6 months (80.2%) of participating in the data collection.

Table 7: Summary of the number of months until marriage

Months Until Marriage	N	Percentage
0-2	1547	31.2
3-6	2431	49.0
7-12	814	16.4
13 or more	167	3.4

Couples were asked how long the partners had known one another at the time of data collection, and the distribution was reported as follows by 4,995 couples: 297 (5.9%) couples had known one another for less than one year, 1,306 (26.1%) couples had known each other for 1-2 years, 1,592 (31.9%) couples had known one another for 3-4 years, and 1,800 (36%) couples had known each other for 5 or more years (Table 8). A total of

4,984 couples reported the number of years they had cohabited with the majority of couples (77.3%) cohabiting for two years or less (Table 9). Of the 5,000 couples, 3,793 (75.9%) couples had never broken up with the partner they were planning to marry, and 1,207 (24.1%) had at some point in the past.

Table 8: Summary of length of time partners had known one another

Years Known Partner	N	Percentage
Less than 1	297	5.9
2-3	1306	26.1
3-4	1592	31.9
5 or more	1800	36.0

Table 9: Summary of couples' cohabitation periods

Years Cohabiting	N	Percentage
Less than 1	1795	36.0
1-2	2060	41.3
3-4	817	16.4
5 or more	312	6.3

Females and Males

Four females and two males did not complete the question regarding age. Of the

4,996 females who did respond, 163 (3.3%) were under 20 years old, 2,211 (44.3%) were between 21 and 25 years, 1,405 (28.1%) were between 25 and 30 years, 646 (12.9%) were between 31 and 35 years, 267 (5.3%) were between 36 and 40 years, and 304 (6.1%) were 41 years or older (Table 10). Of the 4,998 males who reported their age range, 59 (1.2%) were under 20 years old, 1,576 (31.5%) were between 21 and 25 years, 1,621 (32.4%) were between 25 and 30 years, 872 (17.4%) were between 31 and 35 years, 417 (8.3%) were between 36 and 40 years, and 453 (9.1%) were 41 years or older (Table 10). Thirty-two females and 50 males chose not to answer the question regarding their level of education. Of the 4,953 females who did answer, most (84%) had attended at least some college, (Table 11) and 46.5% had completed a minimum of a four-year degree. Likewise, of the 4,950 males who responded, 77.7% had attended at least some college and 40.4% possessed at least a four-year degree (Table 11). Forty-seven female participants and 34 male participants chose not to disclose their annual incomes. Of the 4,953 females that did answer, the highest number of participants (24.4%) fell into the income bracket of \$20,000 to \$29,999 (Table 12). Of the 4,966 males that responded, the most frequent income bracket was \$30,000 to \$39,999 containing 23.3%, followed closely by 20.2% of males earning \$20,000 to \$29,999 (Table 12).

Table 10: Summary of participants' ages

Age in years	Females	Percentage	Males	Percentage
	N		N	
Less than 20	163	3.3	59	1.2
21-25	2211	44.3	1576	31.5
26-30	1405	28.1	1621	32.4
31-35	646	12.9	872	17.4
36-40	267	5.3	417	8.3
41 or older	304	6.1	453	9.1

Table 11: Summary of participants' completed education

Completed education	Females	Percentage	Males	Percentage
	N		N	
Graduate/Professional	798	16.1	626	12.6
4 Year College	1509	30.4	1376	27.8
Some College/Technical	1865	37.5	1846	37.3
Finished High School	677	13.6	893	18.0
Some High School	119	2.4	208	4.2

Table 12: Summary of participants' annual income

Annual Income	Females	Percentage	Males	Percentage
	N		N	
\$0-\$9,999	774	15.6	239	4.8
\$10,000-\$19,999	934	18.9	499	10.0
\$20,000-\$29,999	1211	24.4	1005	20.2
\$30,000-\$39,999	951	19.2	1155	23.3
\$40,000-\$49,999	521	10.5	755	15.2
\$50,000-\$74,999	402	8.1	840	16.9
\$75,000-\$999,999	99	2.0	260	5.2
\$100,000 or more	61	1.2	213	4.3

When asked about their ethnic origin, 13 female participants declined to answer. Of the 4,987 females and 4,979 males that responded, the vast majority of female and male participants were Caucasian, with 90.3% of women and 88.9% of men belonging to this category (Table 13). Thirty-two female and 71 male participants did not answer the question pertaining to religious affiliation. Of the 4,968 females that did, 1,099 (22.1%) were Catholic, 65 (1.3%) were Jewish, 1,553 (31.3%) were Protestant, and 2,251 (45.3%) claimed to be Other (Table 14). Similarly, 4,929 males reported a religious affiliation of 27.1% Catholic, 1.3% Jewish, 29.3% Protestant, and 41.3% Other (Table 14).

Table 13: Summary of participants' ethnic origin

Ethnic Origin	Females	Percentage	Males	Percentage
	N		N	
African America	70	1.4	133	2.7
Asian American	79	1.6	48	1.0
Caucasian	4504	90.3	4427	88.9
Hispanic-Latino	113	2.3	126	2.5
Mixed	88	1.8	101	2.0
Other	133	2.7	144	2.9

Table 14: Summary of participants' religious affiliation

Religious Affiliation	Females	Percentage	Males	Percentage
	N		N	
Catholic	1099	22.1	1334	27.1
Jewish	65	1.3	63	1.3
Protestant	1553	31.3	1466	29.3
Other	2251	45.3	2066	41.3

Regarding past marital status, 4,984 females reported that 4,052 (81.3%) of the sample had never been married, 895 (18%) had been previously married, and 37 (.7%)

were widowed. Likewise, 4,985 male participants reported that 3,991 (79.8%) had never been married, 977 (19.6%) had been previously married, and 17 (.3%) were widowed. When asked for their parents' marital status, 22 female participants did not answer. Of the 4,978 that did, 53.3% of females reported that their parents were still married and 35% reported their parents to be separated or divorced (Table 15). Similarly, of 4,980 males, 55.5% reported that their parents were married and 30.4% had parents that were separated or divorced (Table 15).

Table 15: Summary of participants' parental marital status

Parents' Marital Status	Females	Percentage	Males	Percentage
	N		N	
Married	2652	53.3	2764	55.5
Separated	95	1.9	81	1.6
Divorced, Both Single	368	7.4	326	6.5
Divorced, Both Remarried	552	11.1	475	9.5
1 Single, 1 Remarried	728	14.6	636	12.8
1 Single, 1 Deceased	347	7.0	414	8.3
1 Remarried, 1 Deceased	154	3.1	144	2.9
Both Parents Deceased	82	1.6	140	2.8

Descriptive Statistics

Couple type was the dependent variable and the reported presence of past, witnessed or experienced, abuse was the independent variable in this study. The frequency of couple types reported for the 5,000 couples in this study were such that 2,270 (45.4%) were classified Vitalized, 863 (17.3%) were Harmonious, 1,132 (22.6%) were Traditional, and 735 (14.7%) were Conflicted (Table 16).

Table 16: Summary of couple type frequency

Couple Type	N	Percentage
Vitalized	2270	45.4
Harmonious	863	17.3
Traditional	1132	22.6
Conflicted	735	14.7

Tables 17-20 depict the responses of the female participants regarding abuse between parents (Table 17), abuse by parents (Table 18), abuse by partner (Table 19), and abuse by anyone else (Table 20). The number of females choosing not to answer the abuse questions were as follows: 31 did not respond to abuse between parents, 33 to abuse by parents, 32 to abuse by partner, and 40 to abuse by anyone else. The percentage of female participants reporting some level of abuse between parents was 51%, abuse by parents was 28.3%, abuse by partner was 11.2%, and abuse by anyone else was 44%.

Table 17: Frequency of females witnessing abuse between parents

Response	N	Percentage
Never	2434	49.0
Seldom	1017	20.5
Sometimes	799	16.1
Often	426	8.6
Very Often	293	5.9

Table 18: Frequency of females experiencing abuse by parents

Response	N	Percentage
Never	3583	72.1
Seldom	503	10.1
Sometimes	526	10.6
Often	222	4.5
Very Often	293	5.9

Table 19: Frequency of females experiencing abuse by partner

Response	N	Percentage
Never	4442	89.4
Seldom	369	7.4
Sometimes	121	2.4
Often	22	.4

Table 20: Frequency of females experiencing abuse by anyone else

Response	N	Percentage
Never	2799	56.4
Seldom	972	19.6
Sometimes	767	15.5
Often	277	5.6

Tables 21-24 depict the responses of the male participants regarding abuse between parents (Table 21), abuse by parents (Table 22), abuse by partner (Table 23), and abuse by anyone else (Table 24). The number of males choosing not to answer the abuse questions were as follows: 54 did not respond to abuse between parents, 44 to abuse by parents, 40 to abuse by partner, and 45 to abuse by anyone else. The percentage

of male participants reporting some level of abuse between parents was 50.1%, abuse by parents was 23.8%, abuse by partner was 13.4%, and abuse by anyone else was 26.4%.

Table 21: Frequency of males witnessing abuse between parents

Response	N	Percentage
Never	2470	49.9
Seldom	1342	27.1
Sometimes	717	14.5
Often	287	5.8
Very Often	130	2.6

Table 22: Frequency of males experiencing abuse by parents

Response	N	Percentage
Never	3776	76.2
Seldom	605	12.2
Sometimes	389	7.8
Often	138	2.8
Very Often	48	1.0

Table 23: Frequency of males experiencing abuse by partner

Response	N	Percentage
Never	4295	86.6
Seldom	497	10.0
Sometimes	137	2.8
Often	26	.5

Table 24: Frequency of males experiencing abuse by anyone else

Response	N	Percentage
Never	3645	73.6
Seldom	891	18.0
Sometimes	320	6.5
Often	78	1.6

Summary of Findings

A sample of 5,000 cohabiting couples was obtained in order to investigate whether a linear combination of abuse-related background variables could accurately predict couple type. Discriminant analysis revealed no significant ability to classify couples based on reported past experience of abuse, confirming the null hypothesis. However, the comparison of couple type frequencies between females and males

reporting past abuse very often and the overall sample indicated that males with the highest frequencies of abuse had a higher percentage of Harmonious and Vitalized couple types. Females did not indicate this same pattern, and in fact, those reporting abuse by parents and abuse by anyone else very often had a higher percentage of Conflicted couple types and a lower percentage of Vitalized couple types.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The current study investigated the ability of abuse-related background variables to accurately predict cohabiting couples' PREPARE couple relationship types. It was hypothesized that (1) a linear combination of females' abuse-related background variables could successfully predict cohabiting couples' relationship types, and that (2) a linear combination of males' abuse-related background variables could accurately predict cohabiting couples' relationship types. The present chapter discusses the findings of the empirical study. These findings are then expanded upon to explore research implications, recommendations, limitations, and opportunities for future research.

Discussion

Review of Findings

Previous research has shown that past abuse can significantly affect individuals' interpersonal relationships into adulthood in a negative manner (Coleman & Widom, 2004). Thus, it was hypothesized that the presence of an abusive past would significantly affect the relationships of a group of cohabiting couples consisting of high and low relationship satisfaction. The current study investigated whether a linear combination of abuse-related background variables could successfully predict the cohabiting couples' relationship types. This was done in an effort to better understand the group of cohabiting couples, which contained two dichotomous groups that were separated into four couple types. Vitalized and Harmonious couples had relatively high relationship satisfaction and

stability, while Traditional and Conflicted couples had comparatively lower relationship satisfaction. The data from the discriminant analysis did not support the ability of witnessed or experienced past abuse to correctly predict cohabiting couples' types.

Females and males were analyzed separately to determine whether their individual past abuse affected the type of relationship they had become a part of as adults. Fifty-one percent of females and 50% of males reported witnessing some level of abuse between their parents. Twenty-eight percent of females and 24% of males stated that they had been the recipient of some level of abuse by one or both of their parents. Regarding abuse by a partner, 11% of females and 13% of males answered affirmatively to abuse at some level. When asked if they had been abused by anyone else, 44% of females and 26% of males responded that they had to some degree. However, neither female nor male past abuse was significant in predicting couple classification.

After failing to reject the null hypothesis, females and males reporting past abuse "very often" were isolated from the overall sample to examine whether there was a difference in couple type frequencies when looking at the most severe frequencies of abuse. Females witnessing abuse between parents "very often" had a similar percentage of Conflicted, Traditional, and Harmonious couple types, but a higher percentage of the Vitalized couple type than the overall sample, indicating that the females in this category enjoyed a somewhat higher level of satisfaction than the general sample did. Those females experiencing abuse by a partner "very often" also had a somewhat higher level of relationship satisfaction than the overall sample. Females experiencing abuse by parents

and abuse by anyone else “very often” had a higher percentage of low-satisfaction couple types than the overall sample.

Interestingly, males with the highest frequency of witnessed or experienced abuse had a more consistent finding. For all four abuse-related variables, males reporting abuse “very often” had a higher level of relationship satisfaction than the overall sample. This finding is contrary to much of the published research on abuse and interpersonal relationships, and, therefore, warrants further research.

Previous research found that individuals from a lower socioeconomic status and with less education were more likely to cohabit than those with higher education and a higher level of income (Manning & Smock, 2002). Additionally, couples possessing the best economic prospects are the most likely to transition from cohabitation to marriage (Manning, 2002; Manning & Smock, 1995). Consistent with these findings, 84% of sample females and 77.7% of males had attended at least some college, and the majority of males (64.9%) earned at least \$30,000 in annual income. Females earned less than males, however, 41% of females earned at least \$30,000 annually as well. The current sample may also not fit the typical socioeconomic demographics because the participants in this study were overwhelmingly Caucasian (90.3% females and 88.9% males) individuals intending to marry. Previous research found that although African Americans are more likely to cohabit than Caucasians (Brown & Booth, 1996), members of minority groups are less likely than Caucasian individuals to transition from cohabitation to marriage (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Landale & Fennelly, 1992; Loomis & Landale, 1994; Manning, 1995; Manning, 2001; Manning & Smock, 1995; Manning & Smock, 2000;

Smock, 2000), so it would follow that minorities and individuals from a lower socioeconomic status would be underrepresented in this marriage preparation group.

A finding contrary to the literature is that more than half of the females' (53.3%) and males' (55.5%) parents were still married to one another. Not only is the divorce rate in America over 50% (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Goldstein, 1999), but an individual's parents' marital status is said to be a predictor of cohabitation (Thornton, 1991). Specifically, children of divorced parents or parents who chose to cohabit in the past are more likely to enter into cohabitation themselves compared to children of married couples whom have been found less likely to cohabit. All of these couples had chosen cohabitation, yet the majority of the couples' parents had never divorced. Perhaps the setting of PREPARE-CC administration influenced this discrepancy. Over 73% of the respondents participated in PREPARE through their church, so this sample may not be representative of the general population, and this higher involvement with the church may influence family divorce rates.

In looking at the distribution of the sample's couple types, 62.7% of the sample couples were classified as Vitalized and Harmonious, the more satisfied and stable types. Traditional and Conflicted couples are the less satisfied unions, and 37.3% of the sample fell into these two categories. The highest percentages of couples were classified as Vitalized (45.4%) and Traditional (22.6%). These findings were interesting in that the majority of sample couples were considered to have very strong relationships with few weaknesses, when the results of numerous research studies find cohabiting relationships, in general, to be unstable with many weaknesses (Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Booth &

Johnson, 1988; Brown & Booth, 1996; Brownridge & Halli, 2000; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991; DeMaris, 2000; Manning & Smock, 1994; Newcomb, 1987; Nock, 1995; Schoen, 1992; Seltzer, 2000; Stafford, Kline, & Rankin, 2004; Stets, 1991; Teachman, 2002; Thomson & Colella, 1992). Again, this may indicate that the sample is not representative of the general population, however, it could be valuable to further explore these strong cohabiting couples to determine what contributes to their strengths above the general population.

It was also of interest that the second highest category of couples was Traditional. Fowers and Olson (1992) previously found that these couples had the lowest rate of cohabitation, and they tended to behave in a manner more in line with traditional values and roles. Although cohabitation is not yet considered a traditional practice, perhaps a high representation of these couples in a group of cohabiters is yet another indication that cohabitation is becoming more accepted in American society.

An area where the sample followed published trends in literature was regarding the length of time that the couples had been cohabiting. The majority of couples (77.3%) had been cohabiting for two years or less, and were preparing for the transition to marriage. At least half of cohabiting couples are found to break up or transition to marriage by the end of two years (Brown & Booth, 1996), and the sample appeared to be following the trend with only 23% of the couples waiting longer than two years to get married.

Implications

There are various possibilities as to why the presence of past witnessed or experienced abuse did not significantly affect the couples' relationship types. Although literature asserts that individuals who have witnessed or experienced past abuse often have significant interpersonal difficulties, the individuals that are often studied have experienced forms of abuse so severe that children were removed from their homes or at least had the abuse legally documented (Benda & Corwyn, 2002; Bolger, Patterson, & Kupersmidt, 1998; Cherlin, Chase-Landsale, & McRae, 1998; Coleman & Widom, 2004; Ornduff, 2000; Ornduff & Kelsey, 1996; Trickett & McBride-Chang, 1995). Even among these samples, there was always a percentage that did not exhibit significant interpersonal difficulties. Coleman and Widom stress the importance of remembering that a history of childhood victimization does not inevitably lead to interpersonal dysfunction and romantic distress. In their study, which examined the effects of childhood abuse and neglect on adult interpersonal relationships, divorce and infidelity rates were higher for abused than for nonabused women, however, they were not universal. In addition, among both males and females that were involved in a committed romantic relationship at the time of the study, perceptions of relationship quality were high for about two-thirds of the abused sample.

The current study assessed the presence of abuse by participants' responses to the questions outlined in Appendix B. It is unknown how many of the participants were removed from their homes as a result of abuse or if any of the abusive situations were ever reported to authorities. It is possible that the experience of being removed from an

abusive home and the living situations that follow may have a direct impact on children's and, subsequently, adults' interpersonal relationships as well, however this was not controlled for in the present study. Additionally, it is not known exactly how the participants in this study interpreted the word abuse or the levels of abuse that they had experienced.

Only 4.1% of males and 11.8% of females in the sample reported that they had witnessed abuse between parents or had experienced abuse by parents, a partner, or anyone else "very often." Therefore, only a small percentage of the sample experienced what the researcher assumes to be the most severe and highest frequencies of abuse, thereby indicating that the level of past abuse for the overall sample may not have been significant enough to affect participants' interpersonal functioning and couple types. After isolating those females and males reporting the highest levels of abuse, it did appear that the level of abuse somehow influenced the couples' types, however, future research would have to examine this finding more thoroughly.

A positive interpretation of the overall results could indicate that the individuals experiencing past abuse were resilient and learned what behaviors they did not want to emulate and bring into their current interpersonal relationships. It is not known how many of the participants experiencing past abuse had participated in counseling or personally made an effort to work through issues related to their past abuse prior to completing PREPARE-CC.

The primary implication of the results for the current study is the contribution to the knowledge base of cohabiting couples. The presence of past abuse did not directly

predict whether cohabiting females or males would experience relationships with high or low levels of satisfaction. However, this study isolated a significant number of cohabiting couples with very high relationship satisfaction and stability, and indicated that couples can experience this positively characterized relationship even when they have chosen to cohabit premaritally and when individuals within the couples have experienced varying degrees of past abuse. In addition, this study tentatively indicated that cohabiting males experiencing or witnessing a high frequency of abuse and participating in the PREPARE program enjoy a somewhat higher level of relationship satisfaction than the general sample.

Conclusions

Limitations

The present study has several limitations that deserve discussion. First, PREPARE-CC is a self-report instrument allowing for the possibility that some participants did not accurately report their history of witnessed or experienced past abuse. Previous research comparing adults' recall of abuse experiences to case records indicates that a significant proportion of adults maltreated in childhood may fail to report their experiences of abuse in retrospect (Coleman & Widom, 2004; Widom & Morris, 1997; Widom & Shepard, 1996). This may be related to the phenomenon of social desirability which refers to the degree to which people describe themselves in socially acceptable terms in order to gain the approval of others (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964), and this concern is greater with self-report instruments (Zerbe & Paulhs, 1987).

The abuse-related items on the PREPARE-CC inventory (See Appendix B) are Likert scale. Since Likert scale responses are subjective in nature, there may not have been uniformity in the interpretations of the scaled responses. This may have affected the data to some degree, however, the distinction between whether abuse had ever occurred or not was likely more consistent. Participants were not typically provided with a definition of abuse at the time of taking PREPARE-CC. This, again, allowed for subjectivity to enter the data collection.

The lack of standardization of data collection is another identified weakness of the present study. Administrators of PREPARE-CC are required to be trained in the manualized premarital approach, and members of couples are required to complete the instruments apart from one another. However, the participants completed PREPARE-CC in a number of settings (e.g. counseling offices, churches, the homes' of marriage preparation lay persons) overseen by different types of professionals (e.g. counselors, clergy, supervised lay persons) and may have participated in a group or individual setting. Completing the PREPARE-CC inventory is the first step in the PREPARE program, so differences in the administration of the PREPARE program itself would not affect data collection, however the setting and type of professional overseeing PREPARE-CC may have been influential.

The lack of diversity among the subjects limits the generalizability of the data, however, this limitation can also be interpreted as narrowing the population of study because cohabiting couples are a very diverse population. The participants of the study were predominantly Caucasian and completed the PREPARE-CC inventory in relation to

a religious setting. The annual income and education levels were also higher than those of the general population. Additionally, research has found that cohabiting couples with marital intentions are qualitatively different than cohabiting couples not planning to marry. This sample included only cohabiting couples preparing for marriage. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize the results of this study to all cohabiting couples. However, it would be appropriate to generalize these findings to cohabiting couples participating in the PREPARE program.

Future Research

A great deal of research exists depicting cohabitation as a disadvantaged, unstable form of relationship between heterosexual couples (Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Brown & Booth, 1996; Brownridge & Halli, 2000; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991; DeMaris, 2000; Manning & Smock, 1994; Newcomb, 1987; Nock, 1995; Schoen, 1992; Seltzer, 2000; Stafford, Kline, & Rankin, 2004; Stets, 1991; Teachman, 2002; Thomson & Colella, 1992). Because the trend toward cohabitation prior to and instead of marriage continues (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; Seltzer, 2000), it is recommended that future research focus on understanding the stronger cohabiting relationships. Clinicians can use what is learned from these couples in their work with the many cohabiting couples that are disadvantaged and have numerous relationship weaknesses.

In addition, it would be beneficial to look further into the finding that the males from this sample with the highest levels of abuse also enjoyed a higher level of

relationship satisfaction than the overall sample. This distinction was not detected by the discriminant analysis procedure, but isolating these individuals and examining them more thoroughly may help researchers and therapists to have a better understanding of abused males. Based on this and other findings, it appears that females may respond differently than males to abuse when examining interpersonal relationships (Coleman & Widom, 2004).

The most prominent researchers in the area of cohabitation currently take the position that cohabitation does not represent a unitary phenomenon and is a very complex, multilayered family form that needs extensive further research into its effects on relationships, children, and our society if demographers are to truly understand it (Brown, 2002; Kalil, 2002; Manning, 2002). The research that we have available today is largely simplistic, not able to control for numerous variables, and often comparing inequitable groups. These problems could be controlled to some degree by employing longitudinal research. The current research was able to narrow the sample to heterosexual cohabiting couples with the intention of marrying, which is an important distinction, however, other variables were not known, such as whether the couples had either biological children or children brought from another relationship. Future research into cohabitation could benefit by originating from the position that cohabiters are a complex population and considering as many distinctions as possible (e.g., biological children present, “step-children” present, socioeconomic status, intentions to marry) when attempting to derive empirically-based characteristics of cohabiters and the effects of their union. It is difficult to control for many variables when attempting to study

cohabiting relationships or compare cohabiting with marital relationships. Cohabitation is a dynamic institution that must be continually explored in order for researchers and clinicians to be current in their knowledge and ability to work effectively with couples.

APPENDIX A: IRB LETTER



Office of Research & Commercialization

February 9, 2005

Page Thanasiu
1116 Bradenton Road
Daytona Beach, FL 32114

Dear Mrs. Thanasiu:

The University of Central Florida's Institutional Review Board (IRB) received your protocol entitled, "The Effect of Background Variables on Couple Type Using PREPARE-CC". The IRB Chair did not have any concerns with the proposed project and has indicated that under federal regulations this project using de-identified data is exempt from review by our IRB, so an approval is not applicable and a renewal within one year is not required.

Please accept our best wishes for the success of your endeavors. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 407-823-2901.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Ward".

Barbara Ward, CIM
IRB Coordinator

Copies: IRB File

APPENDIX B: ABUSE-RELATED BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

Background Information

26. How often did you observe abuse (verbal, emotional, or physical) between your parents?
27. Were you ever abused (verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually) by your parents?
28. Have you ever been abused (verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually) by your partner?
29. Have you ever been abused (verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually) by anyone else?

1 – Never

2 – Seldom

3 – Sometimes

4 – Often

5 – Very Often

The researcher was granted permission by Life Innovations, Inc. to reprint item numbers

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