

WHY PREGNANT, UNMARRIED, COHABITORS REMAIN UNMARRIED:
A FOCUS ON FINANCES AND SUPPORT FROM ALTERNATIVE OTHERS

By

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Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Melissa Curran", written over a horizontal line.

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Abstract

I examined why pregnant, unmarried, cohabiting, couples remain unmarried while expecting their first child together. Although much research has been conducted on the transition to parenthood for married couples, less is known about unmarried couples' experiences during the transition to parenthood. This research on unmarried partners is important because, in the United States, the number of children being born to unwed mothers is more common than in previous years, reaching an all-time high in 2006 of 38.5% of all births (Martin, Hamilton, Sutton, Ventura, Menacker, Kirmeyer, & Mathews, 2009). Data were collected from both male and female members through a survey about life experiences and relationship quality. I used Symbolic Interactionism (SI) theory to examine financial reasons for not marrying, and social exchange theory to examine support from alternative others as reasons for not marrying. The results of this study supported SI in that financial symbols of marriage appeared to have important meaning for those who consider themselves to be highly traditional. The results also supported tenets of social exchange theory, in that women who reported lower partner support also reported higher levels of support from family and friends than did women who reported higher partner support.

Introduction

In this study, I examine questions concerning unmarried, cohabiting, couples who are expecting their first child. Although much research has been conducted on the transition to parenthood for married couples (see reviews by Belsky & Pensky, 1988; Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Demo & Cox, 2000), less is known about unmarried couples' experiences during the transition to parenthood. This research on unmarried partners is important because, in the United States, there is currently a decrease in marriage and increase in cohabitation (Popenoe, 2008), and scholars believe that cohabitation will continue to increase (Popenoe, 2008; Smock, 2000). Even more importantly, the number of children being born to unwed mothers reached an all-time high in 2006 of 38.5% of all births (Martin, Hamilton, Sutton, Ventura, Menacker, Kirmeyer, & Mathews, 2009), illustrating the importance of studying the experiences of pregnant, unmarried, cohabiting, couples and how these experiences may be unique from what we already know about married couples.

The goal of this study is to examine why pregnant, unmarried, couples choose to remain unmarried despite expecting a child together. I will examine pregnant, unmarried, cohabitators and their reasons for not marrying. Previous research has shown variance among life stressors (e.g., pregnancy) and the sources of support available to married couples experiencing these stressors (Rini, Schetter, Hobel, Glynn, & Sandman, 2006); however, research has not addressed what these support networks are for unmarried couples experiencing major life stressors together. I put forth two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is how Symbolic Interactionism Theory can be used to predict financial reasons for not marrying based on individual differences in traditionality and religion. The second is how Social Exchange Theory can be used to examine support from the partner and alternative others, including family and friends, to predict pregnant, unmarried,

cohabitators' reasons for not marrying based on relationship quality, focusing in particular on women.

When comparing married and cohabiting couples, demographic and mental health differences emerge. Marcussen (2000) found that married people, on average, are more likely to be older, White, more educated, homeowners, previously married, church attendants, and report a higher average income than cohabitators. In contrast, cohabitators were more likely to be employed but also more likely to be in debt (perhaps explaining why they need to work in order to pay off their debt). These demographic differences suggest a link to social class differences between married and cohabiting individuals.

In addition, other differences among cohabitators and married couples include traditional differences, religious differences, or both. Cohabitators have been found to be less traditional and less religious than married people. Studies have shown that cohabitators are significantly less religious than noncohabitators (Dempsey & de Vaus, 2004; Newcomb & Bentler, 1980; Yllo, 1978), and less likely than married individuals to attend church (Marcussen 2000). Furthermore, positive correlations exist between traditional attitudes toward family and gender roles and conservative attitudes about marriage and cohabitation (Lye & Waldron 1997). Taken together, these studies suggest that those who are less traditional and have fewer religious inclinations are more likely to be cohabitators than to be married.

Theoretical Background

Symbolic Interactionism Theory and Subjective Perceptions of Marriage

Blumer (1969) defines Symbolic Interactionism (SI) Theory using three core premises. The first premise is that people act toward things based on the meanings that the things have for them. The second premise is that the meaning of these things arises out of social interaction with

others. The third premise is that these meanings are modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer 1969). Within SI, *meaning is a central theme*, especially as it relates to whether the meaning of certain things is shared or not shared among individuals. Meaning results from interpretations of interactions with others and symbols in the environment (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Thus, both symbols and interactions with others are important to SI. A symbol is defined as objects, words and behavior. Interactions with others can involve both verbal and nonverbal communication with others, ranging from significant others like family members, to more global others such as those in the greater society and community (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Symbols and interactions with others come together through an interpretive process to create meaning, and this meaning may or may not be shared between and among others. Meanings may differ based on varying experiences and other characteristics such as social and family life, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, values, geography, age, gender and race (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

In the current study, I focus specifically on socioeconomic status, or financial reasons for not marrying, because there are a number of symbols associated with marriage that are grounded in finances (e.g., buying a house together), which are understood through the shared versus not shared meaning between and among individuals.

When applied to unmarried, pregnant, cohabitators, SI would suggest that the meanings attributed to marriage and pregnancy by individuals are the key component in directing the individuals' decision to remain unmarried. That is, pregnant, unmarried, cohabitators may choose to remain unmarried because they have distinct meanings of marriage and childbearing that differ from the common notion that marriage and childbearing are life events that belong

together, or are linked. That is, pregnant, unmarried, cohabitators may have a meaning such that marriage and parenthood are not linked, or that one can come before the other.

In research involving interviews with low-income women with children, Edin and Kefalas (2005) examined potential reasons for the growing number of children being born to unwed mothers. Through their interviews, the authors identified reasons for not getting married including that “a young couple that wants to marry ‘the right way’ often feel(s) they must also save up for a ‘real’ wedding” (p. 115). Also, “women feel that having enough income to purchase the props of a respectable lifestyle is a crucial prerequisite for marriage” (p. 112). That is, women being interviewed may have felt that the meaning of marriage was about a real wedding and having enough income. Without these specific symbols of marriage, as developed through interactions with others and the interpretive process that gives these symbols meaning, these women may have felt that they could not marry because they were not in possession of these symbols, and they needed to have these symbols before they could get married. These women would wait for money for a wedding and income for a respectable lifestyle before they thought it would be okay to marry.

These comments by low-income women with children are supported within the SI framework in that although no objective meaning exists for “the right way” to marry, or a “real wedding,” or even for a “respectable lifestyle,” the *shared meaning by these unmarried women with children* was that they needed a wedding and a certain income before they would get married, even though these meanings may not necessarily be shared by others (family, friends, society at large, etc.). This shared meaning underscores the process that interactions with others, and symbols in the environment, contribute to an interpretive process of what marriage means, and that meaning then directs behavior. For these women, the meaning of marriage (or reasons

not to get married) was shared, but for others, the meaning of marriage may be very different. Lack of shared meaning between the unmarried women with children and married women with children who do marry underscores why SI is a useful framework and why the meaning of marriage matters.

The findings by Edin and Kefalas (2005) also indicate a materialistic interpretation of marriage rather than a romanticized one (also discussed below under Hall, 2006). Financial reasons for remaining unmarried were commonly cited among the unmarried, pregnant, couples that were interviewed in their research. One father-to-be says, “I like to do things *right* though, instead of cutting corners and doing everything half-assed. I’d rather get engaged for two years, save money, get a house, make sure... the baby’s got a bedroom, [than get married now]” (p. 106). He later adds, “I want a *wedding*” (p. 107). His pregnant partner agrees, “And I get a yard with grass. [And] I want a nice wedding” (p. 107). According to Edin and Kefalas (2005), many unmarried mothers share the same meaning toward marriage. Edin and Kefalas (2005) summarize this common meaning here:

Marriage ought to be reserved for couples who’ve already ‘made it’ economically, and who demonstrate their worth by acquiring the symbols of modest success: a mortgage, a house with some furniture, a car or two, and enough left over to put on a ‘decent’ wedding. (p. 111)

Sassler and Cunningham (2008) also approach the subject of pregnancy in low-income communities, where childbearing and marriage are seen as largely independent events, a theme echoed by others in terms of the delinking of marriage and parenthood (Roy, Buckmiller, & McDowell, 2008). Sassler and Cunningham (2008) note that while cohabitation used to be mainly limited to the poor, it has now become normative across all levels of education. Included

with this shift is the growing belief that marriage is no longer a prerequisite for childbirth. Marital delay and nonmarital childbirth continue to increase among the working and lower-middle classes (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Martin, et al., 2009).

According to Hall (2006), a symbolic interactionist perspective is the best model in which to analyze the different ways that people view commitment and marriage, especially for cohabitators. From his study, Hall outlined five major themes of the meaning of marriage: Special status of marriage versus neutral alternative, self-fulfillment versus obligation, mutuality versus individuality, romanticism versus pragmatism, and role hierarchy versus role parallelism.

Special status of marriage versus neutral alternative involves elevating marriage to a status as the ultimate desired relationship, above all other intimate relationships and is indicative of different levels of traditionality associated with the way individuals view marriage (Hall, 2006). It could be argued that different levels of traditionality might also be associated with unmarried individuals (i.e., cohabitators). Although the literature discussed earlier suggests that cohabitators are less religious and traditional (Dempsey & de Vaus, 2004; Lye & Waldron, 1997; Marcussen, 2000), it is possible that cohabitators who consider themselves to be traditional and religious choose to remain unmarried because they place a “special status” value on marriage and are unable to meet their own idealistic expectations about marriage, in line with SI. Financial instability might be one reason that individuals with these idealistic expectations decide to remain unmarried.

Individuals who are highly traditional, religious, or both, are conceivably the same individuals whose view of marriage is characterized by traditional symbols such as a diamond ring and a decent wedding. Therefore, financial stability, or the ability to pay for a wedding and provide for a family, might be one of the primary reasons for not marrying one’s partner.

Marriage is easily attainable without adequate finances; however, those who place a high “special status” value on marriage may feasibly view these symbols of marriage (e.g., a diamond ring or fancy wedding) as necessary prerequisites. Therefore, I predict that:

- Individuals high in traditionalism and high in religiousness will cite financial reasons for not marrying as a *greater* percentage than all other groups of individuals.
- Individuals low in traditionalism and low in religiousness will cite financial reasons for not marrying as a *lower* percentage than all other groups of individuals.
- And individuals with mixed traditionalism and religiousness will fall in between these groups in terms of financial reasons not to marry.

Social Exchange Theory and Support

SI can be used to explain why pregnant, unmarried, cohabitators may choose to remain unmarried despite expecting a child together for financial reasons. In contrast, social exchange theory can be used to explain why support from others such as family and friends predicts reasons pregnant, unmarried, cohabitators would not feel the need to marry the partner.

Social exchange theory uses an economically based model to predict relationship satisfaction and stability and invokes a comparative process in which to understand satisfaction and stability (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993). Relationship satisfaction is determined by the outcomes (rewards and costs) obtained from the relationship minus the comparison level. The comparison level, or CL, is the standard against which the present relationship is judged (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993). That is, what is rewarding to you may or may not be rewarding to someone else, and what is a cost to you may or may not be a cost to someone else. The CL is an important part of social exchange because it involves a comparative process such that your perceptions and experiences are weighed against your expectations (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993).

Relationship stability is determined by a combination of relationship satisfaction, the comparison level of alternatives, and dependence. The comparison level of alternatives (CLalt) expands upon the CL in that one's perceptions and experiences are weighted against the perceived quality of any available alternatives to the current relationship (this could be an alternative partner or no partner); that is the CLalt is the lowest level alternative someone will accept. In addition to affecting stability, dependence can also affect perceptions of CLalt because dependence is defined as the degree to which the individual believes they must rely on the other for certain outcomes. If the individual believes that the current partner is the only one who can provide desired outcomes, the CLalt diminishes. Stability is also predicted by barriers preventing individuals' willingness to stay in or leave the relationship. Social pressures such as a lack of economic resources or the presence of children, along with quality of available alternatives, act as potential barriers (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993).

Applying social exchange theory to pregnant, unmarried, couples and support, particular focus is given to *individuals' comparison levels of alternatives (CLalt) in terms of support* to determine reasons why partners would not marry one another, and might instead find support from family, friends, or both. For example, focusing on the female: If she expects support from her partner, but the partner cannot give the support that is expected, her outcomes (rewards – costs) are subtracted from her CL, and her resultant satisfaction is low. Even if support from her partner is relatively high, if the woman's expectations are higher than what the partner can provide, her outcomes subtracted from her CL will result in low satisfaction. In addition to her outcomes, CL, and satisfaction, the female's CLalt comes into play. If the woman has more viable alternatives than the partner, in this case high support from family, friends, or both, she may be more likely to pair low satisfaction, high CLalt from family, friends, or both, and

dependence in predicting reasons why she does not want to marry her partner. We know that cohabitation is heterogeneous (Kiernan, 2004), and that marriage is not synonymous with stability (divorce, infidelity, etc.). However, even with increased cohabitation rates, marriage is still revered, as evidenced by the fact that only 3% to 4% of single adults age 25 to 54 have no desire to marry (Mahay & Lewin, 2007). Thus, marriage, in general, still tends to be equated with stability, as is common in the literature (Popenoe, 2008). That is, the meaning of marriage for most individuals is of stability.

Research suggests that support predicts positive outcomes. In a review of 81 studies, support had a beneficial effect on various aspects of health (Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). A review of 28 studies found that support from the partner, particularly a marital partner, can be a source of help or of stress (Lincoln, 2000). The support that is given from the partner needs to be of support and not something more detrimental in order to be beneficial. It is true that married individuals experience health benefits, but the greatest health benefits are for those who experience more positive than negative marital quality, which can be likened to support. In fact, with negative partner interactions, health can actually suffer (Abbey, Abramis, & Caplan, 1985; Bertera, 2005; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Horwitz, McLaughlin, & White, 1998; Jackson, 1992; Marcussen, 2000; Umberson, Williams, Powers, Liu, & Needham, 2006; Walen & Lachman, 2000). Furthermore, husbands' stress has been found to transmit in marriage and lead to adverse effects on the emotional health of the wife (Rook, Dooley, & Catalano, 1991).

Gender differences also exist in terms of support. Women have been found to have larger social networks than men (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987; Kessler & McLeod, 1984), and within these social networks, women give and receive more support than men (House, Umberson, and Landis, 1988). Therefore, women may have more available supporters than do men.

Taken together, then, the pregnant, unmarried, cohabiting women may prefer to receive support from their partner, but do not find support from him. Finding low support from the partner, alternative support from family, friends, or both, may help explain why female partners would not marry the parent of their expectant child. That is, the female partners do not need to marry the low supporting partner assuming they can find alternative sources of support in family, friends, or both. This hypothesis is specific to women given the potentially larger social networks of women versus men (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987) discussed above.

Using the tenets of Social Exchange Theory, I explore the following question: How does the comparison level of alternatives affect pregnant, unmarried, cohabitators' reasons for not getting married? Specifically, I compare support received by the pregnant woman from her partner, versus support from family, friends, or both. I predict that the following pattern will explain reasons why female partners are not marrying the fathers of their expectant children: Low support from the male partner and high support from family and friends. Given that female partners can find comparatively higher levels of support from alternative sources outside the partner, these women do not then have a need to marry their partner as explained by social exchange theory (i.e., higher CLalt from family and friends). I will examine these patterns for both men and women and overall patterns, but focus my discussion on this pattern of results for women.

Summary of hypotheses

From SI, I predict that:

- Individuals high in traditionalism and high in religiousness will cite financial reasons for not marrying as a *greater* percentage than all other groups of individuals.

- Individuals low in traditionalism and low in religiousness will cite financial reasons for not marrying as a *lower* percentage than all other groups of individuals.
- Individuals with mixed traditionalism and religiousness will fall in between these groups in terms of financial reasons not to marry.

From social exchange:

I hypothesize that the following pattern of low support from partner and high support from family, friends, or both, will predict overall reasons why pregnant, unmarried, cohabitators do not marry, and I focus my discussion on women.

Method

Procedure and Participants

To participate in this research, individuals must have been at least 18 years of age at the beginning of the study, expecting their first child together, and unmarried. All but one of the couples in the study were cohabiting, that is, one couple reported keeping separate residences but staying together a few times out of the week. Partners could have children from previous relationships, and in five of the couples, one partner had a child from a previous relationship. The number of participants was 38 individuals or 19 paired couples, except in the financial reasons for not marrying measure, in which 4 individuals did not respond with regard to reasons for not marrying, and in the support measure, one couple did not respond with regard to all support questions. At least one member of each couple did respond to the financial reasons for not marrying measure and therefore, 34 individuals and 19 couples were represented in this measure. All members of 18 out of the 19 couples in the study responded to the support measure and therefore, 36 individuals and 18 couples were represented in this measure.

Data were collected through an initial survey about life experiences and relationship quality, as well as a daily diary survey completed for seven days about relationship quality. All data used in this analysis were from the initial survey. See Table 1 for demographic information about the sample.

Measures

Religiousness and traditionality. To assess religiousness and traditionality, participants were asked, “How would you describe your degree of religiousness?” and “How traditional do you see yourself as being?” Participants were given the following options for each question: 1=Very religious/traditional, 2=Somewhat religious/traditional, 3=Neutral, 4=Not very religious/traditional, 5=Not at all religious/traditional.

Support. To assess support, participants were asked the following questions about their partner, family, and friends:

“How much does _____ really care about you?”

How much does _____ really understand the way you feel about things?

How much can you rely on _____ for help if you have a serious problem?

How much can you open up to _____ if you need to talk about your worries?”

For each question, the participant could respond with 1= not at all, 2=a little, 3=some, 4=a lot.

Reasons for not marrying. To assess reasons for not marrying, participants were provided with the following directions: “Please read the reasons below, and indicate, which instances, if any, would be a reason for you in your decision not to marry your current partner, either now in the future, using the following 1 to 7 point scale.” The listed reasons were: Financial stability, ability to pay for wedding, doubts about self as spouse, doubts about partner as spouse, quality of current relationship, doubts about self as parent, doubts about partner as parent, own capability

of being economic provider, partner capability of being economic provider, fear of divorce, infidelity, in-laws, bringing children from own and partner's previous relationships together (i.e., blended or stepfamilies), and other not listed. For each reason, the participant could respond on a scale of 1 to 7 in which the following anchors were used: 1 (*not at all a reason for me*), to 4 (*neutral*), to 7 (*very much a reason for me*). The focus of this analysis was on financial reasons for not marrying over all other reasons. Financial reasons for not marrying included 4 items: Financial stability, ability to pay for wedding, own capability of being economic provider, and partner capability of being economic provider.

Results

I first discuss results from Hypothesis 1 (SI and financial reasons) and then discuss results from Hypothesis 2 (social exchange and a focus on alternative support from family, friends, or both, compared to support from the partner).

Hypothesis 1

In Table 2, I report the results of data regarding religiousness, traditionality, and financial reasons for remaining unmarried. Using median splits, I separated the individuals into four groups based on their reported levels of traditionality and religiousness. Medians were as follows: The median for traditionality was 3.0. High traditionality was defined as a reported score less than or equal to the median (1 to 3). Low traditionality was defined as a reported score greater than the median (4 to 5). The median for religiousness was 3.0. High religiousness was defined as a reported score less than or equal to the median (1 to 3) and low religiousness was defined as a reported score greater than the median (4 to 5). The four groups were:

Group 1: High Traditionality and High Religiousness (n = 13)

Group 2: High Traditionality and Low Religiousness (n = 7)

Group 3: Low Traditionality and High Religiousness (n = 6)

Group 4: Low Traditionality and Low Religiousness (n = 8)

After forming these four groups, I next computed the percentage of cited financial reasons for not marrying based on the following steps:

Step 1: Computed the sum across all 13 items for each individual's reported reasons for not marrying.

Step 2: Computed the sum of the 4 items for financial reasons for not marrying (i.e., financial stability, ability to pay for wedding, own capability of being economic provider, and partner capability of being economic provider) for each individual's reported reasons for not marrying.

Step 3: Calculated the percentage of reported financial reasons for not marrying out of the total reasons for not marrying. That is, the final score reported for each individual was the score for the sum of financial reasons for not marrying divided by total sum score of reasons for not marrying.

Step 4: Divided the sample into four groups based on levels of traditionality and religiousness (i.e., Group 1, Group 2, Group 3, and Group 4 as described above), and averaged the individual percentages with the other individuals of the same group in order to find each group's percentage of reported financial reasons for not marrying. Thus, the total percentages need not equal 100%, as they are percentages of financial reasons out of total reasons.

From SI, I predicted that individuals high in traditionalism and high in religiousness (Group 1) will cite financial reasons for not marrying as a greater percentage out of their total reasons for not marrying, whereas individuals low in traditionalism and low in religiousness (Group 4) will cite financial reasons for not marrying as a lower percentage, while individuals

with mixed traditionalism and religiousness (Groups 2 and 3) will fall in between these groups in terms of financial reasons not to marry.

I found partial support for my hypothesis. As expected, financial reasons accounted for the lowest percent of reasons for not marrying for Low Traditionality and Low Religiousness (Group 4). However, for High Traditionality and High Religiousness (Group 2), financial reasons for not marrying were second highest, and not the highest overall.

In order of percentages (highest to lowest) the following pattern was found:

Group 2: High Traditionality and Low Religiousness group, financial reasons for not marrying accounted for 32.0% of their total reported reasons for not marrying (not as expected).

Group 1: In the High Traditionality and High Religiousness group, financial reasons for not marrying accounted for 27.8% of their total reported reasons for not marrying

Group 3: In the Low Traditionality and High Religiousness group, financial reasons for not marrying accounted for 27.6% of their total reported reasons for not marrying.

Group 4: In the Low Traditionality and Low Religiousness group, financial reasons for not marrying accounted for 24.3% of their total reported reasons for not marrying (as expected).

Hypothesis 2

Using median splits, I separated the women into two groups based on their reported levels of partner support, calculated from the averages of each female participant's responses to the four questions assessing partner support. I used the following median splits: High partner support (median = 3.75) was defined as a reported score greater than the median (4.00). Low partner support was defined as a reported score less than or equal to the median (2.75 to 3.75), to derive the following two groups:

For women in Group 1: Low Partner Support (n = 11)

For women in Group 2: High Partner Support (n = 7)

From social exchange, I hypothesized that the pattern of low support from the male partner and high support from family, friends, or both will predict overall reasons why female, pregnant, unmarried, cohabitators do not marry.

I found support for this hypothesis. (See also Table 2):

As expected: For women who reported low partner support (Group 1), these women also reported an average family support score of 3.36 and an average friend support score of 3.30.

For women who reported high partner support (Group 2), they reported both lower family (3.04) and friend (3.18) support.

Discussion

Symbolic Interactionism and Financial Reasons for Not Marrying

My first hypothesis was that more traditional and more religious pregnant, unmarried, cohabitators would cite financial reasons for not marrying as a high percentage of their overall reasons for not marrying, as compared to less traditional and less religious individuals. This hypothesis was partially supported in that financial reasons accounted for the lowest percent of reasons for not marrying for the low traditionality and low religiousness group (Group 4). However, the group with the highest percentage of cited financial reasons was the high traditionality and low religiousness group (Group 2), contradicting my hypothesis that individuals high in both (Group 1) would be more likely to cite financial reasons for not marrying. An explanation for this unexpected finding for high religion, high traditionalism (Group 1) is that high traditionalism may be more important in determining financial reasons for not marrying than high religiousness.

My results compliment SI in that financial symbols of marriage appear to have an important meaning to those who consider themselves to be highly traditional. These financial symbols appeared to be of greater importance to the highly traditional than to the highly religious, although there was an increase between low religious and high religious when traditionality was low.

There are two possible explanations as to why my findings varied from what was expected. I did not assess any specific religious affiliation as any religious affiliation is related to a greater likelihood to marry than to cohabit, than no religious affiliation (Dempsey & de Vaus, 2004; Newcomb & Bentler, 1980; Yllo, 1978). The diversity of religious affiliations within the highly religious groups perhaps leads to greater diversity of reasons for not marrying. Also, traditionality could be defined differently by each individual, in accordance with SI, each individuals meaning of what it is to be “traditional” will vary based on their interactions with others.

Social Exchange and Support

My second hypothesis was the following pattern: low support from partner, and high support from family, friends, or both, as reasons for pregnant, unmarried, cohabitators not to marry. That is, if the partner does not provide the expected support, then perhaps support can instead be found with family, friends, or both, such that family and friends are viable alternatives in contrast to the low support of the partner. This hypothesis was supported for women, in that for women who reported *lower* partner support also reported *higher* levels of support from family and friends than did women who reported higher partner support. That is, if the partner is low in terms of support, family, friends, or both offer viable alternatives of support to the women in terms of support, in line with social exchange theory.

This finding, however, needs to be interpreted with caution because the median of women's reported male partner support was 3.75 out of a possible score of 4.00. If a male partner support score of 3.75 is considered to be a low score as was defined in this study, then family and friend support should also be considered low for all groups. To better assess the relationships between partner, family, and friend support, a larger sample, a more varied measure of support with more possible ranges, or both, would need to be used. Also, data from male participants and overall participants (provided in tables below, but not discussed here) could be compared to the data from female participants in order to better analyze the expressed pattern of findings for support.

Although this hypothesis was framed in terms of social exchange, SI could also offer an explanation as to why family and friend support was not as high when partner support was high. That is, why don't women report high support from family and friends, when also reporting high support from the partner?

According to SI, shared meaning is very important. Because the pregnant, unmarried, cohabiting partners share the context of their relationship, it seems that the meaning they have of their relationship (pregnancy and marriage as delinked) would also be shared. Support is more effective when experiences are shared between the supporter and the support recipient (Jackson, 1992). Furthermore, if one's partner is the primary source of support, then having a confidant is important for one's well being. Taken together, and as explained by SI, women might be more likely to perceive male partners as high in support when both have a shared meaning about parenthood as not necessarily equated with marriage, which may *not* be the same meaning shared by family, or friends.

Social exchange theory focuses on relationship satisfaction in general as a factor of costs and outcomes of relationships in general, and while variables such as support can be factored into social exchange, social exchange theory does not make predictions based solely on support. Therefore, there are limitations to applying social exchange and CLalt to support alone as a reason for women not to marry. In order to elaborate on these findings, future research should include more specific survey items relating support and relationship stability. Also, future analysis of findings for men and overall participants would indicate differences in support between men and women. The current findings reveal a potential shared meaning between pregnant, unmarried, partners, that may not be shared by family or friends, and future research should examine the cause between this separation in meaning.

Conclusions

The delinking of parenthood and marriage, previously discussed in terms of low-income populations (e.g., Roy, Buckmiller, & McDowell, 2008), is now becoming more prevalent in middle class samples, in line with a small body of other research (Sassler & Cunningham, 2008). In the current sample, 23 of 34 pregnant, unmarried, cohabitators had at least some college education and 29 of 38 were employed. This sample adds to the growing idea that cohabitators are diverse (Kiernan, 2004) and that the delinking of parenthood and marriage occurs in samples other than those restricted by low income.

The results of this research hold insight into the increasing rate of childbirth outside of marriage, and the reasons pregnant, unmarried, cohabitators may choose to remain unmarried. Those who characterize themselves as highly traditional (characteristic of both Group 1 and Group 2) cite greater financial reasons for not marrying than the other groups of individuals. In line with SI, this pattern of results may be because marriage has a high special status for them,

and these highly traditional individuals value socially accepted symbols of marriage, commonly financial symbols. Additionally, women who report lower partner support also report high support from family and friends, and may choose not to marry because of the availability of support outside of that from the partner, emphasizing the importance of other alternatives, in line with social exchange theory.

These results underscore why it is important to gather data from individuals who are pregnant, unmarried, and cohabiting in terms of understanding reasons for not marrying. Given the high percentage of cited financial reasons for not marrying by those who were high on traditionality, it is important to be aware of how such symbols of marriage might need to be in place before such individuals consider further the idea of marriage. That is, for those individuals interested in promoting marriage (although not necessarily the goal here), assistance in the form of job acquisition, buying a home, or paying for a wedding, may encourage couples to then talk further about the possibility of marriage. Also, if support from the partner is low, support from others, including family, friends, or other sources of support (e.g., support groups involving family or friends, for example) might be especially important to aid unwed mothers.

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Tables

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics (N = 38 individuals)

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Age	Range between 18 and 31	
Ethnicity		
African American or Black	1	3%
Caucasian	23	61%
Asian or Pacific Islander	2	5%
Hispanic	9	24%
Native American	1	3%
Mixed ethnic background: Noted as “Black, White, Hispanic, and American Indian” and “White and Hispanic”	2	5%
Highest Attained Education		
Some high school	5	15%
Graduated high school	2	6%
Some college or Associate’s degree	15	44%
Bachelor’s degree	6	18%
Some graduate school	4	12%
Master’s degree	2	6%
Employment status		
Employed	29	76%
Unemployed	9	24%

Table 1 continued

	<i>n</i>	%
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Family or Joint Income (as reported by individual)		
Less than \$5,000	3	9%
\$5,000 to 9,999	2	6%
\$10,000 to 19,999	3	9%
\$20,000 to 29,999	4	13%
\$30,000 to 39,999	6	19%
\$40,000 to 49,999	3	9%
\$50,000 and above	11	34%
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Children from previous relationships		
For all individuals (n out of 38 individuals)	5	13%
For all couples (n out of 14 couples)	5	36%
Notes about children from previous relationships:		
➤ For one male participant: Son, age 4, spends 6 months with biological mother, and 6 months with biological father.		
➤ For one female participant: Daughter, age 15 months, lives full time with woman and her boyfriend, and child does not see biological father.		
➤ For one female participant: Son, age 5, lives with biological mother and her boyfriend.		
➤ For one male participant: Son, age 5, lives with biological mother during the week and with biological father and his girlfriend on weekends.		
➤ For one male participant: Son, age 3, lives with biological father and his girlfriend 5 months out of the year (during the summer months and December), and with biological mother during the rest of the year.		

Table 2

Women's Patterns of Partner Support, and Family and Friend Support (N = 18)*

	Support Score From...	
	Family	Friends
Group 1: Low Partner Support (2.75 to 3.75), n=11	3.36	3.30
Group 2: High Partner Support (4.00), n=7	3.04	3.18

Table 3

Men's Patterns of Partner Support, and Family and Friend Support (N = 18)*

	Support Score From...	
	Family	Friends
Group 1: Low Partner Support (3.25 to 3.75), n=11	3.41	2.84
Group 2: High Partner Support (4.00), n=7	3.32	3.04

Table 4

Overall Patterns of Partner Support, and Family and Friend Support (N = 36)*

	Support Score From...	
	Family	Friends
Group 1: Low Partner Support (2.75 to 3.75), n=22	3.39	3.07
Group 2: High Partner Support (4.00), n=15	3.18	3.11

*One couple (two individuals) did not respond to survey items involving support, and this couple was excluded from these analyses.

**Possible range of support was 1.00 to 4.00.