MEASURING COHABITATION: DOES HOW, WHEN, AND WHO YOU ASK MATTER?

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Jean Knab
Sara McLanahan

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If you'd like a copy of this paper, email jeanknab@princeton.edu.

Measuring Cohabitation:

Does How, When, and Who You Ask Matter?

In response to the dramatic increase in cohabitation during the 1980s and 1990s and growing interest in this new family form, researchers have pushed for the inclusion of measures of cohabitation in large-scale surveys. While many national surveys now include questions designed to identify cohabitors, they differ with respect to the wording and format of the questions. Not only do these differences in measures affect our estimates of the prevalence of cohabitation (Casper & Cohen, 2000), they also shape our understanding of correlates and outcomes (Knab, 2004).

Inconsistent measurement across surveys occurs in part because of the different goals of and constraints on particular surveys. It also reflects a lack of consensus in the research community about how to define cohabitation. While living together seems like a fairly straightforward concept, recent research highlights the ambiguity regarding the boundaries and meaning of cohabitation for many couples. Cohabitors are diverse in their marriage intentions (Brown & Booth, 1996; Osborne, 2002), residence patterns (Binstock & Thornton, 2003; Knab, 2004), and reasons for living together (Manning & Smock, 2003; Sassler, 2004). Because of these differences in form and function, cohabitation estimates may vary depending on how and when the question is asked.

Measurement is complicated even further when we consider that cohabitation consists of two individuals who may have different perceptions of the same relationship. Researchers have documented differences in couples' perceptions of their relationship quality and expectations about marriage (Waller & McLanahan, Forthcoming). Moreover, couples have been known to report differently on a variety of subjective and objective issues including father-child contact and fertility intentions (Auriat, 1993; Coley, 2002; Williams & Thomson, 1985). Therefore, cohabitation rates may also vary, depending on whether it is the man, woman, or both partners who are asked to report on their living arrangements.

Most previous research on cohabitation measurement compares the correspondence between direct and indirect measures of cohabitation across different surveys (Baughman, Dickert-Conlin, & Houser, 2002; Casper & Cohen, 2000). In this chapter, we examine variation in direct measures within a particular survey. We use data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS) to construct multiple measures of cohabitation and to determine how these different measures affect our estimates of the prevalence, composition, and consequences of cohabitation.

Background

Rates of heterosexual cohabitation have increased dramatically over the latter half of the 20th century. Cohabitation rates for unmarried women tripled from three percent to nine percent between 1978 and 1998 (Casper & Cohen, 2000) and today, more than one-half of women in the U.S. cohabit before they marry (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Because of the increased prevalence of cohabitation, childbearing and childrearing increasingly occur within cohabiting unions. Demographers estimate that roughly 13 percent of all births (40 percent of non-marital births) are to cohabiting couples and that 40-50 percent of children will spend some time in a cohabiting parent household during childhood (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Graefe & Lichter, 1999).

The increasing prevalence of cohabitation has generated a great deal of research, much of which is focused on trying to get inside the black box of cohabitation. Researchers examine the characteristics of the institution of cohabitation, and of cohabitors themselves, in order to situate cohabitation along the spectrum of romantic relationships. However, fitting cohabitation into a single theoretical construct has proven to be difficult. Instead, cohabitation appears to be comprised of multiple institutions, serving different purposes and taking on different meanings for different couples.

The diversity in the form and function of cohabiting unions has implications for the clarity and consistency of cohabitation measurement.

Research examining residential patterns, vagueness about terms used to identify cohabitors, and couple disagreement about relationship quality and marriage intentions all suggest that our knowledge of the prevalence and nature of cohabitation is conditioned by the nature of the questions and the respondents.

Casper and Cohen (2000) began the work of examining variation in cohabitation rates across the major surveys, including the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), the Survey of Income Participation (SIPP), the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), and the Current Population Survey (CPS). Because each of these surveys measures cohabitation slightly differently, cohabitation rates vary across surveys (e.g., up to 13 percentage points between the NSFG and CPS for some age groups (Casper & Cohen, 2000)). Casper and Cohen provide a review of many of the reasons why cohabitation rates vary across surveys. Our paper extends their work by examining how cohabitation rates vary within a single survey that uses different direct measures of cohabitation.

The remainder of this section will describe how cohabitation is typically measured and how differences in measurement may affect estimates of prevalence and correlates of cohabitation within a given survey. We focus specifically on three differences: differences in *how* cohabitation questions are asked (and specifically differences in the amount of time the partner spends in the household), differences in *when* questions are asked (concurrently or retrospectively), and differences in *who* answers the questions.

How Cohabitation is Typically Measured

One approach to measuring cohabitation is to ask respondents a direct question about their current relationship status and/or household membership. However there are differences across and within surveys in the criteria for household membership. For example, the NSFG-6, SIPP, and CPS limit household membership to persons who have the same "usual address," the NSFG-5 limits household membership to people that "live and sleep here most of the time," and the NSFH-1 asks about people living in the household "half of the time or more." Questions that ask about cohabitation in terms of current relationship status often present no guidelines for household membership. Some surveys ascertain cohabitation status from multiple questions (household roster and relationship questions), which may act to boost cohabitation rates.

Variation in household membership criterion may lead to different couples being counted as cohabiting across surveys/questions. Recent qualitative research by Manning and Smock (2003) describes a "slippery slide" into cohabitation for many young couples, with couples gradually moving in together over a period of time while maintaining multiple residences. Therefore, some couples are cohabiting part-time and would be classified as cohabitors in one survey but not another. In addition to their deliberate inclusion/exclusion across surveys via household membership criteria, couples who are cohabiting part-time may be uncertain about whether to label themselves as such when not provided with formal guidelines (or even despite formal guidelines).

If the "slippery slide" into cohabitation is fairly common, it would have important implications for the measurement and interpretation of cohabitation in large-scale surveys. Questions that set higher criteria for cohabitation will produce lower prevalence rates. Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, Knab (2004) shows that a significant minority of unmarried mothers are cohabiting part-time when their child is age one. Between 5 and 11 percent of mothers who were unmarried at their child's birth report living together *part of the time* one year after the birth. Therefore, including all or some of these couples as cohabitors would have a significant impact on the cohabitation rate. Including/excluding part-time cases not only affects estimates of the prevalence of cohabitation, it also affects the demographic characteristics of cohabitors as well as the effects of cohabitation on union transitions, pooling, and father involvement.

A related (and somewhat overlapping) issue is whether a respondent understands the terminology used to identify cohabitation or whether he/she even subscribes to the idea that he or she is "living together" with a partner. Manning and Smock (2003) find that the term "unmarried partner," which is often used in household rosters, does not resonate with many couples. These labels are not terms that couples commonly use to refer to each other and may imply a different level of commitment than what is perceived by respondents. Another issue is that of intentionality, as some couples report having moved in together without having made a conscious decision to do so. The fact that these couples never "decided" to live together (Manning & Smock, 2003), may lead to ambiguities regarding the labeling of their relationship.

Knab (2004) finds evidence of substantial variation in the labeling of living arrangements across mothers. While some respondents who spend two to six nights together per week report themselves as not cohabiting, others with the same residential pattern consider themselves cohabiting. These relationship labels may be tied to a couple's marriage intentions, religious beliefs, or the quality of their relationship at a given moment.

When Cohabitation is Typically Measured

Another approach to measuring cohabitation is to collect retrospective information on cohabitation histories. For each previous relationship, cohabitation histories ascertain the dates the couple started (and stopped) living together. Cohabitation histories also vary across surveys. Some histories allow for multiple start and end dates for cohabitation in a given relationship, while others limit to only a single start/end.

The retrospective approach has long been used to collect data on marriage and fertility. Previous survey research has documented discrepancies between contemporaneous and retrospective reports of marital transitions and have found these can influence estimates of divorce and remarriage (Lillard & Waite, 1989; Peters, 1988). One might expect the discrepancies between contemporaneous and retrospective reports of cohabitation to be even greater given the ambiguities described above. For example, if couples have cohabited part-time, they may find it more difficult to recall or pinpoint start dates in retrospective surveys.

Teitler, Reichman, and Koball (2004) use data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to examine the correspondence of reported cohabitation over time. They find that 16 percent of mothers change their report of whether they were cohabiting at the time their child was born between the baseline and one-year follow-up interviews. The authors explore some of the correlates of discrepancies in reports of cohabitation and find that mother's individual level characteristics (but not father's) and couple's current relationship status are strongly related to changes in reported cohabitation.

Another issue is that high rates of residential separations among cohabitors have implications for cohabitation histories. Binstock and Thornton (2003) find that a substantial proportion of cohabiting couples spend time living apart (for reasons other than relationship discord). It is unclear whether during this time these couples should and do consider themselves "living together" and how they would respond to a cohabitation history that asked for only one start and end date per partner.

Who Reports About Cohabitation

Finally, surveys differ with respect to who is asked to report on cohabitation status, with some surveys targeting any knowledgeable respondent (CPS), others targeting women (the NSFG-5), and still others collecting data from both partners (FFCWS, NSFH, NSFG-6). Given the ambiguities surrounding the meaning of cohabitation and the frequency of part-time cohabitation and short-term separations, it is easy to see how couples might disagree about their status. It is also possible that men and women have different understandings of the meaning of cohabitation. If gender differences exist, this would lead to differences in estimates of prevalence and associations.

There is a substantial literature on reporting differences in both subjective and objective measures across couples, such as father-child contact and fertility intentions (Auriat, 1993; Coley, 2002; Williams & Thomson, 1985). A recent paper looking at household membership, specifically the living arrangements of children of divorced parents, found fairly substantial differences in reporting across mothers and fathers (Lin, Schaeffer, Seltzer, & Tuschen, 2004). These authors highlight the subjective nature of this type of reporting and how living arrangements can be complex and responses highly sensitive to the wording of the question.

At least two papers provide information on couple disagreement in the Fragile Families Study. Waller and McLanahan (Forthcoming) found that one-quarter of the romantically involved couples in the Fragile Families Study differed in their expectations about future marriage to their partner. If cohabiting partners have different levels of commitment, they may also choose to label their relationship differently (in terms of cohabiting or not), particularly if this is a subjective (as well as residential) distinction as alluded to in earlier research. Looking at the report of cohabitation at the child's birth, a measure we reexamine in this paper, Teitler and Reichman (2001) found that 11 percent of couples disagreed on their cohabitation status at the child's birth.

The Data

In the analysis below, we use data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to examine if and how the issues raised above lead to differences in reports of cohabitation. Because these data contain multiple questions about cohabitation, a panel design (with current and retrospective questions), and couple data, they allow us to examine the importance of *how* questions are asked, *when* they are asked, and *of whom* they are asked.

The FFCWB Study is a longitudinal study of a birth cohort from the late 1990s. The data were collected in large, urban areas (as the sampling frame was limited to cities of 200,000 people or more). See Reichman et al. (2001) for more detail on the sample design. The sample of approximately 5,000 births, with an over-sample of non-marital births, makes it ideal to study cohabiting parents.

Baseline surveys were conducted from 1998-2000, at the birth of the focal child. First follow-up interviews were conducted approximately one year after the baseline interview. Eighty-seven percent of eligible, unmarried mothers responded to the baseline interview -- yielding a sample of 3,712 unmarried mothers. Eighty-nine percent of these mothers responded to the one-year follow-up (N = 3,294). For the analyses comparing current and retrospective reports, we use this sample of mothers who were interviewed at both the baseline and one-year follow-up. We dropped nine cases where the baseline interview was greater than one month after the child was born since the retrospective question asks about living together when the child was born. We also dropped 25 cases that were not asked about their cohabitation status at baseline, yielding a final sample of 3,260 for this portion of the analysis.

For the analyses of couple data, we further limited the sample to couples for whom we had interviews with both partners at both waves. Sixty-five percent of mothers interviewed at both waves had a corresponding father interview at both waves (N=2,128). We dropped 303 cases in which the couple was interviewed more than one month apart at baseline (N = 1,825). At baseline, parents were asked whether they were living together "now," and a difference of one month is likely to seriously affect their report.

We look only at whether the mother is cohabiting with the focal child's father since we are focusing on cohabitation at the child's birth. All of the respondents in our sample are parents, and therefore our results cannot be extended to the population of cohabitors as a whole. In this paper, we refer to the respondents as "mother" and "father."

Results

How we ask about cohabitation

We begin by examining how much part-time cohabitors affect the prevalence of cohabitation at the child's birth. At the one-year interview, the Fragile Families Study asked mothers whether they and their baby's father were "living together: all/most of the time, some of the time, rarely, or never?" at the time of the child's birth.[1] Results are reported in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

As shown in Table 1, 50 percent of mothers said they were living with the father "all or most of the time" at the child's birth. An additional nine percent reported living with the father "some of the time." If we treat living together "some of the time" as cohabitation, the prevalence increases by nearly 20 percent, from 50 to 59 percent, a non-trivial number. These findings clearly demonstrate that part-time cohabitation is a relatively common phenomenon, at least among unmarried parents, and we suspect that it is equally, if not more, common among childless couples.

It is not clear, however, whether we should count adults who are living together part of the time as cohabiting. Knab (2004) finds that in some domains, part-time cohabiting couples are similar to dating couples, whereas in other domains, they are similar to full-time cohabiting couples. Later in this chapter, we compare these two groups in terms of their composition and outcomes.

When we ask about cohabitation

The next table examines whether the timing of the question about cohabitation (current versus retrospective reports) affects the prevalence. At baseline, mothers were asked, “Are you and [baby’s father] living together now?” Allowable responses were “yes” or “no.” We refer to this question as a measure of “current” status. As shown in Table 2, 48 percent of mothers reported that they were cohabiting at the child’s birth.

[Table 2 about here]

Next, we infer cohabitation at birth using a cohabitation history measure taken from the one-year follow-up interview. Mothers who reported at the one-year follow-up survey that they were living with the child’s father at least part of the time at birth were asked, “When did you and (father) start living together?” This date was compared to the child’s birth date to determine whether or not the parents were cohabiting at the child’s birth.[2] Using the date reported at the follow-up interview, we obtain a cohabitation rate of 52 percent. In short, we find higher rates of cohabitation using the retrospective report than using the current report.[3]

Whereas the aggregate cohabitation rates imply only a four percentage point discrepancy, rates of disagreement are much higher when we look within mothers over time. Only 39 percent of mothers report at both the baseline and one-year follow-up interviews that they were cohabiting with the father when their child was born. In total, 21 percent of mothers disagree between their reported cohabitation at baseline and their inferred cohabitation based on the date reporting at one-year follow-up.[4] Discrepancies are not evenly dispersed – mothers are more likely to “upgrade” their relationship (13 percent) than “downgrade” their relationship (9 percent). Given the systematic differences in reporting changes, this difference could impact the associated characteristics and union transitions.

Because we are looking within a single, panel survey, we can look for the sources of the discrepancies in reporting. Looking at mothers who “downgraded” their relationship status (reported cohabiting in the baseline interview, but not cohabiting via the retrospective report) suggests three primary sources for the discrepancy. First, approximately 20 percent of the mothers report they were married at the child's birth, perhaps in an attempt to "legitimize" the birth. Second, 18 percent of the mothers report that they did not know the month or year (primarily the month) they started living with the father (see endnote 2 for a description of how/when dates were imputed). And finally, 26 percent of the mothers report that they started living together after the birth, with most of the clustering occurring around one to three months following the birth. The remainder (one-third) of the mothers report that they were rarely or never living together at the time of the child's birth. If cohabitations begin because of an impending or recent birth, rates of cohabitation may be highly sensitive to imputation strategies used, and whether the question is asked contemporaneously or retrospectively.

Looking at mothers who "upgraded" their relationship status highlighted two important findings. First, 29 percent of mothers said they were cohabiting part-time at birth. This implies that these mothers would not have included themselves in a yes/no question about cohabitation but did include themselves in a question that allowed for part time cohabitation.

Another interesting finding was that the mothers who upgraded their status had a mean "start date" of 27 months (or 2 ¼ years) prior to the child's birth. Only a small percentage of mothers reported a start date for living together within three months of the birth. The high rate of discrepancy between these measures may be the result of transitions in and out of cohabitations alluded to by Binstock and Thornton (2003) – perhaps related to temporary transitions out of cohabitation around the time of the birth due to relationship issues or support receipt by the mother. In sum, cohabitation histories that ask only the start date of the relationship may skew estimates of prevalence at a given point in time.

Who we ask about cohabitation

Finally, we examine whether cohabitation rates differ depending on who is asked the question. Here we limit our sample to couples for which we have both a mother and father report at baseline and at the one-year follow-up. At baseline, 64 percent of mothers in this sub-sample reported that they were living with the child's father (Table 3). Reported cohabitation was slightly higher (67 percent) when asked of the child's father.

[Table 3 about here]

While the aggregate rates imply only a three percentage point difference in mothers and fathers reports of cohabitation, approximately 10 percent of couples disagreed about their cohabitation status. Therefore, the reporter can potentially impact the characteristics and outcomes of cohabitors, which we examine in the next section.

Characteristics and outcomes of cohabitors

In the previous section we showed that the prevalence, and therefore the composition, of cohabitors can vary substantially depending on how, when, and who is asked about cohabitation. In this section, we examine how the characteristics and outcomes of cohabitation are affected by differences in measures.

[Table 4 about here]

In Table 4, for each set of comparisons (*how, when,* and *who)* we compare two demographic characteristics (percent black and percent completed any college) and two outcomes (percent married and percent separated one year after birth) of cohabitors. Then we use t-tests to see if the means of these characteristics and outcomes differ depending on the definition used.

Looking at *how* we ask about cohabitation, we compare the characteristics of mothers who cohabit all/most of the time to those of mothers who cohabit all/most or some of the time.[5] We find that the more inclusive sample is more likely to be black, raising the proportion of cohabitors who are black from 48 percent to 51 percent, but no different in terms of having attended college. Similarly, the more inclusive definition shows a lower risk of marriage and a higher risk of breaking up.

Looking at *when* we ask about cohabitation, concurrently or retrospectively,[6] we find that the retrospective reports show a higher proportion of cohabitors as black, raising the proportion rather dramatically from 44 percent to 49 percent. Using the retrospective report we find lower rates of marriage (by 3.5 percentage points) but similar rates of union dissolution (21 percent). Again, there are no differences in the percentage of mothers who completed any college across measures of cohabitation.

Finally, looking at *who* we ask about cohabitation yields some differences as well. We find similar demographic compositions of cohabitors,[7] but differences in union transitions across reporters. Fathers who report cohabiting at the child's birth are more likely to report marriage one year later than mothers (17 percent versus 16 percent respectively). Cohabiting fathers are also three percentage points less likely to report union dissolution than cohabiting mothers (15 percent versus 18 percent respectively). If we require that both parents agree they are cohabiting, cohabiting mothers are less likely to be black, but they have similar rates of education, marriage and dissolution as if we use the mother's report of cohabitation only.[8]

Summary/Conclusions

This chapter documents the changes in prevalence, characteristics and outcomes of cohabitors depending on *how*, *when*, and *who* is asked about cohabitation. The results imply that how we measure cohabitation matters. Estimates of cohabitation at the child's birth that use the mother's report range from 48 to 59 percent depending on when and how we ask about cohabitation. Estimates also vary within couples, depending on who is asked. Cohabitation rates are higher using retrospective reports, father reports, and when we include part-time cohabitors.

Reporting differences do not appear to be random. Consequently, the resulting sample differences lead to statistically significant differences in the proportion of cohabitors who are black, which could dramatically impact the prevalence of cohabitation across racial/ethnic groups, and in rates of marriage and often in rates of union dissolution.

The institutional ambiguities of cohabitation appear to be related to reporting changes. Mothers have difficulty recalling dates of cohabitations that began only within the previous year and a half and that occurred around the birth of a child -- an important life event. “Land marking” to life events usually aids in recall (Belli, 1998), but perhaps cohabitation starts are too “fuzzy” to pinpoint. Because of the inconsistencies in date reporting, even over this short period of time, imputations of dates in cohabitation histories may influence reported cohabitation at birth.

Unlike marriage and divorce, which are legal event with well defined dates, cohabitation is a subjective concept with different meanings for different people. In sum, the more we learn about cohabitation, the more we recognize the heterogeneity that underlies this new family form.

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Table 1
Prevalence of Cohabitation at Birth
Based on *How* Question is Asked

	Percent
When (child) was born, were you and (baby's father) living together? [1]	
All or most of the time	50.0
Some of the time	9.0
All/most/some	59.0

Notes:

Sample includes mothers interviewed at baseline and one-year follow-ups (N=3,260) in the Fragile Families Study.

Cohabitation as reported at the one-year follow-up.

[1] Three percent of mothers now report being married at the child's birth, including as not cohabiting.

Table 2
Prevalence of Cohabitation at Birth Based on *When* Question is Asked

	Percent
Prevalence	
Current report	
Are you and (baby's father) living together now?	
Responded "yes"	47.7
Retrospective report	
When did you and (baby's father) start living together?[1]	
Date preceded focal child's birth	51.6
Agreement	
Yes, both waves	39.1
Yes, current; No, retrospective	8.6
No, current; Yes, retrospective	12.6
No, both waves	39.8

Notes:

Sample includes mothers interviewed at baseline and one-year follow-ups (N=3,260) in the Fragile Families Study.

[1] Three percent of mothers now report being married at the child's birth, including as not cohabiting.

Table 3
Prevalence of Cohabitation at Birth Based on *Who* is Reporting

	Percent
Prevalence	
Mother	
Are you and (baby's father) living together now?	
Responded "yes"	63.6
Father	
Are you and (baby's father) living together now?	
Responded "yes"	66.9
Agreement	
Both report cohabiting	60.3
Mother reports cohabiting, father reports not cohabiting	3.3
Father reports cohabiting, mother reports not cohabiting	6.5
Neither reports cohabiting	29.9

Notes:

Sample includes mothers and fathers interviewed at baseline and one-year follow-ups of the Fragile Families Study. Includes only those couples in which mothers and fathers were interviewed within one month of each other at baseline (N = 1,825).

Table 4
Variation in Prevalence of Cohabitation at Birth and Related Outcomes Depending on How, When, and Who is Asked Question

			Percent of cohabitors who:		
	Overall Prevalence	Are Black	Completed any college	Married at one-year follow-up	Separated at one-year follow-up
What question is asked (N = 3,260)					
Cohabiting all/most of time	50.0	47.5	26.2	12.0	18.3
Cohabiting all/most or some of time	59.0	50.6 ***	25.7	10.9 ***	21.7 ***
When question is asked (N=3,260)					
Current report	47.7	44.2	27.1	14.7	20.8
Retrospective report (date)	51.6	48.8 ***	25.9	11.1 ***	20.9
Who is reporting (N = 1,825)[1, 2]					
Mother only	63.6	41.9	27.6	16.0	17.9
Father only	66.9	42.0	26.5	17.1 ***	14.9 ***
Both[3]	60.3	40.3 ***	27.4	16.2	17.4

Notes:

Stars represent results from t-tests of mean differences *** = p≤ .01; ** = p ≤ .05; * = p ≤.10.

[1] Includes only cases with both mother and father interviews at both baseline and one-year follow-up.

[2] Percent black and percent completed any college are mother characteristics as reported by the mother.

[3] Outcomes as reported by the mother. Mean differences relative to mother only reported cohabitation.

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[1] Mother's were not asked about part-time cohabitation during the baseline interview.

[2] If the month was missing, but the year was prior to the child's birth, the couple is counted as cohabiting. If the month was missing and the year was the same as the child's birth, the couple is counted as not cohabiting (or unconfirmed cohabitation). Most surveys would likely allocate a portion of these couples via imputation. If the mother reported at the one-year follow-up that in fact she was married at the child's birth, this is counted as not cohabiting (or disagrees with baseline reported cohabitation).

[3] An added complication is the effect of attrition on these estimates. This is a separate issue that will not be discussed in this paper.

[4] The discrepancy rate reported here is approximately 5 percentage points higher than found by Teitler, Reichman, and Koball (2004). We use the partially-imputed (see above) date report as our retrospective report of cohabitation, which potentially includes part-time cohabitors. Teitler, Reichman, and Koball (2004) limit their comparisons to mothers who responded they were living together "all/most of the time."

[5] T-tests represent the difference in means between those cohabiting all/most of the time and those cohabiting some of the time.

[6] T-tests represent the difference in means between those cohabiting based on the retrospective report only and those cohabiting based on the current report only.

[7] The proportion of cohabitors who are black and who completed any college are characteristics of the mother as reported by the mother. Ideally, we would have the fathers' reports of these characteristics of the mother, but that is not available in the data. Union transitions are as reported by the father.

[8] T-tests represent the difference in means between those cohabiting based on the mother's report only and those cohabiting based on the couples reports.