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Author(s): Bryndl E. Hohmann-Marriott
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BRYNDL E. HOHMANN-MARRIOTT *Pennsylvania State University*

Shared Beliefs and the Union Stability of Married and Cohabiting Couples

Cohabiting couples and couples who cohabit prior to marriage have less stable relationships than married couples who did not cohabit, and these differences in stability may be linked to different processes within the relationships. This research examines the similarity of partners' beliefs about the division of household labor using the National Survey of Families and Households (N = *1,039), finding that couples who do not share beliefs about the division of household labor are more likely to end their union. Cohabiting couples have a particularly high likelihood of ending the union when the two partners hold widely divergent views about whether housework should be shared, suggesting that cohabiting and married couples may have different responses to dissimilarity between the partners.*

Couples who cohabit may experience their relationship differently than married couples who have not cohabited. Cohabitors tend to have more egalitarian relationships, as well as less stable ones, than do married couples. These differences may also extend to the ways in which couples experience their shared expectations for the relationship. Although there is some indication that shared expectations affect marriage, little investigation has explored whether cohabitors are also influenced by their shared expectations. This research examines the effects of shared beliefs about the division of household labor on the stability of couples who are cohabiting, who cohabited prior to marriage, and who married without having cohabited with one another.

Traditionalism and Cohabitation

Overall, cohabiting couples appear to be less traditional than married couples. This is evident in the partnerships that cohabitors form, as well as in their expectations for the relationship. The partnerships of cohabitors tend to be more heterogeneous than those of married couples, for both age and race (Qian, 1998; Qian & Preston, 1993; Schoen & Weinick, 1993). Cohabiting couples are also less likely than married couples to have children living with them, although between one third and one half of cohabiting households do contain children (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991). Beliefs and expectations about the relationship are more nontraditional among cohabitors than married couples (Lillard, Brien, & Waite, 1995), with cohabitors less likely to intend to bear children or to buy a home than married couples (Rindfuss & VandenHeuvel, 1990).

Marriage itself may be less essential for cohabitors, evidenced by the one third of partners in cohabiting unions where one or both partners do not intend to marry (Brown & Booth, 1996; Bumpass et al., 1991; Sanchez, Manning, & Smock, 1998). Cohabitors also tend to be more open to the possibility of divorce (Axinn & Thornton, 1992). Indeed, these nontraditional beliefs do appear to leave cohabitors less committed to the institution of marriage. Relationships of cohabitors are more

Population Research Institute, 504 Oswald Tower, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802 (bryndl@pop.psu.edu).

Key Words: union dissolution, cohabitation, marriage, similarity, consensus, division of labor.

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unstable than those of married couples (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Further, cohabitors who marry have higher rates of divorce than couples who marry without cohabiting with one another (see Smock, 2000, for a review).

Nontraditional beliefs also extend to gendered interactions between the partners. Individuals who cohabit hold beliefs about the division of household labor that are more egalitarian than those of married couples (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, & Waite, 1995; Lye & Waldron, 1997). This means that cohabiting couples tend to establish their relationship on the principle of gender equality, whereas married couples base their relationship on a more traditional gendered division of labor (Brines & Joyner, 1999). Married and cohabiting couples may thus deal very differently with issues pertaining to the gendered division of household labor and specifically to the problem of partners who do not share expectations about the division of household labor.

Shared Expectations for Division of Labor

Many, if not most, couples will in some way be confronted with the problem of the two partners not sharing expectations for their relationship. This is a potential problem because the interpersonal similarity of beliefs, values, and attitudes is an important contributor to marital quality and stability (Booth & Welch, 1978; Larson & Holman, 1994; Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Indeed, holding shared expectations leads to a more stable relationship and to enhanced relationship quality for married couples (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996; Larsen & Olson, 1989; Ponzetti, Zvonkovic, Cate, & Huston, 1992), remarried couples (Pasley, Ihinger-Tallman, & Coleman, 1984), and dating couples (Hill, Peplau, & Rubin, 1981), as well as for cohabiting couples (Chung, Small, & McLanahan, 2004; Kenny & Acitelli, 2001).

Shared beliefs are created when partners in a relationship co-construct reality within their relationship (Berger & Kellner, 1964). Thus, one of the central tasks facing couples who are forming a union is to co-create this shared belief system (Ross & Mirowski, 1984; Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989). If the partners do not share beliefs and expectations, they will lack a common basis for understanding one another, leading to a potentially unstable relationship (Kurdek, 1993).

Couples create shared belief systems about many aspects of their relationship, including fathering (Dienhart, 1998; Dienhart & Daly, 1997), religiosity (Chinitz & Brown, 2001), perception of communication (Pasley et al., 1984; Sabourin, Infante, & Rudd, 1993), and division of household labor (Bahr, Chappell, & Leigh, 1983; Hill et al., 1981), all of which can affect the quality and stability of the relationship. The gendered division of household labor is an integral aspect of heterosexual coresidential households, and it has become a uniquely contentious issue as the prevalence of egalitarian beliefs increases (e.g., Hochschild, 1989).

Much research focuses on the traditional/egalitarian divide among relationships, but perhaps more important is the extent to which these beliefs are shared between partners. In his comprehensive review of the literature on household labor, Coltrane (2000) states that "the fit between husband's and wife's ideology is extremely important to marital satisfaction" (p. 444). When partners share expectations for how household labor will be divided, they are more likely to act in a manner consistent with those expectations (Greenstein, 1996; MacDermid, Huston, & McHale, 1990). Despite this, couples often do not share expectations for how household labor should be assigned, with as many as one third of couples disagreeing about who should be responsible for which aspect of family labor (Hiller & Philliber, 1986). This lack of shared expectations can cause relationship quality to decline (Bahr et al., 1983; Hill et al., 1981; Lye & Biblarz, 1993), and this would suggest that shared beliefs about the division of labor have the potential to influence union stability as well.

To resolve the inevitable difficulties arising when partners do not share beliefs about the household division of labor, the partners need to possess problem-solving and communication skills. Research consistently demonstrates that married couples who lack these skills are dissatisfied with their relationship and are more likely to eventually divorce (i.e., Cohan & Bradbury, 1997; Gottman, 1993, 1994; Gottman et al., 1998). There is additional evidence that couples who cohabited prior to marriage may have weaker communication skills than couples who married without cohabiting. Cohan and Kleinbaum (2002) observed problem-solving behaviors in these two groups of couples and found that couples with prior cohabitation exhibited more negative behaviors and fewer positive behaviors than couples who married without cohabiting. If couples who choose to cohabit have less effective communication

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skills, they might be less able to resolve the issues that arise when the partners do not share expectations for their relationship.

Hypotheses

Cohabiting couples may have a weak commitment to their partnership, and they may also lack communication skills. Thus, when difficulties arise, these couples may have particular difficulty resolving issues and may turn to dissolving the relationship as an acceptable solution. The nontraditional beliefs of cohabiting couples could lead to the division of household labor being an especially critical issue. In particular, couples who cohabit may be sensitive to the extent to which the partners share expectations about the division of labor. I thus hypothesize that greater dissimilarity between partners' beliefs about the division of household labor will lead to greater instability and that this effect will be more pronounced for couples who are cohabiting or who cohabited prior to marriage than for couples who married without cohabiting.

METHOD

Data

Data for the analysis are drawn from the first two waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), a nationally representative probability sample containing oversamples of recently married and cohabiting individuals. Wave I was collected in 1987 – 1988 and Wave II in 1992 – 1994. The NSFH is ideal for this study because it contains longitudinal information about both partners for a cross section of cohabiting and married couples, detailed marriage and cohabitation histories, and assessments of relationship beliefs.

Sample

The sample for this analysis comprises couples who are married or cohabiting at Wave I, where the respondent's spouse/partner also completed a survey and the respondent is reinterviewed at Wave II. Of the 7,554 Wave I respondents who are married or cohabiting, 6,163 (81% of all couples) also have partner information, and 5,886 (95% of all couples with partner information) are also interviewed at the second wave. In order to make the samples of married and cohabiting couples comparable, couples are limited to those where both respondents are younger than 50 years at Wave I, as most cohabiting couples are younger than 50, and whose relationships, in their current status, began 4 or fewer years prior to Wave I, as most cohabitations do not last longer than 4 years. This results in a loss of 3,870 couples (66% of fully interviewed couples) where either or both partners are older than 50, as well as a further 870 couples (15% of fully interviewed couples) who are younger than 50 years, but whose relationships began more than 4 years prior to the survey. Using these criteria, the total number of eligible respondents is 1,146 or 19% of the fully interviewed couples. When respondents who are missing responses to the questions used (except income) are removed, the total number of couples included in the analysis is 1,039, which represents 91% of the eligible couples.

This analysis is conducted with the couple as the unit of analysis. All variables are based on the couple's shared characteristics and experiences. In the analyses, couples are entered into the model as a single unit rather than as two individuals, thus precluding nonindependence. The necessity for couple-level analysis and the conceptualization of these analyses are detailed by Thompson and Walker (1982).

Union Dissolution

The outcome variable is union dissolution, which is measured at Wave II. Dissolution is defined for married couples as separation or divorce, and for cohabiting couples as separation (or marriage and subsequent separation or divorce). Of the total sample, 26% ($n = 271$) are no longer together by the second wave. Of married couples who did not cohabit before their marriage, 17% ($n = 69$) are no longer together by the second wave, whereas 33% ($n = 94$) of couples who cohabited prior to marriage are no longer together. For couples cohabiting at Wave I, 46% ($n = 108$) are not together by the second wave, with 87 ending their cohabitation directly and 21 first marrying and subsequently ending their marriage. Of the 129 couples cohabiting at Wave I who stay together, 35 stay in a cohabiting relationship and 94 marry. A separate analysis of cohabiting couples (not shown) demonstrates that similarity of beliefs does not differentially predict relationship status at Wave II for couples who continue to cohabit versus those who marry. Because of

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this, and because the survey was conducted when these couples were cohabiting, I treat these couples as one group.

There is the potential that dissolution may be underestimated as more unstable couples will have been selected out of the sample before Wave I, leaving a sample of couples in longer lasting unions. I have attempted to correct for this by only including in the analysis couples who have been married or cohabiting for 4 or fewer years, but given that relationships most often begin well before the date of marriage or even cohabitation, the sample is nevertheless selective of those couples in longer lasting and presumably more stable unions.

Beliefs About Division of Labor

The key independent variables measure beliefs about the appropriate gendered division of household labor and the extent to which partners share these beliefs. Beliefs about the division of labor are measured in the NSFH by responses to two statements: "It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family" (referred to as *separate spheres*) and "If a husband and a wife both work full-time, they should share household tasks equally" (referred to as *shared housework*). Responses can range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The female partner's response to each statement is included in the models (the male partner is not included to avoid multicollinearity). The correlation between these items is .10 and combining them into a scale results in a Cronbach's α of only .23. For this reason, these items are used separately in the analysis.

The similarity of the partners' responses is measured by a couple-level variable encompassing both partners. Following the method used by Booth and Welch (1978) and Kurdek (1993), similarity is measured here by subtracting the woman's response from the man's response and taking the absolute value. These difference scores can range from 0 to 4, with a score of 0 indicating that the two partners give the same response, a score of 1 indicating that the two partners give responses that are one category apart, and so on. The higher ranges contain very small or empty cells for some union types, and so these higher values are collapsed and used to construct categorical variables. The three categories thus include *same response* (difference score of 0), *moderately different responses* (difference score of 1), and *very different responses* (difference scores of 2 – 4).

Couple Characteristics

All couple characteristics are measured at Wave I, and all are measured at the couple level. To create couple variables for each characteristic, both the content of the characteristic and the similarity between the partners is included, following the method used by Qian (1998).

The age of the couple is represented by two variables, the age of the female partner and a dummy variable indicating whether the couple is in an age-heterogeneous relationship, defined as one partner being more than 5 years older than the other.

Race is self-reported by each respondent and coded here to represent the racial composition of the couple. Couples are grouped as both White, as both non-White, or as each partner reporting a different race. Couples in the both non-White category have both partners reporting the same non-White race and include couples where partners both report being Black, both Hispanic, both American Indian, or both Asian. This category is thus very diverse; unfortunately, there are such a small number of non-White respondents in this survey that this group cannot be subdivided any further. The different-races category includes couples where each of the two partners reports a different race, and all racial groups are represented in this category.

The educational levels of both partners are measured using three categories for partners with similar educations (*both less than high school*, *both high school*, and *both more than high school*) and three categories for partners with different educational levels (*one less than high school and one high school*, *one less than high school and one more than high school*, and *one high school and one more than high school*). More than high school includes some college, as well as 2-year degrees, 4-year degrees, professional degrees, and graduate degrees.

The couple's income is measured by taking each partner's net income, including salary, wages, and tips (but not including investments and other wealth), and using the sum of the two incomes. Because 96 cases (8% of the sample) are missing this information for either or both partners, the missing partner's income is mean substituted by gender. Indicators for whether the

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man's or the woman's income is mean substituted are included in the models as a control. A comparison of models with missing incomes dropped versus mean substituted demonstrates no substantive differences in results, indicating that the mean-substituted cases are not biasing the results.

The shared housework question directly refers to couples where both partners work full time, making it important to consider whether the respondents are in such a union themselves. Therefore, a variable is included that indicates whether both partners in the couple are working full time, defined as 35 hours or more per week.

In this study, relationship length is measured as the amount of time in the current union status. This operationalization is used because the different union statuses and entries into the unions preclude identical measurements of the beginning of the relationship. Thus, the length of the relationship for all married couples (regardless of prior cohabitation) is the amount of time between the wedding date and the date of the interview, and for cohabiting couples, it is the amount of time between the date they first began living together and the interview.

The variable for coresidential children indicates whether the couple has children younger than 18 years living in their household, either the biological or adopted children of both together or of either partner. Noncustodial parents are thus not coded as having coresidential children as division of household labor decisions will be most affected by children who are living with the couple.

To consider prior relationship experience, a measure for any prior marriage is included. If either or both partners had been married prior to their current relationship, which means that a married person would have been married more than once, and a cohabiting person would have been ever married, the couple is coded as having a prior marriage. Additionally, a measure for any prior cohabitation is included to identify serial cohabitors. If either or both partners had cohabited with someone other than their current partner, the couple is coded as having a prior cohabitation.

All these couple-level variables are included in each model. Correlations between the control variables reveal that all are correlated at .30 or less, with the direction of correlation as expected. (e.g., income is correlated positively with *both White* couples and negatively with *both non-White* couples and with *different-race* couples.) These weak correlations indicate that these variables may be used together in a model without incurring multicollinearity.

Descriptive Results

The responses of the partners to the division of labor statements (with the male partner included for reference only) are given in Table 1. The second column in Table 1 shows that when asked about their beliefs on the appropriate gendered division of household labor, both men and women believe more strongly in sharing housework than they do in separate spheres. When men and women are compared, women have, on average, a stronger belief than men in sharing housework, whereas men have, on average, a stronger belief in separate spheres than women.

The third, fourth, and fifth columns in Table 1 give the division of labor beliefs of couples who married without cohabiting (39% of the sample), couples who cohabited prior to marriage (38% of the sample), and couples who are currently cohabiting (23% of the sample), respectively. Consistent with prior research on cohabiting couples (Clarkberg et al., 1995; Lye & Waldron, 1997), both men and women who married without having cohabited believe more strongly in separate spheres than those who either cohabited prior to marriage or are currently cohabiting. By contrast, beliefs about shared housework are comparable across men and women in all three relationship types.

Couple similarity of beliefs about the division of household labor are also detailed in Table 1, with the overall sample given in the second column. Fewer than one third of couples give the same response to the separate spheres statement, and 44% of couples give the same response to the statement about shared housework. For both statements, the largest percentage gives responses that are one category apart. These moderately different responses mean either that the partners both agree or both disagree, with one partner having a strong opinion and the other a more moderate opinion, or that one partner has a moderate opinion and the other is undecided. Although fewer in number, there are also couples where partners give responses that are two or more categories apart, which means either that one has a strong opinion, whereas the other has no opinion, or that they have opposite responses to the statement. For separate spheres, about 25% hold these widely divergent beliefs,

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Table 1. *Division of Household Labor Responses and Partner Similarity*

	Overall	Married Without Cohabiting	Cohabited Prior to Marriage	Currently Cohabiting
Separate spheres				
Female partner				
M (*SD*)	2.84 (1.89)	3.04 (1.21)	2.73 (1.13)	2.68 (1.20)
Male partner				
M (*SD*)	3.04 (1.14)	3.22 (1.16)	2.91 (1.06)	2.97 (1.18)
Partner similarity (%)				
Same response	31	33	30	31
Moderately different responses	44	44	46	39
Very different responses	25	24	24	30
Shared housework				
Female partner				
M (*SD*)	4.27 (0.78)	4.28 (0.76)	4.29 (0.77)	4.20 (0.82)
Male partner				
M (*SD*)	4.12 (0.72)	4.17 (0.73)	4.11 (0.73)	4.09 (0.69)
Partner similarity (%)				
Same response	44	46	44	39
Moderately different responses	47	45	45	51
Very different responses	10	9	10	10
Total (%)	1,039	403 (39)	399 (38)	237 (23)

Note: National Survey of Families and Households respondents and partners married or cohabiting at Wave 1. Scores range from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Male partners' responses are included here for comparative purposes only as this variable is not included in the analytic models.

whereas 10% have very different beliefs about shared housework.

Surprisingly, partner similarity is consistent across the three types of couples, detailed in the third, fourth, and fifth columns of Table 1. This table shows that the proportion of couples at each level of dissimilarity is equivalent across union types. Additionally, χ^2 tests are not significant, indicating that couples in the three union types are no different from one another in the extent to which partners share beliefs about either separate spheres or sharing housework.

The couple characteristics for the overall sample are shown in the second column of Table 2, and the three union types are compared in the third, fourth, and fifth columns. Couples who married after cohabiting are older than either couples who did not cohabit prior to marriage or currently cohabiting couples, and couples who married without cohabiting are less likely to be in age-discrepant relationships. Married couples who did not cohabit are more likely than cohabiting couples to both be White and less likely than either cohabiting couples or those who cohabited prior to marriage to report different races. Married couples have the highest levels of education, with a greater percentage of couples having both partners with more than a high school education. The three couple types are not different in their income levels or the proportion of couples where both partners work full time, however. Not surprisingly, cohabiting couples have the shortest amount of time in their current relationship status. Couples who cohabited prior to marriage are the most likely to have children living with them, with cohabiting couples the least likely and couples who married without cohabiting falling between the two. Couples who married without cohabiting are much less likely than either of the other two groups to have one or both partners with a prior marriage or a prior cohabitation, whereas couples who cohabited prior to marriage have the largest proportion with prior cohabitation experience.

RESULTS

The first hypothesis is that couples in all three union types will be more likely to end their relationship if they have more dissimilar beliefs. This

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Table 2. *Characteristics of Couples by Union Type*

	Overall	Married Without Cohabiting	Cohabited Prior to Marriage	Currently Cohabiting
Age				
Female partner				
M (*SD*)	27.98 (6.04)	27.37 (5.58)	29.28 (5.94)	27.32 (6.54)
Male partner				
M (*SD*)	30.36 (6.62)	29.34 (6.16)	31.75 (6.51)	29.76 (7.14)
Age discrepancy (%)	27	20	31	32
Race (%)				
Both White	84	86	84	80
Both non-White	8	8	7	10
Different races	8	6	9	10
Education (%)				
Both > HS	38	47	34	32
Both HS	18	17	18	18
Both < HS	3	3	3	5
One > HS, one HS	26	24	30	23
One > HS, one < HS	4	2	6	5
One HS, one < HS	10	8	10	15
Income of couple				
M 1987 dollars (*SD*)	34,827.54 (32,314.06)	33,636.32 (25,931.95)	37,090.25 (27,958.98)	33,043.74 (45,985.43)
Length of union				
M years (*SD*)	2.03 (1.09)	2.28 (1.04)	2.06 (1.09)	1.55 (1.01)
Resident children (%)	48	47	57	37
Prior marriage of either partner (%)	45	30	54	54
Prior cohabitation by either partner (%)	23	9	34	28
Both employed full time (%)	58	55	60	61
Total (%)	1,039	403 (39)	399 (38)	237 (23)

Note: National Survey of Families and Households respondents and partners married or cohabiting at Wave 1. Male partners' characteristics are included here for comparative purposes only, as this variable is not included in the analytic models. HS = high school.

is tested using logistic regressions predicting union dissolution by the second wave, and the results are detailed in Table 3. Model 1 includes union type and couple characteristics, Model 2 adds the responses to the two division of labor statements, and Model 3 adds partner similarity for the two division of labor statements.

The first two models explore the relationship factors other than similarity of beliefs that influence stability. Model 1 indicates that cohabitation status is a very important predictor of relationship dissolution. Couples who are currently cohabiting are much more likely to end their union by Wave II than couples who married without cohabiting. In addition, couples where one or both partners cohabited with someone prior to their current partner are 72% more likely to end their union than couples where partners never cohabited or cohabited only with their current partner. With prior cohabitation controlled for, married couples who cohabited with the person they eventually married are no less likely to end their relationship than married couples who did not first cohabit. Further analyses (not shown) confirm this by indicating that the chance of dissolution is increased for couples who cohabited prior to marriage only when one or both partners cohabited with a prior partner. This finding confirms research demonstrating that cohabitation with only the current partner may be less detrimental to the relationship than having a prior cohabitation history with other partners (Teachman, 2003). Prior cohabitation does not appear to affect the chance of dissolution for currently cohabiting couples or for couples who married without cohabiting with one another. Other

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Table 3. *Effects of Division of Labor Ideology on Relationship Dissolution*

	Model 1: Couple Characteristics		Model 2: Model 1 + Responses to Statements		Model 3: Model 2 + Partner Similarity		Model 4: Model 3 + Interactions	
	Coefficient (*SE*)	Odds Ratio	Coefficient (*SE*)	Odds Ratio	Coefficient (*SE*)	Odds Ratio	Coefficient (*SE*)	Odds Ratio
Age								
Female partner	−0.09*** (0.02)	0.91	−0.09*** (0.02)	0.91	−0.09*** (0.02)	0.91	−0.10*** (0.02)	0.91
Heterogeneity	0.09 (0.18)	1.09	0.09 (0.18)	1.09	0.07 (0.18)	1.08	0.09 (0.18)	1.10
Race (vs. both White)								
Both non-White	0.43 (0.27)	1.53	0.43 (0.27)	1.53	0.35 (0.28)	1.42	0.38 (0.28)	1.46
Different races	0.30 (0.27)	1.35	0.32 (0.27)	1.37	0.32 (0.27)	1.37	0.35 (0.28)	1.42
Education (vs. both > HS)								
Both HS	0.75 (0.42)	2.11	0.78 (0.42)	2.18	0.67 (0.43)	1.95	0.63 (0.44)	1.88
Both < HS	0.37 (0.23)	1.45	0.40 (0.23)	1.49	0.37 (0.23)	1.45	0.36 (0.23)	1.43
One > HS, one HS	−0.08 (0.21)	0.92	−0.07 (0.21)	0.94	−0.07 (0.21)	0.94	−0.09 (0.22)	0.92
One > HS, one < HS	0.01 (0.39)	1.01	0.04 (0.39)	1.04	0.03 (0.40)	1.04	0.10 (0.40)	1.10
One HS, one < HS	0.77*** (0.26)	2.17	0.82*** (0.27)	2.26	0.80*** (0.27)	2.24	0.84*** (0.28)	2.33
Income of couple	−0.01 (0.00)	1.00	−0.01 (0.00)	1.00	−0.01 (0.00)	1.00	0.01 (0.00)	1.00
Both employed full time	0.19 (0.16)	1.21	0.19 (0.16)	1.21	0.17 (0.16)	1.19	0.19 (0.17)	1.21
Coresidential children	0.16 (0.18)	1.18	0.16 (0.18)	1.18	0.15 (0.18)	1.16	0.13 (0.18)	1.14
Length of union	−0.01 (0.01)	1.00	−0.01 (0.01)	1.00	−0.01 (0.01)	0.99	−0.01 (0.01)	0.99
Prior marriage	0.42* (0.20)	1.53	0.43* (0.20)	1.54	0.46* (0.20)	1.59	0.50** (0.20)	1.65
Prior cohabitation	0.54*** (0.18)	1.72	0.53*** (0.19)	1.71	0.51* (0.19)	1.66	0.53*** (0.19)	1.71
Union type (vs. married without cohabiting)								
Cohabited prior to marriage	0.30	1.35	0.30 (0.20)	1.34	0.29 (0.20)	1.34	−0.38 (0.30)	0.69
Currently cohabiting	1.19***	3.30	1.19*** (0.21)	3.29	1.18*** (0.21)	3.26	0.76* (0.32)	2.13
Response of female partner to statement								
Separate spheres			−0.02 (0.07)	0.98	0.00 (0.07)	1.00	0.01 (0.07)	1.00
Shared housework			0.09 (0.10)	1.09	0.13 (0.10)	1.14	0.13 (0.11)	1.14
Partner similarity (vs. same response)								
Separate spheres								
Moderately different					0.24 (0.19)	1.27	0.22 (0.19)	1.25
Very different					0.36* (0.21)	1.44	0.38* (0.21)	1.47

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Table 3. *Continued*

	Model 1: Couple Characteristics		Model 2: Model 1 + Responses to Statements		Model 3: Model 2 + Partner Similarity		Model 4: Model 3 + Interactions	
	Coefficient (*SE*)	Odds Ratio	Coefficient (*SE*)	Odds Ratio	Coefficient (*SE*)	Odds Ratio	Coefficient (*SE*)	Odds Ratio
Shared housework								
Moderately different					0.13 (0.17)	1.14	−0.33 (0.29)	0.72
Very different					0.54* (0.27)	1.71	−1.07* (0.60)	0.34
Interactions of union type with shared housework								
Married after cohabiting × Moderately different							0.44 (0.42)	1.55
Married after cohabiting × Very different							2.18** (0.80)	8.88
Currently cohabiting × Moderately different							0.89* (0.40)	2.43
Currently cohabiting × Very different							2.31** (0.72)	10.07
Intercept	0.48 (0.48)		0.14 (0.69)		0.50 (0.70)		−0.65 (0.87)	
Likelihood ratio χ^2 (*df*)	147*** (19)		148*** (21)		155*** (25)		171*** (29)	

Note: National Survey of Families and Households respondents and partners married or cohabiting at Wave 1, $N = 1{,}039$. HS = high school.
*$p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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factors increasing the chance of dissolution by Wave II include one partner having a high school education and the other less, either or both partners having been previously married, and being younger.

Model 2 demonstrates that the content of the woman's responses to the division of labor statements does not influence union dissolution by Wave II. Couples are no more likely to end their union if the woman agrees or disagrees with either of the statements. This finding corroborates Chung et al.'s (2004) finding that content of beliefs is not predictive of union dissolution. Additional analyses (not shown) indicate that the couples' stability is unaffected by whether it is the woman or the man who has higher levels of agreement with the statements.

Dissimilarity and Dissolution

The similarity of division of labor beliefs is added in Model 3 of Table 3. Lending support to the first hypothesis, the analysis finds that greater levels of partner dissimilarity increase the likelihood of dissolution by Wave II, controlling for union type and other couple factors. If the partners give very different responses to the separate spheres statement, they are 44% more likely to end their relationship. There are no differences between couples where partners give responses that are the same and those whose responses are only moderately different. Similarly, partners who give responses that are very different from one another on the shared housework statement are 71% more likely to end their relationship than couples where partners give the same response. These results indicate that dissimilarity is particularly destabilizing when the partners hold beliefs that are widely divergent.

When similarity of response is added to the model, the coefficient for prior cohabitation drops both in size and in significance. This result suggests that the destabilizing effects of having cohabited with previous partners are at least somewhat offset by the extent of ideological similarity between the two current partners.

Cohabitation and Dissimilarity

The second hypothesis explores the differential effect of similarity of beliefs for each type of union. To this end, Model 4 (in Table 3) adds an interaction between similarity of belief in shared housework and union type. The change in χ^2 between Model 3 and Model 4 is significant at $p < .001$, indicating that the overall interaction is significant.

Shared expectations, or the extent to which partners give similar responses about shared housework, do have a differential effect on couples' chances of dissolution dependent on the type of union. This result is represented in Figure 1, which shows the predicted probabilities of dissolution by union type and similarity of response to the statement about sharing housework. This figure is based on Model 4 in Table 3, and predicted probabilities are calculated using the mean of each covariate. All predicted probabilities are given in the figure, although for both married couples who did not cohabit and couples who cohabited prior to marriage, there is only a significant effect when the two partners give very dissimilar responses.

Figure 1 illustrates that high levels of dissimilarity between partners lead to increased probability of dissolution for cohabiting couples and for couples who cohabited prior to marriage. For these couples, the probability of ending the union is at least twice as high if they hold dissimilar views than if they hold the same view. Further, for currently cohabiting couples, even moderate amounts of dissimilarity are associated with higher chances of dissolution. For couples who married without cohabiting, couples who are very dissimilar actually have a lower chance of dissolution than those where partners hold a shared view.

These differences between couple types are only seen for the statement about sharing housework. Models that include an interaction term between union type and similarity of responses to the statement about separate spheres (not shown) indicate that there is no significant interaction. This demonstrates that the similarity of beliefs about separate spheres is affecting relationship dissolution consistently across all three union types.

DISCUSSION

Couples who do not share expectations about the division of household labor are more likely to end their relationship. Cohabiting couples have less stable relationships than married couples, and they have the greatest likelihood of instability when the two partners have widely divergent views. Couples with these contrasting beliefs include those where one partner believes that

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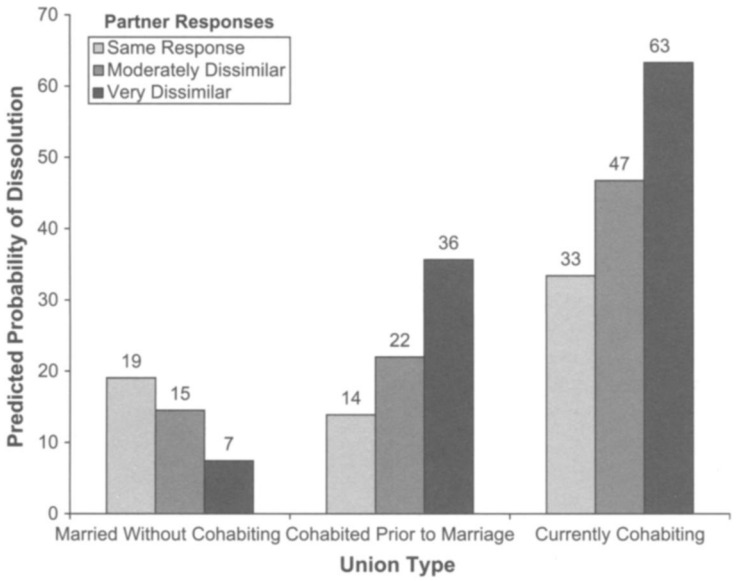
FIGURE 1. PREDICTED PROBABILITIES OF DISSOLUTION BY UNION TYPE AND SIMILARITY OF RESPONSE.



Note: National Survey of Families and Households respondents and partners married or cohabiting at Wave 1, $N = 1{,}039$ (403 married without cohabiting, 399 cohabited prior to marriage, and 237 currently cohabiting). Probability of dissolution is predicted controlling for all other variables in the model. There is no significant effect of same response or moderately dissimilar responses for either couples who married without cohabiting or couples who cohabited prior to marriage.

couples should share housework, whereas the other does not believe this, or where one partner believes very strongly in sharing housework, whereas the other has no particular opinion. Clearly, this level of dissimilarity between the partners has the potential to pose a challenge to couples.

The belief that men should earn and women should care for home and children affects couples in all union types equivalently. For this overarching issue, it is only when the partners hold very different views that their relationship is more unstable. By contrast, when partners hold dissimilar beliefs about whether partners should share housework if both are employed, couples are affected differently depending on their cohabitation status. Currently cohabiting couples are the most disrupted by partner dissimilarity. These partners are more likely to end their union if there is any difference between the partners, even a moderate one. Couples who cohabited before marriage, however, are not affected by small differences and are only more likely to end their union if the partners hold opposing views on sharing housework if both are employed.

Couples who cohabit appear to respond to ideological difference between the partners by ending their relationship. Married couples who did not cohabit, by contrast, appear to have relationships that are particularly strong when the partners hold dissimilar beliefs about sharing household labor. This finding suggests that the relationship process of a couple who has cohabited is very different from the process within a couple who has chosen not to cohabit without marriage. Couples who cohabit exhibit less effective problem-solving abilities (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002), and it is possible that these weaker communication skills keep the partners from resolving their issues, perhaps even increasing their levels of conflict and hostility. Further, these couples may be more likely to consider dissolving their relationship. When confronted with ideological differences and unresolved conflict, they may choose to end their union. Married couples who did not cohabit, by contrast, may be both more committed to their relationship and better able to resolve their problems. When faced with conflicting expectations for the division of labor, these partners are motivated and able to work

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together to address the issues that arise from their differences and may develop an even stronger and more resilient partnership as a result.

Although this study demonstrates, as expected, that couples who married without cohabiting have more traditional beliefs about the division of labor, it also finds that it is not these beliefs themselves that affect stability. Rather, it is the similarity between the partners that has a greater influence on the stability of the union. Interestingly, this research does not find that current cohabitors or couples who cohabited prior to marriage are any less likely to share beliefs about the division of household labor than married couples who did not cohabit with one another. This result suggests that the effect of couple similarity on union stability is operating not in the extent to which couples are dissimilar but rather in couples' responses to their dissimilarity.

Shared expectations exist within the context of the couple relationship and may have reciprocal influences on many aspects of the relationship. For example, couples with shared characteristics such as educational level may be more likely to share beliefs about the division of labor, and it could be this underlying homogeneity that influences the stability of the union. In addition, couples with similar beliefs about the division of household labor may also be more likely to share beliefs in other areas of their relationship that may also contribute to their stability. Further research is needed to explore the factors contributing to shared expectations and to determine possible additional effects on union stability.

It does appear, though, that the division of labor reflects a particularly fundamental and contentious reality for couples that may uniquely influence the stability of their relationships. In analyses not presented here, similarity was investigated in several other aspects of the couple's relationship, such as beliefs about whether children are harmed if the mother works, and the similarity of perceived disagreement across several areas. Similarity or dissimilarity in these areas did not predict instability, suggesting that there may be something uniquely meaningful about sharing beliefs about the division of labor.

In particular, this research finds the most differences between couple types for the statement that partners should share housework if they are both employed. This belief taps into a vital characteristic of dual-earner households (e.g., Hochschild, 1989) and as such can be viewed as an indicator of underlying beliefs about fairness and how men and women should organize their labor. Given the propensity of cohabiting couples to hold egalitarian beliefs, it may be particularly distressing to these couples if the two partners do not share these beliefs.

When partners share expectations for the division of household labor, they are more likely to maintain their relationship, an effect that is especially strong for cohabiting couples and for couples who cohabited prior to marriage. This finding is an indication that a relationship that is more at risk of dissolution, such as cohabitation, may be affected to a greater degree by the extent to which partners share fundamental ideologies. Policies, programs, and practitioners working with unmarried couples should consider the importance of shared beliefs in these core areas of relationship functioning.

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