Cohabitation has increased in the United States. In 1987, just 33% of women 19-44 ever cohabited, rising to 65% by 2014 (FP-15-01). A majority of young adults expect to cohabit in the future (Manning et al., 2014), with many couples cohabiting to assess their compatibility prior to marriage (Lamidi et al., forthcoming; Bumpass et al., 1991). This profile is the first in a new three-part series using Monitoring the Future data to examine almost forty years of change in high school seniors’ expectations of and attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation and is an update to FP-10-03. The focus of this profile is high school seniors’ agreement or disagreement (neutral responses are not shown) with the statement “It is usually a good idea for a couple to live together before getting married in order to find out whether they really get along.” The profile examines trends over time and by parental educational attainment, race/ethnicity, and gender.

**Attitudes on Cohabitation as a Testing Ground for Marriage Over Time**

High school seniors’ attitudes towards cohabitation as a testing ground for marriage have become increasingly favorable over the past 40 years.

In 1976, slightly more high school seniors disagreed than agreed with cohabitation as a testing ground for marriage, with a reversal seen by the early 1980s. In 2014, the gap has widened, with the percentage who agree (71%) much larger than the percentage who disagree (16%).

![Figure 1. Attitudes Towards Cohabitation as a Testing Ground for Marriage, 1976-2014](image)

**Attitudes on Cohabitation as a Testing Ground for Marriage by Parental Educational Attainment**

Agreement with cohabitation as a testing ground for marriage increased among all high school seniors regardless of parental education.

Seniors whose parents have some college education are consistently the most agreeable with cohabitation as a testing ground for marriage.

![Figure 2. H.S. Seniors’ Agreement with Cohabitation as a Testing Ground for Marriage by Parental Education, 1976 and 2014](image)
Attitudes on Cohabitation as a Testing Ground for Marriage by Race & Ethnicity

- Increases in agreement with cohabitation as a testing ground for marriage occurred across racial/ethnic groups presented here from 1976 to 2014.
- In 2014, Hispanics were the most agreeable with cohabitation as a testing ground for marriage.

Attitudes on Cohabitation as a Testing Ground for Marriage by Gender

- The gender gap is closing, with greater increases in the proportion of young women who agree with cohabitation as a testing ground for marriage than young men.
- Young men have consistently been more likely to agree with cohabitation as a testing ground for marriage.

References:


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http://www.bgsu.edu/ncfmr.html

005 Williams Hall
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH 43403
419.372.3119
ncfmr@bgsu.edu

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