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ABSTRACT

As cohabitation has risen dramatically in the past few decades among adults of all ages, it is possible that middle and older-aged parents are "learning" cohabitation from their young adult children. The present study tests this theory to determine if parents are more likely to cohabit themselves following the start of a young adult child's cohabitation. Using three waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (N = 273), results show that union formation patterns are influenced by young adult children among parents who are single at their child's 18th birthday. Parents are less likely to marry than remain single and are much more likely to cohabit than marry if they have a young adult child who cohabits.

Cohabitation: Parents Following in their Children's Footsteps?

Cohabitation has risen rapidly in the United States over the past 30 years. Today, there are over 5 million cohabiting couples in the United States, which is over 9 times the number of couples cohabiting in 1970 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005). Cohabitation has contributed to a delay, and some argue a decline, in first marriage (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Cohabitation is most often studied in early adulthood, as it is typically viewed as a family formation behavior. Researchers are beginning to realize, however, that cohabitation is also occurring in middle and later life. Only a handful of studies have attempted to describe older cohabitors and determine what factors are considered in their decision to cohabit rather than marry (Brown, Bulanda, & Lee, 2005; Brown, Lee, & Bulanda, 2006; Chevan, 1996; King & Scott, 2005). These studies have not considered the impact of socialization by young adult children on the decision to cohabit in middle and later life.

Socialization has in the past been considered a top down process; parents socialize their children, teachers socialize their students, and so on. From this perspective, children are merely passive receptacles of the information, lessons, and social cues that are presented to them either directly or indirectly (e.g., Erikson, 1950; Freud, 1933). Mead (1934/2002), Heinz (2002) and other early symbolic interactionists proposed the notion that individuals have agency and are therefore able to decide what socialization cues to adopt, to ignore, and to modify to better suit the self. It is this sense of agency that allows for the process of reciprocal socialization. Reciprocal socialization is simply the notion that individuals are both agents and subjects of socialization. This process continues throughout the life course as individuals are socialized by many other

institutions and in turn socialize other individuals. Socialization from child to parent has been discussed in the theoretical world; however, empirical studies of these processes have been rather limited (Crouter & Booth, 2003).

To date, there are no studies that have examined the effect of young adult children's cohabitation experience on subsequent parental cohabitation behavior. One study did examine the influence of young adult children's cohabiting behavior on parental *attitudes* toward cohabitation and found that young adults' behavior positively influenced parental attitudes (Axinn & Thornton, 1993). Taking this a step further, I examine the influence of young adult children's cohabiting behavior on parental cohabiting *behavior*.

Cohabitation is the modal pathway to marriage among young adults (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Cohabitation is also more likely to occur among the ever married population than the never married (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Furthermore, cohabitation among those 60 and older has increased from just 10,000 in 1960 to more than 400,000 in 1990 (Chevan, 1996). Moreover, in 2000, there were approximately 1.2 million cohabiting persons over age 50 in the United States (Brown et al., 2005; Brown et al., 2006). Demographic trends such as cohort replacement, a high divorce rate, and incidence of widowhood result in a greater number of older adults "at risk" to cohabit and this group will continue to grow as the baby boomers reach older ages. It is likely that middle- and older-aged adults learned cohabitation from their young adult children.

This study contributes to the literature on both reciprocal socialization in adulthood and cohabitation in later life. The study of cohabitation among older adults is distinct from the study of marriage as cohabitation is not institutionalized and, although

becoming more prevalent, is still non-normative, particularly among older adults. The rapidly increasing phenomenon of cohabitation may be something older parents need to witness among those closest to them, namely their young adult children, before they would consider cohabiting themselves.

BACKGROUND

Reciprocal Socialization

The family has traditionally been viewed as the primary agent of socialization (Erikson, 1950; Freud, 1933; Heilbrun Jr., 1965). The socialization of children by parents is thought to be so intense, take place over so many years, and have such strong consequences for the development of the self that the effects of childhood socialization last well into adulthood (e.g., Campbell, 1969). There have been two main critiques of traditional socialization theory. The first is that perhaps parents do not specifically transmit their values and beliefs to the child but instead transmit their status (Acock, 1984). In other words, the similarity of values, beliefs, work ethic, and so on are actually transmitted through macrosocial identities such as race, class, religion, marital status, and other important social statuses that impact social attitudes.

The second critique is that traditional socialization theory does not acknowledge the influence of children on their parents and the relationship between the parent-child dyad throughout the life course (Featherman, 1983; Hagestad, 1981). This latter critique has come to be known as reciprocal socialization. There have been limited empirical studies to test this concept (Glass, Bengtson, & Dunham, 1986; Hagestad, 1981; Lewis & Rosenblum, 1974). All of these studies provide evidence of the existence of child-to-parent socialization in the domains, for example, of religious, political and gender role

attitudes (Glass et al., 1986) and attitudes toward cohabitation (Axinn & Thornton, 1993). Clearly, this topic does not receive adequate attention in the literature. As attitudes and behavior are typically linked, and given the positive influence of young adult child cohabitation on parental attitudes, parents of children who cohabit may be more likely to experience cohabitation themselves.

Cohabitation in Later Life

More than 1 million of the approximately 10 million cohabitors in the U.S. are over the age of 50, according to the 2000 Census. However, cohabitation is most often studied during the period of emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is a demographically dense period in one's life given the vast number of transitions and changes in trajectories in those years (Rindfuss, 1991). Cohabitation is a phenomenon occurring among young adults as either a step in the courtship process leading to marriage, a testing ground for marriage, or an alternative to marriage. The reasons for cohabitation in this stage of life and the possible implications for trajectories have been well studied in the literature (e.g., Brown, 2000a; Brown, 2000b; Brown & Booth, 1996; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Casper & Sayer, 2000). The connection between cohabitation and marriage and family formation behavior in emerging adulthood has been the justification for the focus on that period of the life course. In actuality, however, cohabitation is more likely to occur among the ever married than among the never married (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). With high rates of divorce and a greater proportion of people never marrying (Bumpass & Lu, 2000) several scholars have projected a declining proportion of older adults will be married in the future (e.g., Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2000; De Jong Gierveed, 2004). Therefore, it is more likely than ever that cohabitation is also occurring

in middle and later life and will continue to increase rapidly as the Baby Boomers age into older adulthood.

Only a handful of studies have actually estimated the prevalence of cohabitation in middle and later life and its correlates. In individual level surveys, older adult males are much more likely to cohabit than older females. In addition, those who are deepest in poverty are more likely to cohabit, much as in the young adult population. The young old (60-69, Chevan; 51-59, Brown et al., 2006) are more likely than the older old to cohabit. The widowed are more likely than the never married but less likely than the divorced and separated to cohabit. Black men are more likely than other men to cohabit although there is no significant racial difference for women (Brown et al., 2006; Chevan, 1996).

It is theorized that cohabitation has a different meaning for the middle aged and older aged population than it does for young adults (Brown et al., 2005; Brown et al., 2006; Chevan, 1996). Among women who have completed their childbearing years, the need to marry or cohabit to have a child is irrelevant. Economic reasons to cohabit seem to operate much the same way among the younger and older populations. In addition, cohabitation may be viewed as a positive alternative to marriage to protect pensions, avoid the marriage tax, and ensure inheritance of money and property to offspring, rather than the new partner. Chevan (1996) notes the possibility of children or other relatives, having either experienced cohabitation themselves or seen it among their peers, encouraging or applauding cohabitation rather than marriage among the middle and older generations, although he does not empirically test this nor say much else about it.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two main theories have addressed the social psychological processes within parent-child dyads over the life course. The first is the developmental perspective. The developmental perspective, proposed by Erikson (1950), posits that the attitudes of parents and children converge over the life course. During the period of adolescence, teens are developing a sense of self and identity. To accomplish this individuation, they must separate themselves from their parents. Adolescents are influenced by non-familial entities, such as friends and the media. During this period, the adolescents' attitudes diverge from their parents'. However, as adolescents become young adults, they engage in family formation behavior, such as marriage and childbearing, and thus their purpose is to socialize the next generation. The nurturance and family building behavior they engage in is much the same as their parents. In other words, parents and young adult children are now "in the same boat." They both want to take care of and nurture their children, they want their children to be valuable members of society, and they want to teach them important lessons. Not only do attitudes of the parent-child dyad converge over time, but as parents age, their individual attitudes tend to remain fairly stable. Thus this theory really suggests that it is the young adult child's attitudes that are changing to match that of their parents'.

The socialization perspective, on the other hand, suggests a divergence of parent-child attitudes over the life course. This perspective mirrors part of the developmental perspective in that there is a divergence of parent-child attitudes in adolescence, when children are mapping out their own identity independent of their parents. However, according to this perspective, as adolescents grow into young adults, they continue to diverge from their parents as they are then socialized by other institutions, such as their

workplace. In addition, young adult children move out of the parental household and set up their own household with, for example, their spouse or cohabiting partner. Geographically, they may be farther away from their parents, therefore not receiving daily reinforcement of parental attitudes. They are also being influenced by their partner, their partner's family, and their friends, among other groups they may be a part of. In addition, young adults may be more susceptible to rapid social change than their parents. Young adult children continue to change, but in a way that is not in line with their parents. Once again, the undertone here is that the parent's attitudes are remaining stable over time and that their young adult children are adjusting their attitudes with the influences of outside sources away from their parents.

Two studies have empirically tested these two competing hypotheses. The first, using cross-sectional data to compare middle-aged child/elderly parent dyads (G2/G1) with young adult child/middle-aged parent dyads (G3/G2) found no support for either the developmental perspective or the socialization perspective (Glass et al., 1986). Instead the authors found similarity between the two dyads, suggesting stability in attitudes over the life course. However, this finding could have been due to cohort effects. Therefore, Miller & Glass (1989) conducted a similar study using longitudinal data (a 14-year separation between two interviews; 1971 and 1985) to determine the age effects and minimize the presence of cohort effects. Changes, or lack thereof, on three scales (political, religious, and equality of gender roles) were gauged. Their analysis yielded inconsistent evidence for their hypotheses. The dynamics of these relationships are interesting, particularly for the current study. The oldest generation (G1) only changed their political attitudes (i.e., they became more conservative); they did not change their

religious attitudes or their gender role attitudes. The youngest generation (G3) significantly changed on two of the three scales; they became slightly more politically conservative and more accepting of equality of gender roles whereas their religious attitudes did not change. The middle generation (G2) changed their attitudes in all three arenas; they became more politically conservative, more religiously fundamental, and more accepting of equality in gender roles. Their religious attitude difference was statistically significant but the magnitude of the change was minimal. Therefore, the similarity in attitudes among the middle-aged parents (G2) and their young adult children (G3) was due primarily to changes by the middle-aged parents and is an artifact of changes being made in the same direction by both the G2 and G3 generations. The developmental hypothesis was not supported given the stability in attitude similarity within the young adult child/middle-aged parent dyads (G3/G2). Furthermore, the mean difference scores for the G2/G1 dyads increased, which contradicts the notion that attitude similarity is stable in later life. As for the socialization hypothesis, only partial support was found. The divergence between the G1 and G2 dyads supported the hypothesis; however, the stability within the G2 and G3 dyads contradicts it.

The relatively new aspect of socialization theory that was not included in the study by Miller and Glass (1989) is the notion that socialization is reciprocal. Not only do parents socialize their children but children also socialize their parents (Putney & Bengtson, 2002). Parents are receptive of cues they get from their children about learning strategies, techniques of discipline, and parenting strategies more generally and therefore change and adjust to their children accordingly. In addition, parents may learn about technology or fashionable styles of dress from their children. While it is generally

accepted that individuals continue to be socialized throughout their lives, minimal attention has been given in the theoretical and empirical literature to how children continue to socialize their parents in young adulthood and later life.

Certainly, young adults are socialized by their significant others, their peers, their work life, other groups they may be involved in, and social change more generally. Furthermore, they then bring these attitudes, values, and behaviors back to their parents thus socializing their parents and encouraging change in parental values and attitudes as well. Recall the results from the Miller and Glass (1989) study. Middle-aged parents changed their attitudes more than their elderly parents and their young adult children resulting in a similarity of attitudes between the middle-aged parents and their young adult children. This pattern is consistent with reciprocal socialization between these two generations in which the young adult child is in fact changing somewhat from outside influences and bringing those messages back to their parents. Their parents then adjust their attitudes to match their children. This possibility was neglected in Miller and Glass' conclusions. This is not to say that children are no longer learning from their parents or that tensions may not arise from new perspectives or attitudes, however, the introduction of new ideas being brought to the table by the young adult child can then be open for discussion and have the potential to be agreed upon by both parties. For example, middle-aged parents positively changed their attitudes toward equality of gender roles (Miller & Glass, 1989). This is something most likely learned from young adult children as both male and female children in 1985 were likely to go to school longer, get married at later ages, cohabit before marriage, and therefore, have more egalitarian gender role attitudes.

Why does this matter for cohabitation behavior? Axinn and Thornton (1993), focusing on the intergenerational effects of attitudes and behavior, found that parents who did not view cohabitation favorably, whose young adult children subsequently cohabited, were likely to then favor cohabitation. Parental attitudes toward cohabitation had some positive influence on whether children would cohabit; however, rapid social change of increasing acceptance of nonmarital cohabitation led many children to cohabit regardless of parental attitudes (Axinn & Thornton). After young adult children began to cohabit, parents' attitudes toward cohabitation were more favorable, particularly when the cohabitation ended in marriage (Axinn & Thornton). This pattern is evidence of the reciprocal socialization process. The present study takes this a step further to determine if parental attitudes are then transferred into their own behavior thus making them more likely to form a cohabiting union themselves following the start of their young adult child's cohabiting union.

THE CURRENT STUDY

The notion of reciprocal socialization has been theorized, however, the empirical evidence has been minimal. It has been well established in the literature that parental cohabitation is positively associated with later cohabitation by children in young adulthood (e.g., Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Graefe & Lichter, 1999). In addition, cohabitation by a young adult child changes parental attitudes toward cohabitation to be more positive, even if their attitudes were unfavorable before the cohabitation began (Axinn & Thornton, 1993). The current study proceeds to the next logical step. Are parents of young adult children who cohabit more likely to cohabit (for the first time) than parents of young adult children who do not cohabit? This is the main question the current study

proposes to answer. Given that attitudes are likely to predict behavior and young adult's cohabitation behavior positively influences parental attitudes toward cohabitation, I hypothesize that parents whose young adult children cohabit will be more likely to cohabit themselves than their counterparts whose young adult children do not cohabit. This research will contribute to the literature by examining the reciprocal socialization process between parents and young adult children. It has been well recognized that the socialization process continues throughout the life course (e.g., Bush, Diane Mitsch Bush & Simmons, 1981/1990), yet virtually no attention has been given to the role that young adult children play in the socialization of middle-aged and older-aged parents.

METHOD

The main respondent data of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH1), as well as the union history files (which were constructed using NSFH2 and NSFH3 data) for the main respondents and the focal children are employed to conduct the analyses for the current study. The NSFH1 was collected in 1987-88 and included a nationally representative probability sample of 13,007 respondents aged 19 and older. A randomly selected main respondent was chosen from each household with which a face-to-face interview was conducted. The main respondent was also given a self-administered questionnaire to complete (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988). Within the questionnaire, if applicable, a focal child between the ages of 5 and 18 was selected. NSFH2 was then conducted between 1992 and 1994. Main respondents were re-interviewed (N = 10,007) in person. A telephone interview was conducted with the focal child aged 5 to 18 at NSFH1 who was 12-17 or 18 to 23 at NSFH2 (Sweet & Bumpass, 1996). Finally, NSFH3 was collected between 2001 and 2002 and consisted of both an

interview with the main respondent and a focal child between the ages of 18 and 33, irrespective of whether they were interviewed at wave 2 (Sweet & Bumpass, 2002).

After NSFH3 was collected, union history files were created for both the main respondent and the focal child. For the main respondent, these files were created using union information from all three waves. For the focal child, the files were created using union information from the third wave only.

This data set is arguably the richest source with which to examine these questions due to the longitudinal, prospective design, the inclusion of complete union histories from both the main respondent (the parent) and the young adult focal child, the measurement of parental attitudes toward cohabitation, as well as a plethora of demographic background variables. The analytic sample is first limited to those respondents who have a focal child and have union history files for both parent and young adult child (n=1579). The observation period cannot begin before the child's 18th birthday because the child, as well as the parent, needs to be at risk to cohabit. There were no children who began a cohabiting union before they turned 18 years old. Main respondents who cohabited at any time before the child was 18 years old are not included to avoid endogeneity (n=1039). In addition, respondents who are married at the child's 18th birthday are not included. Therefore, the final analytic sample includes main respondent/focal child pairs for which the main respondent was not cohabiting or married at the child's 18th birthday and had never cohabited before the child's 18th birthday (n = 190). The child's 18th birthday is the starting point so that, along with the constraints of the sample, both the parent and young adult child are at risk to form a cohabiting or marital union.

MEASURES

Dependent Variable

The outcome variable of interest in this analysis is the hazard of whether or not the parent formed a cohabiting union. Using event history analysis, there are three outcomes that remove the main respondent (hereafter referred to as parent) from the risk set: (1) he/she begins cohabiting, (2) he/she gets married, or (3) he/she is not in a union by the NSFH3 interview date. The union history file is used to determine the dates of these events.

Independent Variables

The focal variable is whether the young adult child (hereafter referred to as the child) cohabited. This is established using a time-varying cohabitation variable which records a 0 for every month the child does not cohabit and 1 for each month after the child begins a cohabiting union. Note that the variable does not simply record the months they are in a cohabiting relationship because the focus here is on whether the parent cohabits *any time* after the child cohabits.

Parental attitudes toward cohabitation measured at NSFH1 are controlled in the analyses, as attitudes are the most proximal determinant of behavior. At NSFH1, parents are asked their level of agreement with the following two statements: "It is all right for an unmarried couple to live together even if they have no interest in considering marriage;" "It is all right for an unmarried couple to live together as long as they have plans to marry." The responses range from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). These responses are summed to create a *cohabitation attitudes* scale (Cronbach's alpha = .62), with higher scores indicating more favorable attitudes toward cohabitation.

The *gender of the parent* and the *gender of the young adult child* are accounted for in the analysis. Research has shown that the mother-daughter relationship is more influential than the mother-son (Axinn & Thornton, 1993), father-daughter, or father-son relationship in socialization processes (Corsaro & Eder, 1995). In addition, cohabitation trends among the middle-aged and elderly population vary considerably by gender (Chevan, 1996), with men being more likely to form marital and cohabiting unions than women. *Age* of the parent at the beginning of the observation period is included and ranges from 34 to 70. Cohabitation varies considerably by race and therefore race of the parent is included as a dummy variable, *non-White* (1). Due to small ns in the non-White categories (Black, Hispanic) they had to be collapsed. A prior union history dummy variable is included to indicate whether the parent was ever *divorced or separated* (0) or *never-married or widowed* (1) before the beginning of the observation period. Having a child in the household may prevent a parent from having a partner move in, perhaps more so for a cohabiting partner than a spouse; therefore, a dummy is included to indicate whether there is a *child under the age of 18 in the household* (1). Note that this variable was originally divided into dummies for children under age five and children aged five and older (school-aged), however, there were small numbers of children under age five which resulted in zero-cell problems therefore the single dummy variable is used. *Education* and *income* of the parent at NSFH1 are also measured. *Education* is measured in years completed. *Income* is measured in dollars in the last year (logged for analyses to correct for skewness). Typically, cohabitation is more likely to occur among those of lower socioeconomic status (Manning & Smock, 1995).

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

A discrete-time, event history analysis is conducted to model the competing risks of marrying, cohabiting, or remaining single. The first model includes the focal variable, whether the young adult child cohabits. The control variables are added in the second model. Initially, the predictor variables were added separately in blocks to determine whether ascribed characteristics, socioeconomic characteristics, or other household level characteristics accounted for the effects of child cohabitation on parental union formation, however, there were no differences in the effects between those models and the final model and therefore only the full model is shown here.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

The unweighted sample means are shown in Table 1 for the full sample (N = 190). Not many parents form unions after their young adult child turns 18 years old. Only 13 percent (n = 25) form a cohabiting union and only 12 percent (n = 22) form a marital union. As expected, half (51%) of the young adult children form at least one cohabiting union during the observation period.

Parents' attitudes toward cohabitation at NSFH1 are slightly disagreeable, with an average score of five. A score of six would indicate that they 'neither agree nor disagree' with both statements.

Ninety percent of the sample is female, which is expected given that these are middle-aged parents with children and men are more likely to be partnered in middle-age. The gender distribution of young adult children is evenly split. About 28 percent of the sample is non-White. Ten percent of parents were never married, 16 percent were widowed and 75 percent were divorced or separated. Average age of the parents is 45.6

years and ranges from 34 to 61. Seventy percent of the sample had at least one child in the household less than 18 years of age at the start of the observation. At NSFH1, average education is just over a high school degree and average yearly income is $16,901, with a range from $0 to $74,340.

Hazard-Model Results

Table 2 shows the maximum likelihood estimates of the predictor effects on the relative risk of cohabiting versus remaining single, marrying versus remaining single, and cohabiting versus marrying. Model 1 shows the zero-order effects of the young adult child cohabiting. Having a young adult child who cohabits does not significantly change the odds of cohabiting versus remaining single. It is, however, significantly associated with a decrease in the likelihood of a parent getting married (about 85% lower odds) versus remaining single. As hypothesized, there is a 706 percent increase in the odds of forming a cohabiting union versus a marital union if a young adult child cohabits. As expected, if parents form a union, it is much more likely to be a cohabiting union than a marital union.

Model 2 includes all of the covariates. As the table shows, these covariates do not have much bearing on the outcomes. The inclusion of these variables slightly decreases the magnitude of the effect of a young adult child's cohabitation on the odds of marrying versus remaining single (.151 to .165) and there is a decrease in the odds of cohabiting versus marrying although the odds ratio remains high (5.73). The controls that do have a significant effect on the outcomes are in the expected directions. Being female and having at least one other child under 18 years old in the household at the beginning of the observation period each reduce the likelihood of cohabiting versus remaining single (78%

and 63%, respectively). Black and Hispanic parents have 80 percent lower odds of marrying versus remaining single than Whites. Additionally, being older at the beginning of the observation period is associated with lower odds of marrying versus remaining single (14% lower odds). Having a child under the age of 18 present in the household at the beginning of the observation period is associated with lower odds of cohabiting versus marrying.

Alternative Specifications

A significant limitation of the current study is the selectivity of the sample. Parent respondents had to have never cohabited before their child's 18th birthday and could not be married at their child's 18th birthday. Indeed, parents in the analytic sample (n = 190) comprise 12 percent of the total NSFH sample with available parent and child union history data (N = 1562). Parents who are most likely to cohabit by their own accord would have already cohabited by the time of their child's 18th birthday (n = 585; 37%) thus dubbing them ineligible to be included in the sample. Furthermore, parents who are more likely to marry and remain married have already done so and therefore could not be included (n = 701 continuously married parents; 45%). Finally, those who do not divorce until after their children have grown up are also excluded (n = 86; 5.5%). Due to the high selectivity of the analytic sample, at the suggestion of expert advisors, I added the latter group of parents who had never cohabited and were married at the child's 18th birthday but subsequently divorced or became widowed before the NSFH3 interview to make the sample more inclusive (new analytic sample = n = 273; 17% of total NSFH sample).

For this group, the observation begins at the divorce or widowhood date. This group is different than the initial sample both analytically and substantively. Analytically, the observation period of this group cannot begin until the divorce or widowhood date (i.e., when they become at risk to cohabit). Their children, however, can cohabit at any time after their 18th birthday, which may be before the observation period for this group begins. As such, the effect of the child's cohabitation, which may occur while the parent is still married, will not have an immediate effect (i.e., the parent cannot begin cohabiting themselves because they are still married). It is possible that the effect of having a child who cohabits may be different for this group, therefore, I treat these two groups as separate in the analysis by including a dummy variable indicating whether the parent is in the *immediate risk group* (IRG; observation begins at the child's 18th birthday because the parents are not cohabiting or married and have never cohabited) or the *delayed risk group* (DRG; observation begins at the divorce or widowhood date which is after the child's 18th birthday if they have never cohabited). The new analytic sample makes up 17 percent of the total NSFH sample for which data are available for both parents and children.

Substantively, a lesser proportion of the DRG is female (78% versus 90% of the IRG). Ten percent of the IRG has never married and by default, none of the DRG is in that category. Age at the beginning of the observation period is almost 46 for the IRG and almost 50 for the DRG. Sixty nine percent of the IRG has children under the age of 18 in the household at the start of the observation period whereas the corresponding percentage for the DRG is only 28. Finally, the IRG has an average yearly income of $16,901 and the average income of the DRG is $14,359.

The analyses for the full sample include a dummy variable for the group the parent is in (immediate risk group or delayed risk group) and an interaction term between the child cohabitation variable and the parent group (IRG or DRG) as well as all control variables. These analyses reveal the effect of having a child who cohabits on parents union formation behavior significantly differs between the IRG and the DRG (results not shown; available upon request). Parents in the IRG have the same results as shown in Table 2. They are no more likely to cohabit versus remain single, they are less likely to marry versus remain single, and they are significantly more likely to cohabit versus marry if a union is formed when they have a child who cohabits. However, for the DRG, having a child who cohabits has no effect on any of the parents' union transitions. In light of these new analyses, there is only partial support for the hypothesis. The effect of having a child who cohabits on parents' union formation behavior is only significant for parents who are not married and never cohabited at the child's 18th birthday.

There are a few potential explanations for these results. First, parents who divorce or become widowed between their child's 18th birthday and the NSFH3 interview date are not observed as long as parents in the IRG (3.9 years vs. 7.8 years), therefore, it is possible that their next transition is simply not being captured with these data. Second, parents in the IRG have been single on average 8.29 years (range 0.1 – 26.8, median 7.6). It is possible that parents and their young adult children may have a closer friendship and therefore, parents may be influenced by their children more than parents who have been married for a long time (Arditti, 1999; Fox & Inazu, 1982). On the other hand, parents who divorce when the children are older may have a more strained relationship as a result of the divorce (Amato & Booth, 1996; Lye, 1996). The child's behavior may not have

the same effect on their parent's union formation behavior as children of the IRG. Third, parents who are in the DRG have unfavorable attitudes toward cohabitation (although not significantly lower than the IRG). If parents' attitudes do in fact remain stable over time, DRG parents may disapprove of their child's cohabitation and thus would not likely cohabit themselves once they divorce or become widowed. Unfortunately, these potential explanations cannot be tested with these data. Future investigations should attempt to examine why children of DRG parents do not influence their parents' union formation behavior.

Further analyses (not shown) were conducted to test (1) whether a young adult child's marriage is associated with union formation behavior of their parents, (2) whether the mode through which a child's cohabitation ends is associated with the outcome variable, and (3) various interactions. To test whether a young adult child's marriage is associated with parents' union formation behavior, the same analyses were run with a time varying young adult child marriage variable similar to the cohabitation variable, both by itself and along with the cohabitation variable (available upon request from the author). The analyses revealed that a young adult child's marriage does not significantly affect parental union formation behavior.

Axinn and Thornton (1993) found that parents' attitudes toward cohabitation became most favorable when the child's cohabitation ended in marriage. This idea was tested here to determine if the way in which the child's cohabitation ends is associated with the union formation behavior of their parents. Three time varying variables were created, similar to the original cohabitation variable, to indicate the start of a cohabiting union which eventually ended in separation, marriage, or remained intact (no cohabiting

union is the reference category) and were entered in the models in place of the original cohabitation indicator. None were significant indicating that the way in which a child's cohabiting union ends is not associated with the parent's union formation behavior.

Finally, various interactions were tested, including gender of child by gender of parent, gender of parent by child's cohabitation history, gender of child by child's cohabitation history, and gender of parent by age. None were significant.

In sum, having a young adult child who cohabits does not contribute to forming a cohabiting union instead of remaining single although it does reduce the odds of getting married versus remaining single and greatly increases the odds of forming a cohabiting union versus a marital union for the immediate risk group. Parents in the delayed risk group are not affected by their children's cohabitation behavior. The results show partial support for the hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the reciprocal socialization processes in the young adult child/middle-aged parent dyad in the context of cohabitation behavior. Research on reciprocal socialization processes has been rather limited; however, the available studies do support the presence of child-to-parent socialization. Cohabitation among middle-aged and older adults is on the rise. Perhaps middle-aged and older adults are learning cohabitation from their young adult children. Using longitudinal data from the National Survey of Families and Households, this study tested the influence of having a young adult child who cohabits on a parent's own union formation behavior.

There are two main findings that expand our understanding of the reciprocal socialization process between parents and their young adult children throughout the life

course and our understanding of cohabitation in middle- and later-life. First, while having a child who cohabits is not associated with the likelihood of forming a cohabiting union versus remaining single, it does decrease the likelihood of forming a marital union for the immediate risk group. Perhaps IRG parents with young adult children who cohabit do not feel the need to be in a formal union. It would be interesting to include dating patterns of parents as well to test this theory, however, that is not possible with these data. For the delayed risk group, having a child who cohabits does not have a significant effect on union formation behavior.

Second, and more importantly for the current investigation, among those who form unions, having a young adult child who cohabits dramatically increases the likelihood of forming a cohabiting union versus a marital union for the IRG parents, although there is no effect for the delayed risk group. These findings show partial support for the hypothesis and authenticate the notion of reciprocal socialization with some caveats. It does seem that some parents are learning cohabitation behavior from their children.

There are a few limitations to the current study. First, the sample is rather small and select. Parents had to be unmarried and not cohabiting at their child's 18th birthday. This makes for a select group of people. Although parents who were married at their child's 18th birthday but subsequently divorced or became widowed were added to the analyses, the full sample only accounts for 17 percent of the total NSFH sample for which parent and child data are available. Given the nature of the research question, these selection issues are present in the larger population and were handled in the best way possible. In addition to the selectivity of the sample, there are relatively small

numbers of parents who form either a cohabiting (44; 16%) or marital (33; 12%) union. These low numbers in the categories of interest suggest that the findings should be interpreted with caution. However, obtaining significant results with a small sample size means that it is likely these same effects would be detected in a larger sample.

Second, variables such as the relationship quality between the parent and the young adult child were not included. Measuring these types of variables at NSFH1 is not appropriate since the children are very young. However, since the data are available to empirically test this relationship, I included a global measure of relationship quality measured from the parent at NSFH1 and found no effect (results not shown).

Third, while there are advantages of using the NSFH, most of the young adult children turned 18 in the mid- to late-90s, when the observation period began. Therefore, some of the unions observed may have occurred up to 13 years ago. Updating this study with more recent data is required to see if these patterns would still exist today.

Last, the influence of other people in parent's lives, such as friends and siblings, is unknown in the current study. The young adult child's influence is of interest here, however, it is possible that having friends or siblings who cohabit may influence the parent's decision to cohabit as well. The observation period of this study occurred during a time of rapid increase in cohabitation, therefore, the possibility that parents "learned" cohabitation from other outside influences cannot be ignored.

This study has uniquely contributed to our understanding of the process of reciprocal socialization by showcasing that some parents "learn" cohabitation from their young adult children when they are in middle- and later-life. Parents with young adult children who cohabit are less likely to marry versus remaining single and are much more

likely to cohabit than marry when they were unpartnered at their child's 18th birthday. Thus, it appears that when it comes to cohabitation, parents are likely to follow in their children's footsteps.

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Table 1: Sample Means (N = 190)				
Variables	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Outcome:				
Cohabit	0.13	0.34	0	1
Marry	0.12	0.32	0	1
No Union	0.75	0.43	0	1
Predictors:				
Young Adult Child (YAC) Cohabits	0.51	0.50	0	1
Cohabitation Attitudes	5.02	1.90	2	10
Female	0.90	0.31	0	1
YAC Female	0.51	0.50	0	1
Black or Hispanic	0.28	0.45	0	1
Divorced/Separated	0.75	0.44	0	1
Widowed	0.16	0.37	0	1
Never Married	0.10	0.29	0	1
Age at YAC 18th Birthday	45.58	5.86	34	61
Child Under 18 in HH	0.69	0.46	0	1
Education	12.63	1.60	8	16
Income	16901	12558	0	74340

Table 2: Event History Analysis Estimates of the Relative Risk of Transitioning VS. Remaining Single & Cohabiting VS. Marrying (N = 190; Person-Months = 17,940)

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Cohabit v. Remain Single	Marry v. Remain Single	Cohabit v. Marry	Cohabit v. Remain Single	Marry v. Remain Single	Cohabit v. Marry
Independent Variables	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds
Young Adult Child (YAC) Cohabits^	1.22	0.15 **	8.06 **	0.94	0.16 **	5.73 *
Cohabitation Attitudes				1.17	0.86	1.36
Female				0.22 *	0.54	0.41
YAC Female				1.28	0.71	1.80
Black or Hispanic				0.63	0.20 *	3.10
Never Married[a]				0.24	0.26	0.96
Widowed[a]				0.52	0.86	0.61
Age at YAC 18th Birthday				0.93	0.86 **	1.08
Child Under 18 in HH				0.37 *	1.81	0.20 *
Education				0.92	0.75	1.22
Income (Logged)				1.07	1.23	0.86

Note: All outcome contrasts shown

^Time-varying covariate; [a]Divorced/separated reference group

† p<.10 * p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001 for two-tailed test