COHABITATION AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT*

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ABSTRACT

In Canada, heterosexual cohabitation has transformed from a marginal to a normative life experience since the 1970s. However, there are still uncertainties regarding the meaning of cohabitation and how it fits into kinship systems. Of especial interest is to what degree cohabitation represents a marriage-like institution in terms of its organizational, functional, and social attributes. This article compares cohabiting-couple unions to marital couple unions (and other marital statuses) on social engagement to determine whether cohabitation is advancing toward becoming a complete institution. The article compares cohabitation to marriage on several principal dimensions of social engagement, including social contact with relatives, number of close friends, development of social networks, social participation, and reciprocal exchange. For these comparisons, this article uses 2003 General Social Survey (GSS-17) data (N = 25,000) and multivariate statistical techniques. These dimensions of social engagement are crucial for the development of social capital, which is a cornerstone of durable union relationships.

COHABITATION AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

This study considers social engagement in the context of marital status, comparing non-marital cohabitation to legal marriage, singlehood (never-married), and other marital statuses. In Canada, the United States, Western Europe, and elsewhere, cohabitation is a normative life experience, though it was an uncommon, and perhaps a deviant, social behavior just a generation ago (Booth & Crouter, 2002; Smock, 2000; Wu, 2000). In 2006, cohabiting-couple households comprised 18% of couple families, accounting for 2.75 million adults, compared to 6% in 1981 (Wu, 2007). While a large number of cohabitations are transient arrangements or transitional relationships, a growing amount are long-term unions, and a non-trivial proportion are durable alternatives to legal marriage (Kiernan, 2002; La Bourdais & Lapierre-Adamcyk, 2004; Smock & Gupta, 2002). As Kinsley Davis (1985) argues, the diffusion of cohabitation would be an immaterial condition if it represented little more than a stage between courtship and legal marriage. But the transnational increases in cohabitation and concurrent decreases in marriage represent a clear departure from a marriage-centric conjugal model (Cherlin, 2004).

There is, however, a limited consensus regarding the social functions that cohabitation fulfills vis-à-vis marriage (Manting, 1996). Brown (2005) observes that cohabitation has become a conventional setting for conjugal unions, but this socio-cultural shift, however important, does not indicate that cohabitation is an equivalent of marriage in other respects. To be fair, cohabitation is an evolving social structure – i.e., non-marital families remain at a premature stage of social development, despite widespread growth in prevalence – but most accounts indicate that the characteristics

typical of cohabitations (and of cohabitants themselves) still tend to differentiate cohabitation from marriage. The literature demonstrates that, on aggregate, the relationships of cohabitants diverge from the relationships of married couples in several respects (e.g., Brines & Joyner, 1999; Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, & Waite, 1995; Nock, 1995). For example, there are differences in commitment levels, union cohesion, and partnership expectations. In addition, there are dissimilarities in household organization, functional attributes, and relationship-specific benefits. Hence, Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel (1990) conclude that cohabitation is also an alternative to singlehood, not just a precursor to marriage or a marriage-like union.

There is an ample literature on the structure of cohabitation, the individual characteristics of cohabitants, and the micro-level implications of cohabitation (e.g., Manning, 2006; Smock, 2000; Wu, 2000; Waite, 2000). In contrast, there is little concrete information regarding the exterior effects of cohabitation, apart from its demographic impact on patterns of first union formation, divorce, and repartnering. Hence, we understand a considerable amount about the meaning and outcomes of cohabitation for cohabitors themselves, but not so much about its ramifications for communities. For example, how does cohabitation influence patterns of social cohesion, considering that families are the building-blocks of modern, Western societies? Our objective is to determine if cohabitation resembles marriage (or singlehood) in terms of its external social contributions. To address this research gap, this paper compares cohabitation to marriage (and other marital statuses) on social engagement, and so presents further insights into the institutional status of cohabitation in Canada. Using 2003 General Social Survey (GSS-17), this study focuses on several core dimensions of

social engagement, such as social network size, composition of social networks, volunteering, contributions of social support, and voting.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Social engagement refers to social activities (excluding work and work-related activities) that generate public benefits and interpersonal connections, such as volunteering, participation in local organizations, donations, reciprocal exchanges, and voting. Moore-McBride (2007) remarks that the concept *social engagement* implies an active connection (being engaged) of individuals to their communities via their behavioral commitment to and personal investments in the public sphere. In this sense, social engagement involves those community-level interpersonal activities – Putnam (2000) refers to such social interactions as *bridging ties* – that are essential for building civic-level sources of social capital and networks of trust, i.e., cornerstones of social cohesion and individual-level well-being (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Indeed, these activities are foundations of liberal-democratic societies, and represent the capacities of the masses to organize themselves for mutual benefit and social protection (Moore-McBride, 2007).

In modern industrial societies, social engagement is a pillar of social cohesion (Jenson, 1998). As Bader (2001) argues, modern societies are differentiated and individualized societies, which implies that social cohesion cannot be founded on minimal inter-individual differences (e.g., similar values, routines, or customs) or what Durkheim called *mechanical solidarity*. Instead, institutions form the principal locales for connecting individuals to one another and for creating common interests in modern

societies (Jenson, 1998). Of course, other institutions besides families generate channels for social engagement, such as educational systems or organized religions, but families have a central position in mobilizing individuals for common purposes. As Ravanera observes (2000), families are not isolated, private spheres, but interface with public domains in multiple ways, and therefore have significant bearing on communities and community-level outcomes. For example, families can stimulate community-level social integration by producing off-spring, because children connect unrelated people through common outlets, such as neighborhood contacts and cooperation, schools and school associations, and formal organizations (Beaujot, 2000).

Our question is whether such activities (i.e., social engagement) differ according to marital status. Our *a priori* assumption is that marital status could predict social engagement, inasmuch families afford individuals environments for social participation and for producing the interpersonal connections that foster social engagement. Prior research suggests that marital status is an important indicator of social integration, which itself is a reasonable barometer of social engagement. There is, for example, a well-documented relationship between marital status and chances of suicide. According to Durkheim's logic, the rate of suicide relates to levels of social integration in that low levels of normative integration (anomie) increases suicide. Stack and Wasserman (1993) demonstrate that social disintegration of individuals increases suicide, other maladaptive behaviors (e.g., alcoholism), and antisocial tendencies. Hence, the higher rates of suicide among divorced, widowed, and never-married persons associate with their relative social isolation. Social disintegration is a sort of normative vacuum that diminishes one's social responsibilities or obligations (activities that get individuals engaged), and stimulate the

individualistic or egoistic attitudes that underlie suicide. In contrast, marriage tends to subordinate these attitudes through compelling a higher relative level of altruism, social involvement, and instilling a sense of purpose in individuals.

Although marital status differences in suicide rates is not our interest, the linkage between suicide and a lack of social integration implies, albeit in an indirect fashion, that suicide is an extreme type of social disengagement. There is reason to suspect that deficient social integration (or social isolation) among cohabitants contributes to a structural difference between cohabitation and marriage. For example, Stets (1991) observes that domestic violence is at least 2 times higher in cohabitations than in marriages, suggesting that low levels of social integration among cohabitants accounts for this disturbing difference. Stets indicates that this relationship persists after controlling for individual-level factors of domestic violence, such as age, education, and income, which points our attention toward the structural-level aspects of cohabitation. In particular, Stets attributes this incidence of anti-social behavior to the social isolation of cohabitants, which she defines in terms of social disintegration. She postulates that social disintegration could affect the functional aspects of union relationships through leaving cohabitants with limited social support and in a condition of relative normlessness. According to Stets, an insufficient amount of social support to help cohabitants cope with their relationship difficulties in combination with a lack of social control (normlessness) over their behaviors is a plausible explanation for the higher levels of domestic violence in cohabitation.

Stets concludes that it seems to be the type (rather than the degree) of social isolation that influences the behavioral patterns of cohabitants. Her findings indicate that,

whereas cohabitants are no less connected than marrieds in terms of their absolute number of social connections, there is a significant difference in their connections to the inner (partner/spouse) and outer strata of informal networks. Of importance here is her observation that cohabitants have a weaker connection to exterior stratum of informal networks, which consists of connections to community-level groups, organizations, and associations. Of course, Stets' conclusions refer to the internal dynamics of cohabitational relationships, but these are also germane to our *a prior* assumption, as these findings highlight some potential mechanisms that might generate important disparities in social engagement between cohabitants and marrieds, such as restricting avenues of engagement through deficits of social integration. As Hurlbert and Acock (1990) argue, the form/composition of social integration differs according to the structural (or contextual) factors that parallel marital status, which accounts for marital status differences in individual well-being, happiness, criminal behavior, and suicide. However, not much is understood about marital status differences in social engagement *per se*, and the purpose of this paper is to close this gap.

There is a general consensus that cohabitation represents a different kind of relationship than marriage does, although this distinction could attenuate after/if cohabitation matures into a normative alternative to marriage. Accordingly, Nock (1995) labels cohabitation an "incomplete institution," which is a fitting conceptualization for several important reasons. For example, Nock shows that commitment levels, relationship quality, and kinship linkages tend to be weaker for cohabiting couples than for married couples. He attributes these deficits of intergenerational relationships to the general social uncertainties (normlessness) regarding whether cohabitation is a legitimate

form of long-term union. Of course, cohabitation and marriage are similar in mundane respects, such as one would expect of couples sharing an intimate co-residence. But Nock concludes that the crucial distinction resides in the development of relationships *outside* the immediate conjugal union, such as those that integrate married persons into broad social networks. In this regard, Smock (2000) comments that the structural aspects of cohabitation, or the absence of clear institutional norms defining what cohabitation is, tends to preclude cohabitants from social integration into such marriage-like networks (e.g., intergenerational relationships) and, presumably, from certain types of social associations and reciprocal exchange.

In addition, comparing cohabitants, marrieds, and singles on school enrollment, homeownership, and child-bearing intentions, Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel (1990) found a stronger resemblance between cohabitants and singles than between cohabitants and marrieds, leading them to propose that cohabitation quite often represents an alternative to singlehood. Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, and Waite (1995) demonstrate that cohabitation has a different set of expectations than marriage, and an emphasis on individual-oriented interests or goals influences entrance into cohabitation. Thomson and Colella (1992) show that cohabitants are less committed to the institution of marriage and tend to define marriage in individual-centric (rather than couple-oriented) terms.

A strong commitment implies duties, obligations, and responsibilities to others that subordinate self-interest, or demand compromises, in numerous situations. Brines and Joyner (1999) suggest that marriage is a form of commitment that involves regular trade-offs and deference of individual preferences to coupledom and familial needs, whereas as cohabitation is less cohesive because it represents a prioritization of

individual freedoms over such contractual obligations to others. The heightened individualistic tendencies among cohabitants, according to Brines and Joyner, is a common explanation for the instable nature of cohabitation. That is, the robust presence of self-interest in cohabitational relationships increases chances of separation, because it decreases incentives to invest in relationship-specific capital and contains less strict adherence to the norms that discourage people from dissolving marriages.

These findings are consistent with theories that cohabitation is selective of people that have more individualistic value orientations (e.g., Thornton, 1989). Johan Surkyn (2003) observes that there are persuasive reasons for tracing changes in expressions of social cohesion to household-level change, such as increases in the prevalence of cohabitation. Indeed, the spread of individualism is a common denominator for household- and community-level transition and corresponds to shifts in value orientations and behavioral patterns (Surkyn & Lesthaeghe, 2004). Here individualism refers to an emphasis on personal fulfillment and a concomitant fracturing of individual behaviors from external regulations or ideologies. As Lewis (2001) points out, however, the degree to which individualism manifests itself in selfishness (or egoism) is a matter for debate. One question that remains unanswered is whether the putative individualistic value orientations of cohabitants translates into a marital status difference (decrease) in prosocial behavior. Our objective is to address this matter through comparing cohabitants to marrieds, singles, and others on several dimensions of social engagement.

DATA AND METHODS

Data

Our empirical analysis uses data from the General Social Survey Cycle 17, (GSS-17). The GSS program collects individual-level and household-level data on Canadian adults to monitor long-term changes in living conditions and social trends (Statistics Canada, 2004). The GSS-17 focused on multiple dimensions of social engagement, including, social contact (with relatives, friends, and neighbors), scope of social networks, social capital, reciprocal exchanges, association/club membership, participation in formal organizations, volunteer activities, charitable donations, civic engagement, and political involvement. In addition, the GSS-17 collected data on standard socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, marital status, gender, income, education, and cultural background. Statistics Canada conducted the GGS- 17 between February and December 2003.

The target population for the GSS-17 includes Canadian residents 15 years of age and older. It excluded individuals living in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, the three northern territories, and full-time residents of institutions. It used a stratified sampling design and a Random Digit Dialing (sampling) method to identify the sample elements (households). Though 98% of Canadian households have telephones, GSS-17 estimates were adjusted (weighted) to represent households without telephones (ibid.). Using the computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) method, the GSS-17 collected information from a sample of 24,591 individuals living in private households, with an overall response rate of 78% (see Statistics Canada, 2004 for further details on sample design and data collection).

To compare and contrast cohabitants and the married on social engagement, we decided to limit our analysis to respondents aged 18–64 for two reasons. First, although

cohabitation has been around for a long time, the rapid increase in cohabitation is a recent social phenomenon, and is uncommon among older persons, especially in comparison with young persons (Wu, 2000). Second, excluding respondents older than 64 allows us to retain employment variables, as age 65 coincides with the nominal onset of retirement in Canada. With this restriction, the final study sample includes 19,507 respondents.

Measures

We considered 3 dimensions of social engagement in our analysis: social network size and composition, political participation, and social participation. For social network size and composition, we used 3 indicators: the number of close relatives, the number of close friends, and the number of other friends. The distinction between these measures is important because these are designed to capture the concepts of strong and weak ties and of kin and non-kin ties, as discussed in the social network literature (e.g., Granovetter, 1973). In the GSS-17, each respondent was asked, "How many relatives (friends) do you have who you feel close to, that is, who you feel at ease with, can talk to about what is on your mind, or call on for help?" A similar question was asked for close friends. For other friends, the question was, "How many other friends do you have who are not relatives or close friends?" Although actual numbers were recorded during the interviews, for the public-use data, valid tabulated categories for these variables are ordinal: none, 1-2, 3-5, 6-10, 11-20, and more 20.

We considered 3 indicators for political participation. In the module of political participation, the respondent was asked, "Lots of people find it difficult to get out and vote. Did you vote in the last federal election?" Similar questions were asked about the

last provincial election, and the municipal or local election. We measured these voting behaviors as dummy variables.

We used 3 indicators to measure social participation: volunteering, giving help, and donating money/time. These measures are based on the responses to the following questions: a) "In the past 12 months, did you do unpaid volunteer work for any organization?" b) "Did you provide (instrumental, emotional or other) help to anyone on a regular basis?" and, c) "In the past 12 months, did you donate money or goods to any organization or charity, not including membership fees or dues?" Again, we constructed 3 dummy variables for these measures.

Our primary independent variable is marital status. It is measured as a 5-level categorical variable: married, cohabiting (reference group), separated or divorced, widowed, and never married. Table 1 shows that 53% of the target population are married, 12% are cohabiting, 26% are never married, 8% are separated or divorced, and less than 2% are widowed.

<Table 1 About Here>

Our regression analysis also controls for a number of individual-level variables that influence may social engagement, such as age, presence of children, region, religion, and socioeconomic characteristics. Variable definitions and descriptive statistics for these variables are also presented in Table 1.

We considered 7 socio-demographic variables. Age is measured in 5 categorical levels, ranging from age 18-24 to 55-64. Although single years of age is unavailable from the public-use data file, there is no reason to believe that this more refined measure would influence the relationship between marital status and social engagement. Indeed,

measured categorical variable, age could actually better discern the effects of lifecycle stages on social engagement.

We created 5 dummy variables indicating: a) being female, b) presence of children under age 15 in the household, c) being born outside Canada, d) residing in the province of Quebec, and e) living in a rural area. In addition, we also included religion, which is measured in 5 levels: Roman Catholic, United Church, Other Protestant, other religions, and no religious orientation.

We considered 3 indicators of socioeconomic status. Employment status is measured in 3 levels: a) attending school, b) working at a paid job or business, and c) not working outside the home. Education is measured in 10 levels, ranging from elementary school or less (1) to some post-graduate education or more (10). The mean level of education for the target population is 5.9, which is close to some university education. Household income is measured in 12 levels, ranging from no (earned) income (1) to $100,000 or more (12). Table 1 shows that the mean household income is 8.9, which is just below $50,000.

Because physical environments and living conditions are important predictors of social engagement (Kearns & Parkinson, 2001; Saegert & Winkel, 2005), we included 4 community/neighborhood indicators as control variables. Community belonging is an attitudinal item, measuring one aspect of social cohesion. The respondent was asked, "How would you describe your sense of belonging to your local community?" Response categories range from "very weak" (1) to "very strong" (5). We used two indicators for community/neighborhood attachment. One is homeownership, and the other is length of residence in the dwelling. Finally, we used an attitudinal item for neighborhood safety

based on the question, "How safe do you feel from crime walking alone in your area after dark?" Response categories range from very unsafe (1) to very safe (5).

Statistical Method

We chose the logistic model for data analysis largely because logistic regression is a well-understood and common statistical method for binary and ordinal data (e.g., Agresti, 2002; Long, 1997). As it has become a standard topic in the (senior) undergraduate and graduate curricula in social and health sciences disciplines, there is no need to present the formal model here. For this paper, we estimated both ordered and binary logit models using SAS (9.1) Logistic Procedure. Parameters were estimated using the maximum likelihood (ML) method which involves an iterative algorithm (SAS Institute, 2003). For goodness-of-fit statistics, we reported twice the negative of the log likelihood (for the final model including intercept and all covariates) as well as Akaike's information criterion (AIC) and the Schwartz criterion (SC), also known as Bayesian information criterion (BIC). The larger the log likelihood (chi square) value, the smaller the information measures, the better the fit.

In fact, a practical reason for using the logistic regression in the analysis is the ease for interpreting (transformed) regression coefficients as *odds ratios*, which are obtained through the antilog of logit coefficients (e^β). For the ordered logit model, the odds ratios can be interpreted as the odds of being in a higher category (rather than being in a lower category) for a one unit increase in the independent variable. For the binary logit model, the odds ratios represent the odds of $Y = 1$ rather than $Y = 0$ for a one unit

increase in the independent variable. Categorical covariates are interpreted in a similar

manner (see Allison, 1991).

RESULTS

Table 2 presents descriptive (bivariate) statistics for our selected measures of

social engagement, according to marital status. For number of close relatives, which

situates individuals in terms of kinship, there is no discernable pattern to illustrate a clear-

cut marital status difference in social networks, either in magnitude or in composition.

That said, about 28% of cohabitants report having 1-2 close relatives, in comparison with

22% of married persons, which offers some limited evidence that cohabitation is

subordinate to marriage as a foundation of kinship. The fact that 24% of married

individuals report having 6-10 close relatives and another 10% report having 11-20,

compared to 20% and 6%, respectively, among cohabitants seems to buttress this

presumption. That is, our assumption is that marriage tends to produce denser kinship

networks (more close relatives) than cohabitation, because it represents a formalized

union that is grounded in well-established kinship norms (i.e., marriage is a complete

institution), unlike cohabitation. On the other hand, cohabitation better resembles

singlehood in kinship terms, as these marital status groups are similar at higher kinship

network densities, i.e., reports of having 3-5, 6-10, and 11-20 close relatives.

<Table 2 About Here>

According to Table 2, there is no obvious compositional differences of social

networks between cohabitation and marriage, because the balance between close relative,

close friends, and other friends is not dissimilar across members of these marital status

groups. About 40% of both marital status groups report having 3-5 close friends. There are some slight differences, however, such as a somewhat higher proportion of married persons reporting having 6-10 and 11-20 close friends and a corresponding lower proportion reporting having 1-2 close friends. To what extent this difference, albeit marginal, represents a significant marital status difference is indicated below. But factors associated with marriage could increase one's chances of developing close friendships. For example, married persons could possess more friendships for structural reasons, such as homeownership, length of residence in a particular neighborhood, presence of children, and other factors that tend to increase a person's social network.

Table 2 also presents some interesting differences in voting behaviors. Keeping our attention on cohabitation and its comparison to marriage and singlehood, we observe that the voting behaviors of cohabitants is closer to those of married persons than of single persons, although married persons vote in higher proportions in federal, provincial, and municipal elections. For example 74% of marrieds, 68% of cohabitants, and 47% of singles report voting in the last federal election. In comparison with never-married status, these bivariate results suggest a relationship between marital status and voting behaviors, such that the experience of coupledom seems to increase individual propensities to participate in national, provincial, and local elections.

The bivariate results for social participation are rather mixed, and thus do not reveal a clear pattern to distinguish cohabitants from others. Hence, we cannot offer many preliminary comments as to whom cohabitants best resemble, married or single persons. However, at 23%, cohabitants volunteer in a much lower proportion than all other marital status groups, which could indicate lower tendencies of prosocial behavior,

at least for this particular dimension of social engagement. There is not much difference between cohabitants and marrieds on social support (giving regular help), but a somewhat higher proportion (38% versus 32%) of singles report providing social support than cohabitants. In addition, 70% of cohabitants reported donating money/goods during the past 12 months, compared to 80% of married people and 61% of never-married people.

Table 3 presents parameter estimates from ordered logistic regressions of our selected social network indicators on marital status. There is a small literature on marital status differences in social network size and composition, but, to our knowledge, no previous studies includes cohabitation as a comparison group. For example, Hurlbert and Acock (1990) demonstrate that married persons and widows possess denser, and more mature kinship networks than either single or divorced persons. Table 3 expands upon such previous research findings by considering cohabitants, and also measuring different types of social contacts, including close relatives, close friends, and other friends. These comparisons are designed to illustrate marital status differences in social network size, and also provide some insight into compositional differences in social networks.

<Table 3 About Here>

In terms of social networks consisting of close relatives, there is a significant difference between cohabitation and marriage, considering the effects of age group, gender, presence of children, and other selected independent variables. In particular, marriage (including widows/widowers) increases one's chances of falling inside a denser kinship network in comparison with cohabitation. On the other hand, there is a non-significant difference between cohabitants and never-married singles in kinship network size. These results, therefore, suggest that cohabitation is closer to singlehood than

marriage on this measure of social engagement. This is an unsurprising result considering that marriage forges deeper, more extensive kinship bonds than marriage, according to previous studies. For example, Nock (1995) observes that cohabitation provides a lesser degree of intergenerational connections, and demonstrates that parent-child relationships are more strained among cohabitants. Hence, while being an acceptable setting for a conjugal union, perhaps cohabitation is still a lesser form of kinship. Though it is normal for an individual to acquire close relatives (in-laws) upon marriage, this appears far less the experience for cohabitants. Cohabitation does not seem to generate these "automatic" kinship connections, which is consistent with the notion that, in general, cohabitations are informal unions.

Table 3 also presents parameter estimates for marital status differences in social networks consisting of close friends and of other friends. The regression analysis indicates a non-significant difference between cohabitation and marriage for both of these social engagement indicators. However, there is a significant difference between cohabitation and singlehood in close friendship networks. Our findings indicate that single persons tend to have denser networks of close friends in comparison to cohabitants. Hence, cohabitants are closer to married individuals than to single persons in terms of size of friendship networks. On close friends, moreover, both widowed and separated/divorced persons have, on average, denser friendship networks than cohabitants. The relative lack of friends among cohabitants could indicate that, similar to marriage, the intimate connection that cohabitation embodies, could decrease the need (or opportunities) for forming or maintaining a dense friendship network.

Table 4 examines differences in voting patterns in federal, provincial, and municipal elections, according to marital status. Some previous research indicates that there is a marital status gap in voting/non-voting, and shows that marriage tends to increase participation in these political activities (Sigelman et al., 1985). But not much is understood about whether cohabitation influences marital status patterns of electoral turnout, since most previous research focuses on comparisons of married persons to never-married persons, and ignores cohabitation. After considering selected confounding variables, our results illustrate that there is indeed a significant difference in electoral turnout between cohabiting and married persons. In specific, the comparative likelihood of voting for married persons is 20% $((e^{.182} - 1) \times 100)$ in federal elections, 26% in provincial elections, and 14% in municipal elections. In addition, being never-married decreases the likelihood of voting in comparison to cohabitation. The never-married have a 15% less likelihood of voting in federal elections, for example, which is about similar to their lower comparative likelihoods of voting in provincial and municipal elections.

<Table 4 About Here>

Table 5 presents parameter estimates from logistic regressions of social participation indicators on marital status, including volunteering, providing social support, and donations of cash or goods. These regression models include controls for age group, gender, presence of children, religion, socioeconomic status, and other factors that have bearing on social participation. In terms of volunteering, cohabitants are a rather unique group, in that all other marital status groups have greater propensities to volunteer. In comparison with cohabiting persons, the likelihood of volunteering is 49% higher for married persons, 46% higher for separated/divorced persons, 39% higher for

widowed persons, and 40% higher for never married persons. There is no significant difference between cohabiting and married persons in providing regular social support, but there is a significant difference between cohabitants and members of other marital status groups (except for the widowed). For example, the chances of providing regular social support are 35% higher among separated/divorced persons and 23% higher among never married persons. Finally, the only significant difference in donations is between cohabitants and married persons, with the likelihood of donating being 38% higher among the latter.

All regression models considered factors (control variables) that can confound the relationship between marital status and social engagement. For example, the results indicate that foreign-born status (immigrants) associates with an across-the-board reduction in social engagement. This is consistent with findings from previous studies, which suggest that, through mechanisms such as English language usage and place of origin, immigrants tend to be less engaged than domestic-born persons (e.g., Baer, 2008). This is a troubling finding as it could suggest that immigrant groups, and those from non-European countries in particular, are less well integrated into their host communities. Education is another important social engagement variable (Egerton, 2002). Our results demonstrate that all dimensions of social engagement considered increase alongside education. In general, socioeconomic status seems rather important, because there is also a significant association between household income and almost all measures of social engagement. Not surprisingly, increases in sense of community belonging tend to foster concomitant increases in social engagement. In most cases, our findings demonstrate that

our selected independent variables have significant effects on our dependent measures of social engagement, which indicates that our model specifications are good.

CONCLUSION

This article investigated the effects of marital status on multiple dimensions of social engagement, which is an important aspect of social cohesion. Our objective was to examine how (or indeed if) cohabitation influences broader patterns of social organization, including kinship network membership, political participation, and social participation. As is well-established, the diffusion of cohabitation is among the most salient socio-demographic events that has occurred during the past 3-4 decades across Canada and within most industrial countries. As a central trend in what demographers term the Second Demographic Transition (SDT), cohabitation belongs to a broad general socio-cultural shift from traditional institutional arrangements (e.g., the male-breadwinner, female-homemaker marriage model), and towards more individualized, liberal-democratic ideals (Lesthaeghe, 1995; Van de Kaa, 1987) . Within the SDT was a gradual relaxation of social, moral, and legal restrictions on conjugal behaviors, such as divorce, pre-martial sex, and cohabitation. As Lesthaeghe and Neels (2002) observe, an emphasis on individual needs and self-actualization (contra a deference to institutional norms) defines the socio-cultural attitude of the post-war socio-demographic transition.

There has been considerable debate about the putative impact of these demographic changes, and about increases in divorce and cohabitation in particular, on families and societies. Of course, there is a well-known connection between cohabitation and both declining rates of marriage and increasing rates of divorce (see Bumpass, Sweet,

& Cherlin, 1991; Wu, 2000), but whether cohabitation has implications for social organization apart from immediate familial relationships is an unexplored research frontier. There have been some suggestions that cohabitation is an endemic manifestation of an individualism that is a threat to social cohesion, but, as Lewis (2001) indicates, whether this individualism is indeed a threat to social cohesion is debatable. However, the point is that, whereas our understanding about the internal dynamics of cohabitation and of cohabitants themselves is quite extensive, there is little firm knowledge about the relationship of cohabitation to social cohesion. That is, does cohabitation influence patterns of social organization or social connection outside of the conjugal dyad itself?

This study offers several new insights into where cohabitation fits in terms of social integration. Three implicit conceptual problems motivated our empirical analysis of the relationship of marital status to social engagement. First, are cohabitors more like married persons or more like single persons in social engagement? Second, is there a marital status pattern that suggest that the putative individualism of cohabitation is contributing to social disengagement or weaker prosocial behaviors? Third, do these results suggest about the general status of cohabitation in Canada?

The first problem is interesting because it addresses whether, on aggregate, cohabitation is a transient or transitional union (closer to singlehood), or a durable alternative to marriage. However, there is no straightforward answer here, for cohabitation appears to represent a unique status, rather than something that is close to marriage or close to singlehood. But in terms of kinship networks, cohabitation is indeed closer to singlehood than marriage. This is not a surprising result considering that, even though it is acceptable, cohabitation does not appear to function as does marriage in

broader kinship terms. For example, marriage tends to represent a coming together of families, creating a formal network of in-laws. In contrast, the informal nature of cohabitation could lack the critical incentives that an extensive kinship network requires. A marriage is a semi-public event in that it involves explicit social acknowledgement (and approval) of a couple's union, and thus involves an implicit extended familial-level "commitment" to the couple. This form of "commitment" is expressed through families accepting each other as kin-relations. In contrast, the private, unacknowledged status of cohabitation might block off similar channels of kinship.

On other aspects of social engagement, we could not uncover a clear pattern to suggest whether cohabitation is a marriage-like relationship or an alternative being single. Perhaps this is even an inappropriate frame of reference for social engagement. For example, our analysis of political participation demonstrates that cohabitants are neither like married or single persons. In comparison with cohabitants, electoral turnout is higher among married persons, but is lower among single persons. In addition, we examined marital status patterns of social participation, including volunteering, giving social support, and donating cash/goods. On volunteering, our results indicate that all marital status groups are more "engaged" than cohabitants, which we discuss below. In terms of social support, we found a non-significant difference between cohabitants and married persons, but a significant difference between cohabitants and single persons. That is, the never-married (as do the separated/divorced) report proving regular social support in greater numbers than cohabitants. This difference between coupledom and singlehood suggests that reciprocal exchange is less crucial for individuals belonging to a union. Presumably, the functional aspects of intimate dyads produce internal supplies of support,

thus decreasing incentives to offering outside support. If we understand support giving as a social exchange, then the endogenous benefits of partnership, whether marital or cohabitational, decrease an individual's need to develop supportive networks.

Whether the putative individualism of cohabitation translates into lower prosocial behavior remains a matter of debate. Our findings, however, do suggest that it is possible that, on average, cohabitants are less prosocial than others. In particular, our results indicate that cohabitants volunteer much less than all others, and donate less cash/goods than married persons. There is no obvious reason to explain this relationship, for we considered the usual confounding factors, such as age group, socioeconomic status, presence of children, and community belonging, among other things. At least, these factors rule out the differentials in volunteering that associate with life cycle status (or available time), such as employment situation, schooling, or familial obligations. What is troubling is not a difference between cohabitation and marriage per se, but the *general* disparities that indicate that never-married, separated/divorced, and widowed people are closer to married people in terms of volunteering than are cohabiting people. Of course, this is just a single dimension of social engagement, but it could indicate that cohabitation is indeed selective of individuals that possess a higher relative sense of self-interest.

So what is the general status of cohabitation in Canada? Though we cannot offer a definitive answer, we can provide some additional insights as to what cohabitation appears to represent. To be sure, cohabitation has numerous marriage-like features, such as a similar household division of labor, shared household expenses, and intimate co-residence (Smock & Gupta, 2002). In this regard, cohabitation functions in a fashion similar to marriage, but these functional similarities are specific to cohabiting couples,

and thus could have little further bearing. To be sure, cohabitation is an accepted form of conjugal union, but whether it is accepted in similar terms as marriage is uncertain. Though cohabiting does not generate a discernable degree of social exclusion or stigma, nor does it appear to forge a kinship network similar to marriage. Our results indicate that kinship networks are denser for married persons than for cohabiting persons. This suggests that, whereas cohabitation has become a normative practice, it does not resemble marriage in kinship terms. That is, living together out-of-wedlock still appears to represent a somewhat weaker foundation for building kinship ties.

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Table 1 Definitions and Descriptive Statistics of the Independent Variables Used in the Analysis: Canadian Adults (Age 18 - 64), 2003

Variable	Definition	M or %	S. D
Marital status			
Married	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	53.0%	—
Separated/divorced	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	7.8%	—
Widowed	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	1.4%	—
Never married	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	26.3%	—
Cohabiting	Reference group	11.6%	—
Age			
18 - 24	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	14.6%	—
25 - 34	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	21.4%	—
35 - 44	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	25.4%	—
45 - 54	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	22.8%	—
55 - 64	Reference group	15.7%	—
Female	Dummy indicator (1 = female, 0 = male)	50.0%	—
Children	Dummy indicator (1 = presence of children under 15, 0 = otherwise)	34.3%	—
Immigrant	Dummy indicator (1 = born outside Canada, 0 = otherwise)	22.8%	—
Quebec	Dummy indicator (1 = living in Quebec, 0 = otherwise)	24.0%	—
Rural	Dummy indicator (1 = living in rural areas, 0 = otherwise)	18.9%	—
Religion			
Catholic	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	39.7%	—
United Church	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	7.3%	—
Other Protestant	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	20.6%	—
Other religions	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	7.6%	—
No religious affiliation	Reference group	24.8%	—
Employment status			
Attend school	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	9.5%	—
Not work outside home	Dummy indicator (1 = yes, 0 = no)	22.4%	—
Work outside home	Reference group	68.0%	—
Education	Education in 10 levels (1 = elementary or less, …, 10 = graduate school or more)	5.92	2.76
Household income	Household income in 12 levels (1 = none, …, 12 = $100k+)	8.91	2.20
Community belonging	5-point Likert scale (1 = very weak, …, 5 = very strong)	3.42	1.26
Homeownership	Dummy indicator (1 = someone in the household owns the dwelling, 0 = renting)	72.2%	—
Length of living in dwelling	Length of living in the same dwelling in 6 levels (1 = <6 months, …, 6 = 10+ years)	4.28	1.63
Feel safe	Feel safe walking alone in neighborhood in 5 levels, (1 = very unsafe, …, 5 = very safe)	4.07	1.15
N		19,507	

Note: Weighted means and percentages, and unweighted *N*.

Table 2 Study Indicators for Social Engagement by Marital Status: Canadian Adults (18 - 64), 2003

Social engagement	Married	Cohabiting	Sep/Div	Widowed	Nev mar	Chi square df
Number of close relatives						
None	5.7%	5.6%	8.3%	4.6%	7.7%	
1 - 2	22.3%	27.6%	28.6%	27.1%	23.4%	
3 - 5	34.5%	37.5%	36.5%	35.9%	36.9%	
6 - 10	24.3%	20.1%	18.1%	21.0%	20.7%	
11 - 20	9.6%	6.2%	5.5%	7.8%	7.9%	170.2
20+	3.6%	3.0%	3.2%	3.7%	3.4%	(df = 20)
Number of close friends						
None	6.0%	5.6%	5.7%	8.3%	3.2%	
1 - 2	25.5%	31.1%	26.0%	24.9%	19.2%	
3 - 5	40.6%	40.2%	42.8%	38.4%	42.8%	
6 - 10	19.6%	17.3%	18.9%	19.2%	25.9%	
11 - 20	6.4%	4.4%	5.0%	7.7%	7.0%	279.7
20+	1.9%	1.3%	1.7%	1.5%	1.9%	(df = 20)
Number of other friends						
None	4.5%	5.1%	6.8%	8.5%	4.1%	
1 - 2	3.5%	4.5%	4.3%	4.4%	2.8%	
3 - 5	12.7%	13.5%	14.7%	12.7%	10.0%	
6 - 10	23.0%	24.5%	22.0%	19.8%	21.6%	
11 - 20	28.1%	28.8%	28.3%	26.9%	31.1%	130.6
20+	28.4%	23.7%	24.0%	27.7%	30.5%	(df = 20)
Voted in last federal election						1178.1
(1 = yes)	74.0%	68.4%	69.0%	73.0%	46.6%	(df = 4)
Voted in last provincial election						1031.8
(1 = yes)	72.4%	66.6%	67.4%	71.7%	46.4%	(df = 4)
Voted in last municipal election						892.5
(1 = yes)	60.1%	51.8%	53.0%	60.8%	34.8%	(df = 4)
Unpaid volunteering						208.2
(1 = yes)	37.7%	22.9%	31.2%	31.8%	31.5%	(df = 4)
Help someone regularly						117.2
(1 = yes)	29.8%	31.2%	36.9%	33.3%	37.9%	(df = 4)
Donated money/goods						660.2
(1 = yes)	80.4%	70.2%	70.3%	73.3%	61.3%	(df = 4)

Note : Weighted percentages. *N* = 19,507.

Table 3 Parameter Estimates from Ordered Logistic Regressions of Social Network Indicators on Marital Status and Selected Covariates: Canadian Adults (Age 18 - 64), 2003

Variable	Network indicators		
	Close relatives	Close friends	Other friends
Marital status			
Married	0.239 ***	0.050	0.025
Separated/divorced	-0.069	0.224 ***	0.061
Widowed	0.202 *	0.271 **	0.226 *
Never married	-0.087	0.262 ***	0.004
Cohabiting[a]			
Age			
18 - 24	0.406 ***	0.475 ***	0.599 ***
25 - 34	0.251 ***	0.237 ***	0.176 ***
35 - 44	0.001	0.019	0.054
45 - 54	-0.084	-0.063	-0.075
55 - 64[a]			
Female (1 = yes)	0.278 ***	-0.085 **	-0.210 ***
Children (1 = yes)	-0.058	-0.193 ***	-0.134 ***
Immigrant (1 = yes)	-0.422 ***	-0.242 ***	-0.234 ***
Quebec (1 = yes)	-0.598 ***	-0.719 ***	-0.699 ***
Rural (1 = yes)	0.094 **	0.006	0.046
Religion			
Catholic	0.058	-0.153 ***	-0.082 *
United Church	0.206 ***	0.064	0.113 *
Other Protestant	0.173 ***	0.081 *	0.139 ***
Other religions	0.170 **	-0.060	-0.181 **
No religious affiliation[a]			
Employment status			
Attend school	0.082	0.113	0.061
Not work outside home	-0.092 **	-0.088 *	-0.182 ***
Work outside home[a]			
Education	0.047 ***	0.087 ***	0.061 ***
Household income	0.043 ***	0.061 ***	0.087 ***
Community belonging	0.187 ***	0.248 ***	0.221 ***
Homeownership (1 = yes)	-0.039	0.004	0.023
Length of living in dwelling	-0.014	-0.016	-0.002
Feel safe	0.077 ***	0.083 ***	0.089 ***
Intercept6	-5.159 ***	-6.222 ***	-3.023 ***
Intercept5	-3.809 ***	-4.631 ***	-1.704 ***
Intercept4	-2.382 ***	-3.018 ***	-0.543 ***
Intercept3	-0.779 ***	-1.086 ***	0.579 ***
Intercept2	1.146 ***	1.104 ***	1.204 ***
AIC	58450	53673	58284
BIC	58687	53909	58520
-2 Log Likelihood	58390	53613	58224

[a] Reference category.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. (Two-tailed test.)

Table 4 Parameter Estimates from Binary Logistic Regressions of Political Participation Indicators on Marital Status and Selected Covariates: Canadian Adults (Age 18 - 64), 2003

Variable	Voted in last election		
	Federal	Provincial	Municipal
Marital status			
Married	0.182 ***	0.232 ***	0.132 *
Separated/divorced	-0.141	-0.108	-0.138 *
Widowed	-0.342 *	-0.216	-0.186
Never married	-0.163 *	-0.133 *	-0.143 *
Cohabiting[a]			
Age			
18 - 24	-2.309 ***	-2.049 ***	-1.659 ***
25 - 34	-1.545 ***	-1.524 ***	-1.229 ***
35 - 44	-1.058 ***	-1.028 ***	-0.777 ***
45 - 54	-0.599 ***	-0.537 ***	-0.461 ***
55 - 64[a]			
Female (1 = yes)	0.035	-0.002	0.176 ***
Children (1 = yes)	-0.102 *	-0.098 *	-0.040
Immigrant (1 = yes)	-1.375 ***	-1.385 ***	-1.010 ***
Quebec (1 = yes)	0.488 ***	0.634 ***	0.345 ***
Rural (1 = yes)	-0.047	-0.012	-0.159 ***
Religion			
Catholic	0.441 ***	0.439 ***	0.408 ***
United Church	0.321 ***	0.384 ***	0.378 ***
Other Protestant	0.129 *	0.158 **	0.174 ***
Other religions	0.222 **	0.245 **	0.250 ***
No religious affiliation[a]			
Employment status			
Attend school	-0.435 ***	-0.451 ***	-0.443 ***
Not work outside home	-0.175 ***	-0.216 ***	-0.113 **
Work outside home[a]			
Education	0.137 ***	0.125 ***	0.071 ***
Household income	0.045 ***	0.029 **	0.015
Community belonging	0.158 ***	0.169 ***	0.205 ***
Homeownership (1 = yes)	0.309 ***	0.323 ***	0.317 ***
Length of living in dwelling	0.124 ***	0.135 ***	0.166 ***
Feel safe	0.011	-0.006	0.004
Intercept	-0.591 ***	-0.592 ***	-1.427 ***
AIC	19923	20340	23137
BIC	20128	20545	23342
-2 Log Likelihood	19871	20288	23085

[a] Reference category.
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. (Two-tailed test.)

Table 5 Parameter Estimates from Binary Logistic Regressions of Social Participation Indicators on Marital Status and Selected Covariates: Canadian Adults (Age 18 - 64), 2003

	Social Participation		
Variable	Volunteer	Give help	Donate
Marital status			
Married	0.397 ***	-0.001	0.321 ***
Separated/divorced	0.378 ***	0.299 ***	0.023
Widowed	0.328 **	0.110	0.077
Never married	0.333 ***	0.204 ***	-0.006
Cohabiting[a]			
Age			
18 - 24	-0.092	0.295 ***	-0.788 ***
25 - 34	-0.252 ***	0.027	-0.581 ***
35 - 44	-0.045	-0.060	-0.399 ***
45 - 54	0.035	-0.075	-0.205 ***
55 - 64[a]			
Female (1 = yes)	0.256 ***	0.381 ***	0.495 ***
Children (1 = yes)	0.175 ***	-0.114 **	0.151 ***
Immigrant (1 = yes)	-0.440 ***	-0.239 ***	-0.394 ***
Quebec (1 = yes)	-0.534 ***	-0.060	-0.120 *
Rural (1 = yes)	0.269 ***	-0.070	-0.087
Religion			
Catholic	-0.045	0.145 ***	0.280 ***
United Church	0.227 ***	0.033	0.486 ***
Other Protestant	0.340 ***	0.103 *	0.425 ***
Other religions	-0.008	0.093	0.152 *
No religious affiliation[a]			
Employment status			
Attend school	0.683 ***	0.019	-0.161 *
Not work outside home	0.174 ***	-0.051	-0.382 ***
Work outside home[a]			
Education	0.144 ***	0.049 ***	0.157 ***
Household income	0.054 ***	0.007	0.120 ***
Community belonging	0.301 ***	0.106 ***	0.092 ***
Homeownership (1 = yes)	0.046	-0.041	0.289 ***
Length of living in dwelling	0.011	-0.004	0.005
Feel safe	0.034 *	-0.004	0.036 *
Intercept	-3.796 ***	-1.634 ***	-1.556 ***
AIC	23067	24563	19962
BIC	23272	24768	20167
-2 Log Likelihood	23015	24511	19910

[a] Reference category.
* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01; *** *p* < .001. (Two-tailed test.)