

Myths of Cohabitation and Marriage

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Trends in Canadian Cohabitation

- The proportion of common-law families, rose to 15.5% in 2006,
 - from 13.8% five years ago,
 - 7.2 two decades ago.
- The proportion of lone-parent families rose to 15.9% from 15.7% in 2001 and 12.7 two decades ago.

Figure 1: married couple families with children, declining.

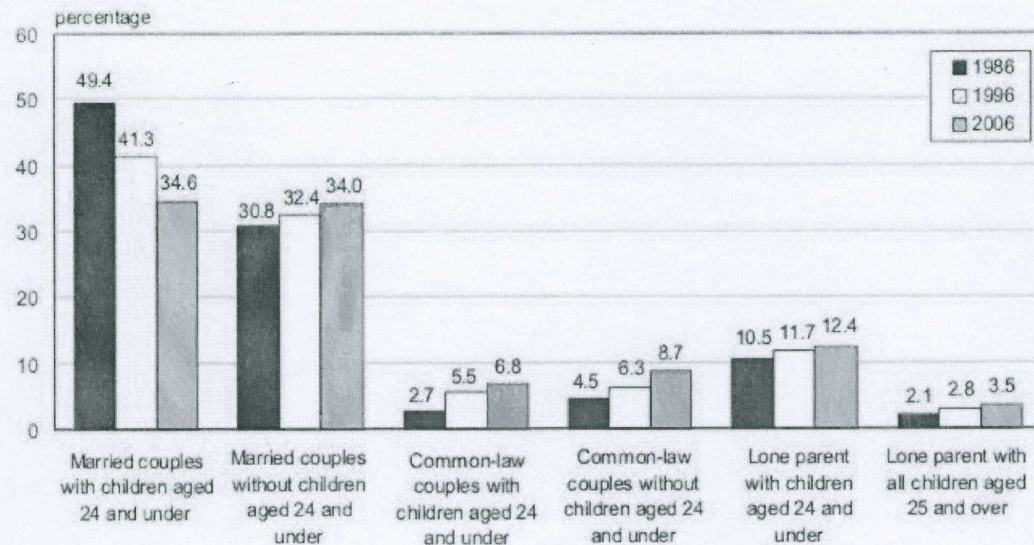


Statistics Canada / Statistique Canada

Canada

Figure 1
Married-couple families with children aged 24 and under is largest family structure, but declining¹

Description



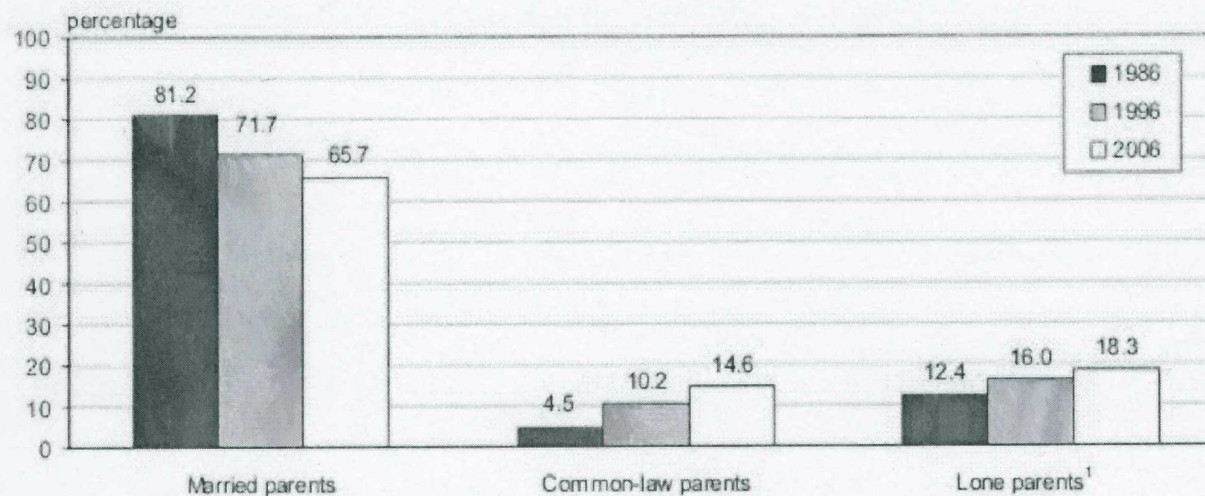
1. Historical comparisons for census families, particularly lone-parent families, must be interpreted with caution due to conceptual changes in 2001.

Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1986, 1996 and 2006.

Figure 13: Proportion of children under 14 living with married parents continues to decrease.

Figure 13
Proportion of children aged 14 and under living with married parents continues to decrease

Description



1. Historical comparisons for census families, particularly lone-parent families, must be interpreted with caution due to conceptual changes in 2001.

Note: For each census year, 2.1% or a smaller percentage of children are counted in the 'other' category.

Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1986, 1996 and 2006.

Myths of Marriage, Marriage is Bad Because:

- Women can be trapped in dangerous and abusive marriages.
- Marriage is an emotional trap.
- Marriage is too much financial responsibility.

Cohabitation is Good Because:

- We'll figure out if we are compatible.
- We'll avoid divorce if we find that we aren't compatible.
- We'll have a better marriage in the end.

Implicit Theory:

- Marriage is just a piece of paper.
- Marriage is just a contract between consenting adults. We can make any agreement we want.

Three topics:

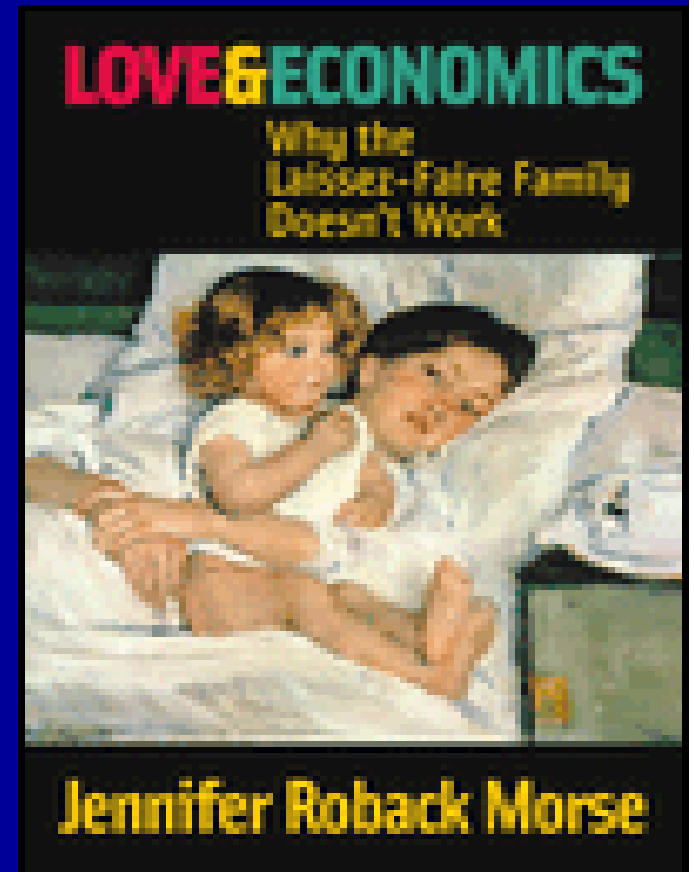
- Examine the implicit theory of marriage.
- Explode the myths of cohabitation and marriage.
- Explore why cohabitation is so disappointing.

Understanding Marriage:

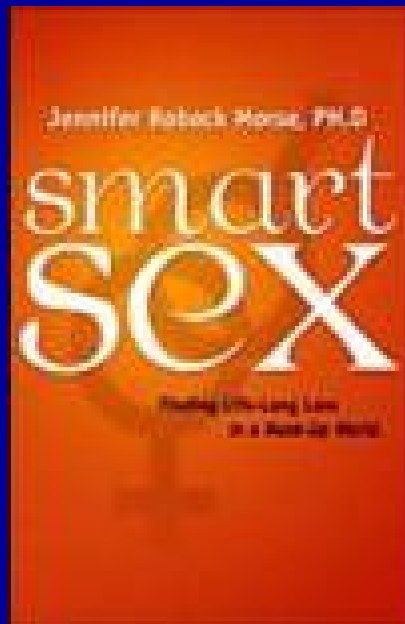
- The Theoretical, Philosophical Level
- The Public Policy Level
- The Personal, Individual Level
- Let's take a moment to look at marriage at the Philosophical level.

Love and Economics:

Why the Laissez-Faire Family
Doesn't Work



Smart Sex: Finding Life-long Love in a Hook-up World



“Smart Sex” presupposes something called “Dumb Sex.” How do you suppose I got to be an expert on Dumb things that Don’t Work?

My story

- Cohabiting. Bought house. Got dog.
- “married singles” life style
- Infertility
- Adoption and birth
- Needed far more cooperation than we had been used to.
- We had to unlearn what we learned while cohabiting.

What are social institutions and why do we need them?

- Three broad sectors: the legal, political sector, the economic market sector, and the social cultural sector.
- Each sector has its own role to play, its own strengths and limitations.

More than a collection of individuals

- Social institutions perform team production.
- Their “product” can not be easily distributed or “privatized” among the members without significant losses.
- Social institutions can have a legal identity, independently of the individuals within it, and can outlive the members.

Marriage is a Social Institution

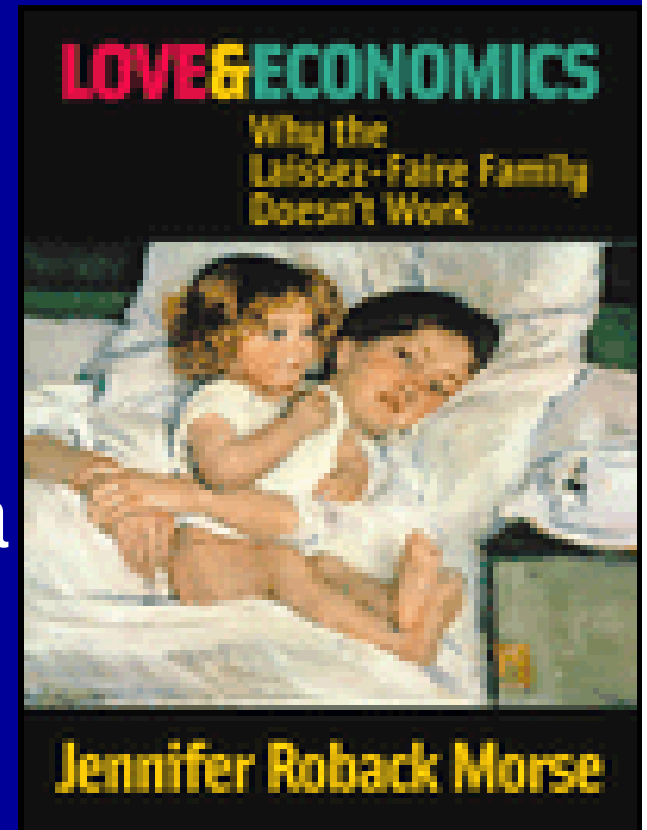
- The “production” of children is a genuine team effort.
- Men and women come together spontaneously.
- Marriage is not the creation of the state.
- Solves problems more personally than can the state or the market.
- The cooperation between mothers and fathers is the most basic unit of social cooperation.

Marriage is more than a contract.

- Rights and responsibilities can not be fully specified.
- Life-long, not a limited term relationship.
- Contracts are not the only form of social cooperation.
- Partnership, not contract.
- Thinking contractually can undermine cooperation.

Love and Economics

Chapter 4: Why Marriage is Not a Contract.



Exploding the Myths

Modern opinion-makers have:

Over-stated the risks of marriage,

Understated the risks of cohabitation.

Cohabitation has been extensively studied.

I will give

robust general results.

recent specific results.

General Reference:

- **“Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know about Cohabitation Before Marriage: A Comprehensive Review of Recent Research,”** David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, (Rutgers, NJ: The National Marriage Project, 2002).
- **“No positive contribution of cohabitation to marriage has ever been found.”**

Get the National Marriage Project Materials on-line:

<http://marriage.rutgers.edu/publications.html>

<http://marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/swlt2.pdf>

Myth: Marriage is dangerous to women and children.

- **Fact: cohabitation is more dangerous to women and children than marriage.**

Domestic violence against women

- Women in cohabiting relationships are more likely to suffer physical and sexual abuse.
- Aggression: **at least** twice as common among cohabitators.
- Two studies, one in Canada, one in the US, found that women in cohabiting relationships are about **nine times** more likely to be killed by their partner than are women in marital relationships.

Child Abuse:

- Recent study (2005) of child deaths in Missouri.
- Children residing in households with unrelated adults were nearly 50 times as likely to die of inflicted injuries than children residing with 2 biological parents.

The Boyfriend Problem:

- Children in households with a single parent and no other adults in residence had no increased risk of inflicted injury deaths.
- In households with unrelated adults, most perpetrators (84%) were the unrelated adult household member.
- Only 6.5% of perpetrators were the biological parent of the child.

Complete reference:

- “Child Deaths Resulting from Inflicted Injuries: Household Risk Factors and Perpetrator Characteristics,” Patricia G. Schnitzer, Bernard G. Ewigman, **Pediatrics** 116, no. 5, November 2005.

Myth: marriage is an emotional trap.

- Fact: Cohabiting couples report:
 - lower levels of happiness
 - lower levels of sexual exclusivity
 - Less sexual satisfaction
 - poorer relationships with their parents
 - Greater uncertainty about the relationship
- than do married couples.

Depression

- Cohabiting women are more than three times more likely than married women to be depressed.
 - The presence of children increases the likelihood of depression among cohabiting women, but not among married women.

Myth: Marriage is too much financial responsibility.

- Fact: Marriage is a wealth-creating institution.
- Cohabiting couples: about two-thirds of the income of married couples with children.
- Average income of male cohabiting partners: about half that of male married partners.
- Private transfer of wealth among extended family members: lower for cohabiting couples than for married couples:
 - family members are more willing to transfer wealth to “in-laws” than to mere boyfriends or girlfriends.

Myths (Fantasies?) of Cohabitation:

- We'll figure out if we are compatible.
- We'll avoid divorce if we find that we aren't compatible.
- We'll have a better marriage in the end.

Risks to Relationships.

- More instability within the existing relationship.
- Greater probability of divorce, if the couple does go on to marriage.
- More perceived problems.
- Attitudes that inhibit successful relationships.

Relationship instability

- A 1992 study found that prior cohabitators are estimated to have a hazard of later marital dissolution that is 46% higher than non-cohabitators.
- Serial cohabitation is particularly problematic. Some studies indicate: the effect of cohabitation on later marital instability is found only when one or both partners had previously cohabited with someone other than their spouse.

Is it all a selection effect?

- Are those who cohabit systematically different from those who marry?
- Students want to know this!
- Early studies checked this closely.
- Demographic characteristics typically explain some, **but not all**, of the impact of cohabitation.

Recent study (2003) of US Data

- Tested selection effects.
 - Are cohabitators more likely to be losers?
- Tested cohort effects.
 - Are the ill-effects of cohabitation diminishing, as cohabitation becomes more socially acceptable?
- Answer to both questions: NO!

Results: Cohort?

- Cohorts defined: those married between 1964 and 1980 (when cohabitation was less common) and those married between 1981 and 1997 (when cohabitation was more common.)
- Probability of divorce:
 - The odds of divorce were 90% higher in the more recent cohort.
 - Even holding cohort constant, cohabitators had a 151% increase in the odds of divorce.
- Whether you got married in 1964 or 1997, cohabiting still is associated
 - lower marital happiness
 - greater marital instability.

Results: Selection Bias?

- Including race, education, income and parental divorce reduced the impact of cohabitation on happiness, conflict and later divorce, but did not eliminate it.
- Without control variables: 151% higher odds of divorce for cohabitators.
- With control variables: the odds of divorce for cohabitators were a mere 77% higher than for non-cohabitators.

Complete Reference:

- “The Relationship between Cohabitation and Marital Quality and Stability: Change across Cohorts?” Claire M. Kamp Cush, Catherine L. Cohan, and Paul R. Amato, **Journal of Marriage and Family**, 65 (August 2003): 539-549.

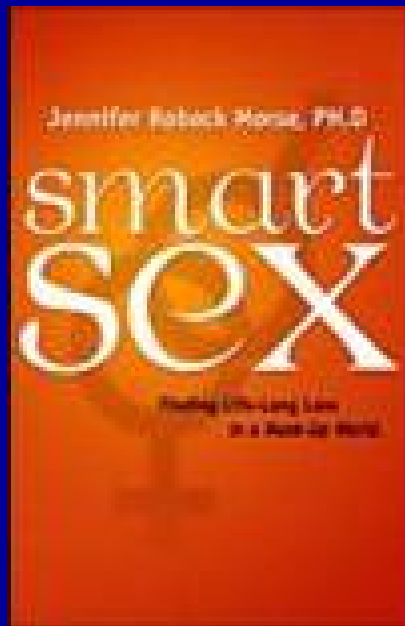
Why is cohabitation so disappointing?

- The Oxytocin Effect.
- Poorer choice of partner.
- Learned habits.
- Why not take her for a test drive?

The Oxytocin Effect

- Oxytocin is a hormone that promotes bonding and attachment.
- Women secrete Oxytocin during sex and lactation.
- Nature's way of building a family.
- Cohabitators are creating an "involuntary chemical commitment," which clouds their judgment about the suitability of a partner.

Smart Sex: Finding Life-long Love in a Hook-up World



Chapter 2: "The Gift of Sex" discusses how sex creates attachment.

Choice of partner?

People choose riskier partners when cohabiting than when marrying.

- Completing high school
- stable employment
- high earnings

are less important prerequisites for cohabiting than for marriage.

Learned Behaviors

Cohabitators tend to:

- Be less committed to continuing the relationship
- Be more oriented toward their own personal autonomy.
- be less motivated to develop conflict resolution and support skills.

Among married individuals,
premarital cohabitation is related
to:

- less time spent together in shared activities
- higher levels of marital disagreement
- less supportive behavior
- less positive problem solving
- more reports of marital problems
- greater perceived likelihood of marital dissolution

Cohabitation inhibits marriage skills.

- Marriage skills must be learned.
- 101 Tips for a Happier Marriage: it can be taught!
- Why NOT take her for a test drive?

Hazards to Children

- People are often not thinking about children when they choose to cohabit. But kids suffer from:
 - Fewer economic resources.
 - Relationship instability.
 - Domestic violence.
 - Diminished school achievement.
 - Sadness, loneliness, lack of self-control.

The Big “If Only”

- “If Only” cohabiting parents had as much income as married parents;
- “If Only” cohabiting mothers were depressed as infrequently as married mothers.
- “If Only” stepfathers spent as much time with kids as biological fathers.
- “If Only” cohabiting boyfriends were not as violent as married biological fathers.

But these “if’s” hardly ever hold.

- Result:
- Lower school achievement
- More sadness and loneliness for children.
- Less self-control for children.

What should we do?

- As legislators, do not encourage cohabitation, by treating it like marriage.
- Begin constructive dialogue with:
 - Social workers
 - Family law attorneys and judges
 - Psychologists
 - Police

Our goals:

- For children: to spend their entire childhood with their own married parents.
- For adults: life-long married love.
- For young adults: to enter into married life with hope and without fear.
- For the taxpayer: reduced expenditures on social services that compensate for loss of family.

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