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**Marriage or Partnering? Effects of Cohabitation and Family Structure Changes  
on Early Adolescent Well-Being**

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## Abstract

The present study investigated the association of marriage, cohabitation, and partnership instability with young adolescents' cognitive and socioemotional trajectories. Using longitudinal data from *Welfare, Children and Families: A Three-City Study*, we tracked family structure changes for 855 low-income adolescents (10 - 14 years-old in wave 1) during the 16 months between interviews. Adolescents in stably married families experienced improved psychological and behavioral functioning over time in comparison to their peers in stable cohabiting or single-parent families, although no differences were found in standardized assessments of reading and mathematics. Even though stable married unions appeared beneficial for low-income adolescents, psychological and behavioral problems increased when mothers entered marriage, and such problems declined when marriages dissolved. Theoretical and applied implications of these findings are discussed.

Key Words: FAMILY STRUCTURE, COHABITATION, LOW-INCOME, ADOLESCENT, MARRIAGE, DIVORCE

## **Marriage or Partnering? Effects of Cohabitation and Family Structure Changes on Early Adolescent Well-Being**

Several important demographic shifts have occurred over the last few decades that have implications for the structure and stability of American children's home environments. From 1990 to 1997, the percentage of children born to unmarried mothers increased from 28% to 32% (Seltzer, 2000). At the same time, the number of single-mother households modestly declined in the late 1990s, particularly among low-income families (Acs & Nelson, 2001; Dupree & Primus, 2001). These seemingly contradictory trends can be attributed primarily to the growing incidence of births and childrearing in cohabiting-couple families (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991; Cherlin, 1992; Seltzer, 2000). Marriage rates have declined while rates of cohabitation have steadily increased, especially in disadvantaged populations (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Manning & Lichter, 1996). Although the number of children living in cohabiting households during a given year is relatively low (e.g., under 4% in 1990; Manning & Lichter, 1996), recent estimates project that 40% of children in the U.S. will reside in a cohabiting-couple household at some point during their childhood (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). However, cohabitations tend to be short-lived, and the proportion of cohabiting couples who marry has also declined (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Furthermore, even though the number of single-mother headed families has decreased over the last decade, the incidence of father absence and single-parenting remains disproportionately high in low-income populations (Acs & Nelson, 2001; Cherlin & Fomby, 2002; Primus, 2002). Consequently, strong associations between economic deprivation and marital/partnership instability have repeatedly surfaced in the extant literature.

Paradoxically, although low-income families most frequently experience changes in family structure, research examining the impact of household transitions, like divorce, on child well-being rarely targets this population. Instead, data are collected from middle-income samples (e.g.,

Hetherington, 1989; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992), or national data sets are analyzed and the effects of poverty are statically controlled (e.g., Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, & Booth, 2000; McLanahan & Booth, 1989; Najman, et al., 1997). Imprecise and static indicators of family structure are also commonly used, such as intact versus nonintact families, which masks the variability and instability among poor families' living arrangements (Burton & Jayakody, 2001). Moreover, most family structure research reflects the partnering patterns of middle- and upper-class households where marriages are typically formed prior to childbirth, divorces involve children's biological fathers, and remarriages introduce stepfathers into the family. However, in low-income families, first marriages may be formed *after* a non-marital birth and could involve a stepfather rather than the child's biological father (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Moore & Chase-Lansdale, 2001; Sweeney, 2003). The effects of these less traditional partnerships, as well as the impacts of marital dissolution with a stepfather, have received considerably less attention. Finally, limited research has addressed how cohabiting partnerships may influence child and adolescent development, especially if the cohabiting partner is the child's biological father (Booth & Crouter, 2002; DeLeire & Kalil, 2002).

Given recent changes in federal welfare legislation, these demographic trends and research needs have become increasingly policy-relevant. In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) instigated sweeping changes to discourage welfare dependency and encourage economic self-sufficiency among low-income families. Since the enactment of PRWORA, states have concentrated most of their efforts on moving welfare recipients into the labor force with considerably less attention paid to the other goals of PRWORA: reducing the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families (Horn & Sawhill, 2001; Parke, 2003). In the proposal for the reauthorization of PRWORA, the Bush Administration (2002) has generated more explicit state mandates and

earmarked \$300 million dollars per year to develop and evaluate programs aimed at promoting healthy marriages. Their proposal specifically contrasts marriage with cohabitation and concludes that married unions will provide the most advantageous environments for improving children's psychological, academic, and behavioral functioning. As social scientists respond to these public policy initiatives, the influence of maternal partnerships and family structure changes on low-income children's well-being warrants further investigation.

The present study seeks to examine partnering status and stability within a representative sample of low-income, urban families and to address the influence of such partnerships on children's cognitive and socioemotional development over time. In particular, we focus on the years of early adolescence, a key developmental period in which the effects of family structure changes appear to be elevated (Amato & Keith, 1991; Amato, 2001; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992).

Several theories have been posited to explain why familial disruption effects are exacerbated for young adolescents. First, young adolescents encounter a number of biological, social, cognitive and school transitions to which they and their families must adjust (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). The onset of puberty and expansions in cognitive skills and processes create changes in the manner in which adolescents view and relate to those around them, and in the responses they elicit (Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, 1990). Parent-child relations evolve as young adolescents seek to establish autonomy and an individuated sense of self (Daniels, 1990; Sessa & Steinberg, 1991). In addition, school transitions are normative during early adolescence, as youth move to middle or high schools (Eccles et al., 1996; Entwisle, 1990). Theories about cumulative changes (Coleman, 1974; Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford, & Blyth, 1987) have maintained that the combination of these normative developmental transitions with familial disruptions may exacerbate the adverse effects of maternal partnership instability for young adolescents. The

challenges of adolescent developmental transitions may also activate delayed responses to earlier familial disruptions and stresses (Adam & Chase-Lansdale, 2002). In addition, changes in family structure may impose expectations and responsibilities on youth that they are not yet behaviorally, cognitively, or emotionally ready to manage (Sessa & Steinberg, 1991). For example, adolescents in divorced families may be granted more independence and decision-making power than are normally afforded to adolescents in non-divorced families, or teenagers may need to provide increased emotional support to their single mothers, thereby impairing their efforts to attain autonomy (Hetherington, 1993; Sessa & Steinberg, 1991).

Clearly, early adolescence is an important developmental period for tracking the influence of family structure changes, especially for adolescents facing the added risks of economic hardship. Therefore, we pursued the following research questions:

- (1) After controlling for demographic and economic correlates of single-parent status, could stability in single-parent structures serve a protective role in low-income adolescents' development, or is marriage a more potent buffer?
- (2) Within stable maternal partnerships, does marriage confer a distinct advantage in comparison to cohabitation?
- (3) How do changes in family structure, particularly the transition from single-parent to married-couple households, influence low-income adolescents?

#### *Marriage versus Single-Parenting*

An expansive body of research has delineated the advantages of stably married families for adolescent well-being. Adolescents in nondivorced, two-parent families show more academic success and greater behavioral competence than their peers raised in single-parent homes (Ackerman, D'Eramo, Umylny, Schultz, & Izard, 2001; Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Youth from single-parent families report receiving less educational

support from their parents than do adolescents living with two biological parents, and they later display greater disengagement from school and higher drop-out rates (Astone & McLanahan, 1991). Adolescent girls from single-parent households are at higher risk of becoming single mothers themselves (Kiernan, in press; McLanahan & Booth, 1989; Wu & Martinson, 1993), and residing in a single-parent family predicts leaving home at younger ages for both male and female adolescents (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999; Kiernan, 1992). These adverse outcomes are generally attributed to four main sources of influence in single-parent homes: (1) greater economic deprivation and higher poverty rates; (2) mothers' higher stress and fewer psychological resources; (3) more conflictual mother-child relations and less maternal monitoring and supervision of adolescent children; and (4) less interaction with fathers (Coley, 2001; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994, Klebanov, McLanahan & Booth, 1989; Baer, 1999; Hetherington, 1993; Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1995; Waite, 1995).

Within the population of single-parent families, family stability and history are also key dimensions. Never-married single-parent households are among the poorest families compared to other family structures (Demo & Acock, 1996), and never-married mothers report lower levels of education and lower employment rates than previously married single mothers (Thomson, Hanson, & McLanahan, 1994). However, once the effects of family income are controlled, children from never-married households tend to show more positive developmental outcomes than children from divorced single-parent families (Najman, et al., 1997), possibly due to interparental conflict before and after the marital disruption (Shaw, Winslow, & Flanagan, 1999). Indeed, transitions *per se* may be the riskiest factor for child development. For example, studies of multiple transitions into and out of single-parent status show the most deleterious consequences for children (Ackerman, Brown, D'Eramo, & Izard, 2002; Capaldi & Patterson, 1991; Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1994, 1995; Martinez & Forgatch, 2002; Wolfinger, 2000). Thus, while growing up in a single-parent household

is associated with a variety of negative outcomes for children and adolescents, these effects are magnified by the cumulative effects of maternal partnering instability.

### *Marriage versus Cohabitation*

Trends in cohabitation have surged in the last few decades (Kiernan, 2002; Smock & Gupta, 2002). At least 50% of first unions in the United States are cohabitations (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Nonmarital birth rates have increased significantly in cohabitations, and approximately half of cohabiting couples live with children (Bumpass, et al., 1991; Seltzer, 2000). In fact, about 25% of stepfamilies are formed when cohabiting couples have children from prior relationships, thereby establishing “cohabiting stepfamily households” (Bumpass, Raley, & Sweet, 1995; Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000). However, cohabiting partnerships are more precarious and short-lived than marriages; more than half end within five years either from breakup (40%) or marriage (55%) (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Smock, 2000). This dissolution rate translates into a significant proportion of children experiencing multiple family structure changes within a short period of time. Cohabitation occurs more frequently among economically disadvantaged families and adults with lower education (Bumpass, et al., 1991; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Cherlin, 1992; Manning & Lichter, 1996), which may profoundly influence the family environments experienced by low-income children (Jayakody & Cabrera, 2002).

Although cohabitations appear less stable than marriages, potential benefits of cohabitations for low-income children and families could reasonably be expected, whereby the family’s economic, psychological, and parenting resources are enhanced by the addition of another adult, especially if the adult male is the child’s biological father. However, cohabiting couples face a number of challenges that may undermine any positive gains for adolescent well-being. For example, male cohabiting partners tend to contribute less financially to the household than do married men (Brandon & Bumpass, 2001; Graefe & Lichter, 1999, Manning & Lichter, 1996), and

cohabiting partners pool less of their income than married spouses (Bauman, 1999). Despite many cohabitators' expectations to marry at some point (Bumpass, et al., 1991; Gibson, Edin, & McLanahan, 2003), cohabiting relationships are characterized by poorer relationship quality than marriages, even after controlling for the economic discrepancies between these family structures (Brown & Booth, 1996; Nock, 1995). Recent evidence has also documented higher rates of domestic violence between cohabiting partners in low-income adolescents' households (Lohman, Votruba-Drzal, & Chase-Lansdale, 2002).

Research that assesses the impact of cohabitation on child well-being is notably sparse (Brown, 2002), but the emergent evidence points to more adverse developmental outcomes for children and adolescents exposed to cohabiting-couple families (Acs & Nelson, 2002). Among school-aged children, negative effects of cohabitation compared to marriage have been detected for socioemotional and behavioral outcomes (Ackerman, et al., 2001; Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2002). Compared to other family structures, adolescents in cohabiting-couple households scored the lowest on academic achievement and highest for behavior problems (Thomson, et al., 1994).

Mixed evidence has been found regarding the role of biological fathers in cohabiting-couple families (Manning, 2002). Although descriptive analyses reveal more behavioral and emotional problems for children living with two biological cohabiting parents than two biological married parents (Brown, 2002), nonsignificant differences in psychological functioning and school behavior have been demonstrated in multivariate analyses (Hanson, McLanahan, & Thomson, 1997). Other research has found lower rates of high school completion and college attendance among adolescents in cohabiting-couple families (with the biological father or stepfather) compared to youth in married-parent families, as well as significantly greater incidence of smoking, drinking and sexual initiation among adolescents in cohabiting stepfather families (DeLeire & Kalil, 2002). Last, although a large body of research has documented the developmental challenges associated with

divorce and remarriage for children (e.g., Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Cherlin, et al., 1991; Hetherington, 1989), it remains unclear how transitions into and out of cohabiting unions may differentially affect child well-being.

### *Family Structure Changes*

#### *Marital Dissolutions: Short- and Long-Term Effects of Divorce on Adolescent Well-Being*

During the two years following a divorce, adolescents display a variety of negative adjustment patterns, such as lower grades and academic achievement and escalated depression, delinquency, and disruptive behaviors (Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990; Forehand, Thomas, Wierson, Brody, & Fauber, 1990; Hetherington, 1993). Because mothers typically retain child custody after a divorce (Seltzer, 1994), adolescents must cope with their father's absence (Hetherington, et al., 1998), as well as the increased economic hardship associated with this transition, such as lower household income (Bianchi, Subaiya, & Kahn, 1999; Hanson, McLanahan, & Thomson, 1997; Smock, Manning, & Gupta, 1999) and residential moves to poorer neighborhoods (Haveman & Wolfe, 1994; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; South, Crowder, & Trent, 1998). In the short-term, both mothers and adolescents report more strained and conflictual interactions with each other, and maternal parenting quality often declines, including greater coercion and irritability, less vigilant monitoring and supervision, weakened control, and diminished communication and affection (Demo & Acock, 1996, Hetherington, et al., 1998, Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1995). In the long-term, the majority of adolescents recover (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). However, for a subset of teenagers, the effects of divorce persist through young adulthood, especially if maternal partnering transitions continued after the first divorce. Adults who were exposed to a familial disruption in childhood or adolescence show modestly higher rates of mental health problems, use of psychological services, premarital births, and dissolution of their

own first partnerships (Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin, & Kiernan, 1995; Kiernan, in press; Kiernan, & Cherlin, 1999; Wu, 1996; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993).

However, as researchers increasingly approach divorce as a multi-stage process rather than a singular disruptive event, selection and predisruption characteristics take on greater importance. For example, divorce effects on children's academic progress, mental health, and behavior problems are substantially reduced when predivorce levels of child functioning and/or maternal histories of antisocial behavior are controlled (Block, Block, & Gjerde, 1986; Cherlin, et al., 1991; Emery, Waldron, Kitzmann, & Aaron, 1999; Morrison & Cherlin, 1995; Sun, 2001). In other words, personality and temperamental characteristics may increase the likelihood of some mothers experiencing marital instability; these traits would also be correlated with mothers' psychological functioning, parenting practices, and general home climate prior to a divorce, and may thus contribute both genetically and environmentally to their children's functioning (Cleveland, Wiebe, van den Oord, & Rowe, 2000). Thus, the effects of divorce are a complex consequence of pre- and post-disruption factors (Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale, & McRae, 1998). Finally, it is important to note that the influence of divorce on adolescent adjustment is not uniformly negative. When adolescents are exposed to elevated parental conflict and adversity, transitioning into a less stressed single-parent household can facilitate improved psychological and behavioral functioning (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagen, 1999; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

#### *Marital Formations: Stepfamily Effects on Adolescent Well-Being*

Since declines in mothers' economic and psychological resources are related to worsened adolescent functioning in single-parent and divorced homes, remarriage would be expected to alleviate familial hardship and instability and thus potentially improve adolescent well-being. The addition of another adult can supplement household income and provide emotional and parenting support for mothers and children (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000). However, research has not

supported these expectations; the detrimental effects of parental divorce on child functioning generally are not ameliorated when the custodial parent remarries (Chase-Lansdale, 1994; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Cooksey, 1997; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Hetherington, et al., 1998). Adolescents in stepfamilies resemble youth from single-parent households more than married-parent households in their disengagement from school and higher drop-out rates (Astone & McLanahan, 1991), as well as in their tendency to leave home at earlier ages (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999; Kiernan, 1992).

In fact, within the span of childhood, adolescents seem to have more difficulty than younger children adapting to their mothers' remarriage (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). As children get older, they are less likely to form strong attachments to stepfathers or consider them "family" (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994). If mothers remarried when children were in early adolescence, Hetherington (1993) found that stress and conflict in parent-child relations escalated, and maternal control and monitoring weakened to lower levels than exhibited by divorced mothers. Among older adolescents, mother-child relations in stepfamilies were marked by increased negativity and decreased communication (Hetherington, 1993). Moreover, little research has distinguished the influence on adolescent development of a second marriage versus a mother's first marriage to a stepfather (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Moore & Chase-Lansdale, 2001; Sweeney, 2003).

#### *The Present Study*

The data required to meet the aims of the current investigation must adequately capture the variability of living arrangements among low-income families. Data from *Welfare, Children and Families: A Three-City Study* is comprised of a large, representative sample of low-income children and their caregivers to allow for more refined analysis of these family structures and processes in a short-term longitudinal design. A rich assortment of cognitive, socioemotional, and psychological measures of adolescent well-being were collected from multiple respondents and sources (e.g.,

standardized assessments, separate interviews with mothers and adolescents) which provides the opportunity to examine more rigorously the influence of family structure types and changes across a number of important developmental domains for low-income adolescents.

We hypothesize that: (1) stable marriages will convey a developmental advantage for young adolescents in comparison to stably cohabiting or stably single families; and (2) transitions into and out of maternal partnerships will create developmental disturbances in the short term, although it is not clear if differential effects will emerge when the changes involve married versus cohabiting unions.

## Method

### *Participants and Procedures*

The present investigation utilizes data from *Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three-City Study*, a longitudinal, multimethod investigation of the well-being of low-income children and families in the wake of federal welfare reforms (Winston, et al., 1999). This study contains a longitudinal, household-based, stratified random sample of approximately 2,200 children and their primary caregivers from low-income neighborhoods in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio. The majority of these families are African-American (42%) or Hispanic (47%). In households with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, interviewers randomly selected one focal child (ages 0-4 or 10-14) and conducted interviews and assessments with the focal child and the female primary caregiver (90% were biological mothers). Two waves of data were collected in 1999 and 2000-2001, with an average length of 16 months elapsing between interviews. In wave 1, the screening response rate was 90% and the interview completion response rate was 83%, yielding a total response rate of 74%. In wave 2, the response rate was 88%. Probability weights that adjust for sample selection and nonresponse create a sample that is representative of low-income children and their families in low-income neighborhoods in the three cities.

### *Measures*

An array of demographic, economic, psychological, parenting, cognitive and socioemotional measures were obtained from mothers and/or children at both waves.

#### *Predictor Variables*

*Demographic characteristics.* Mothers provided information on their age, educational attainment (0 = did not complete high school diploma or GED; 1 = high school diploma or GED), and the number of children younger than 18 in their household. Mothers also reported on the focal child's age, race/ethnicity (non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, or non-Hispanic White/Other), and gender (0 = male; 1 = female).

*Income, public assistance, and employment information.* Income-to-needs ratios were calculated from maternal reports of each household member's income from a variety of sources, using federal poverty designations dependent on household size. Mothers also reported their current employment status (0 = not employed; 1 = employed) and welfare receipt (0 = not currently receiving welfare; 1 = currently receiving welfare).

*Partnership status and identity of the male partner.* Information about current maternal partnerships was obtained at each wave of data collection in several ways. Mothers provided a roster of every member in their household that included each individual's age, gender, relationship to the mother, and relationship to the focal child. In addition, mothers were asked directly if they were married in wave 1. In wave 2, if mothers reported a spouse or live-in partner in their household roster, the computer program automatically coded them as married or cohabiting, respectively. We also identified cohabiting mothers who did not list a live-in partner in their household roster but later reported during the interview that their child's father figure was a live-in partner (wave 1,  $n = 15$ ; wave 2,  $n = 13$ ). From this information, mothers were coded as being married, cohabiting, or single in each wave. In addition, for married and cohabiting mothers, the

partner's identity was coded as biological father of the focal child or stepfather (the latter meant as a general term to include all non-biological partners, married or not). The data do not include complete marital histories for all respondents.

### *Outcome Variables*

The following cognitive, psychological, and behavioral measures were obtained at each wave of data collection.

*Cognitive skills.* Adolescents were administered two subscales from the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Education Battery- Revised (Woodcock & Mather, 1989, 1990): Letter-Word Identification (e.g., word decoding and reading skills) and Applied Problems (e.g., mathematics and problem-solving). The Spanish version of the Woodcock-Johnson, Bateria Woodcock-Munoz: Pruebas de aprovechamiento-Revisada, was administered if either the child or parent reported that Spanish was the child's primary language (wave 1,  $n = 18$ ; wave 2,  $n = 20$ ; Woodcock & Munoz-Sandoval, 1996). Raw scores were converted to standard scores ( $M = 100$ ,  $SD = 15$ ) using the procedures and norms outlined by the developers of this measure. Mothers reported adolescents' grades on the most recent report card, which were rated on an 8-point rating scale ( $1 =$  mostly failing to  $8 =$  mostly A's).

*Socioemotional functioning and behavior problems.* Mothers were administered the 4-18 version of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991). The CBCL has been used extensively to assess socioemotional and behavioral problems, and the total and subscale scores have generally high reliability (.65 - .95; Achenbach, 1991, 1992). Standard scores (t-scores) from the two primary subscales are utilized in the present study: Externalizing Problems (e.g., aggressive and destructive behaviors;  $\alpha = .89$  and  $.90$  for wave 1 and wave 2) and Internalizing Problems (e.g., depressive, withdrawn, or somatic behaviors;  $\alpha = .87$  and  $.88$ ).

Adolescents also self-reported on psychological distress, mother-child relationship quality, and delinquent behaviors using an Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interview (ACASI) procedure to increase the validity of their reports for this sensitive information.

*Psychological distress.* Adolescents completed the Brief Symptom Inventory 18 (BSI 18; Derogatis, 2000), which was developed to screen for psychiatric disorders in medical and community populations. Respondents report the severity of their symptoms over the past seven days on a 5-point Likert scale ( $1 =$  not at all to  $5 =$  extremely). Two subscales were utilized in the present study, and scores were formed by averaging the items in each scale: Depression (e.g., no interest in things, lonely, and hopeless about the future;  $\alpha = .75$  and  $.87$ ) and Anxiety (e.g., nervousness or shakiness, restlessness, and fearfulness;  $\alpha = .78$  and  $.92$ ).

*Mother-Child Relationship Quality.* Adolescents received a shortened version of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), a self-report measure of the affective and cognitive dimensions of adolescents' relationships with their parents and close friends (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999; Lopez & Gover, 1993). Based on past research with African American families (Coley, in press; Pittman & Chase-Lansdale, 2001), two subscales were formed, Trust and Communication, and Anger and Alienation. The Anger and Alienation subscale was examined in the present study to ascertain adolescents' frustration and perceived disconnection in their relationship with their mother (e.g., "I get upset a lot more than my mother knows about;" "My mother expects too much from me"). The six Anger and Alienation items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ( $1 =$  never true to  $5 =$  always true), and higher mean scores indicate greater anger and alienation ( $\alpha = .60$  and  $.74$ ).

*Delinquency.* Adolescents also reported on the type and frequency of delinquent or illegal activities that they engaged in during the past 12 months. Seventeen items were administered from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY; Borus, Carpenter, Crowley, & Daymont, 1982)

and the Youth Deviance Scale (Gold, 1970; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991). The present study employs a six-item subscale that indicated engagement in Serious Delinquency (e.g., stealing, vandalizing, fighting) to examine the correspondence of these youth reports to mother reports of externalizing behaviors. Items were standardized, averaged, and then transformed by taking the natural log to correct for skewness. Higher scores represent greater engagement in serious delinquency ( $\alpha = .65$  and  $.82$ ).

## Results

### *Descriptive Analyses*

The sample was restricted to young adolescents (10 - 14 years-old in wave 1;  $N = 902$ ) whose primary caregivers were their biological mothers at both timepoints. Any youth who experienced familial disruptions other than maternal partnership instability, such as a relative assuming custodial care due to parental incarceration or abandonment, were excluded. Inspection of the household data revealed that for a small number of families ( $n = 11$ ), multiple partnering transitions transpired between waves, whereby the partnership type remained the same (married or cohabiting) but the partner had changed (e.g., the biological father was in the household at wave 1 and a stepfather was in the household at wave 2). These multiple transition families, as well as the families who experienced the transition from cohabitation to marriage ( $n = 7$ ) were omitted from analyses due to low sample size. An additional 29 cases were excluded because they were missing data on the covariates, resulting in an analysis sample of 855 adolescents (with missing outcome data, the average  $N$  in the regression analyses was 828). Attrition analyses were conducted comparing adolescents in the analysis sample and youth whose primary caregiver was their mother at wave 1 but were either not interviewed ( $n = 108$ ) or their mother was no longer the primary caregiver ( $n = 15$ ) at wave 2. Very few differences on key demographic characteristics emerged. The exceptions were that mothers in the analysis sample were about 1 year older ( $M = 37$  vs.  $M =$

35.8,  $p = .052$ ), and a smaller proportion of families were receiving welfare at wave 1 than the families not followed (32% vs. 42%,  $p < .05$ ).

Table 1 presents the longitudinal frequencies for each partnership group. Stable groups represent the mothers who reported the same partnership status (married, cohabiting, or single) at both waves. In addition, there are two formation groups, whereby single mothers at wave 1 entered married or cohabiting unions by wave 2, as well as two dissolution groups for the mothers that were married or cohabiting at wave 1 and single at wave 2. Within this analysis sample, 20% of the adolescents experienced a change in maternal partnership between waves. Notably, the formation of maternal partnerships occurred at approximately twice the rate of partnership dissolutions, although the dissolution rate for this 16 month period remains higher than would be expected from national norms (Cherlin & Fomby, 2002). Table 1 also displays the number of stable and transitioning partnerships that involved the focal child's biological father or a stepfather.

Descriptive statistics on the predictor and outcome variables are provided in tables 2 and 3 for the total sample and each family structure group. Briefly, the sample reflects primarily African American and Hispanic families with varying levels of education, employment, and welfare receipt, and low household income-to needs ratios ( $M = .90$ ; see Table 2). Stably single and stably cohabiting families reported the lowest levels of household income in this sample (see Table 2). In wave 1, adolescents in stably married households showed more optimal cognitive and socioemotional functioning than the other groups at waves 1 (see Table 3). Furthermore, youth in stably single households were not uniformly performing the worst; teenagers in the stably cohabiting and marital dissolution groups also seemed to be functioning worse than other groups at wave 1.

When evaluating the benefits and risks of marriage and cohabitation for adolescents in the *Three-City Study*, there are two important caveats to consider. First, descriptive analyses revealed

that the stably married group is largely comprised of Hispanic mothers married to the adolescents' biological fathers (67%), whereas the stably single households included more comparable numbers of Black (52%) and Hispanic (42%) families (see Table 2). All multivariate analyses control for the influence of race/ethnicity on maternal partnerships and adolescent well-being. Second, whether examining stable cohabitations or transitions into and out of cohabiting unions, low-income mothers of adolescents generally cohabited with stepfathers rather than with their child's biological father (see Table 1). We were unable to statistically control for the influence of biological fathers and stepfathers in these arrangements because of the high collinearity with the partnership groups.

#### *Analytic Strategy*

To address the three research aims, weighted ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression analyses were performed that tested the relations of stable and transitioning maternal partnerships with several domains of adolescent well-being (cognitive, psychological, and behavioral). In an effort to analyze adolescents' trajectories between waves, rather than the level of functioning at wave 2, the OLS regression models were lagged or autoregressive, such that the wave 2 outcomes were predicted by the child's outcome score from wave 1. Including the wave 1 outcome measure as an independent variable provided a proxy for (1) unmeasured genetic influences; (2) selection characteristics that may discriminate families with stable versus changing family structures; and (3) children's pre-transition functioning, which would at least partially reflect the effects of earlier family conflict and maternal partnering histories (Cain, 1975; Chase-Lansdale, et al., 2003). As such, the regression coefficients should be interpreted as the influence of each independent variable on changes in adolescents' growth rates or developmental trajectories over time (Kessler & Greenberg, 1981). The regression models also included demographic and economic covariates from wave 1 (maternal age, child age, child gender, child race/ethnicity, number of minors in the household, maternal education, household income-to-needs ratio, and maternal current employment

and welfare status), thus helping to control for selection effects of families into particular partnership statuses.

In the regression models, dummy variables represented the stable and transitioning groups, and the stably single families were the omitted, comparison group (see Table 4). Post hoc adjusted Wald  $F$  tests were conducted to determine whether the coefficients significantly differed for each pair of family structure groups in the full regression models. All analyses were weighted, and given the number of tests performed, the range for interpreting trends was restricted to  $p < .06$ . Figures 1 through 9 present graphs of the standardized regression coefficients for each partnership group in comparison to the omitted group of stably single, with statistically significant post hoc differences between groups noted.

#### *Stable Family Structures (Married, Cohabiting, or Single) and Adolescent Well-Being*

Across the three measures of cognitive well-being, few differences in developmental trajectories emerged between adolescents in stably married, stably cohabiting, or stably single-parent households. No differences were apparent in standardized measures of reading and mathematics (see Figures 1 & 2). The only significant difference was that adolescents in stably married families showed greater improvements in school grades than youth in stably single-parent homes (see Figure 2).

In contrast, consistent discrepancies were apparent in measures of adolescents' socioemotional functioning. Adolescents in stable cohabiting-couple households exhibited more adverse psychological and behavioral trajectories than teenagers in stably married or stably single families. Mothers indicated that adolescents in stably cohabiting households exhibited greater increases in externalizing behavior problems than the stably married, marital dissolution, or marital formation groups (see Figure 4). This pattern was corroborated by the adolescents' accounts of serious delinquency. Adolescents in stably cohabiting households reported greater increases in

serious delinquency than the adolescents in stably married, marital dissolution, and marital and cohabitation formation families (see Figure 5). Young adolescents in the stably cohabiting group also revealed that their depression increased more over time than was experienced by the stably single, marital dissolution, or cohabitation formation and dissolution groups (see Figure 7), although cohabiting mothers did not indicate that any changes in internalizing problems had surfaced over time (see Figure 6).

There was some indication that the adolescents in stably single-parent households also faced developmental challenges. In addition to adolescents' lower academic performance, stably single mothers also reported significantly higher increases in their adolescents' externalizing problems than the stably married group (see Figure 4).

#### *Transitions into Marriage and Cohabitation and Adolescent Well-Being*

In the short-term, no positive effects on child well-being were detected for low-income adolescents whose mothers married between waves 1 and 2. The adolescents in the marriage formation group did not show significantly different growth rates from adolescents in stably single households across a wide range of developmental outcomes, with one exception. Adolescents whose mothers married reported significantly *greater* increases in anxiety than the adolescents exposed to stable single-parenting or marital dissolution (see Figure 8). These youth also expressed growing anger and alienation in their mother-child relationship when their mothers married (see Figure 9). In addition, adolescents in the marriage formation group showed significantly worse cognitive functioning (math achievement) than the adolescents in stably married households (see Figure 2). It should be noted that the marital formation group contained both biological fathers (33%) and stepfathers (67%; see Table 1), although the *ns* are too small to test the differential effects of the male partners' identity.

Similarly, adolescents whose mothers formed a cohabiting union did not differ significantly from stably single youths in growth rates across the outcome measures. Instead, teenagers in both the stably single and cohabitation formation groups showed significantly steeper declines in academic achievement than the adolescents in stably married families (see Figure 3). Conversely, adolescents who transitioned into cohabiting-couple households exhibited more positive socioemotional trajectories than the adolescents in stably cohabiting households, including less growth in delinquency, internalizing problems, and depression (see Figures 5 - 7).

#### *Marriage and Cohabitation Dissolution and Adolescent Well-Being*

Low-income adolescents exposed to marital dissolution generally progressed at the same rate on cognitive and academic outcomes as the adolescents in other family structure groups. However, these teens showed significantly less growth on one cognitive measure, math skills, than the adolescents in both stably married and dissolved cohabitation households (see Figures 1 - 3). Interestingly, whereas anxiety increased when marriages were formed, adolescents reported significant *reductions* in anxiety and depression when marriages dissolved, compared to adolescents in stably married and stably single families (see Figures 7 & 8). These youth also engaged in less serious delinquency over time than their peers in stably single or stably cohabiting households (see Figure 5). Moreover, adolescents who experienced marital dissolution reported significantly greater declines in anger and alienation than the adolescents whose mothers formed a marriage (see Figure 9).

In contrast, adolescents displayed essentially no changes in cognitive, psychological or behavioral functioning when a cohabitation dissolved. These null findings may be attributable to the lower statistical power available for this smallest family structure group ( $n = 18$ ) and should be interpreted cautiously.

## Discussion

Within this representative sample of low-income urban families, both nonmarital cohabitation and family structure changes were quite prevalent within the relatively short time frame (16 months) of the *Three City Study*. This study provides new insights into the repercussions of such partnership experiences and transitions on young adolescents' developmental trajectories in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral realms. We first examined whether stability in household living arrangements was protective for low-income adolescents' well-being, and whether marriage was the more optimal structure in comparison to cohabiting-couple and single-mother status. For this sample of young adolescents from poor and near-poor families, any buffering that family stability offered was dramatically qualified by the type of maternal partnership they experienced. As found previously in national samples (e.g., Najman, et al., 1997; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), low-income adolescents in stably married households in the *Three-City Study* displayed more growth in school grades and greater declines in externalizing behavior problems than adolescents in stably single families. There is a long history in developmental science of the benefits of continuity and predictability in caregiving for optimal child development (e.g., Bowlby, 1969), and marital stability may be particularly important for early adolescents experiencing numerous other developmental transitions and changes (Coleman, 1974; Simmons et al., 1987). However, differences were not detected between adolescents in stably married and stably single-parent families in standardized reading and math assessments and psychological distress. One possible reason for this discrepancy is that other studies have focused on older teenagers or young adults, and we investigated young adolescents. More negative academic outcomes may emerge in the long-term.

With regard to cohabitation, mothers and adolescents provided complementary evidence that living in stably cohabiting-couple households was linked to escalated externalizing behaviors and

delinquency, such as fighting and stealing, and higher elevations in psychological distress in comparison to peers in stably married or stably single-parent families. Why might this be the case? First, adolescent behavior problems and psychological distress are exacerbated by interparental conflict, which tends to be higher in cohabiting-couple households. Second, cohabiting couples have higher rates of financial insecurity (Brandon & Bumpass, 2001; Graefe & Lichter, 1999, Manning & Lichter, 1996), poorer relationship quality (Brown & Booth, 1996), and higher levels of domestic violence (Lohman, et al., 2002) than do married couples, all of which are also risk factors for teenagers' behavior problems. Moreover, the large majority of cohabitations were formed with stepfathers rather than with adolescents' biological fathers, which may also contribute to their adverse adjustment to this cohabiting stepfamily arrangement by introducing a new adult into the family system at a time when young adolescents are already experiencing numerous developmental and educational changes. In contrast, adolescents in stably cohabiting households did not differ in growth of grades or standardized reading and mathematics scores from the youth in stably married or stably single families. It would be useful for future survey and ethnographic work to explore adolescents' expectations and perceptions about these partnerships to aid interpretation of these results.

A second set of findings showed different patterns of adolescent outcomes related to transitions into and out of married and cohabiting unions. Changes in adolescent well-being were more frequently detected when the partnership transition involved marriage. For example, marital dissolution was problematic for adolescents' cognitive growth and behavior problems, which coincides with past divorce research (Hetherington, et al., 1998). However, an interesting discrepancy was detected between maternal and adolescent reports of socioemotional and psychological functioning after the dissolution of a marriage. Mothers did not report any changes in adolescents' internalizing or externalizing behavior problems following a marital transition.

Adolescents, on the other hand, reported significantly diminished psychological distress (anxiety and depression), reductions in delinquent activities, and improved mother-child relations following marital dissolutions. An important corollary of these findings was adolescents' increased anxiety levels and worsened mother-child relations when their mothers married between waves, including both biological fathers and stepfathers. It may be that mothers' reports of adolescent well-being were affected by their own positive psychological states following a marriage. In contrast, adolescents may be responding more directly to the perturbation in family relationships following the entrance of a new partner, or responding positively to a decrease in family conflict in the aftermath of a divorce. These adolescent reports counter past findings of negative associations between divorce and child well-being in middle class and national samples (e.g., Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Najman, et al., 1997) but may offer insight into possible underlying tensions or conflicts associated with these partnerships that the maternal reports did not reveal.

Moreover, the present study uncovered no short-term positive gains across several important developmental domains for low-income adolescents whose single mothers married. Most research that demonstrates more advantageous outcomes for youth in married-parent families has examined children whose biological parents married prior to childbirth. Since a majority of poor mothers of adolescents in our study were more likely to form married or cohabiting partnerships with stepfathers, the expectations of improvements in child well-being in response to new marriages may need to be attenuated, at least for older children and adolescents. Yet, it remains unclear whether greater benefits might emerge for adolescents whose mothers marry for the first time to a stepfather versus a second marriage to a stepfather (Moore & Chase-Lansdale, 2001; Sweeney, 2003). In addition, some mothers in our sample married the biological father when the child was a young adolescent. This coincides with ethnographic work that has shown that low-income mothers may

delay marriage to the child's father for many years until the couple's relationship and economic prospects are strengthened (Edin, 2000). Little research has investigated whether this strategy proves beneficial for children's development.

Conversely, few links to adolescent outcomes emerged when a cohabitation was formed or dissolved. These seemingly contradictory findings may be due to several factors. First, in comparison to a (re)marriage or divorce, movements into and out of cohabiting relationships may be more ambiguous and the commitment level less clear, especially from the perspective of the children in the household. It may be only after a cohabitation persists over time, and the stepfamily begins to negotiate the parent-child roles and responsibilities, that the negative ramifications of this arrangement on adolescent well-being surface. In addition, the cohabitation dissolution group had a small sample size and low statistical power, and therefore more research into cohabitation dissolutions is needed to understand these transitions.

Several limitations should be noted when reviewing these findings. First, all of the partnership effects transpired over a relatively short period of time. Although we were able to collect a rich array of longitudinal data from a diverse sample of low-income families, adolescents' adjustment over the long-term to these familial transitions is not yet known. In addition, we do not have full marital or partnership histories from mothers. The lagged regression models employed in the analyses include adolescents' functioning at wave 1 as a strong step toward controlling for pre-existing differences due to past variations in living arrangements and genetic contributions. Still, our statistical models do not fully control for past family histories or unmeasured characteristics of mothers that might be correlated with both family structure transitions and changes in adolescent developmental trajectories. Similarly, we cannot control for time-varying characteristics of adolescents that might be linked with mothers' marital or partnership transitions. Furthermore, given our nuanced approach for identifying variations in low-income families' living arrangements,

some family structure groups contained a small proportion of cases. This also impeded statistically analysis of the differential effects of biological fathers and stepfathers. Although we have focused on statistically significant patterns that were robust across several outcomes or reporters, the range in sample sizes among the groups, coupled with the number of analyses performed, warrants a cautious interpretation of the findings. Last, the effect sizes of most of our findings are small, averaging about .10, and common among more methodologically rigorous studies of family structure effects that utilize random sampling, multiple-item measures, and larger sample sizes (Amato, 2001).

In summary, we view this study as a first step in understanding the complexities of family structures in low-income families. Future work on other samples should examine whether these patterns are replicated. Moreover, further research should address the dynamic family processes that might explain the links between family structure and adolescents' well-being.

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## Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the following organizations. Government agencies: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (RO1 HD36093 "Welfare Reform and the Well-Being of Children"), Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation, Administration on Developmental Disabilities, Administration for Children and Families, Social Security Administration, and National Institute of Mental Health. Foundations: The Boston Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, The Lloyd A. Fry Foundation, The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The Kronkosky Charitable Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, The Searle Fund for Policy Research, and The Woods Fund of Chicago. We are appreciative of the insights and comments of E. Mavis Hetherington. A special thank you is also extended to the families who participated in *Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three-City Study*.

Table 1

*Longitudinal Frequencies of Family Structures and Male Partners' Relation to Adolescents*

	<i>n</i>	Biological Father	Stepfather
Stably Married	199	166	32
Stably Cohabiting	24	6	18
Stably Single	457	---	---
Marriage Formed	69	23	46
Cohabitation Formed	51	3	48
Marriage Dissolved	37	23	14
Cohabitation Dissolved	18	4	15

Table 2

*Demographic Characteristics for the Total Sample and Maternal Partnership Groups at Wave 1 (N = 855)*

	Total Sample	Stably Married	Stably Cohabiting	Stably Single	Marriage Formed	Cohabitation Formed	Marriage Dissolved	Cohabitation Dissolved
<b>Maternal Age</b>	37 (6.3)	38 (6.6)	35 (3.9)	37 (6.2)	36 (6.2)	38.4 (6.2)	34.6 (5.8)	35.7 (4.7)
<b>Child Age</b>	12 (1.4)	11.9 (1.3)	12.1 (1.2)	12 (1.4)	12.3 (1.5)	11.5 (1.3)	12.1 (1.2)	12.9 (1.3)
<b>Child Gender</b>								
Male	397 (46%)	103 (52%)	11 (46%)	198 (43%)	23 (34%)	41 (81%)	30 (81%)	14 (77%)
Female	458 (54%)	96 (48%)	13 (55%)	259 (57%)	46 (66%)	10 (20%)	7 (19%)	4 (23%)
<b>Child Race/Ethnicity</b>								
Non-Hispanic White/Other	66 (8%)	15 (8%)	1 (6%)	28 (6%)	14 (21%)	7 (14%)	0	0
Non-Hispanic Black	339 (40%)	30 (15%)	9 (37%)	237 (52%)	33 (47%)	8 (15%)	16 (43%)	6 (36%)
Hispanic	451 (53%)	154 (77%)	14 (57%)	192 (42%)	22 (32%)	36 (71%)	21 (57%)	11 (62%)
<b>Maternal Education</b>								
No high school diploma/GED	320 (37%)	74 (37%)	14 (59%)	184 (40%)	15 (21%)	12 (24%)	16 (44%)	4 (22%)
Completed high school diploma/GED	535 (63%)	125 (63%)	10 (41%)	273 (60%)	54 (79%)	39 (76%)	21 (56%)	14 (78%)
<b>Household income-to-needs ratio</b>	.90 (.51)	.97 (.53)	.88 (.29)	.85 (.50)	.97 (.57)	.93 (.44)	.91 (.53)	1.1 (.61)
<b>Number of minors in the household</b>	3.1 (1.4)	3.1 (1.3)	3 (1.2)	3 (1.4)	3.3 (1.5)	2.8 (1.1)	3.4 (1.5)	3.6 (2.2)
<b>Current Employment</b>								
Employed	414 (48%)	84 (42%)	15 (63%)	226 (49%)	36 (51%)	23 (45%)	19 (51%)	11 (63%)
Not Employed	441 (52%)	115 (58%)	9 (37%)	231 (51%)	34 (49%)	28 (55%)	18 (49%)	7 (37%)
<b>Current Welfare Status</b>								
Not on welfare	630 (74%)	178 (90%)	16 (67%)	304 (67%)	51 (74%)	44 (86%)	25 (67%)	11 (63%)
On welfare	226 (26%)	20 (10%)	8 (33%)	153 (34%)	18 (26%)	7 (14%)	12 (33%)	7 (37%)

*Note.* Means and standard deviations are presented for continuous variables, and sample sizes and percentages are presented for categorical variables. Percentages may sum to more than 100 due to rounding.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics on Adolescent Well-Being at Waves 1 and 2*

		Total Sample	Stably Married	Stably Cohabiting	Stably Single	Marriage Formed	Cohabitation Formed	Marriage Dissolved	Cohabitation Dissolved
<b>Reading</b>	Wave 1	101.8 (20.6)	104.6 (18.9)	97 (19.8)	100.8 (21.4)	104.2 (18.9)	100.9 (23.2)	99.4 (17.9)	101.9 (23.7)
	Wave 2	99.9 (19.2)	103.8 (19.0)	95.7 (18.5)	99 (19.3)	99.9 (15.9)	97.4 (23.4)	96.9 (16.3)	97.1 (21.8)
<b>Mathematics</b>	Wave 1	98.1 (16.3)	103.6 (11.7)	102.2 (24.2)	95.4 (17.3)	100.4 (13.7)	95.7 (17.5)	94.0 (13.6)	104.3 (16.0)
	Wave 2	96.0 (13.2)	102.4 (10.8)	96.3 (10.4)	93.8 (13.7)	93.9 (10.5)	96.3 (11.7)	90.1 (13.2)	101.9 (17.1)
<b>Grades</b>	Wave 1	5.5 (1.7)	6.0 (1.5)	5.4 (1.7)	5.3 (1.7)	5.9 (1.4)	5.0 (1.7)	5.2 (2.0)	5.3 (1.3)
	Wave 2	5.2 (1.7)	5.8 (1.7)	5.3 (1.6)	5.2 (1.7)	4.9 (1.7)	4.4 (2.0)	4.9 (1.6)	5.0 (1.9)
<b>Externalizing Problems</b>	Wave 1	52.7 (10.4)	50.1 (9.0)	55.1 (10.4)	52.5 (11.1)	54.0 (10.1)	57.3 (7.4)	57.7 (9.5)	52.8 (15.4)
	Wave 2	52.1 (11.3)	46.9 (9.2)	58.5 (9.6)	53.2 (12.0)	52.6 (9.5)	54.8 (10.9)	55.3 (7.9)	53.0 (7.3)
<b>Serious Delinquency</b>	Wave 1	-.15 (.48)	-.26 (.46)	-.30 (.35)	-.12 (.47)	-.14 (.40)	.13 (.62)	-.27 (.39)	-.02 (.46)
	Wave 2	-.13 (.49)	-.27 (.36)	.08 (.51)	-.08 (.55)	-.14 (.42)	-.07 (.52)	-.36 (.23)	-.02 (.41)
<b>Internalizing Problems</b>	Wave 1	52.6 (11.4)	51.8 (9.7)	58.9 (12.8)	51.5 (11.9)	54.8 (10.7)	56.4 (11.0)	58.6 (10.2)	47.8 (6.1)
	Wave 2	50.4 (11.6)	49.0 (10.6)	57.9 (13.0)	50.0 (11.8)	51.8 (11.6)	50.0 (11.2)	54.1 (9.3)	52.8 (15.4)
<b>Depression</b>	Wave 1	.83 (.81)	.68 (.71)	1.2 (1.2)	.83 (.80)	1.1 (.76)	.78 (.90)	1.0 (.82)	.78 (.77)
	Wave 2	.89 (.87)	.93 (.87)	1.4 (.97)	.86 (.85)	1.1 (1.0)	.67 (.82)	.67 (.62)	.55 (.79)
<b>Anxiety</b>	Wave 1	.78 (.81)	.70 (.76)	.85 (1.04)	.76 (.81)	.97 (.81)	.81 (.78)	.98 (.81)	.64 (.82)
	Wave 2	.73 (.82)	.74 (.83)	.74 (.70)	.68 (.79)	1.2 (.94)	.64 (.82)	.49 (.69)	.70 (.81)
<b>Anger &amp; Alienation</b>	Wave 1	2.5 (.80)	2.4 (.78)	2.3 (.88)	2.4 (.84)	2.6 (.75)	2.7 (.68)	2.6 (.69)	2.2 (.59)
	Wave 2	2.4 (.90)	2.4 (.78)	2.4 (.95)	2.3 (.91)	2.8 (.99)	2.2 (.86)	2.2 (1.0)	2.2 (.63)

*Note.* Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) or frequencies and percentages (in parentheses) are presented.

Table 4

*OLS Regressions Examining the Influence of Maternal Partnerships on Adolescent Trajectories*

	Reading	Mathematics	Grades	Externalizing Behavior Problems	Serious Delinquency
<b>Partnership Groups</b>					
Stably Married	.01	.07	.15**	-.15**	-.08
Stably Cohabiting	-.005	-.01	.01	.05 <sup>t</sup>	.08
Marriage Formed	-.03	-.05	.02	-.06	-.04
Cohabitation Formed	.001	-.01	-.05	-.003	-.05
Marriage Dissolved	-.03	-.06	-.01	-.03	-.08*
Cohabitation Dissolved	-.003	.06	.03	.03	-.01
<b>Wave 1 Outcome</b>	<b>.65***</b>	<b>.51***</b>	<b>.41***</b>	<b>.55***</b>	<b>.43***</b>
<b>Wave 1 Covariates</b>					
Child Age	-.01	-.11**	-.04	-.01	.04
Mother Age	.01	.03	-.02	-.12**	-.05
Male	-.13**	-.03	-.11**	.005	.09
White	.05	.02	-.06	.06	.07
Black	-.11**	-.16***	.001	.10*	.09
Income-to-Needs Ratio	.04	.01	-.17**	.04	.05
# Minors in Household	.06	.004	-.01	.06	-.01
Completed H.S. Diploma/G.E.D.	.10*	.05	.05	.04	-.01
Currently Employed	-.04	.04	-.01	-.02	-.01
Currently on Welfare	-.04	-.12**	.07	-.01	.03

*Note.* Standardized regression coefficients are presented. Omitted groups include stably single families, and Hispanic, female children cared by mothers who did not receive a high school diploma or G.E.D., are not employed, and are not on welfare.

<sup>t</sup> $p < .06$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 4 continued

*OLS Regressions Examining the Influence of Maternal Partnerships on Adolescent Trajectories*

	Internalizing Behavior Problems	Depression	Anxiety	Anger & Alienation
<b>Partnership Groups</b>				
Stably Married	-.04	.07	.03	.04
Stably Cohabiting	.05	.08*	.001	.03
Marriage Formed	-.02	.03	.11 <sup>t</sup>	.10
Cohabitation Formed	-.06	-.03	-.01	-.02
Marriage Dissolved	.004	-.07 <sup>t</sup>	-.08*	-.07
Cohabitation Dissolved	.05	-.04	.02	.001
<b>Wave 1 Outcome</b>	.53***	.36***	.35***	.41***
<b>Wave 1 Covariates</b>				
Child Age	-.06	.11*	.06	.08
Mother Age	-.04	.05	.03	-.05
Male	.06	-.13**	-.13*	-.14**
White	.06	.08	.06	.05
Black	.05	-.06	-.09	-.04
Income-to-Needs Ratio	-.005	-.08	-.01	.05
# Minors in Household	.08	-.01	-.003	-.05
Completed H.S. Diploma/GED	.04	.07	-.02	.06
Currently Employed	.04	-.01	-.02	.03
Currently on Welfare	.03	.02	.01	.07

*Note.* Standardized regression coefficients are presented. Omitted groups include stably single families, and Hispanic, female children cared by mothers who did not receive a high school diploma or G.E.D., are not employed, and are not on welfare.

<sup>t</sup> $p < .06$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Figure Captions

*Figure 1.* Stable and transitioning family structures: Associations with adolescent Woodcock-Johnson reading.

*Figure 2.* Stable and transitioning family structures: Associations with adolescent Woodcock-Johnson mathematics.

*Figure 3.* Stable and transitioning family structures: Associations with adolescent grades.

*Figure 4.* Stable and transitioning family structures: Associations with adolescent CBCL externalizing problems.

*Figure 5.* Stable and transitioning family structures: Associations with adolescent serious delinquency.

*Figure 6.* Stable and transitioning family structures: Associations with adolescent CBCL internalizing problems.

*Figure 7.* Stable and transitioning family structures: Associations with adolescent depression.

*Figure 8.* Stable and transitioning family structures: Associations with adolescent anxiety.

*Figure 9.* Stable and transitioning family structures: Associations with adolescent anger and alienation.

Figure 1. Reading

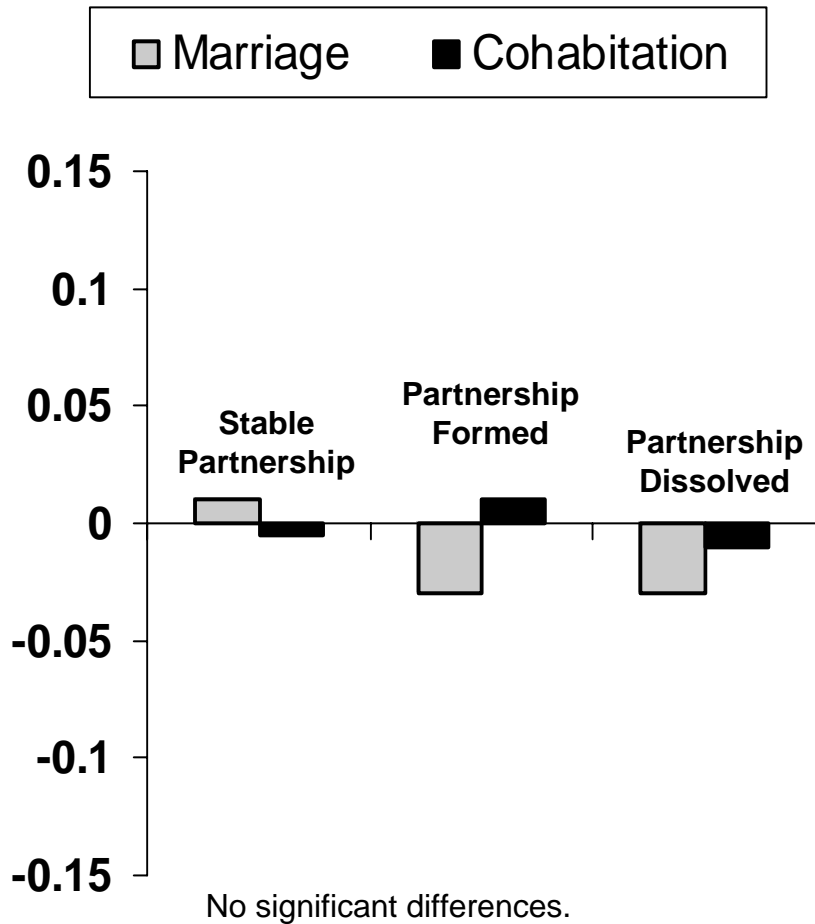
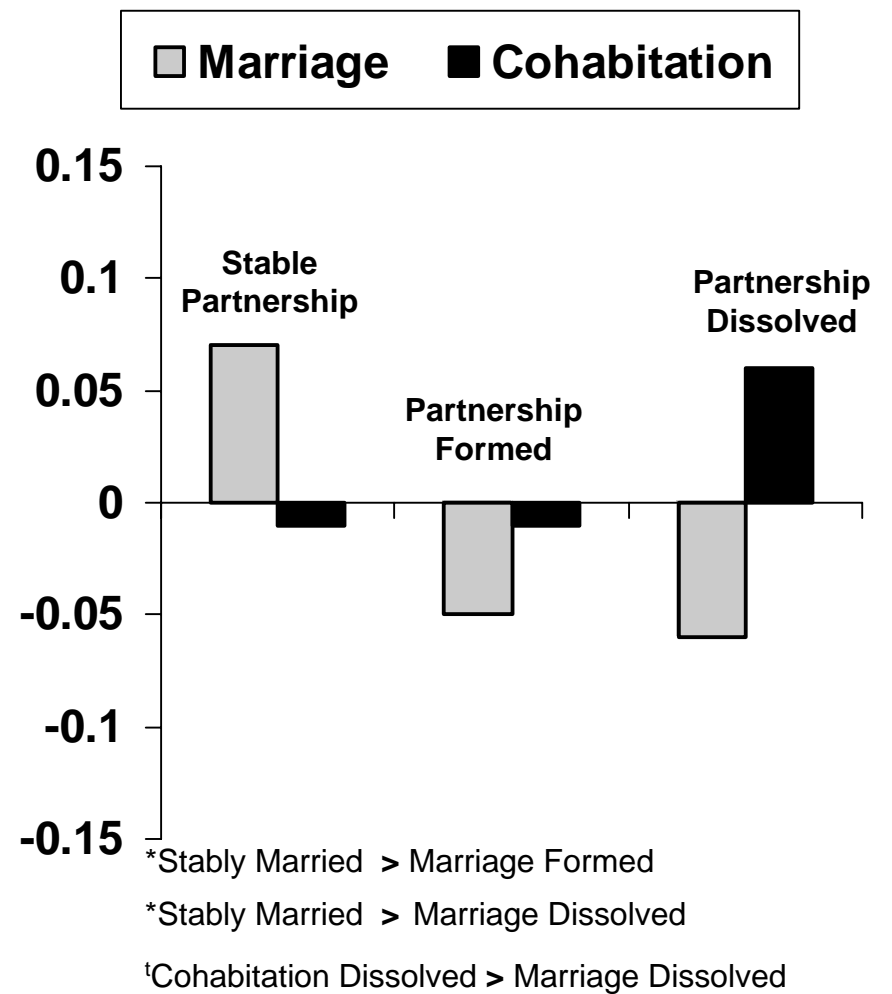


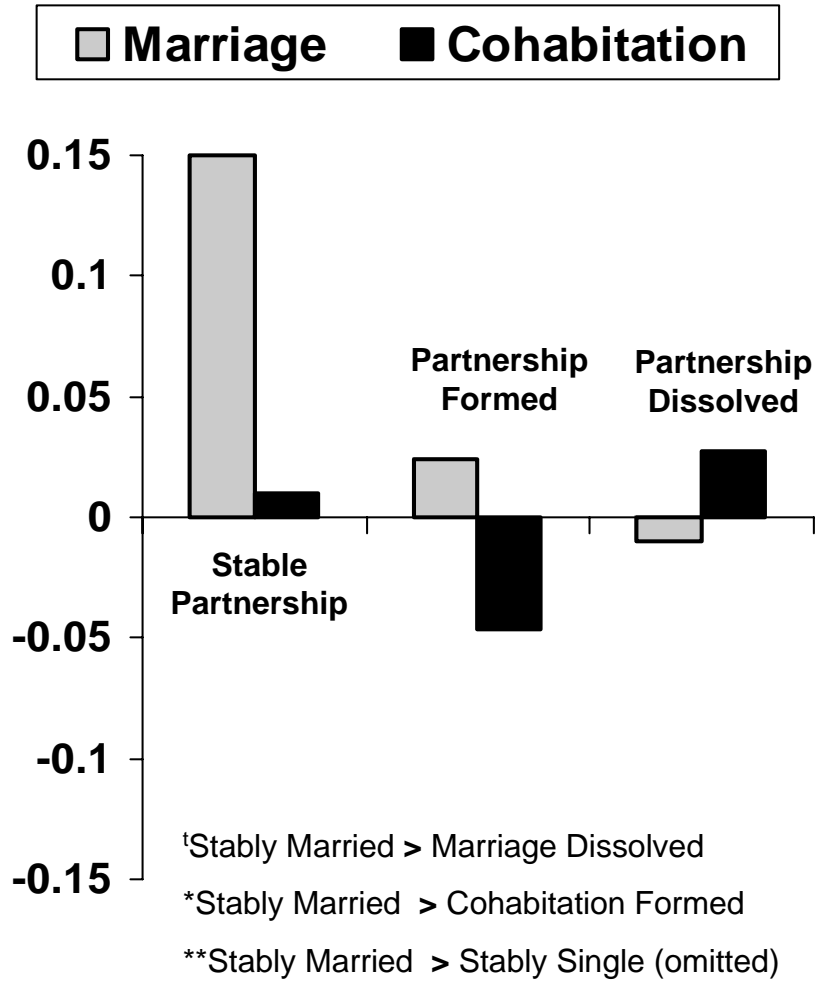
Figure 2. Mathematics



Note. Standardized beta coefficients are presented.

† $p < .06$ , \* $p < .05$ .

Figure 3. Grades



Note. Standardized beta coefficients are presented.

† $p < .06$ , \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

Figure 4. Externalizing Problems

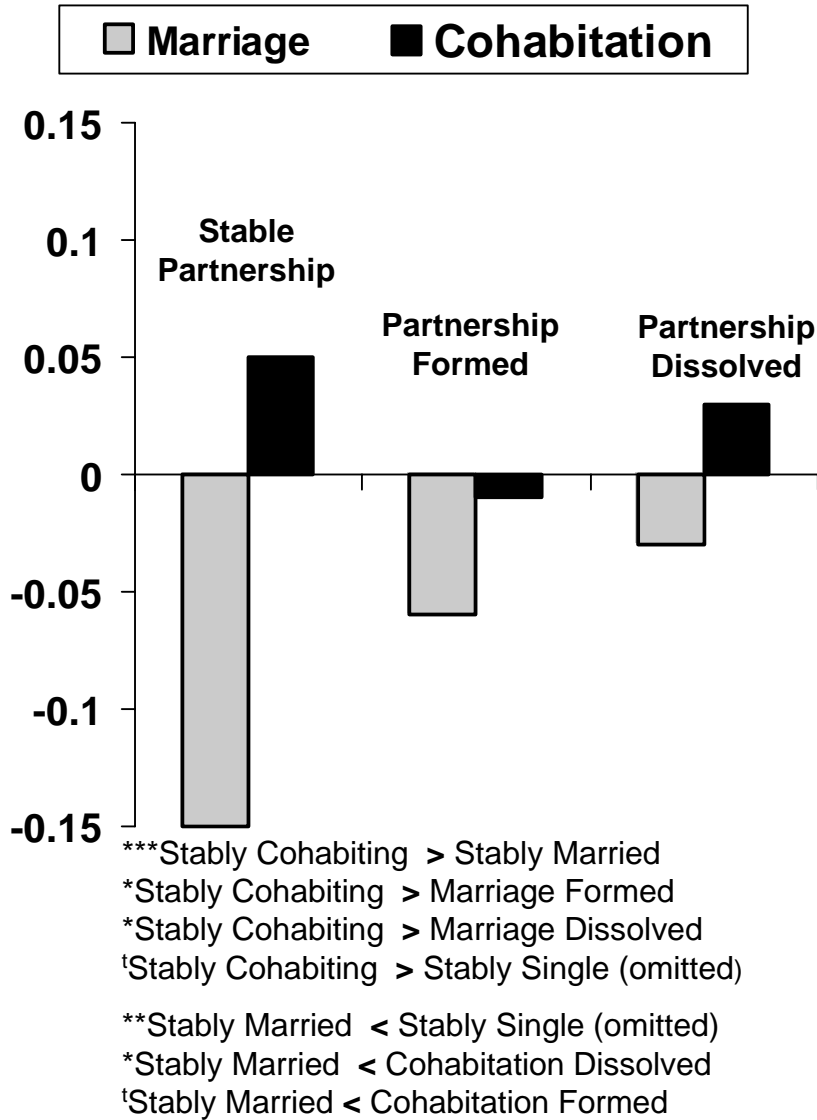
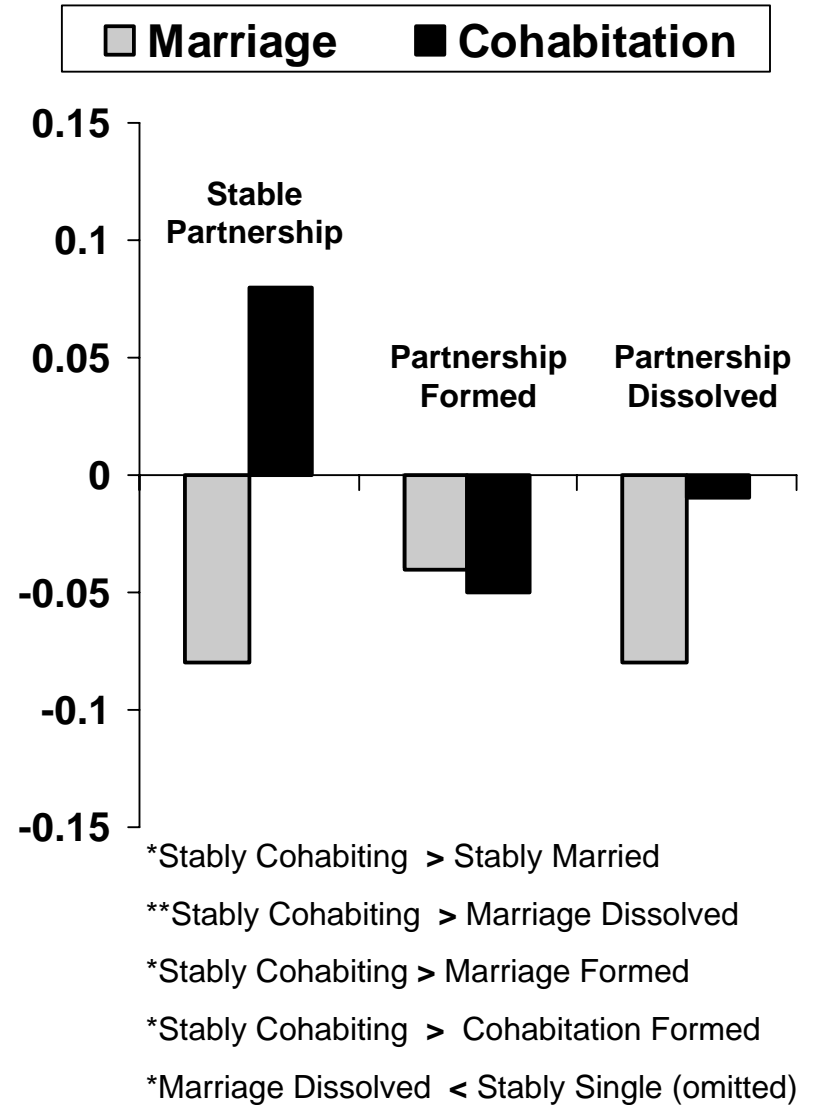


Figure 5. Serious Delinquency



Note. Standardized beta coefficients are presented. † $p < .06$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Figure 6. Internalizing Problems

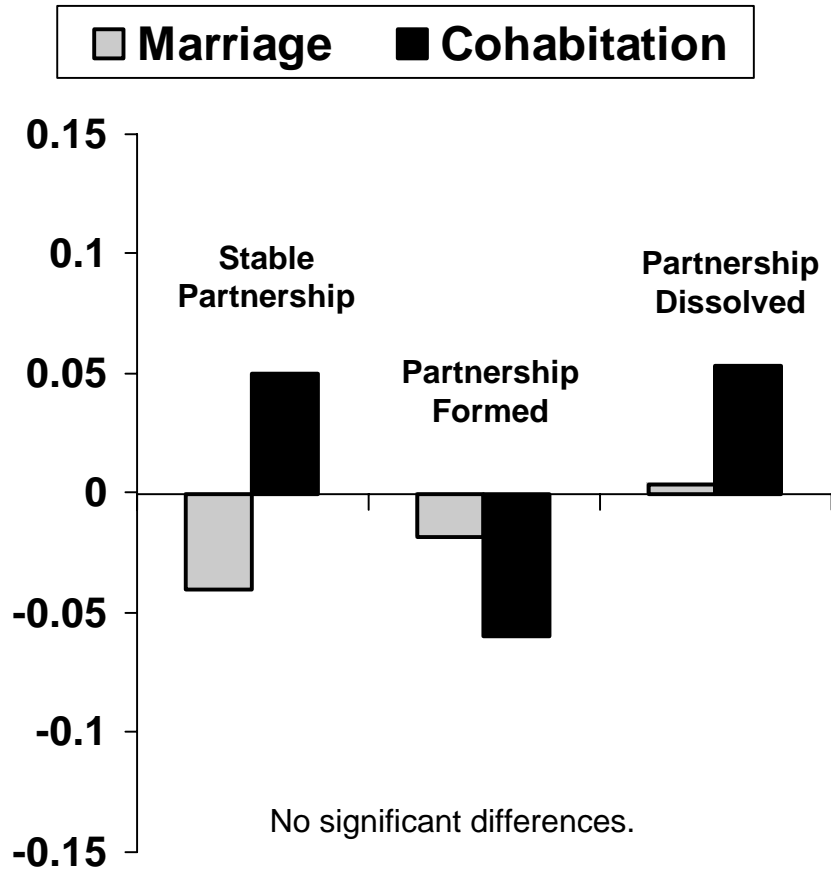
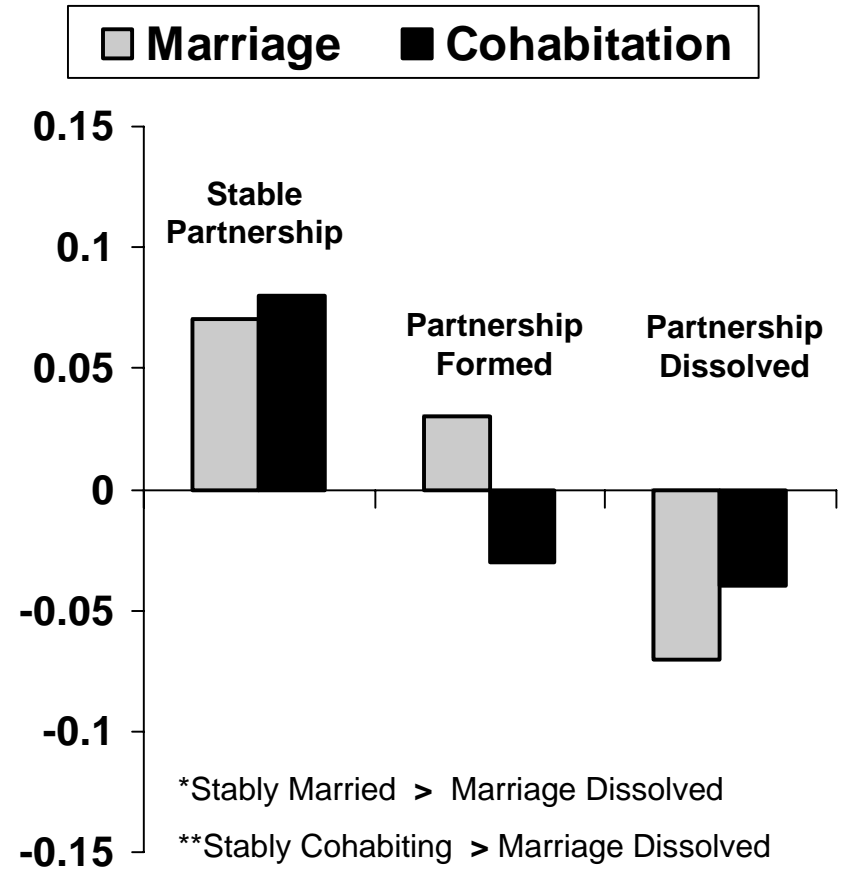


Figure 7. Depression



- \*Stably Married > Marriage Dissolved
- \*\*Stably Cohabiting > Marriage Dissolved
- \*Stably Cohabiting > Cohabitation Formed
- <sup>t</sup>Stably Cohabiting > Cohabitation Dissolved
- \*Stably Cohabiting > Stably Single (omitted)
- <sup>t</sup>Marriage Dissolved < Stably Single (omitted)

Note. Standardized beta coefficients are presented.

<sup>t</sup> $p < .06$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Figure 8. Anxiety

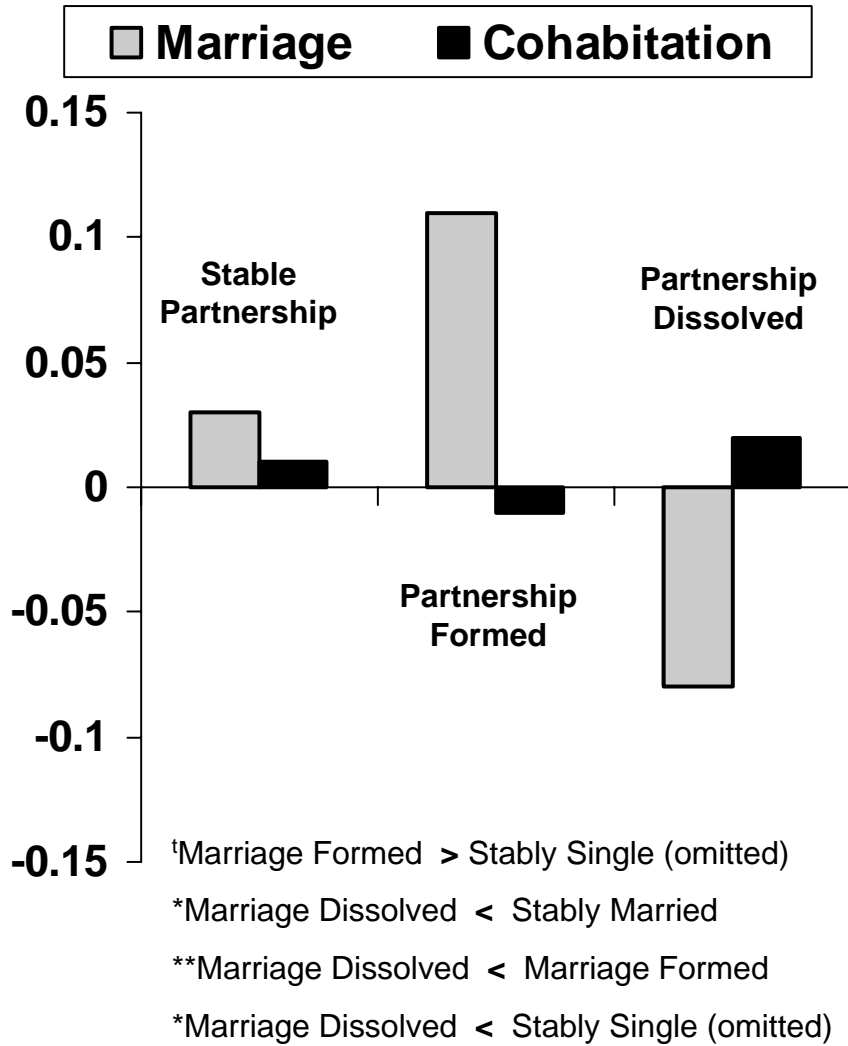
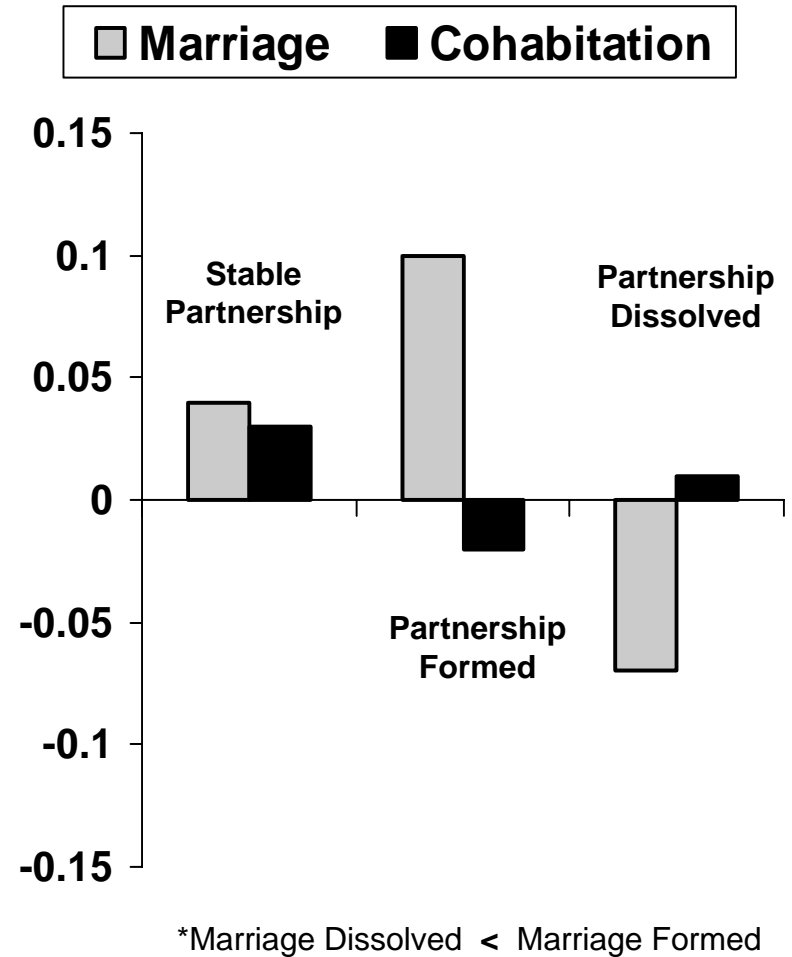


Figure 9. Anger & Alienation



Note. Standardized beta coefficients are presented.

<sup>t</sup> $p < .06$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .