

# **The Form and Function of Premarital Courtship Trajectories**

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## **Abstract**

Premarital courtship experiences matter a great deal for future marital quality and stability, but previous work has typically examined premarital relationship stages in isolation. We extend this work by considering the timing and duration of multiple premarital relationship stages including dating, spending the night, cohabitation, and the transition to marriage. We use novel data on a national sample of 752 married couples that include detailed information on the timing and duration of each premarital relationship stage. First, we fill a descriptive hole by tracing the *form* of premarital courtship trajectories, using cluster analysis to map the heterogeneous relationship paths couples follow into marriage. Second, we explore the *function* of these trajectories, using OLS regression analysis to test whether and how they relate to marital quality outcomes.

## The Form and Function of Premarital Courtship Trajectories

### Introduction

Premarital courtship experiences matter a great deal for the quality and stability of marriage, but there has been relatively limited exploration of the pacing and duration of nonmarital relationships; even less research has focused specifically on premarital courtship trajectories. In the present study, we use national data from a sample of married couples to provide a first look at the shape and timing of premarital courtship trajectories. Previous research has examined courtship experiences for particular subpopulations (e.g., low-income couples or college students; c.f., Bogle, 2007; Sassler, Addo, & Hartmann, 2010; Sassler & Joyner, 2011) or examined a single discrete relationship stage (e.g., cohabitation; c.f., Manning & Smock, 2005; Sassler, 2004). We build on this work by looking at relationship development as a multi-stage process that includes dating, spending the night, cohabitation, and the transition to marriage. Rather than considering these stages in isolation, we argue that particular configurations of relationship stages may matter for marital outcomes.

The present study, therefore, makes two primary contributions to the existing research. First, we fill a descriptive hole by tracing the *form* of premarital courtship trajectories, mapping the heterogeneous relationship paths couples follow into marriage. Second, we explore the *function* of these trajectories by testing how they relate to marital quality outcomes. On one hand, shorter duration courtships may be associated with more positive marital outcomes because people are more likely to move rapidly into commitment when they have fewer concerns about their dedication to their partner and the quality of the union. On the other hand, however, longer duration courtships may be associated with more positive marital outcomes because

people have more opportunities to gather information about the suitability of a union when they proceed more slowly through the less committed relationship stages.

## **Background**

### *Relationship Tempo*

The two relationship stages that have received the most attention in evaluating the tempo of relationship progression are the time spent dating prior to cohabitation and the relationship duration prior to marriage. Studies have shown fairly rapid transitions into cohabitation; approximately half of cohabitators begin living together within six months of the start of their relationship, and only a quarter date for more than a year before moving in together (Sassler, 2004; Sassler, Addo, & Hartmann, 2010). In contrast, 70% of those who entered marriage directly had dated for at least a year before living together in a marital union (Sassler, Addo, & Hartmann, 2010). Studies of the timing of the transition from cohabitation to marriage find that couples live together for approximately one year, on average, before getting married (Manning 1995; Thompson & Colella 1992; although this is much longer for those with a premarital birth (Tach & Halpern-Meehin, 2009)). The overall average duration of courtship prior to marriage is two years (Karney et al., 2003; Whyte, 1990).

These average relationship stage durations, however, tell us little about variation around the mean or how time spent in one relationship stage is related to time spent in another. For example, do couples who move quickly from dating into cohabitation then spend more time cohabiting prior to marriage than people who move more slowly from dating to cohabiting? That is, are there distinct modal premarital courtship trajectories that we miss by focusing on average relationship stage duration?

### *Meaning and Function of Premarital Courtship Trajectories*

There are two strands of literature that point to potentially divergent meanings and functions of premarital courtship trajectories. The first strand of literature suggests that longer duration premarital courtship stages may indicate more troubled relationships. For example, people may be more reluctant to transition from cohabitation into marriage when they have concerns about the quality of the relationship or about their partner as suitable marriage material. Berrington and Diamond (1999) found that longer duration cohabitation was associated with a higher risk of later divorce. Likewise, couples may have longer duration premarital stages when they delay marriage because they feel they are not in the financial position to take on its challenges; for example, Lichter, Qian, and Mellott (2006) found that poor cohabitators were much less likely to transition to marriage than non-poor cohabitators within the first year of cohabitation. Research by Edin and colleagues found that couples were less likely to follow through on their plans for marriage when they worried about the qualities of their relationship or their partner or about their financial readiness for marriage (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Edin & Reed, 2005; Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005). A similar logic lies behind studies that have found that those who cohabited as a way of “testing” their union for marriage reported poorer communication and more physical aggression, as well as less confidence in and commitment to their relationship (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009); spouses who report having had doubts about the union prior to marriage have a higher risk of divorce and marital dissatisfaction (Lavner, Karney, & Bradbury, 2012). People may be more likely to delay moving to a more committed relationship stage and to choose to “test” a relationship or further evaluate a partner when they already have reason to question the strength of the union. That is, longer duration in less committed relationship stages may be an indicator for lower quality unions.

In contrast, the second strand of literature has shown that couples have better relationship outcomes when they proceed more slowly through a courtship. Longer duration in less committed relationship stages allows for more and better information about match and union quality to be gathered before stronger commitments are made. Studies have shown that a couple having known one another for a longer period of time before marriage was associated with a lower divorce risk (Grover et al., 1985; Kurdek, 1993; Raschke, 1987). Research by Stanley and colleagues indicated that a deliberative commitment process was likely to produce better relationship outcomes (c. f., Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006); such a process of purposeful commitment would require spending adequate assessment time in the less-committed stages of the relationship. Several family scholars have warned that moving too quickly through relationship stages can result in poorer quality, more unstable relationships (Cherlin, 2009; Glenn, 2002).

### **Present Study**

In the present study we ask two questions:

- (1) What are the modal relationship pathways couples take into marriage?
- (2) How are different premarital relationship pathways associated with marital outcomes?

Based on the existing research reviewed above, we develop two competing hypotheses to answer this second question:

H1: Longer duration premarital courtship stages are associated with poorer marital outcomes because people will move more slowly into marriage when they are less sure about the quality of the relationship.

H2: Longer duration premarital courtship trajectories are associated with more positive marital outcomes because people will have more time to observe and evaluate match suitability before making a commitment.

If Hypothesis (1) is correct, then we should observe that the people who move into more committed relationship stages more quickly should have better marital outcomes, presumably because they are more sure of their relationship in the first place; that is, people with shorter duration dating and spending the night relationship stages ought to be better off. If Hypothesis (2) is correct, then we should observe that the people who spend the most time in the least committed relationship stages should have better marital outcomes, as they have had the most opportunity to gather information about match quality before committing; that is, people with longer duration dating and spending the night relationship stages ought to be better off.

However, there is a third possibility, which is not fully anticipated by either hypothesis or the strands of research on which they are based: There could be a reverse U-shaped relationship between the pacing of premarital courtship and marital outcomes. This is like the “Goldilocks Effect”: This courtship pattern is too short; this one is too long; and the one in the middle is just right. That is, people who move too quickly may not have adequate time to assess match quality, while people who move too slowly are showing doubts or are not very committed (and end up married through sliding or inertia). This leads us to a third hypothesis:

H3: Couples who spend the most and least amounts of time in premarital courtship stages have poorer marital outcomes than those who progress moderately and consistently towards marriage.

This third hypothesis postulates that both the duration-as-potential-marker-of-problems and duration-as-match-quality-assessment perspectives can be correct. The premarital courtship

process cannot move too quickly (or it precludes proper evaluation of match quality) or too slowly (as this indicates that one or both partners are not fully committed or have reason to doubt the relationship).

We proceed by first answering our descriptive research question about the timing of premarital courtship trajectories. We then conduct a cluster analysis to identify the modal courtship pathways into marriage and predict cluster membership based on demographic characteristics. We answer our second research question by examining whether the courtship pathways identified in the cluster analysis are associated with marital outcomes in the manner predicted by hypothesis one, two, or three. We conclude by discussing what these results tell us about the form and function of the premarital courtship process.

## **Data & Method**

Our analysis uses data from an internet survey conducted by Knowledge Networks (KN), in conjunction with the National Center for Family and Marriage Research (NCFMR) at Bowling Green State University, between July and October 2010. In 1999, KN established the first online research panel (Knowledge Panel [KP]) that is representative of the U.S. population ages 18 to 64, using probability-based sampling methods that include computer users and non-users. If the panel members did not have access to the Internet, they were provided computer equipment to participate in the study. A recent evaluation found that a survey using the KP was comparable to a nationally representative random digit dial (RDD) telephone survey sample, and the data obtained from the KP internet component were superior to the RDD sample with respect to reliability and validity (Chang & Krosnick, 2009).

Knowledge Networks assigned the NCFMR survey to 1,500 married men in the panel, of whom 1,060 completed the survey. The wives of men who completed the survey were assigned

the survey as well, and 752 of them completed the survey. The full sample therefore includes data from each partner in 752 couples, resulting in 1,504 survey responses. Data are weighted to adjust for sample design and survey non-response. We further divide the sample into two groups: married couples who cohabited before marriage (N=380) and married couples who did not cohabit before marriage (N=369), as each group has a distinct premarital courtship path.

### *Measures*

We designed survey questions to measure the onset and length of several relationship stages, including dating, stayovers, cohabitation, and marriage. Due to space limitations in the survey, we did not collect complete relationship histories, but rather focused on the path of the current relationship with particular attention to the beginning of the relationship stage and the duration of each stage. For all relationship stage questions, respondents were not given a ‘don’t know’ option, but were asked to provide their best guess. Each member of a couple was interviewed, so we obtained two sets of responses about the duration of each relationship stage. Below we report results based on the average duration reported by the two partners; we have also considered reports separately for men and women, and based on the longest and shortest durations reported.

*Dating Relationship Stage.* First, we asked all respondents for the date (month/year) they started dating their current partners. We calculate the duration of the dating relationship as the number of months between the date the respondents reported they started dating and the date they started the stayover relationship stage.

*Stayover Relationship Stage.* We define the stayover relationship stage as the period of time when couples “slide” into co-residence, occasionally spending the night with each other but not viewing themselves as cohabiting. We asked respondents, “How long before you were



officially living together did you and your partner start spending the night at one another's homes?" Respondents could report a number of weeks or months, or they could respond that they never spent the night at one another's homes before officially living together. Previous research indicates that respondents can recall the process of starting to spend nights together before officially cohabiting (Manning & Smock, 2005; Pollard & Harris, 2007; Sassler, 2004). We calculate the duration of the stayover relationship stage as the number of months the respondents reported they spent the night at one another's homes before officially living together.

*Cohabitation Relationship Stage.* We then asked respondents whether they lived together before marrying and asked them to report the date (month/year) they officially started living together. Those who reported that they had lived together before marriage were then asked whether they ever separated and got back together while cohabiting. We use the phrase "'officially' living together" and do not describe "officially" to allow respondents to self-define the start of their cohabiting relationship. Providing a definition assumes a common understanding of the start of cohabitation that qualitative research indicates is not the same across all cohabitators (Manning & Smock, 2005). Previous studies, both qualitative and quantitative, have found that respondents are able to report the beginning dates of dating and cohabitation and the length of time between the start of the relationship and cohabitation (Rhoades, et al., 2006, 2009; Sassler, 2004). We calculate the duration of the cohabitation relationship stage as the number of months between the date the respondents reported they officially started living together and the date they got married.

*Marital Relationship Stage.* Finally, we asked respondents to report on the date (month/year) that they got married. While our analysis of the form of premarital courtship trajectories ends with the date of marriage, we also include a control for marital duration in our

analyses of marital quality outcomes, which was calculated based on the difference between the marriage date and interview date.

*Marital Quality.* The survey also includes several measures of current marital quality. A measure of relationship satisfaction asks couples, “Taking all things together, how satisfied are you with your relationship?” A measure of listening satisfaction asks “How satisfied are you with how well your spouse listens to you?” For both measures, respondents answered on a five-point scale ranging from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). We constructed a measure of partner supportiveness which takes the mean of the following items: “My spouse shows love and affection toward me”; “My spouse encourages me to do things that are important to me”; “My spouse will not cheat on me”; “My spouse listens when I need someone to talk to”; and the reverse code of “My spouse and I avoid discussing unpleasant or difficult topics.” Responses were on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The reliability of this scale was  $\alpha = 0.76$ . A measure of relationship happiness asked respondents “How would you rate your relationship with your current spouse?” with responses ranging from completely unhappy (1) to completely happy (10). Finally, respondents were asked “What are the chances you and your spouse will break up in the future?” with responses ranging from no chance (1) to almost certain chance (5).

*Background Characteristics.* We also include measures of respondents’ demographic and economic characteristics as control variables. We measure respondent’s age (< 30, 30-44, 45-59, or 60+), educational attainment (less than high school, high school graduate, some college, or college graduate), race (non-Hispanic black, non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic other, or Hispanic), whether there are children under the age of 18 in the household, household income (< \$20,000, \$20-39,999, \$40-59,999, \$60-99,999, or \$100,000+), and employment status

(unemployed, employed, or retired/disabled). Table 1 provides descriptive statistics about the characteristics of our sample.

### *Method*

The following analysis proceeds in several steps. First, we provide descriptive evidence on the average duration of each premarital relationship stage, as well as the degree of variation around these averages. Second, we conduct a hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's linkage. The clusters were defined based on measures of the duration of each relationship stage: the number of weeks between dating and first spending the night together; the number of weeks between first spending the night together and officially living together; and the number of weeks between officially living together and marrying. Starting from a single cluster (all observations in a single group), Ward's linkage partitions the observations into successively more clusters, in which the observations in each cluster are as homogenous as possible. In technical terms, the clusters are defined so that, collectively, they minimize the sum of squared errors. We determine the ideal number of clusters using the Duda/Hard index (Appendix 1). After determining the cluster membership that best fits the data, we provide descriptive characteristics of each cluster and predict membership in each cluster using multinomial logistic regression based on respondents' demographic and economic characteristics. Finally, we estimate OLS regressions that examine the association between the premarital relationship trajectory typology and marital quality outcomes.

### **Results**

Figure 1 reports the length of premarital courtship stages. We document the great variation in the length of each premarital courtship stage by showing the durations at the 25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, and 75<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the distribution. Among couples who cohabit before marriage, the

median premarital courtship experience is to date for 5.5 months before starting to spend the night together, to spend the night together for 1.4 months before moving in together, and to spend 15.8 months living together before marrying. This results in a premarital courtship of about 23 months. Among couples who entered marriage without first cohabiting, the median premarital courtship duration is similar--about 21 months. However, the median direct-to-marriage couple spends almost all of this time in a dating relationship, with virtually no time spending the night prior to marriage.

If we look at the durations at the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile, we see that a large fraction of married couples move considerably faster through the premarital courtship phases. These premarital cohabitators spend 1.7 months dating before starting to spend the night, 0.2 months spending the night, and 6.1 months living together before marriage, thus completing their entire premarital courtship in less than a year. Couples who did not cohabit before marriage move similarly fast at the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile, dating for just 11 months before marrying.

The 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the duration distribution reveals that many couples progress much slower through the premarital courtship stages. These premarital cohabitators spend 15.6 months dating, 3.3 months spending the night, and 29.4 months cohabiting before marriage, resulting in a total premarital courtship of almost four years. Again, premarital courtships are similarly long among couples who do not cohabit before marriage. They spend 35 months dating and 2.3 months spending the night before marriage, for a total premarital courtship of over three years.

While these descriptive statistics tell us about the great range of premarital relationship durations, they do not tell us how the durations of each relationship stage relate to one another and whether these relationship stages group together in distinct ways. To answer this, we conducted a hierarchical cluster analysis using the measures of the duration of each premarital

relationship stage. Using the Duda/Hart index (Appendix 1), we identified that the number of distinct clusters that best fit the data was four. After examining the average durations of each relationship stage for each of these four groups, we developed labels to describe them. These are reported in Table 2, along with the proportions in which they are represented in our sample. The average duration of each relationship stage for each of these clusters is reported in Figure 2. The first group, who we call Pacers, constitutes 38% of our sample, and this group proceeds at a moderate pace through each of the relationship stages, spending on average 11.8 months dating, 5.6 months spending the night, and 18.8 months cohabiting before marrying, for a total premarital relationship of 36.2 months.

The second group, who we call Speed Racers, moves very quickly through all of the relationship stages, spending on average 3.9 months dating, 1.6 months spending the night, and 6.2 months cohabiting before marriage, for a total premarital relationship lasting just about one year. Speed Racers constitute 33% of our sample. The third group, who we call Drifters, spends a great deal of time in the least committed relationship stage, dating for an average of 52 months before starting to spend the night together. Following this prolonged dating period, Drifters spend the night for about 2.2 months and cohabit for another 17.8 months before finally marrying. This produces an extended premarital courtship of over six years. Drifters constitute 9% of our sample. We call the final group identified in our cluster analysis Start and Stoppers, who constitute 20% of the sample. This group progresses quickly through the least committed relationship stages, dating for 6.9 months and spending the night for 2.9 months before cohabiting, but then they spend an extended time cohabiting, 53.5 months on average, before eventually marrying. This results in a long courtship period of over five years, but unlike the

Drifters who spend most of their premarital courtship dating, Start and Stoppers move quickly to cohabitation but then spend most of their courtship living together.

We conducted a separate cluster analysis for couples who did not cohabit prior to marriage because this group does not have a variable for the number of months cohabiting. Two groups emerge for the married couples that reflect the Pacer and Drifter groups identified among premarital cohabitators, with slightly longer durations for the noncohabitators. 85% of the direct-to-married couples fit in the Pacer category, with an average of 21 months spent dating and 3.1 months spending the night before marrying. The direct-to-marriage Drifters, 15% of the sample, spent 96 months dating and 4 months spending the night before marrying, yielding a total premarital courtship of over eight years.

We next examined the demographic and economic background characteristics of couples in the different relationship trajectory clusters. Table 3 presents the results of a multinomial logit regression of relationship trajectory cluster membership on these characteristics. While our statistical power is limited by a relatively small sample size, we see that, relative to Pacers, couples in Drifter, Start and Stopper, and Speed Racer relationship trajectories are more socioeconomically disadvantaged in terms of either educational attainment or household income. In addition, Drifters are more likely to be racial minorities than are Pacers.

Finally, we ask whether the relationship trajectories we identified have implications for future marital quality. We conducted OLS regressions of each relationship quality outcome on the relationship trajectory types, relative to Pacers. For each outcome, we report the results of a baseline regression followed by the results including the demographic and economic control variables. In the baseline models in Table 4, we see that Drifters, Speed Racers, and Start and Stoppers tend to be in lower quality marriages than Pacers. This is inconsistent with our first and

second hypotheses, which predicted that either the longest (Drifter) or shortest (Speed Racers) relationship progression would be associated with the most favorable outcomes. Instead, these results are consistent with our third hypothesis, that medium-duration relationships would produce the most favorable outcomes relative to relationships that progress too slowly or too quickly. The second set of models in Table 4 shows that these associations are generally maintained, but are slightly attenuated, once we control for couples' demographic and economic characteristics; this indicates that different premarital courtship trajectories may be associated with variation in marital outcomes over and above selection effects.

## **Discussion**

Previous research has shown that the transition into cohabitation tends to occur quickly—within about six months (Sassler, 2004; Sassler, Addo, & Hartmann, 2010)—and the transition to marriage tends to occur about two years into the relationship (Karney et al., 2003). In the present study, we move beyond these “average” views of premarital relationship stages, to examine the premarital courtship period as a multi-stage process. We find that distinct premarital courtship trajectories do exist and that these different pathways into marriage are associated with variation in marital outcomes.

What is notable about these descriptive results, aside from the great variation in the amount of time couples spend in premarital courtship, is that the total duration of the premarital relationship is remarkably similar regardless of whether a couple cohabited before marriage. That is, cohabitation does not seem to add to the total length of the premarital relationship; rather, it substitutes for a longer dating period. Another notable finding from these descriptive characteristics is that spending the night is the shortest relationship stage, and does not occur for

many couples. However, for a non-trivial subset of married couples (25%), it lasts several months, even among those who did not cohabit before marriage.

We find four distinct pathways into marriage, with the Speed Racers moving quickly through all premarital stages, the Drifters moving slowly through all stages, the Start and Stoppers moving quickly into cohabitation and then remaining there for an extended period, and the Pacers moving at a moderate, consistent pace towards marriage. The Pacers are more likely to be college educated, white, and with higher incomes than the other groups. Even after accounting for these demographic differences, however, the Pacers remain more likely to report higher quality marriages. These results show that premarital courtship trajectories matter for marital outcomes, but not in the ways anticipated by Hypotheses (1) or (2). Rather, these findings support Hypothesis (3), that moving neither too quickly nor too slowly through the premarital courtship process is associated with the best marital quality. We speculate that this is because Pacers have adequate time to evaluate their match quality prior to moving into the more committed relationship stages, but their consistent progress towards greater commitment indicates that they do not have serious concerns or hesitations about the union prior to marriage.

There are limitations to this study that offer opportunities for future research. The couples in the sample have been married for a relatively long time—an average of 15 years for those who cohabited prior to marriage and 23 years for those who entered marriage directly. This means we have a conservative estimate of group differences in premarital courtship trajectories, since those on the riskier pathways into marriage are more likely to have divorced and therefore not appear in our sample; that is, we should be less likely to see differences in marital outcomes among the groups given that they have managed to make their marriages work for a relatively long time already. Future research should examine a sample of “younger” marriages to see whether the



four groups we see are also present in newer unions and to test the association between these courtship trajectories and marital outcomes across the population of marriages.

There is a diversity of premarital courtship trajectories that couples follow into marriage. These findings indicate that descriptions of average relationship stage durations miss much in telling the true story of the relationship processes that lead up to marriage. Research that explores the meaning of cohabitation, for example, needs to account for the very different form—and therefore, potentially, different function—this stage plays in the premarital experiences of Pacers versus Speed Racers versus Drifters. Further, there do appear to be particular relationship trajectories that are riskier than others in terms of marital quality; future studies should explore in greater detail why—whether to do with information gathering or doubts about union quality—Pacers have happier marriages.

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Table 1. Sample Descriptives for Premarital Cohabitors and Non-Cohabiting Married Couples

	Premarital Cohabitors		Non-Cohabiting Marrieds			
	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife		
<u>Relationship Quality</u>						
Relationship Satisfaction	4.60	4.49	**	4.66	4.56	*
Listening Satisfaction	4.28	3.99	***	4.38	4.08	***
Partner Supportiveness	4.27	4.17	**	4.31	4.22	**
Relationship Happiness	8.66	8.32	***	8.71	8.57	+
Chance of Breaking Up	1.54	1.53		1.40	1.37	
<u>Background Characteristics</u>						
Age						
< 30	7.9	12.6	*	6.7	8.4	
30-44	45.5	42.4		30.4	33.9	
45-59	41.5	38.4		45.2	46.2	
60+	5.0	6.6		17.6	11.4	*
Education						
Less than High School	8.9	5.7		2.4	2.9	
High School Graduate	27.1	21.1	+	26.3	20.9	+
Some College	30.3	37.6	*	27.1	33.4	+
College Graduate	33.7	35.5		44.1	42.6	
Race						
Non-Hispanic White	83.2	85.0		84.5	85.3	
Non-Hispanic Black	3.4	2.1		1.6	1.3	
Hispanic	7.9	6.3		6.8	6.2	
Non-Hispanic Other	5.5	6.6		7.0	7.1	
Children < 18 in Household	51.8	52.3		47.4	47.1	
Income						
< \$20,000	7.1	7.1		2.1	2.1	
\$20-\$40,000	12.6	12.6		10.5	10.3	
\$40-\$60,000	18.9	19.2		15.4	15.4	
\$60-\$100,000	32.1	32.1		43.1	42.9	
\$100,000+	29.2	28.9		28.7	29.1	
Employment						
Employed	77.9	61.1	***	82.6	60.3	***
Unemployed	10.2	29.4	***	5.7	27.9	***
Other (Retired/Disabled)	11.8	9.5		11.6	11.7	
Marital Duration in Years	15.9	16.0		24.2	24.2	
N	380	380		369	369	

+ p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

Notes: Descriptive statistics are unweighted means and percentages. Significance tests are difference between husbands and wives means

Table 2. Results of Cluster Analysis for Premarital Relationship Stages

Cluster Name	Representation in Sample
Premarital Cohabitor	323 (100%)
Pacer	124 (38%)
Speed Racer	105 (33%)
Drifter	30 (9%)
Start-and-Stopper	64 (20%)
Non-Cohabitor	350 (100%)
Pacer	310 (85%)
Drifter	40 (15%)

Table 3. Multinomial Logistic Regression Predicting Cluster Membership from Respondent Characteristics (N = 323)

	Speed Racers Coef.	Drifters Coef.	Start-and-Stoppers Coef.
Age (ref= Under 30)			
30-44	-0.041	1.784	0.122
45-59	0.539	1.380	-0.242
60 +	0.055	-1.319	0.791
College (ref = HS Grad)			
Less than HS	-0.418	-0.414	-0.356
Some College	-0.210	-0.225	0.232
College +	-0.345	-1.448 *	-1.023 *
Race (ref=White)			
Non-Hispanic Black	0.855	2.959 *	1.264
Hispanic	0.098	1.332 *	0.217
Non-Hispanic Other	1.083 +	0.702	-1.213
Children in Household	-0.350	0.133	-0.116
Household Income (ref < \$20,000)			
\$20-40,000	-1.332 +	-1.116	-0.929
\$40-60,000	-0.592	-2.227 *	-0.739
\$60-100,000	-1.375 +	-1.060	-0.561
\$100,000 +	-1.535	-1.203	-1.024
Employment (ref=Employed)			
Unemployed	0.534	0.430	0.411
Out of Labor Force	0.511	-1.254	0.188
Constant	1.008	-1.435	0.378

+ p < 0.1; \* p < 0.05; Pseudo R-Square = 0.095

Coefficients are log odds coefficients from multinomial logistic regression with "Pacers" as reference group.

Table 4. Results of OLS Regression of Marital Quality Outcomes on Premarital Courtship Trajectory Clusters

Relationship Trajectory Type	Relationship Satisfaction		Listening Satisfaction		Partner Supportiveness			Relationship Happiness		Breakup Chances	
Speed Racers	0.004	-0.033	-0.324 *	-0.283 *	-0.236 **	-0.186 *	-0.243 +	-0.164	-0.046	-0.033	
Drifters	-0.205 +	-0.127	-0.019	0.035	-0.076	-0.028	-0.271 +	-0.15	0.247 +	0.176 +	
Start-and-Stoppers	-0.059	-0.045	-0.114	-0.094	-0.106	-0.107	-0.067	-0.059	0.155	0.161	
Controls	X		X		X			X		X	
Constant	4.638	5.165	3.88	4.03	4.103	4.344	8.305	9.095	1.485	0.891	

Notes: + p < 0.1; \* p < 0.05

Controls include age, education, race and ethnicity, number of children, household income, and employment status

Wives' reports of relationship quality are used here. Results are substantively similar when husbands' reports are used.



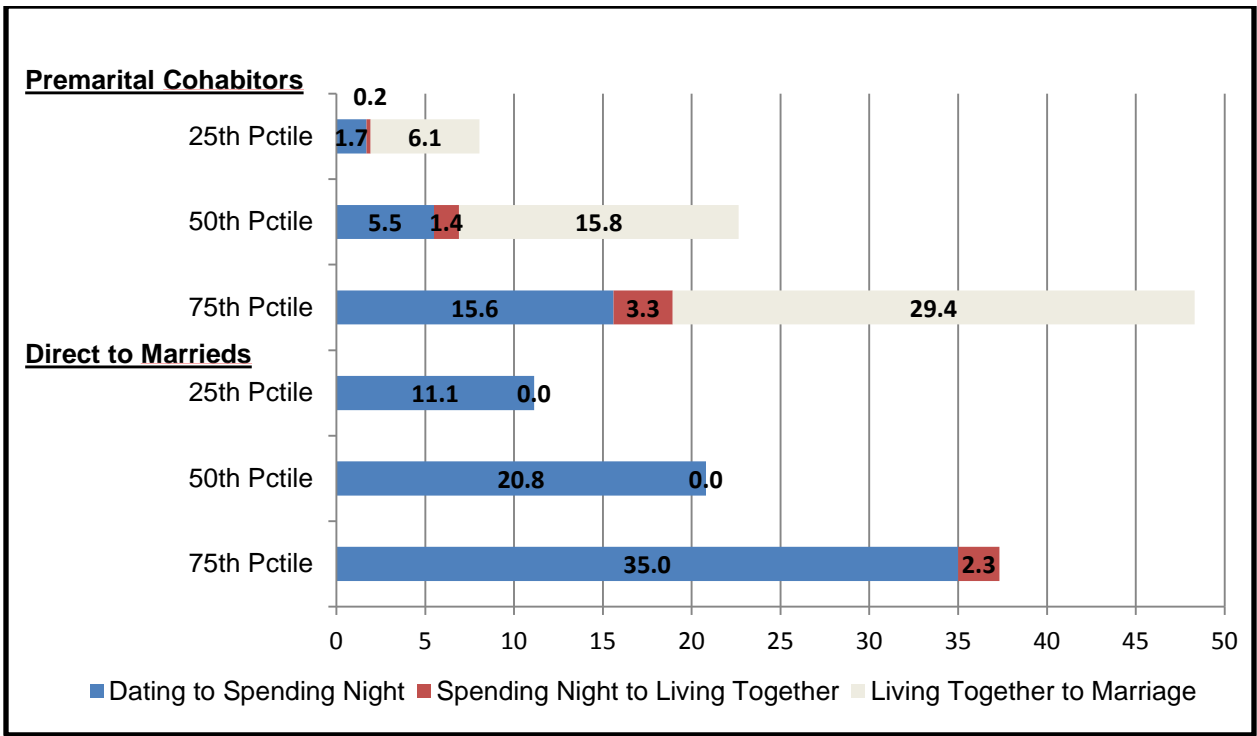


Figure 1. Percentile Distributions of Premarital Courtship Durations by Relationship Stage

*Notes: Duration for each couple based on average of husbands' and wives' reports*

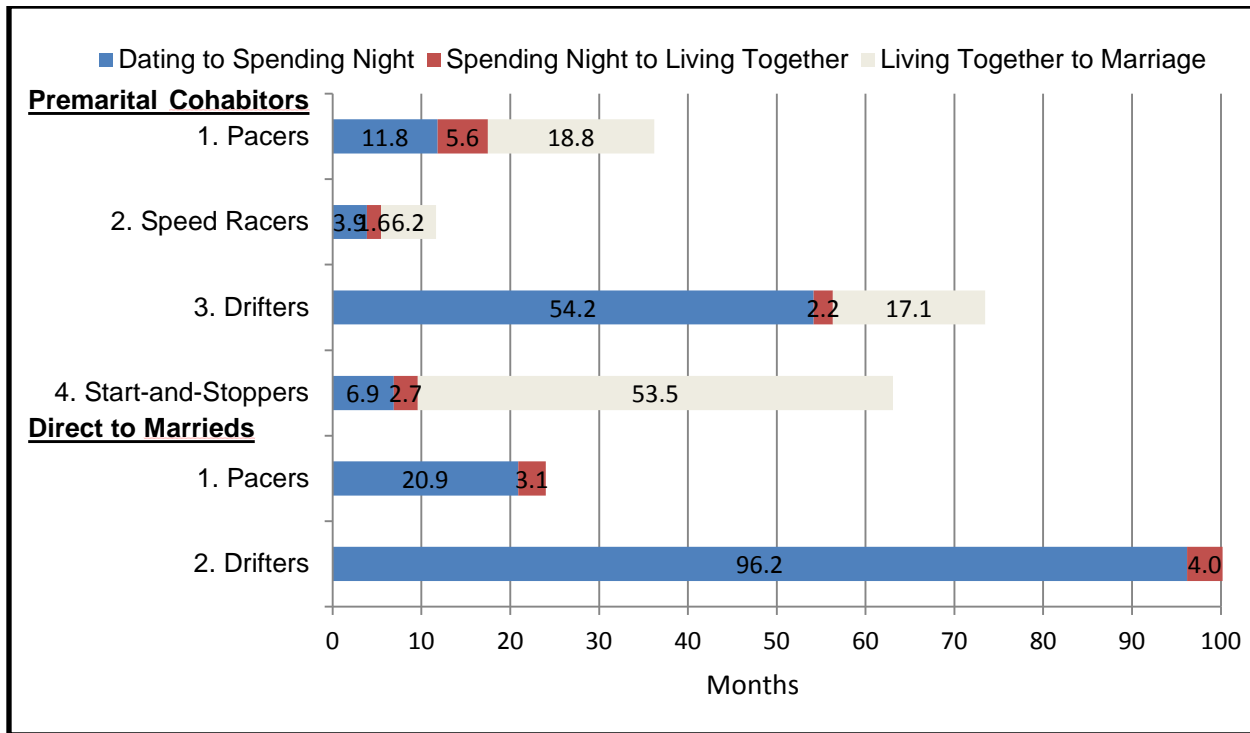


Figure 2. Average Premarital Courtship Durations for Relationship Pathways Identified in Cluster Analysis

*Notes: Durations based on average of husband's and wife's report for each couple.*