

**The Tempo of Relationship Progression  
among Low-Income Couples**

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“It is not time or opportunity that is to determine intimacy – it is disposition alone. Seven years would be insufficient to make some people acquainted with each other, and seven days are more than enough for others.” - *Sense & Sensibility*, by Jane Austen.

Sex has always been a topic of interest for the popular media where stories of promiscuous young adults and celebrity pregnancies stimulate tabloid sales. Several recent books on “hook ups” have fueled concern with the rapidity with which relationships become sexual (Bogle, 2007; Stepp, 2007). Social conservatives, parents, and public health officials have all expressed concern over various aspects of contemporary relationships. Both the public and private sectors have begun to take measure of current relationship trends. Attempts to strengthen healthy relationships and families range from government-sponsored abstinence-only sexual education to relationship skills classes and self-help books like *How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk* (Van Epp, 2008) and others on the dangers of casual sex (Stepp, 2007). Many of these programs are funded by the Department of Health and Human Services’ Health Marriage Initiative, which has a budget of up to \$150 million per year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006).

According to Dr. John Van Epp, a key component to the avoidance of “marrying a jerk” is pacing the relationship to ward off “premature emotional attachment;” the goal of progressing at a moderate pace is to ensure one really knows one’s partner (Van Epp, 2008). However, the research on the tempo of relationship progression is relatively scarce. Furthermore, though many

of the programs designed to assist with building healthy relationships are focused on less-advantaged populations, there is little research specifically on low-income couples. As pointed out in the National Marriage Project's report "Sex without Strings, Relationships without Rings," almost all research on the young and not-yet-married and their relationships is focused on those who attend college (Whitehead and Popenoe, 2000). This research gap is particularly meaningful because many publicly funded policies concerning healthy relationships are targeted at populations that have yet to be specifically studied.

My paper addresses this gap by examining the factors affecting the tempo of low-income couples' relationship progression. Data come from a recently-collected survey, the *Marital and Relationship Survey (MARS)* that obtained information from 700 low-income couples who were either married or cohabiting. While a growing number of nationally representative surveys now collect the dates of key events in sexual relationships, few published studies have examined the factors that expedite or delay the progression to sexual involvement among contemporary adults (though see Peplau, Rubin, & Hill, 1977). The shortage of such research is surprising given the societal and theoretical importance of such knowledge. The period between the start of a romantic relationship and its transition to a sexual or coresidential relationship is an important one, serving as a time during which couples gather information about each other and assess compatibility. This paper explores how various demographic factors are associated with the amount of time respondents report being romantically involved (dating) prior to entering into sexual relations, as well as exploring the duration from dating to forming coresidential unions (whether via marriage or cohabitation). Our results are interpreted in light of recent public policy aimed at creating stable and lasting relationships.

## **Review of Literature**

There is very little literature about the speed at which romantic relationships progress and what consequences this may have. When research focuses on relationship progression, it generally examines the factors shaping the timing of sexual debut and transitions to cohabitation and marriage (Clarkberg, Waite, & Stolzenberg, 1995; Houts, 2005; Manlove, Ryan, & Franzetta, 2007; Pearson, Muller, & Frisco, 2006; Sassler & Goldscheider, 2004; Upchurch et al., 1999, 2001). In contrast to demographic studies of timing, social psychologists have focused on the relationship between the tempo of relationship progression and relationship quality (Cate & Lloyd, 1988; Lloyd & Cate, 1985; Surra, 1987; Surra et al., 1988; Surra & Gray, 2000). Their findings suggest that moving more slowly into sexual and cohabiting relationships may be beneficial in the long run (Surra, 1987; Surra & Gray, 2000; Surra & Hughes, 1997). This literature suggests that an expedited entrance into relationships may result in poorer quality unions.

Individuals' and couples' decisions about what steps to take in a relationship and the degree of commitment that they feel are subject to many factors both internal and external to the relationship (Surra, 1987; Lloyd & Cate, 1985; Stanley, Rhoades and Markman, 2006; Surra & Hughes, 1997; Sassler, 2004). The degree of commitment felt to a relationship changes over time with the stages of the relationship. Commitment is generally viewed as an individual's attachment to the relationship and belief about whether a relationship is going to continue in the long run. While commitment is often viewed through the lens of marriage, "global commitment" is not necessarily limited to marriage and can be manifest in other relationship types – such as dating or cohabiting (Surra & Hughes, 1997). Commitment theory generally looks at two distinct types of forces: one that motivates connection and another that increases the costs of

leaving. This suggests that higher commitment can be both positive and negative, depending on whether compatibility has been adequately assessed (Stanley et al., 2006).

While relationships move to higher levels of commitment for many reasons, these reasons can be grouped into two categories: events internal to the relationship and events external to the relationship (Surra & Hughes, 1997). Events internal to the relationship involve time spent together and behavioral interdependence. Internal events are used to assess compatibility and the staying-power of a relationship. As couples spend more time together, they learn more about their partners and themselves, think about the future they could have together, become more attached to each other, and dedicate themselves to the relationship as opposed to alternatives (Surra & Hughes, 1997). External events that drive commitment are associated with agents outside of the couple, such as social networks and circumstances like finances or convenience (Surra & Hughes, 1997; Lloyd & Cate, 1985). Social network events include interactions with friends, family, and coworkers of one's partner that change the level of commitment felt toward a relationship. While social network events are tangentially associated with the couple themselves, circumstances can be wholly unrelated to the relationship. The timing of holidays and life events- like a job change or a death in the family- can affect commitment within a relationship even though it does not have anything to do with the couple itself (Surra & Hughes, 1997; Sassler, 2004). For example, spending a holiday with a partner's family or attending a friend's wedding with a partner can lead to external pressure from family and friends about where a relationship is going. While nothing has occurred between the couple, one or both partners may feel a change in commitment due to the prodding of their loved ones.

Looking at external and internal events that affect relationships, Surra (1987) recognized two distinct processes that drove changes in commitment within romantic relationships:

relationship-driven and event-driven. These two types of commitment processes appear to have different effects on the quality of a relationship (Surra & Hughes, 1997; Stanley et al. 2006; Surra, 1987; Peplau, Rubin & Hill, 1977). Relationship-driven commitment changes are based on time spent together and the changes in how each partner feels about the other. Because testing compatibility takes time and reflection, couples in relationship-driven commitments develop more slowly and have more satisfying and stable relationships than those in event-driven commitments. Trust and interdependence are built up over time in a way that cannot be instantly created by external events (Surra & Hughes, 1997; Stanley et al., 2006). Moves to higher levels of commitment for these couples are made through a more deliberative process and allow individuals to let the relationship “unfold” (Sassler, 2004). Couples whose commitment to each other is relationship-driven report less conflict, more satisfaction, and are more compatible compared to couples whose commitment is driven by events (Surra & Hughes, 1997). Couples who waited longer to initiate sexual intercourse reported higher levels of love, closeness, and knowledge of their partner (Peplau et al., 1977). Taking more time before moving to sexual intimacy allowed couples to establish their emotional bonds more so than couples who moved more rapidly.

Event-driven commitment changes occur because of events external to the couple. This includes events such as academic graduation, leaving a job, leaving a living space, losing a previous roommate, or becoming pregnant (Guzzo, 2006; Surra & Hughes, 1997; Stanley et al., 2006; Sassler, 2004; Sassler, Miller, and Favinger, forthcoming). These events are tangential to the romantic relationship and do not directly involve one’s partner (Surra 1987). As these events are often unpredictable and happen suddenly, event-driven commitment is less stable and less predictable than relationship-driven commitment. Many cohabiters, for example, “slide” into

cohabitation for event-driven reasons (Guzzo, 2006; Sassler, 2004), as opposed to making a determined decision to do so. Decisions such couples make to move in together are not necessarily linked to the desirability of the relationship and the implications are not fully considered (Surra & Hughes 1997, Stanley et al. 2006).

For example, Stanley, Rhoades and Markman (2006) describe the scenario of a couple who spends more and more time together until one essentially lives at the other's place of residence. From here, the couple moves in together but without ever having discussed the decision or its possible implications, due to relationship inertia. This situation is very similar to others that occur in event-driven relationships. For example, if a woman's lease running out is the reason that she moves in with her partner, the event-driven couple is in a similar situation to the "sliding" couple (Stanley et al, 2006; Surra & Hughes 1997). In a paper that explores how cohabiters decide to move in with partners, based on in-depth interviews with 25 young adults, Sassler (2004) found that individuals mentioned more event-driven reasons for cohabitation than relationship-driven ones. Finances and convenience were the two most common responses for why an individual decided to move in with a partner (see also Stanley et al., 2006). Although there are no nationally representative studies of how rapidly cohabiters move in with partners, or how it varies by social class, finances probably have an even greater influence on low-income populations' relationship progression to cohabitation because money is more likely to be tight, so sharing a lease is even more beneficial. This may lead to still faster transition to higher commitment, including cohabitation, than seen in previous studies of representative samples.

Event-driven relationships can also lead to premature entanglement that traps couples into relationships that may not be satisfactory. This happens when a relationship becomes difficult to end; individuals therefore remain in unsatisfactory relationships (Glenn, 2003;

Stanley et al., 2006). The speed and vagueness concerning commitment in many of these event-driven relationships can lead to unions that are not only less satisfying, but that are harder to exit because of new constraints such as a shared lease. Rapid and ambiguous relationship progression from relationship formation to cohabitation can lead to less satisfactory marriages that are more likely to end in divorce because compatibility was not tested well enough before the relationship reached a point of “no return” (Stanley et. al 2006; Glenn, 2003).

Although cohabitation is not the only “step” in a relationship that can be rushed, and not all relationships go through a stage of cohabitation, it has become a normative stage within relationship progression. While much research has assessed the selective nature of cohabitation and found that it is disproportionately practiced by individuals with particular attributes (Sassler & McNally, 2003; Blackwell & Lichter, 2000; Manning, 1993), and that movement to cohabitation is particularly likely to be event-driven (Guzzo, 2006; Sassler, 2004), it is also true that young adults increasingly recognize cohabitation as a prerequisite to marriage (Manning, Longmore, & Giaordano 2007). In fact, the majority of all marriages today are preceded by cohabitation (Waite, Bachrach, Hindlin & Thompson, 2000; Teachman, 2003). While all types of relationships can be looked at through the lens of event- or relationship-driven commitment, this research focuses on first sex within a relationship and cohabitation because premarital sexual involvement and cohabitation are now widely accepted and practiced (Finer, 2007; Schoen, Landale, & Daniels, 2007).

While most research on event-driven versus relationship-driven commitment has focused on cohabitation, it is applicable to all types of relationships. A couple who does not view cohabitation prior to marriage as acceptable may be rushed into engagement and marriage by an external event, just as another couple may have hurried into cohabitation. The same can be said

of steps within dating, such as the decision to have sex for the first time or to be exclusive. Data for this paper include information on individuals who are cohabiting, who are now married but cohabited prior to marriage, and who married without previously living together.

#### *Other Factors Shaping Relationship Progression*

There are other factors that contribute to relationship patterns and progression tempo. Childhood family structure has been shown in many studies to affect the timing of sexual debut and cohabitation and marriage patterns. Recent research has found that living in a family structure without two biological parents or being born to a young mother can lead to earlier sexual initiation (Cooksey et al. 2002, Pearson et al.2006). Children who grew up in intact families had the slowest entrance into sexual relationships (Sassler & Dush, 2007). Children who experienced a parental divorce tend to marry at younger ages and cohabit more frequently than those who grew up with two biological parents (Jaquet and Surra, 2001; Sassler and Goldscheider, 2004).

Experiencing parental union transitions may mediate the relationship between divorce and relationship patterns (Sassler, Cunningham, & Lichter, 2007). Some research suggests that effects of family structure, for example on sexual initiation, are simply capturing the effects of parental involvement. This work holds that children growing up in disrupted families experience less adult supervision; unfortunately, rather than measuring levels of parental supervision, most studies have utilized measures of family structure. Recent research indicates that family structure is independently related to sexual debut and is not mediated by parental involvement (Pearson et. al, 2006). I therefore expect that family structure in and of itself will be important for sexual initiation, and hypothesize that respondents who grew up in non-intact families will progress more rapidly in their relationships than those whose childhood was spent in an intact

married-parent family.

The socioeconomic class in which an individual grew up also affects future relationship patterns. Social class is associated with sexual debut and relationship pattern (Manlove, Ryan, & Franzetta, 2007; Pearson, Muller, & Frisco, 2006; Upchurch et al., 1999, 2001). Parental divorce has been linked to growing up in a lower socioeconomic status (Amato, 2000). In addition to family structure during childhood, I utilize other measures as proxies for social class. For example, lower maternal education and young maternal age at childbirth are associated with coming from lower socioeconomic classes (Pearson et al., 2006; Cooksey et al. 2002). Younger mothers are more likely to have dropped out of high school, to have had lower family incomes, and to be a minority (Cooksey et al., 2002). Adults whose mothers are highly educated delayed forming sexual relationships longer than others with less educated mothers (Sassler & Dush, 2007). Women whose mothers did not complete high school are less likely to marry or separate from their cohabiting partners (Lichter, Qian & Mellott, 2006). I therefore expect more expedited relationship progression among respondents who grew up in families of lower socioeconomic status.

Race also affects relationship patterns. Black, white and Latina women differ in their patterns of sexual debut, cohabitation, and marriage (Lichter, Qian, & Mellot, 2006; Albrecht & Teachman, 2003; Sassler & Dush, 2007; Pearson et al., 2006). Black women tend to be younger at sexual debut than white women (Albrecht & Teachman, 2003) and to progress more rapidly to sexual involvement than white youth (Sassler & Dush, 2007). Furthermore, minority women are also less likely to marry than their white counterparts (Lichter et al., 2006). Both poor and nonpoor black women are less likely to transition from cohabitation to marriage than are White women (Lichter et al. 2006; Sassler & McNally, 2003).

Respondents' relationship and sexual histories also factor in when looking at relationship tempo. Prior sexual experience is associated with moving more rapidly to sex in future relationships (Sassler & Dush, 2007). Having had previous cohabiting or marital relationships also affects the future union patterns of individuals (Wu & Schimille, 2005; Lichter et al., 2006). Wu and Schimille (2005) found that the formation of second unions is more rapid among people who previously cohabited as opposed to those who were previously married. Men were more likely than women to form second unions (Goldscheider and Sassler, 2006) so, on average, I expect to see men moving more rapidly to subsequent unions. Lichter, Qian, and Mellot (2006) found that poor women who had been previously married and divorced have higher disruption rates in subsequent unions. These findings lead us to hypothesize that having had more previous cohabiting or marital relationships will be associated with faster relationship tempo.

### **The Current Study**

I take advantage of newly collected internet survey data to advance the research on marital quality in several ways. First, I focus on the factors associated with the tempo of relationship progression among a sample of low-to-moderate income couples. Second, information on relationship progression is collected independently for each partner – providing a snapshot of his and her marriages and cohabitations. This enables me to explore factors accounting for couple-level disagreement, and may shed additional light on why men and women often have very different assessments of their relationships and their future together (Sassler and McNally, 2003; Waller and McLanahan, 2005). Third, I explore how the location and context of where individuals met shape relationship progression.

### **Data & Methods**

Data used for this study come from the *Marital and Relationship Survey* (MARS), a web-

based survey that was administered by *Knowledge Networks* (KN) to a nationally representative sample compiled using listed and unlisted telephone numbers. The MARS sample was administered to 700 low-income married or cohabiting couples during March and April of 2006. The sample was restricted to couples with minor children present in the home, with household incomes of \$50,000 or less, where the female partner woman was less than 45 years old (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009).

The survey was implemented by *Knowledge Networks* with probability samples of persons who are members of a web-enabled panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population, and which covers both the online and offline population in the United States. The population is identified from telephone surveys of listed and unlisted telephone numbers. Unlike other internet or web-based surveys that recruit current web-users who are willing to participate in on-line surveys, KN provides on-going household panelists with an Internet appliance, Internet access, Web TV, and a cash payment in return for completing the survey. Panelists then receive unique log-in information for accessing surveys online, and are sent emails three to four times a month inviting them to participate in research (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). Because Internet accessibility was provided for the respondents, the use of an Internet survey did not exclude members of disadvantaged backgrounds, who are the least likely to own a computer or have access to the internet (Fairlie, 2004). The MARS response rate was 80.3% and item non-response was low (less than 4%). Panelists are rotated in and out of the survey to assure up-to-date nationally representative samples.

Another unique aspect of this survey is that both partners from each cohabiting or married couple were surveyed. Each respondent has a private account so one's answers remain confidential. This allowed for the examination of discrepancies in the reporting of key dates and

other facts of the relationship and for more accurate knowledge of each member of the couple.

In surveys where only one partner in a couple responds, the information about the partner that is not present may not be as accurate as if the partner, himself, had responded.

### **Analytic Approach**

I use OLS regression to explore the relationship between progression tempo and other individual partner characteristics. I first fit individual-level models that predict the impact of several personal attributes of each partner on relationship progression tempo. Variables are entered sequentially, to better assess the extent to which blocks of variables contribute to relationship progression.

It is necessary to note here that the use of OLS regression assumes that all data points are independent from one another. Because the data used in this study includes responses from couples, each individual is not independent. This will skew the standard error and R-squared values in the analysis but does not mean that the results are invalid. In future analyses, this problem could be avoided by using only one partner in each couple or by separately running models for men and women.

### **Measuring Relationship Tempo**

Two measures are used to study different facets of relationship progression. The first involves the amount of time from the beginning of the relationship to first sexual involvement with the current partner. Respondents were asked: “How long did you and your [spouse/ partner] date prior to having sex for the first time?” They were given six options to choose from: less than a week; more than a week but less than a month; 1 or 2 months; 3 to 6 months; more than 6 months but less than one year; and one year or more. For respondents who did not answer this question but indicated that they are married and waited until marriage to have sex, the missing

value is replaced with the category that corresponded to the time from the start of the relationship to marriage. Respondents who did not have responses for duration to first sex were re-coded to the mean duration to first sex for their particular current union status.

The second measure of relationship tempo involves the amount of time from the beginning of the relationship to when respondents moved in with their partner. This measure was constructed differently for those who are currently cohabiting and those who cohabited before marriage and those who married without first living with their partner. Respondents who are currently cohabiting or cohabited prior to marriage were asked: “When did you and your current partner start dating” and “When did you and your current partner start living together?” The answers were given in terms of month and year. These dates were used to calculate the number of months from when a respondent began dating the current partner to when he/she moved in with the current partner. Respondents who indicated that they did not live with the current partner before marriage were never directly asked when they moved in with their current partners. For this group, I assumed that coresidence began at marriage. These respondents were asked: “When did your marriage begin?” and “When did you and your spouse start dating?” Again, both answers were recorded in month and year. These dates were used to calculate the number of months that elapsed from when a respondent began dating his/ her current spouse and when the respondent presumably moved in with the spouse. Any respondents who did not have responses for duration to coresidence were re-coded to the mean duration to coresidence for their particular current union status.

### **Measuring Independent Variables**

The independent variables used in this study are family structure, childhood socioeconomic status, and current relationship context. Family structure is broken into three

categories: parents were married at respondent's childbirth and stayed married, parents were married at respondent's childbirth, and parents were not married at respondent's childbirth.

While there are no direct measures of childhood socioeconomic status in the data, there are variables that can be used as proxies. I use maternal educational achievement and maternal age at the respondent's birth to get at childhood socioeconomic status. As discussed earlier, children whose mothers gave birth to them when young and those whose mothers have low levels of educational attainment tend to grow up in less economically advantaged families. For each of these variables, the respondent is coded a 1 if his/ her mother's age/ education falls in the lowest quartile of the distribution for that variable.

Each respondent was asked both: "How many times have you been married" and "How many times have you EVER lived in a nonmarital cohabiting relationship?" Answers from 0 to 99 were allowed for each question. To create a dummy variable for whether each respondent had had at least one previous coresidential or marital union, I consulted the respondents' answers to the two questions above and used their current union status. Respondents received a 1 for this variable if they were (a) currently cohabiting and indicated they had had more than one cohabiting relationship or one or more marriages, (b) currently married with a period of cohabitation prior to marriage with their current spouse and indicated having been married more than once or having cohabited more than once, or (c) currently married without a period of cohabitation with the current spouse and indicated being married more than once or having cohabited at least once.

To measure age at the start of the relationship, I took the date at which the relationship began and subtracted the respondent's birthday from it to get the number of days that had elapsed from the respondent's birth to the beginning of the current relationship. I divided that number by

366 and rounded to the nearest year to create an approximation of how many years old the respondent was at the time of the relationship start. From there I created a dummy variable for being young at the start of the current relationship for those respondents in the youngest quarter.

While there was no direct question about whether a respondent had any children prior to the current relationship, I used the children's birthdays and the relationship start date to create a dummy variable for respondents who had children from previous relationships.

### **Other Controls**

I also include controls for the race/ ethnicity of the respondent, age at the start of the relationship and where the respondent met his/her partner. Race/ethnicity and where the respondent met his/her partner will both be measured categorically. A dummy variable for age at the start of the relationship was created with respondents in the lowest quartile receiving a 1.

Descriptive results are presented in Table 1. Just about one-third of the sample was born to mothers who were age 21 or younger, and about one-quarter had mothers who had less than a high school diploma. Furthermore, 11% were born to unmarried mothers or to mothers who had been married but were no longer married at the respondent's birth, and another 30% of the respondents experienced their parents' divorce during their childhood. Racial minorities are somewhat underrepresented in the sample, as Whites accounted for 84% of respondents.

[Table 1 about Here]

### **Descriptive Results**

I first present descriptive results from the entire sample before disaggregating by union type (Table 2). Over one-third of the sample (34.5%) had become sexually involved with their current partner within the first month of dating, while only about a quarter deferred sexual involvement for six months or longer. As for duration to shared living, the results are consistent

with Sassler's (2004) study of cohabiters, as about three-fourths of this low-income sample had begun living with their partner within six months of the start of their relationship. Although the absence of nationally representative data on relationship progression does not allow us to determine whether this rate is faster (or slower) than usual, it does appear that respondents in our low-income sample entered into their relationships quite rapidly.

[Table 2 about Here]

However, not all union statuses exhibited the same patterns of progression, highlighting the diversity within this low-income sample. For example, about one quarter of those who were cohabiting with their partner at the time of the interview or who cohabited prior to marrying their partners reported engaging in sexual relations within the first week of the start of their relationship (see Figure 1), and another quarter mentioned waiting for less than a month; in contrast, less than 15 percent of those who married without first cohabiting reported that their relationship progressed to sexual involvement within the first month. On the other side of the spectrum, nearly one-third of the respondents who married directly reported deferring sexual involvement for at least a year or more, something which fewer than 4 percent of those who ever cohabited with their respondent reported.

[Figure 1 about Here]

The amount of time respondents reported being romantically involved prior to entering into shared living also differs dramatically across union type (Figure 2). Over 70 percent of respondents who married without first cohabiting reported that they were involved for over a year before forming a shared residence, compared with less than one-quarter of those who cohabited prior to marriage or were currently cohabiting. Current cohabiters also were more likely to have formed their shared living arrangements more expeditiously than their counterparts

who lived with their partner prior to marriage; whereas a quarter of current cohabiters entered into shared living within two months of beginning their relationships, about a fifth of those who cohabited prior to marriage experienced such a rapid progression.

[Figure 2 about Here]

One possible factor that might account for these differential rates of relationship progression is where respondents met (Figure 3). Regardless of union status, the largest proportion of respondents reported meeting their current romantic partner through friends or family, though these shares were greatest for those who had ever cohabited. Married respondents, however, were far more likely to report meeting their partner either at their place of worship or in school than were those who had ever cohabited. Whereas nearly 16 percent of respondents who married directly reported meeting at their place of worship, only minimal numbers of cohabiters indicated they met their partner at a religious venue. Respondents who married without cohabiting first may also have been younger when they first met, as they were more likely to have met their partner at school; parental disapproval of cohabitation may have expedited their marriage, or decreased their likelihood of entering non-marital coresidential unions. Finally, current cohabiters were most likely to report having met their current partner in a public place, while those who were currently cohabiting or had lived with their partner prior to marriage also are far more likely to report meeting at work.

[Figure 3 about Here]

While descriptive patterns suggest that those who marry directly differ in important ways from low-income respondents who enter cohabiting unions, differences in age, family structure as a child, or other factors might account for these variations. To account for these differences, I now turn to our multivariate results.

## Multivariate Results

I present three models for each of the dependent variables in Tables 3 and 4. Model A includes measures for family background, including mother's age at respondent's birth and childhood family structure and certain ascribed characteristics (race and gender). Model B adds information about the context of the current relationship, such as age at the start of the relationship and where respondents met their current partner. Model C adds previous relationship experience, including two dummy variables, one indicating whether the respondent had any children from previous unions at the start of the current relationship and the second about previous coresidential unions, and the current union status of the respondent.

### *Duration to First Sex*

Results of the examination of factors associated with the tempo of progression into first sexual involvement with current partners are presented in Table 3. Many aspects of family background were found to be significant in Model A. While only explaining a relatively small portion of the variance (.035), family background characteristics operated largely as hypothesized. As expected, respondents whose mother was younger at their birth moved more rapidly into a sexual relationship with the partner.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, respondents with less educated mothers also entered into sexual relationships more rapidly than did those whose mothers had a high school degree or some post-secondary schooling but not a college degree (contrast not shown). Respondents whose mothers had at least some post-secondary education delayed the transition to sexual involvement compared to those whose mother had less than a high school

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<sup>1</sup> I originally had a "Don't Know" category which included 251 respondents, but the coefficient for it was small and never came close to being statistically significant, so I grouped those respondents into the "no" category.

diploma<sup>2</sup>. The last indicator of family social class characteristics, childhood family structure, was also salient, but only among those whose parents were married at their birth but who subsequently divorced, who became sexually involved significantly more rapidly compared to respondents whose parents remained married to each other. In line with expectations that race would be a salient variable, Hispanic respondents entered into their sexual relationships at a significantly slower pace than did non-Hispanic Whites.

[Table 3 about Here]

In Model B, variables related to the current relationship context and previous relationship experience were added. This had a sizable impact on the model fit, bringing the adjusted R-squared value to .172. The addition of these variables also caused the significance of many of the family background and ascribed characteristic variables to drop below the .10 level. Having a young mother remained salient and again, as expected, was associated with moving more rapidly into a sexual relationship. Respondents whose mothers had less than a high school diploma still moved significantly more rapidly to sex as compared to respondents with mothers who have a high school diploma. However, compared to respondents whose mothers had some college experience, only those whose mothers did not have a high school diploma differed significantly. The coefficient for respondents whose mothers had at least some post-secondary education was no longer significant, though still positive. Childhood family structure remained salient again only for respondents whose parents were married at their birth and later divorced. These respondents moved significantly more rapidly to sex than did respondents whose parents were married at their birth and remained married. Race and gender were not found to be at all

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<sup>2</sup> I originally ran the regressions with the categories of “Some high school, no diploma” and “Don’t Know” separately, but I grouped them together because their coefficients were small and in the same direction. There were 74 respondents who answered “Don’t Know” for the question about maternal education.

significant once current and previous relationship factors were added into the model.

As expected, being young at the start of the current relationship<sup>3</sup> was associated with moving more slowly into sexual intimacy with current partner. Place of meeting also had significant effects on the duration to sex. Respondents who met their partners through friends and family moved significantly more rapidly into sexual relationships than did those who reported meeting at a place of worship, while walking, shopping or in other public place<sup>4</sup>, or at school. The duration to sexual involvement was particularly long for those who met either at school or at a place of worship, each of which had very large coefficients (1.133 and 1.880 respectively). Respondents who reported meeting their partner at a club or bar moved the most rapidly into their sexual relationships, forming them significantly sooner than those who met through friends and family, as well as at school, at a place of worship, or through dating services (online and personal ads) or singles group and special interest groups (contrast not shown). Respondents who reported meeting their current partners at work also became sexually involved significantly more rapidly than those who met their partners at worship, at school or through dating services (online and personal ads) or singles group and special interest groups (contrast not shown).

Variables related to previous relationship experience and current union status were added in Model C. With the addition of these variables, nearly one-third of the variance was explained by the model, with an adjusted R-squared value of .324. In adding these variables to the model all measures of family background and ascribed characteristics lost significance. The impact of

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<sup>3</sup> 5 respondents whose Age at Start of Relationship came out to numbers between -58 and 9 were recoded to the mean age because it was assumed these respondents had misentered the information either about their birthdays or the start date of their relationships

<sup>4</sup> In preliminary regressions, the categories of “walking, shopping or other public place” and “other/ don’t know” had similar coefficients so for the sake of parsimony I combined them.

relationship context declined in size and statistical significance for many of the measures, such as age at the start of the relationship and various locations where couples met. Being young at the start of the relationship and having met at a club or bar both dropped out of significance. Nonetheless, place of meeting remained salient, with those who reported meeting their current partner at a place of worship, at school, or through dating services (online and personal ads) or singles group and special interest groups still moving significantly more slowly into sexual relationships than those who met their partners through family and friends. Respondents who met their partners at a club or bar or at work also continued to move significantly more rapidly to sexual relationships than their counterparts who had met their partners at worship, at school or through dating services and special groups (contrast not shown). Also, respondents who met their current partner at school were again found to move significantly more slowly to sex than respondents who met their current partners at a club or bar, at work, through friends and family, or while walking, shopping, or in another public place (contrast not shown).

Previous relationship experience and current union status were salient for duration to sex in all measures used in Model C. Both having a child from a previous relationship<sup>5</sup> and having had a previous coresidential union<sup>6</sup> were significantly related to moving more quickly into sexual relationships at the .05 and .01 level respectively. Also, in comparison to respondents who married without cohabiting with their spouse, those who are currently cohabiting or cohabited prior to marriage moved at a faster pace into sexual relationships, both significant at the .01

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<sup>5</sup> This variable originally included a “No Response” category that included 70 respondents, but the coefficient was small and never came close to being statistically significant so I grouped those respondents with those did not have a child from a previous relationship.

<sup>6</sup> I originally ran the regressions with three dummy variables for having had one, two, or three or more previous cohabiting or marital unions. Because the outcomes did not differ statistically when entered separately, I re-categorized the variable to indicate respondents who had no previous cohabiting or marital unions and those who had had at least one.

level.

### *Duration to Coresidence*<sup>7</sup>

Results of the examination of factors associated with the tempo of progression into coresidence with current partners are presented in Table 4. In Model A, certain characteristics of family background were found to be significant. They operated mainly as hypothesized but explained only a small proportion of the variance (.035). Respondents whose mothers had less than a high school diploma moved to coresidence about three months sooner than respondents whose mothers finished high school, while those whose mothers had some college entered shared living about three months later, on average, than their counterparts who were high school graduates. Of note is that respondents whose mothers had some college moved significantly more slowly to coresidence than those whose mother had no high school diploma, a high school diploma, or a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Family structure was also salient in determining duration to shared living. Compared to respondents whose parents were married at their birth and stayed married, those whose parents were not married at the time of their birth and those whose parents were married at their birth but subsequently divorced moved significantly more rapidly to shared living, by about three and four months respectively. This is represented graphically in Figure 4, showing the direct impact of family structure on duration to coresidence. I separated the graph to illustrate males and females differently in order to highlight that women move significantly more quickly than men. Neither race nor gender was significant in Model A.

[Table 4 about Here]

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<sup>7</sup> Due to a number of extreme outliers on the higher end, I top coded the data so that anyone who indicated that they waited more than 48 months before cohabiting was coded as 48 months. This adjusted data was used in the analysis, but not for the calculation of the mean and standard deviation.

Model B adds current relationship context to the equation. These variables had a large effect on the model fit, bringing the adjusted R-squared value to .185. Family background characteristics remained salient in the same ways they were in Model A. Including these controls did diminish the coefficients for having a mother with less than a high school education, having a mother with some college experience but less than a Bachelor's degree and having parents who were married at the respondent's birth but subsequently divorced, but all remained statistically significant. The coefficient for respondents whose parents were not married at the time of their birth increased. With the addition of current relationship context, race and gender attained statistical significance. Female respondents moved to coresidence about three months sooner than their male counterparts, while black respondents moved to coresidence about three months later than non-Hispanic white respondents. Current relationship context variables were also found to be significant in Model B. Being young at the start of the current relationship had a significant slowing effect on duration to coresidence, delaying entrance into shared living by about eight months. The place where the respondents met their current partners was also salient. As compared to respondents who reported meeting their partners through friends and family, those who met at work, at a place of worship, at school, or through dating services or special groups moved more slowly into coresidence. Those who met at school were the most delayed, moving into shared living almost 11 months later than respondents who met their partners through friends and family. Illustrated in Figure 5 is the impact, in months, of place of meeting on duration to coresidence for the places of meeting that differed significantly from those who met through friends and family.

The tempo of progression into shared living was also significantly more tempered among respondents who indicated meeting their current partner at work than for those who met through

family or friends, at a club or bar, or while walking, shopping, or in another public place (contrast not shown). Respondents who met their current partner at school moved significantly more slowly to shared living than all other respondents, particularly those who met at a club or bar where the difference was over 13 months (contrast not shown). Respondents who reported meeting their partner at a club or bar moved significantly more rapidly than all other respondents, except for those that met their partner through friends or family (contrast not shown).

Model C includes measures for previous relationship experience and current union status. The addition of these variables brought the adjusted R-squared value up to .272. The impact of family background and ascribed characteristics remained significant, as did the influence of family structure, gender, and race. Current relationship context remained largely consistent with patterns demonstrated in Model B once controls were included for previous relationship experience and current union status, though the magnitude of some of the coefficients changed sizably. The coefficients for being young at the start of the current relationship and for having met at school both dropped sizably though remained statistically significant. What this suggests is that larger factors driving the tempo of relationship progression are selection into particular types of unions (cohabitation, marrying directly, etc) and significant previous relationship experiences.

Place of meeting operated largely in the same way as it did in Model B and remained significant in most categories, although the coefficient for having met one's partner at a place of worship dropped from nearly six months to almost zero and lost statistical significance. Having met a partner at school seems to be the place of meeting most distinct from the others. Respondents who met at school moved significantly more slowly to coresidence than all other

respondents (contrast not shown). While in Model B respondents who met their partners at a club or bar moved significantly more quickly into shared living than all other respondents except those who met through friends or family in Model C, respondents who met their partners at a place of worship were also not significantly different from those who met at a club or bar (contrast not shown). This finding is interesting because of any two categories, I would have expected these two to be the most distinct from one another.

Previous relationship characteristics and current union status proved to have a significant impact on duration to shared living as well. Respondents who have had a previous coresidential union moved to shared living more slowly than did those who did not, and this two month difference was significant at the .10 level. Not surprisingly, respondents who are currently cohabiting or cohabited prior to current marriage moved significantly more rapidly to coresidence, by about ten months, than did those respondents who wed without cohabiting with their future spouse. This considerable difference is depicted graphically in Figure 6, showing the impact of current union type on duration to cohabitation in terms of months.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

This study has examined what individual-level factors affect the tempo of progression into sexual and coresidential relationships specifically for low-income couples. I investigated the relationship between duration to first sex and to coresidence and individual characteristics within the broad categories of family background and ascribed characteristics, current relationship context, previous relationship experience, and current union status. The results were presented in blocks as to better illustrate how the effects of some variables (like family background) were eventually captured by the addition of other variables (like previous relationship experience and current union status).

Most previous research on the timing of relationship progression has focused on its association with relationship quality. This study attempts to fill a research gap by focusing not on the consequences of the tempo of relationship progression but on the factors that may affect the tempo. A variable of particular interest is where respondents met their partners because this had not yet been examined in relation to relationship tempo and proved to be highly significant in my study.

My results indicate previous relationship experience, place of meeting, and current union status are all highly significant factors in relationship progression, both in duration to sex and coresidence. For duration to sex, the above mentioned factors outweighed all family background and ascribed characteristics showing that one's previous and current relationship experiences are much more salient for timing to first sex with a partner than childhood socioeconomic status or race and gender. However, for duration to coresidence, family and ascribed characteristics did have an effect on progression, though somewhat smaller than current relationship context, previous relationship experience, and current union type. Mother's educational attainment, childhood family structure, race, and gender all had significant effects on duration to coresidence but not duration to first sex. This highlights the fact that the progression to entrance into a sexual relationship and entrance into a coresidential relationship are distinct to some degree.

For both duration to first sex and duration to coresidence, place of meeting was salient. This is something that has never been studied before and opens the door to much more in depth research. My study shows that where respondents meet their partners has a big impact on their relationship tempo. Those who met at school, at work, or at worship tended to move more slowly than respondents who met their partners at other places. Individuals who met their partners at a club or bar moved more rapidly.

It seems that the context of one's childhood is outweighed by later experience. To some extent, the choices people have made in previous relationships and the current one (i.e. type of current union, where met partner) preselect them for a faster or slower moving relationship. Where people meet their partners is highly salient and suggests that where people look to meet partners has a lot to do with the tempo at which a future relationship with that partner will progress. These findings are important because they shed light on some of the factors that drive relationship tempo. Because the tempo of relationship progression has been found to affect relationship quality, identifying factors that mediate that tempo opens the door to a better understanding of how satisfactory relationships are formed.

My findings indicate that low-income couples tend to move quite quickly to sex and coresidence. While the women in the sample are all 45 years old or younger and represent a somewhat older cohort, many of them met their current partners years ago so it is safe to say that this sample is not representative of low-income couples that are forming today. Many of the factors that are associated with rapid transition to sex and coresidence, like coming from a disrupted family or the experience of cohabitation, are increasingly common. As divorce and cohabitation become more normative in our society, it appears that this will lead to even faster relationship tempo for low-income couples.

In terms of policy, these findings can help to inform the plethora of books, classes, and seminars that focus on building healthy and stable relationships and families. As other research has shown that progressing rapidly to sex and coresidence has implications for relationship quality, the new information from this study helps to explain what characteristics account for some of the variation in tempo. There is \$150 million per year allotted for the Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy Marriage Initiative but perhaps this money is being

misdirected. As cohabitation becomes more normative, perhaps the focus should not be narrowed to healthy marriages, but healthy relationships in general.

As expeditious relationship tempo has recently been found to negatively affect relationship quality, focusing on factors we know affect relationship tempo is important. Place of meeting was one of the most salient variables in predicting relationship tempo. Respondents who met their partners at school or at work moved significantly more slowly to both sex and coresidence. Efforts to increase access to post-secondary education and work attachment for low-income populations could perhaps have the spillover effect of slowing down relationship tempo and increasing the stability and satisfaction of these relationships.

Family background and ascribed characteristics were found to be significant in predicting duration to coresidence. The results indicate that certain groups of people are more likely to move expeditiously into coresidence. This information could inform policy to the extent that it helps to target those people who are most likely to move rapidly in their relationships. For example, I found that respondents who grew up in non-intact families move more rapidly to coresidence than respondents who grew up with both biological parents. This identifies youth who grew up in non-intact families as a group that might benefit most from information on healthy relationships and the advantages of getting to know one's partner before moving ahead in a relationship

This study does have a few weaknesses that future research could work to overcome. The sample used only includes couples with a combined income of less than \$50,000. It would be useful to assess if having a sample more representative of the United States as a whole would lead to similar conclusions or not. Also, I do not account for any period or cohort effects in my analysis. While there is a variable that captures age at the start of the relationship, this is not

sufficient to capture period effects. There are respondents ranging in age from 18 to 88 in this sample and many of them started their relationships decades ago. This weakness could be resolved in future analyses by controlling for period by including a variable indicating when the current relationship started.

The results from this study also only cover relationships that have survived. As I have noted before, moving rapidly to sex and coresidence is negatively associated with relationship quality. This suggests that the couples who moved most rapidly to sex and coresidence are more likely to break up than those who moved more slowly and, thus, perhaps the most rapidly moving relationships are not captured in this data. I would guess that if relationships that had ended were also studied, relationship tempo would be found to be even more rapid than what we have seen here.

On the other hand, it may be true that the couples who moved most rapidly are those that felt an instant connection and had a deep passion in their relationships. Moving slowly could be a signal of ambivalence towards the relationship or a lack of confidence about compatibility. If this is the case, then including relationships that already ended could yield results that showed slower relationship tempo because those relationships may have been more slow moving due to a lack of interest. Because I do not examine relationship quality in this analysis, I cannot make a conclusion as to which scenario fits the data. This weakness could be overcome in future studies by looking at a sample of couples whose relationships all started around the same time and following them over time.

Though not a weakness, it is worth mentioning that many factors associated with rapid relationship transitions are on the rise among all populations, not just low-income groups. Divorce, out-of-wedlock births, and cohabitation are all more prevalent today than they were

during the early and middle years of the respondents' lives. This means that as this generation matures to adulthood, there will be a higher percentage of people who grew up in non-intact families and who have cohabited with a partner. In the future, I would expect to see a higher percentage of individuals moving rapidly to sex and coresidence.

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**Table 1. Distribution of variables (Percent, or Mean/Standard Deviation) used in Analysis**

	<b>Percent/ Mean</b>			
	Total Sample	Currently Cohabiting	Cohab. Prior to Marriage	Married Directly
<b>Mother's Age at Respondent's Birth</b>				
Mean	25.25	24.260	24.630	26.11
<i>Std. Dev.</i>	6.14	6.27	6.18	5.99
<b>Young (LE 21)</b>	33.00%	37.85%	40.28%	23.83%
<b>Mother's Educational Attainment (when respondent was 18)</b>				
Some high school, no diploma/ Don't Know	0.28	0.279	0.351	0.191
High school diploma/ GED	0.451	0.414	0.450	0.461
Some college/university or Associate Degree	0.195	0.260	0.139	0.249
Bachelor's degree or higher	0.074	0.048	0.060	0.098
<b>Childhood Family Structure</b>				
Married at birth, intact	0.595	0.471	0.514	0.728
Married at birth, later divorced	0.295	0.317	0.366	0.202
Not married at birth	0.11	0.212	0.121	0.071
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	0.481	0.462	0.482	0.486
Female	0.519	0.539	0.518	0.514
<b>Race</b>				
White, NH	0.84	0.702	0.859	0.851
Black, NH	0.053	0.135	0.046	0.040
2+ races, NH or Other, NH	0.04	0.038	0.036	0.0453
Hispanic	0.067	0.125	0.058	0.063
<b>Age at Start of Relationship</b>				
Mean	24.01	27.57	24.62	22.71
<i>Std. Dev.</i>	7.4	8.38	6.94	5.69
<b>Young (LE 19)</b>	27.13%	13.46%	25.70%	32.48%
<b>Place of Meeting</b>				
At work or work-related function	0.171	0.202	0.187	0.144
At school	0.134	0.010	0.096	0.214
Family or friends	0.336	0.346	0.384	0.272
Place of worship	0.067	0.000	0.004	0.164
Club or bar	0.072	0.106	0.094	0.035
Online dating or internet chat room/ Personal ad/ Singles group/ Special interest group	0.076	0.048	0.086	0.071
Walking, shopping or other public places/ Other/ Don't Know	0.144	0.288	0.149	0.101
<b>Child from Previous Relationship</b>				
No	0.86	0.769	0.809	0.947
Yes	0.14	0.231	0.191	0.053
<b>Previous Coresidential Relationship</b>				
No	0.4194	0.317	0.123	0.819
Yes	0.5806	0.683	0.878	0.181
<b>N</b>	<b>999</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>397</b>

**Table 2. Distribution of Relationship Tempo Measures (%)**

<b>Dependent Variables</b>	<b>Percent/ Mean</b>			
	Total Sample	Currently Cohabiting	Cohab. Prior to Marriage	Married Directly
<b>Duration to Sexual Involvement</b>				
Less than a week	0.176	0.221	0.279	0.035
More than a week but less than a month	0.169	0.260	0.211	0.093
1 to 2 months	0.191	0.240	0.223	0.139
3 to 6 months	0.199	0.183	0.167	0.244
More than 6 months but less than a year	0.118	0.058	0.086	0.174
1 year or more	0.146	0.039	0.034	0.315
<b>Duration to Coresidence</b>				
Less than 2 months	0.137	0.240	0.209	0.020
2 to 3 months	0.123	0.173	0.193	0.023
4 to 6 months	0.123	0.154	0.165	0.063
7 to 11 months	0.134	0.115	0.121	0.156
1 year, less than 2 years	0.190	0.154	0.157	0.242
more than 2 years, less than 4 years	0.220	0.154	0.100	0.388
4 years or more	0.072	0.010	0.056	0.108
<b>Mean (in months)</b>	17.29	11.63	12.20	25.17
<i>Std. Dev.</i>	20.4	18.5	18.7	20.4
<b>N</b>	<b>999</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>397</b>

**Table 3. OLS Regression on Duration from Relationship Start to First Sexual Involvement with Current Partner**

Independent Variables	Model A		Model B		Model C	
	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error
<b>Family Background and Ascribed Characteristics</b>						
Mother's Age at Respondent's Birth (older than 21)						
Young	-0.256	-2.050 **	-0.221	0.116 *	-0.118	0.105
Mother's Educational Attainment (High school diploma)						
Some high school, no diploma/ Don't Know	-0.301	0.126 **	-0.246	0.117 **	-0.064	0.106
Some college/university or Associate Degree	0.262	0.141 *	0.139	0.131	0.052	0.119
Bachelor's degree or higher	0.441	0.206 **	0.250	0.193	0.164	0.174
Childhood Family Structure (Married at birth, intact)						
Married at birth, later divorced	-0.446	0.118 ***	-0.343	0.110 ***	-0.063	0.101
Not married at birth	-0.197	0.181	-0.206	0.170	0.059	0.155
Sex						
Female	0.020	0.104	-0.017	0.099	0.068	0.092
Race (white, non-hispanic)						
Black, NH	-0.011	0.241	0.042	0.225	0.081	0.205
2+ races, NH or Other, NH	-0.340	0.265	-0.107	0.247	-0.346	0.224
Hispanic	0.414	0.209 **	0.298	0.195	0.290	0.177
<b>Current Relationship Context</b>						
Age at Start of Relationship (older than 19)						
Young			0.283	0.118 **	0.043	0.112
Place of Meeting (Family and friends)						
At work or work-related function			0.096	0.142	0.169	0.129
Place of worship			1.880	0.204 ***	1.075	0.194 ***
Club or bar			-0.341	0.198 *	-0.103	0.180
Online dating or internet chat room/ Personal ad/ Singles group/ Special interest group			0.660	0.193 ***	0.618	0.175 ***
Walking, shopping or other public places/ Other/ Don't Know			0.051	0.151	0.099	0.137
At School			1.133	0.162 ***	0.779	0.149 ***
<b>Previous Relationship Experience</b>						
Child from Previous Relationship						
Yes					-0.346	0.136 **
Previous Coresidential Union						
Yes					-0.623	0.122 ***
<b>Current Union Status</b>						
Current Union Status (Married directly)						
Currently cohabiting					-0.959	0.170 ***
Cohabited prior to marriage					-0.930	0.130 ***
Constant	3.546	0.102 ***	3.141	0.120 ***	4.047	0.125 ***
Adjusted R-squared	0.038		0.172		0.324	
N	999		999		999	

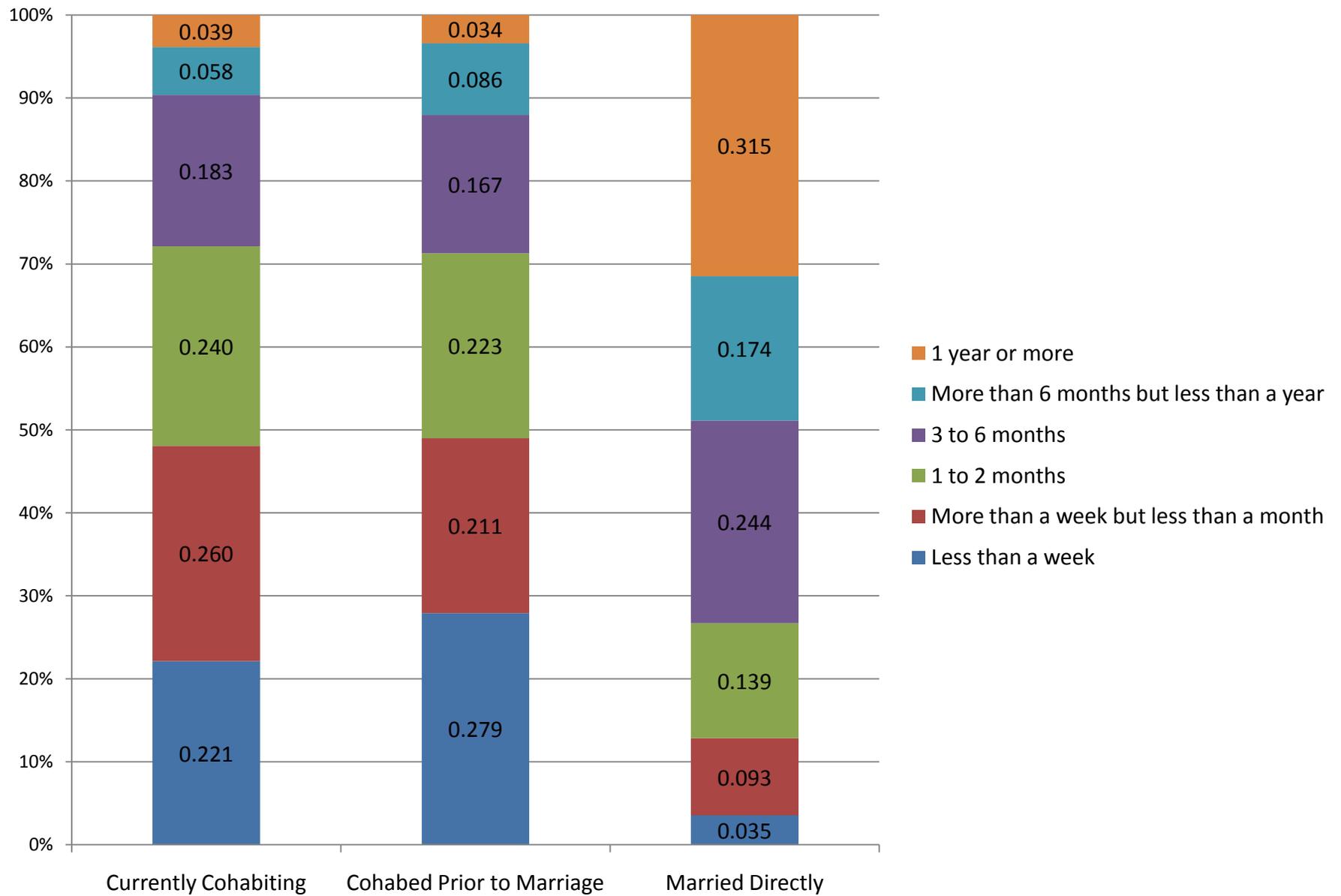
\*\*\* Significant at  $p \leq .01$ ; \*\* Significant at  $p \leq .05$ ; \* Significant at  $p \leq .10$ .

**Table 4. OLS Regression on Duration from Relationship Start to Coresidence**

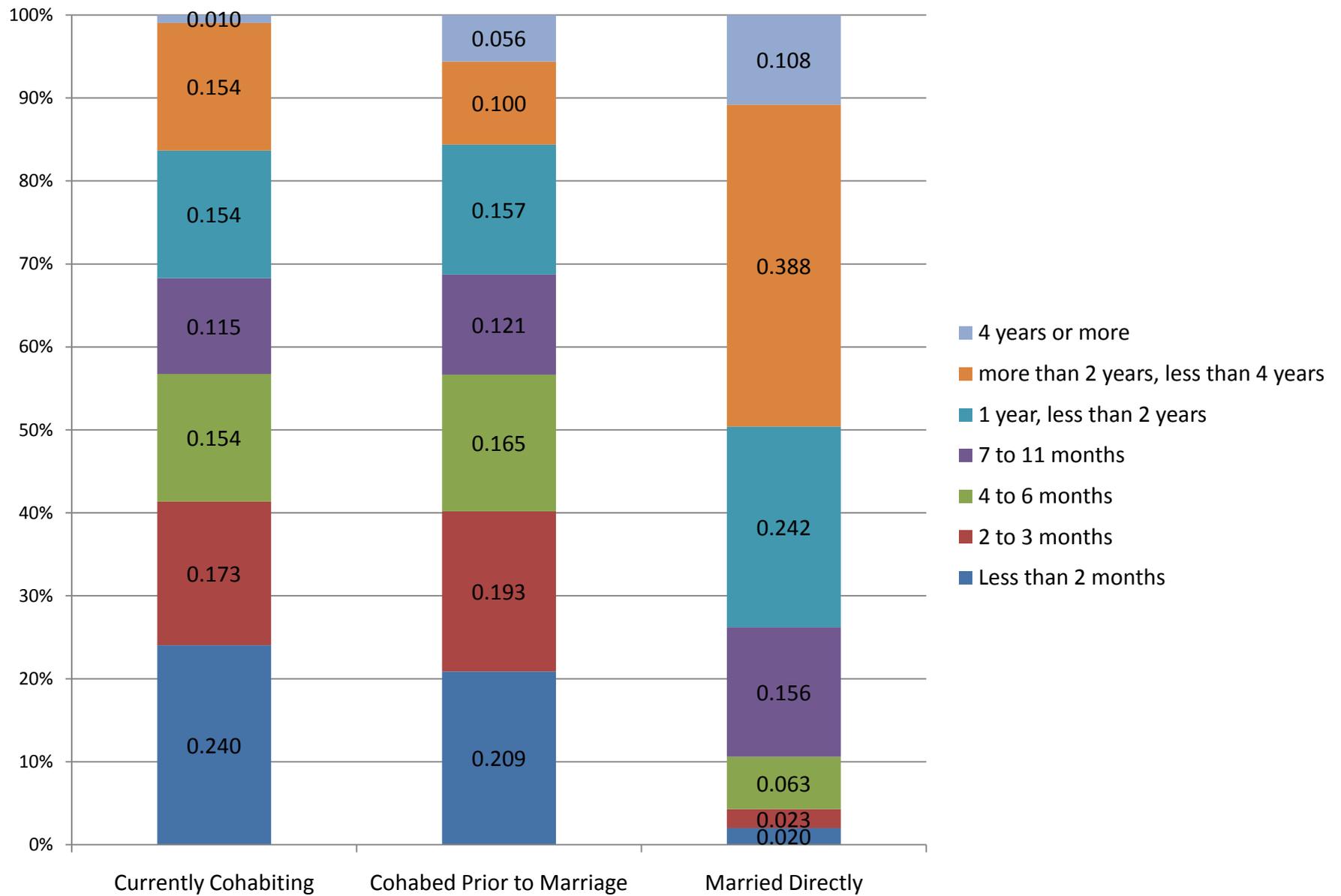
Independent Variables	Model A		Model B		Model C	
	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error
<b>Family Background and Ascribed Characteristics</b>						
Mother's Age at Respondent's Birth (older than 21)						
Young	-1.294	1.105	-0.551	1.019	0.009	0.967
Mother's Educational Attainment (High school diploma)						
Some high school, no diploma/ Don't Know	-3.370	1.115 ***	-2.998	1.027 ***	-1.890	0.981 *
Some college/university or Associate Degree	3.219	1.251 ***	2.232	1.155 *	1.502	1.098
Bachelor's degree or higher	-0.928	1.826	-1.260	1.696	-1.658	1.606
Childhood Family Structure (Married at birth, intact)						
Married at birth, later divorced	-4.080	1.046 ***	-3.467	0.968 ***	-1.931	0.934 **
Not married at birth	-3.076	1.610 **	-4.702	1.497 ***	-2.983	1.428 **
Sex						
Female	-0.598	0.927	-1.862	0.871 **	-1.456	0.848 *
Race (white, non-hispanic)						
Black, NH	2.086	2.140	3.318	1.978 *	3.383	1.882 *
2+ races, NH or Other, NH	-0.081	2.353	2.479	2.175	0.843	2.062
Hispanic	1.328	1.854	0.774	1.713	0.661	1.628
<b>Current Relationship Context</b>						
Age at Start of Relationship (older than 19)						
Young			7.928	1.034 ***	1.628	1.054 ***
Place of Meeting (Family and friends)						
At work or work-related function			4.508	1.252 ***	4.557	1.184 ***
Place of worship			5.993	1.790 ***	0.055	1.781
Club or bar			-2.821	1.738	-2.024	1.653
Online dating or internet chat room/ Personal ad/						
Singles group/ Special interest group			3.505	1.698 **	3.112	1.608 *
Walking, shopping or other public places/ Other/ Don't						
Know			1.584	1.328	1.643	1.263
At school			10.865	1.053 ***	8.382	1.373 ***
<b>Previous Relationship Experience</b>						
Child from Previous Relationship						
Yes					-1.778	1.294
Previous Coresidential Union						
Yes					1.805	0.994 *
<b>Current Union Status</b>						
Current Union Status (Married directly)						
Currently cohabiting					-9.566	1.528 ***
Cohabited prior to marriage					-10.167	0.962 ***
Constant	17.942	0.909	13.320	1.053	18.632	1.152 ***
Adjusted R-squared	0.035		0.185		0.272	
N	999		999		999	

\*\*\* Significant at  $p \leq .01$ ; \*\* Significant at  $p \leq .05$ ; \* Significant at  $p \leq .10$ .

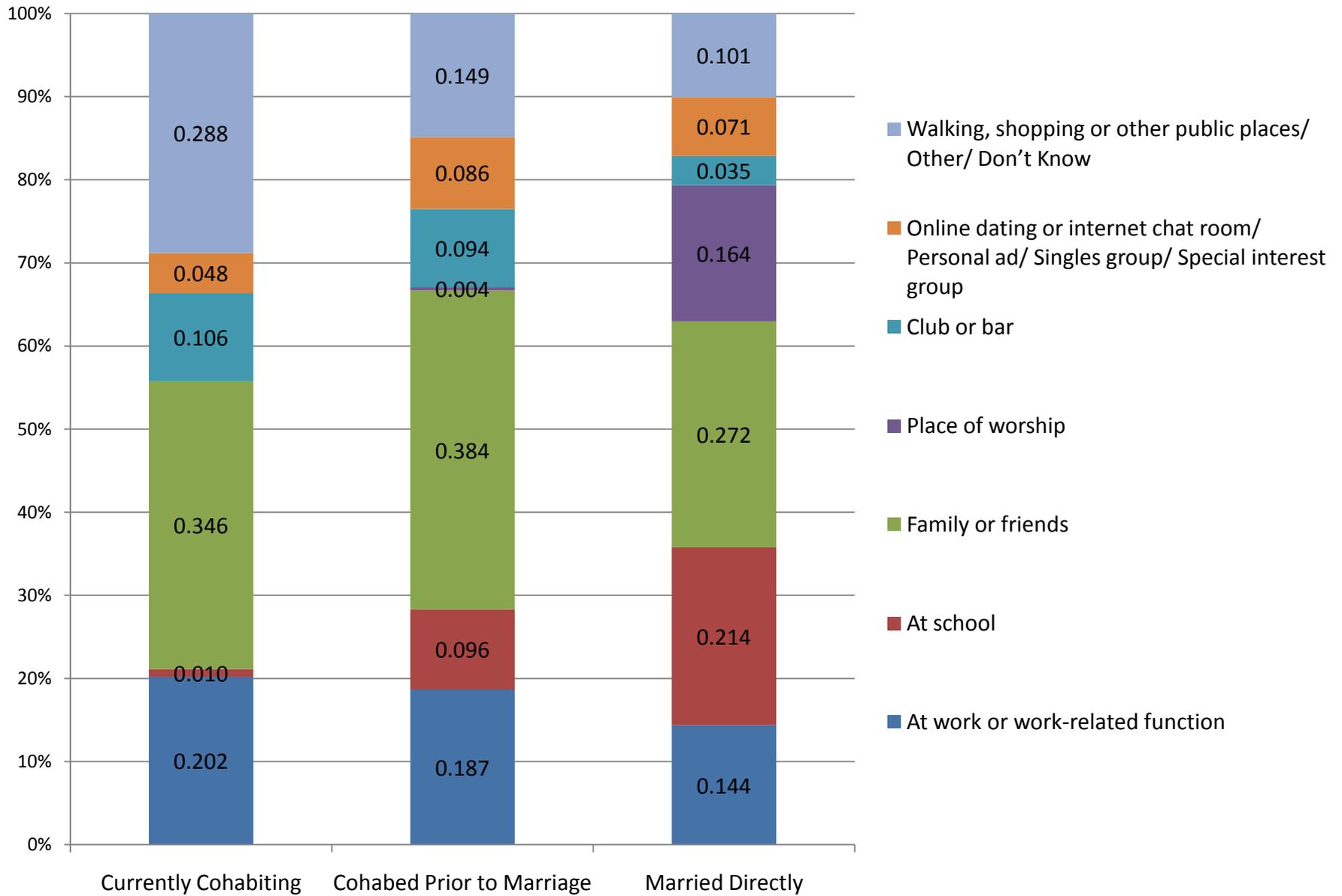
**Figure 1. Duration to First Sex, by Union Status**



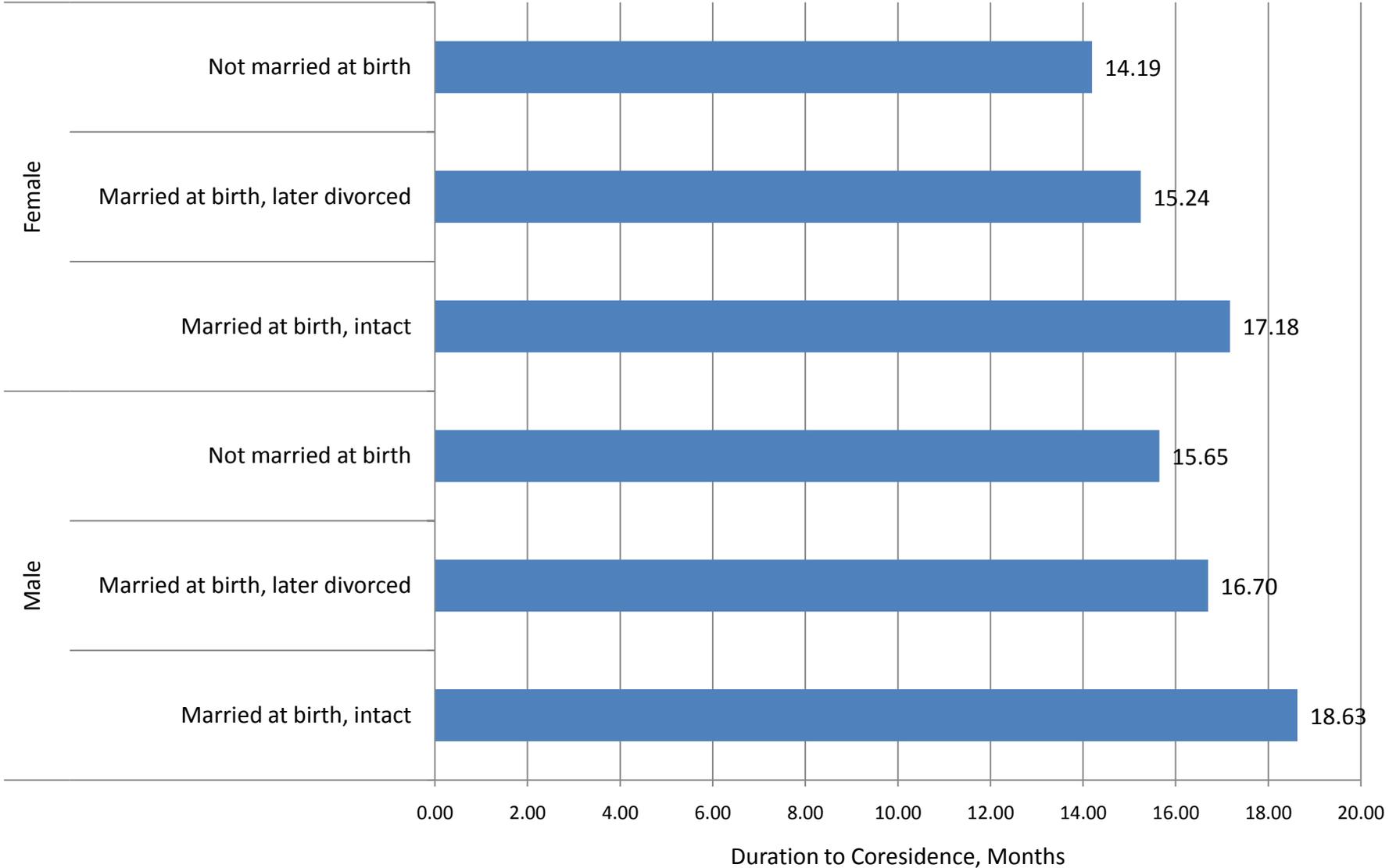
**Figure 2. Duration to Coresidence, by Union Status**



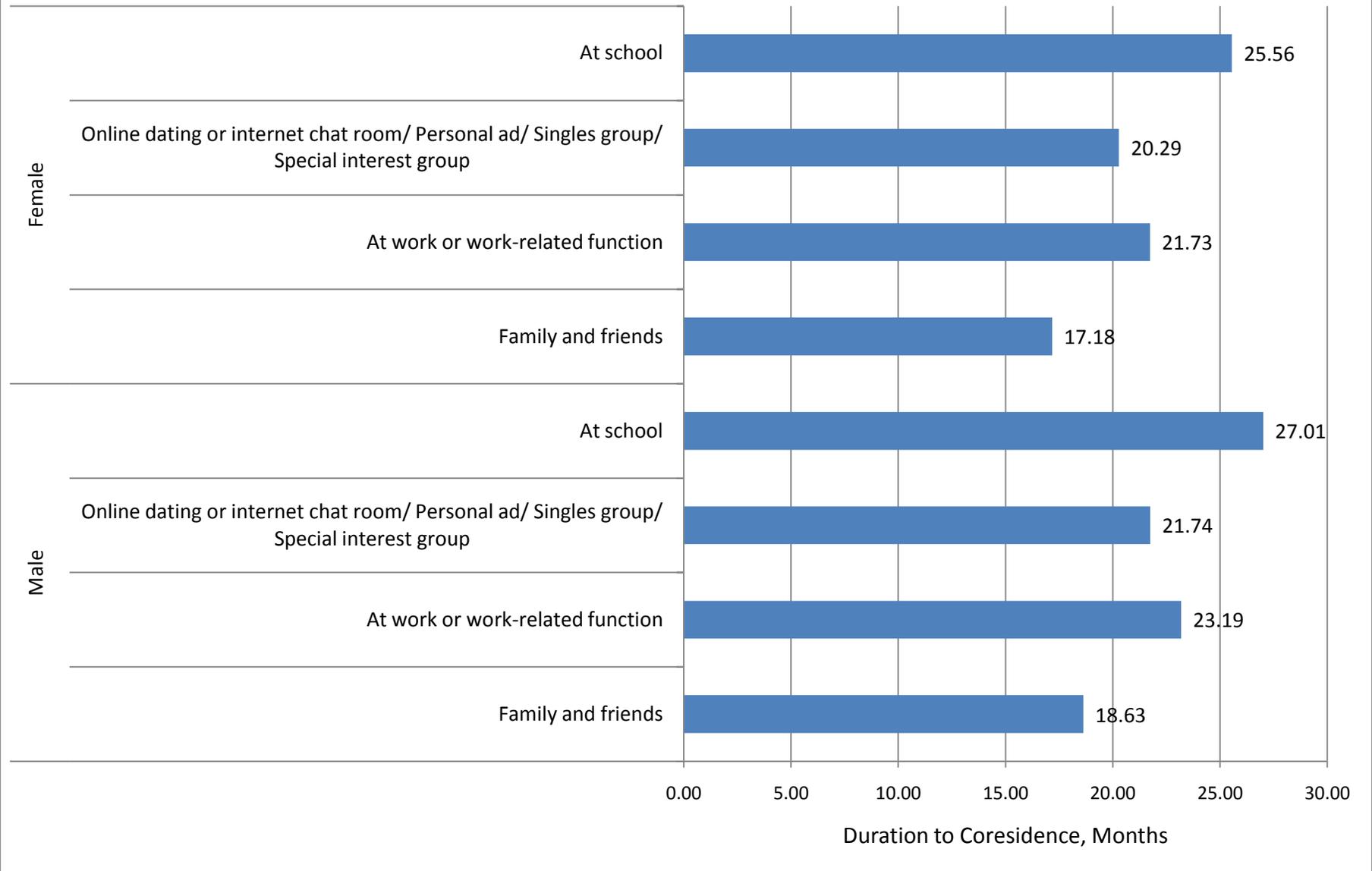
**Figure 3. Place of Meeting, by Union Status**



**Figure 4. Impact of Family Structure on Duration to Coresidence, by Gender**



**Figure 5. Impact of Place of Meeting on Duration to Coresidence, by Gender**



**Figure 6. Impact of Current Union Status on Duration to Coresidence, by Gender**

