The Cohabitation Effect:
Commitment and Sliding versus Deciding

Cohabitation Effect

The association between living together before marriage and poorer marital outcomes.

Ambiguous relationship

Predictors of Cohabitation Effect

- **Selection**—the pre-existing characteristics of those who live together

- **Experience**—communication events that occur while living together that erode the motivation for and/or commitment to marriage

Cohabitation and Selection

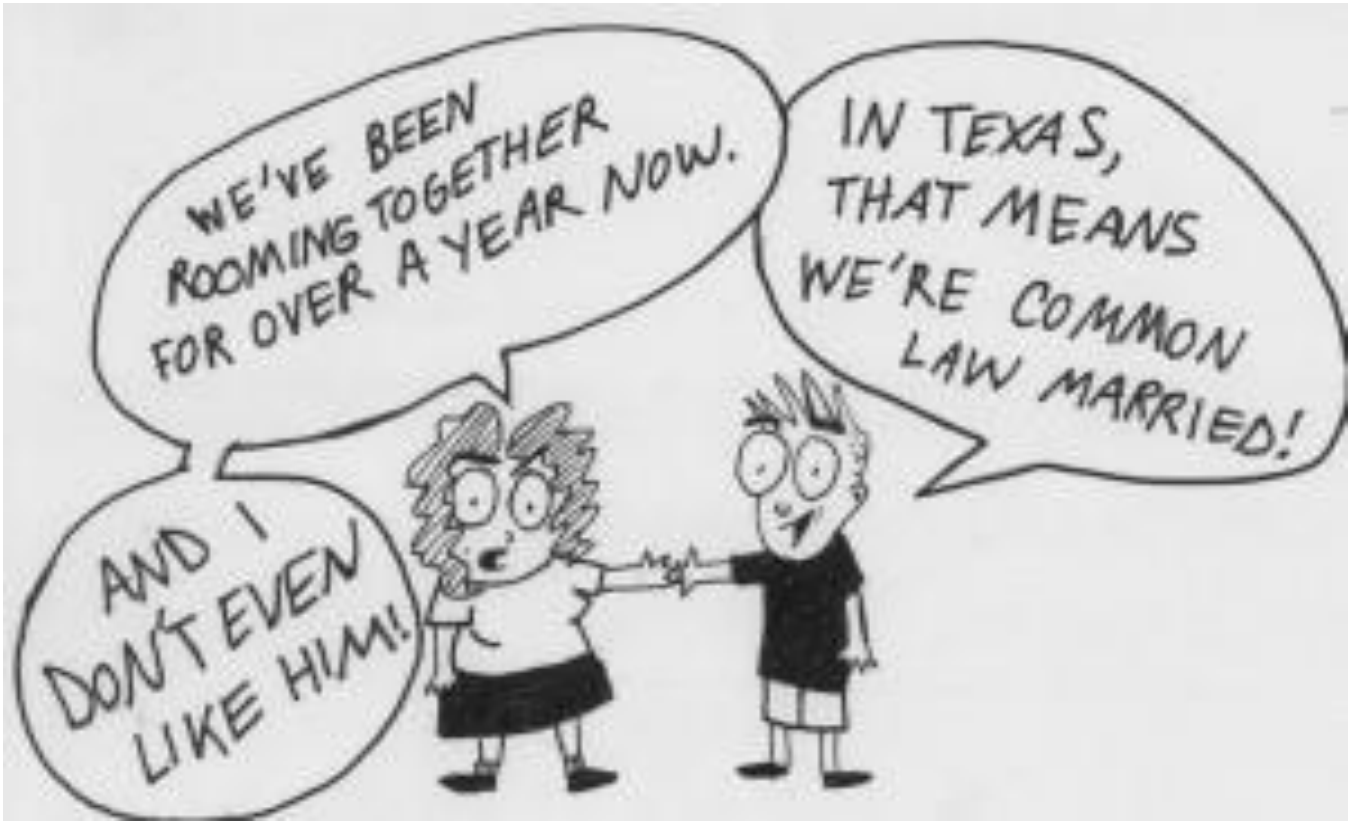
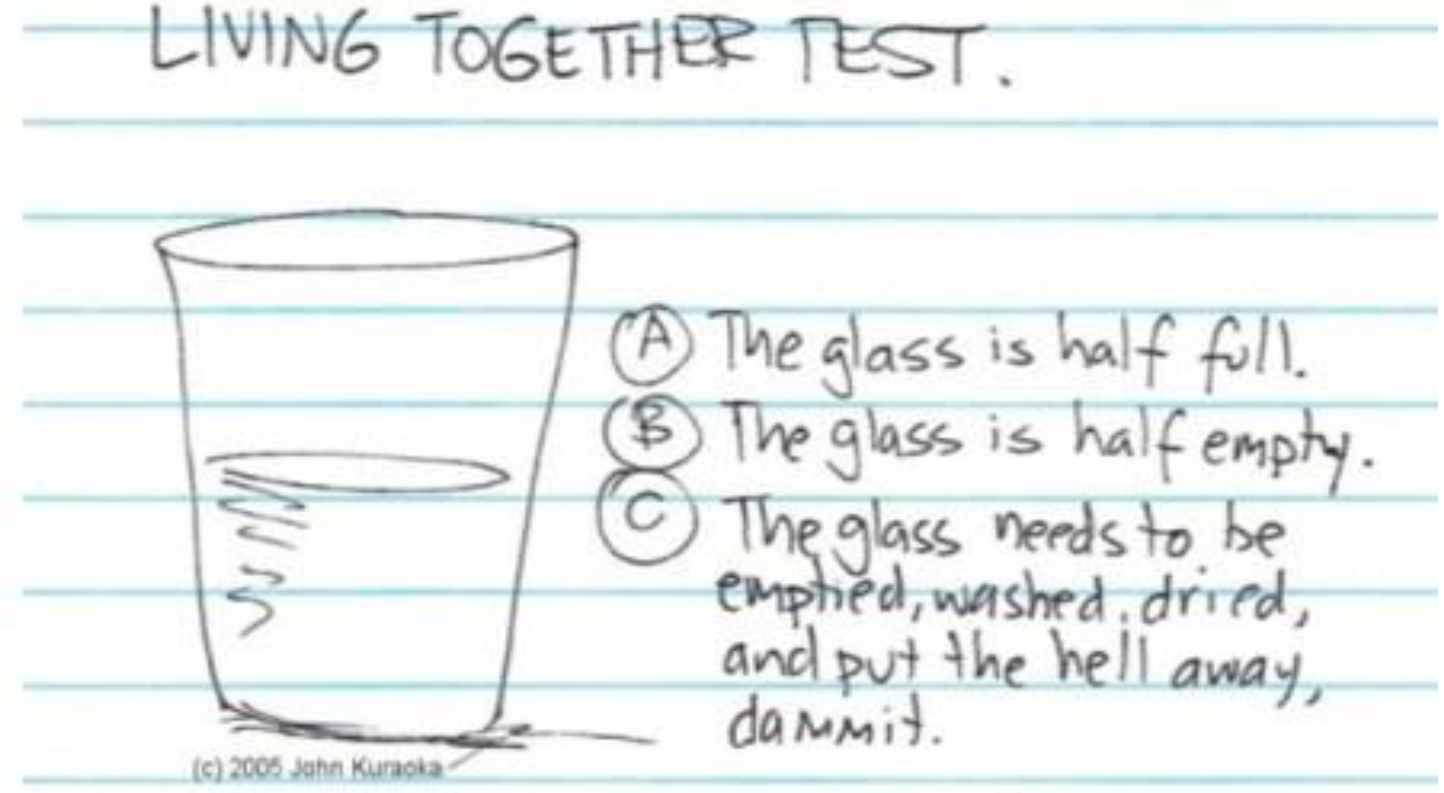
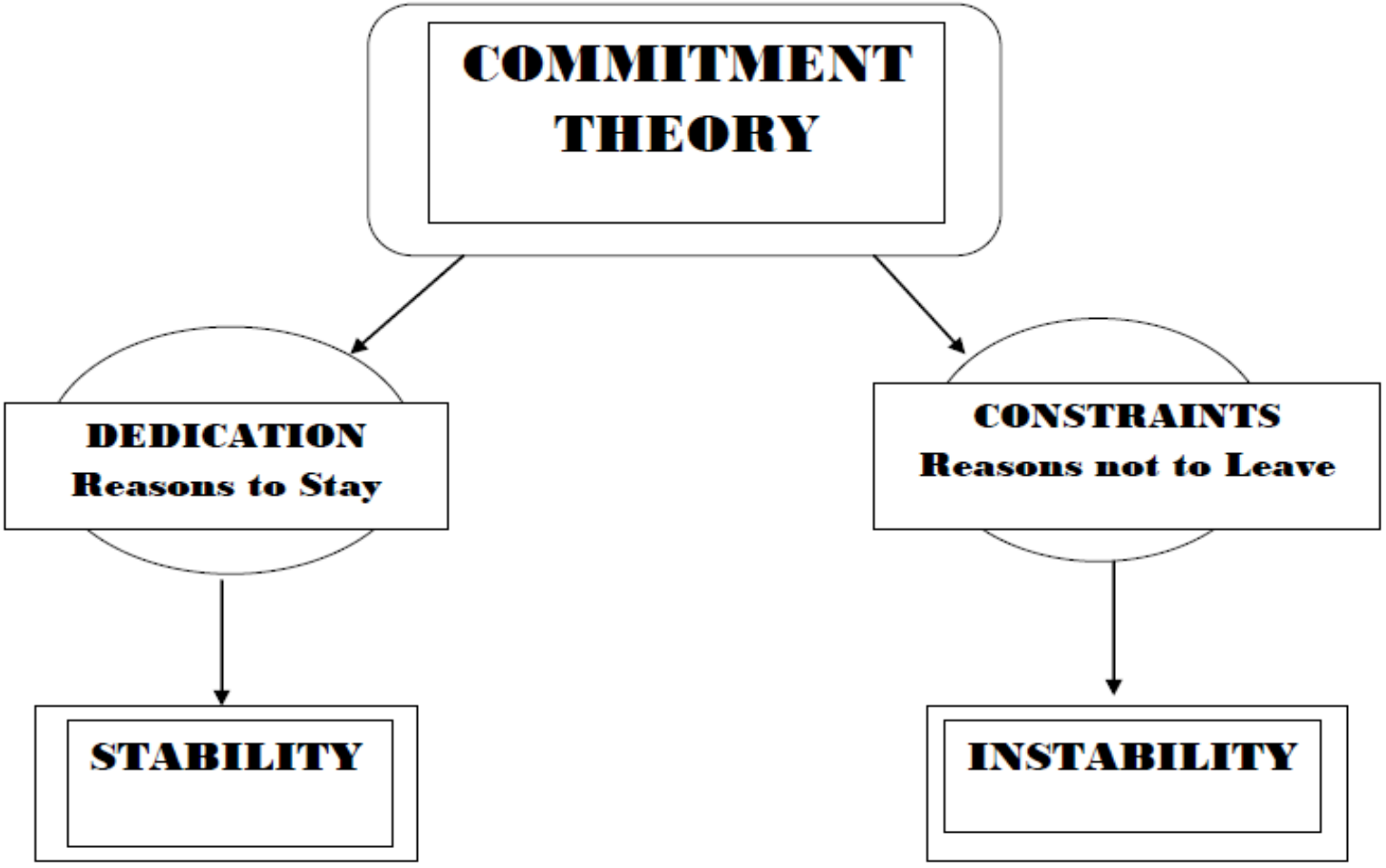


Illustration by Callie Parrish in *The Daily Cougar on September 7, 2011. Retrieved from http://thedailycougar.com/2011/09/07/florida-state-rep-wants-anti-cohabitation-law-to-remain-in-effect/.*

Cohabitation and Experience



Commitment Theory



Commitment Theory

Stanley & Markman (1992). *Journal of Marriage and Family, 54*(3), 595-608.

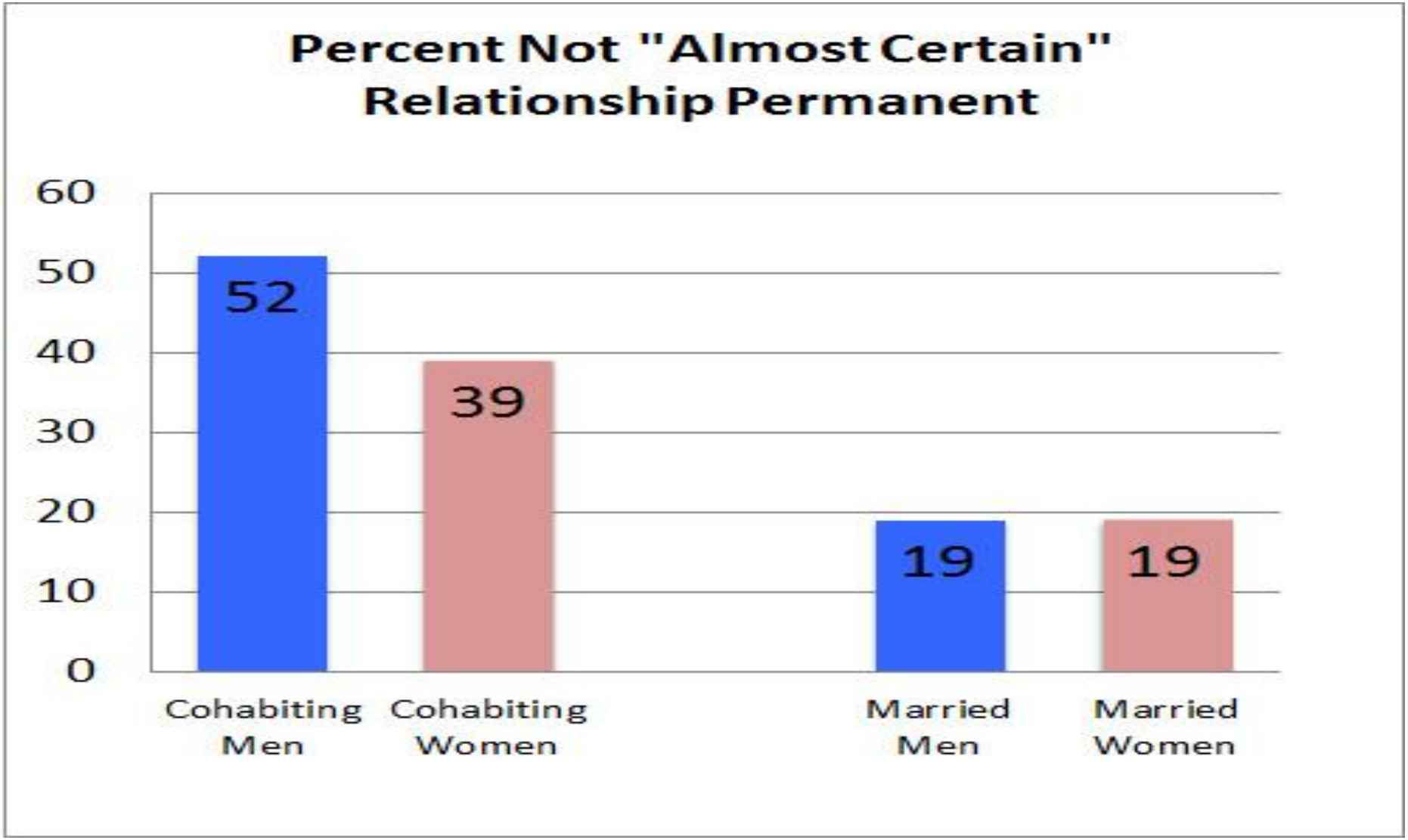
constraints

- Morality of divorce
- Availability of partners
- Social pressure
- Structural investments

dedication

- Relationship agenda
- Meta commitment
- Couple identity
- Primacy of relationship
- Satisfaction with sacrifice
- Alternative monitoring

Cohabitation and Commitment



Cohabitation and Communication

TABLE 2. MEANS (AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS) FOR HUSBANDS' AND WIVES' SOCIAL SUPPORT BEHAVIOR BY COUPLES' PREMARITAL COHABITATION EXPERIENCE

	No Prior Cohabitation		Single Cohabitation with Spouse		Multiple Cohabitations	
Behavior	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife
Positive help seeking	.56	.59	.45	.53	.46	.45
	(.16)	(.17)	(.21)	(.22)	(.24)	(.19)
Negative help seeking	.02	.03	.05	.07	.05	.05
	(.04)	(.05)	(.10)	(.12)	(.09)	(.08)
Positive helper	.52	.55	.48	.47	.38	.38
	(.19)	(.16)	(.21)	(.17)	(.19)	(.18)
Negative helper	.05	.03	.05	.07	.06	.03
	(.07)	(.08)	(.11)	(.12)	(.13)	(.09)

Note: No prior cohabitation, $n = 36$; Single cohabitation, $n = 36$; Multiple cohabitations, $n = 19$. Scores represent the proportion of each behavior.

Pre-Cohabitation Advice

- **Talk about the future**—where do you see yourselves *as a couple* 5-10 years from now?
- **Get on the same page**—what are your expectations about *work, money* and *sex*?
- **Don't slide into marriage**—*decide* to commit; *don't just do it* because you've been living together.

References

- Cohan, C. L. & Kleinbaum, S. (2002). Toward a greater understanding of the cohabitation effect: Premarital cohabitation and marital communication. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 64,* 180-192.
- Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K. & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sliding versus deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations, 55,* 499-509.
- Wilcox, W. B. (2013, July 8). “Men and Women Often Expect Different Things When They Move In Together.” Retrieved November 12, 2013 from http://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/07/men-and-women-often-expect-different-things-when-they-move-in-together/277571/.