

Cohabitation: a question of morals or preference



By Kelly Laughlin
Of The Print

Questionnaires answered last week by College English, drafting and machine shop students reveal a generally liberal attitude toward cohabitation as an alternative or prerequisite to marriage.

Of the 41 men and 42 women questioned, 38 believe in cohabitation as an alternative to marriage, while 36 think living together before marriage is a good idea. Ten surveyed believe living together without being married is not appropriate under any circumstances.

A larger preference toward cohabitation as an alternative to marriage included varied comments by both men and women students at the College. One 43-year-old male stated: "Often two individuals can live together in a relaxed, 'we want to' atmosphere, but once married, find that the pressures of a 'now you have to' situation are too much to bear."

Another student expressed a negative attitude toward marriage. "If true caring is involved, what says you have to wear a ring to say so? Unless there are children involved, I see no reason for marriage."

A few students saw the benefits of a living arrangement. One thought living together "can create a very good foundation for an intimate relationship because there is not as much pressure on the couple as there is in marriage." One 18-year-old woman thought problems are more easily resolved in a living together situation. "Living together is a little more casual than marriage. If there are problems in the relationship, they are more easily resolved. I think there would be a little more freedom of responsibility in a living together relationship."

The large number of students who believe living together

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should only occur with the intent of marriage later, also believe cohabitation is a good basis for a healthy married relationship. One student said, "I think it's a good idea. That is, people can get to know one another's pet peeves. It also seems that it's good because most divorces occur in the first few months or years of marriage."

Another said living together helps "to see how a person is in every circumstance. No one can keep up a false front forever, and they really do act differently at home." One student thought cohabiting prevents problems later on. "If you can't live together unmarried, it's doubtful you'll be able to married. Better to find out first."

A small number of students, however, showed strong religious sentiments against cohabitation. "If you are not recognized by the state as married," one student said, "you are not married in God's sight." Another referred to marriage as an institution that should be revered. "God instituted marriage, in the Bible, and made it His plan. He did not institute living together."

One student, however, voiced a more general disagreement with the living together arrangement. "There is an intimacy in sharing lives together that should be reserved for a life of marriage."

To most students surveyed, cohabitation is becoming a more desirable lifestyle than it was considered in the past. But what about the status of the "marriage institution?"

Forty-four students thought marriage is now less important than it was 10 years ago, while 18 said its status has remained constant. Three entered no comment.

Some said the pressures in our society to marry are diminishing, while divorce is increasing, to provide marriage partners with an easy escape.

As one student put it, "divorce wasn't as approved of before. We can now look at marriage as having an easy escape, if we don't want our partner anymore." Another student remarked, "since divorce has gone up tremendously, in the past 10 years, people are trying different ways of forming long-term relationships without being burdened by the pressures of marriage."

A few students felt that marriage is now not the social obligation that it used to be. "It's generally more acceptable today for people to live together as long as both partners understand the arrangement," said one. Another stated, "marriage is not a big thing anymore. People should do what they feel is right."

The 18 students who said marriage has not shifted in importance believe that people's attitudes toward marriage have changed more markedly. One

student thought marriage remains the "common ideal in our society, but many people are not married, and are taking on varied lifestyles which are gaining wider recognition." Another said more couples are weighing the advantage and disadvantages about the idea of marriage to see if it's important to them.

One single man said, "Women are getting the idea they have a right to choose their own, unique lifestyles, instead of taking on a traditional role."

One called marriage a "dying tradition," and said women need not depend on a man as much and can make it alone.

Strong views about a supposed moral decay in today's culture were voiced by another student, who said, "In the United States, we are experiencing rapid moral decay, and if reforms aren't made soon, our nation will fall like the Roman Empire." Another thought the importance of marriage has "deteriorated to the depths of sin and degradation (Romans 3.23)."

A small number of students, however, think marriage is just as important today as it ever was. One student said, "We need marriage more than we ever have. It makes people more responsible to another, and to think twice before saying quits." Another said, "I don't feel the importance has changed. Many people still feel marriage is the way to go. To me, marriage is a sacred institution and should be meaningful. I strongly frown upon divorce."

Overall, the 84 students were somewhat split in their views about the right of a non-married living partner to file suit for unequal distribution of funds (a la Michele Triola Marvin, who recently won a property settlement from former living partner Lee Marvin. Of the students surveyed, 29 think the law is fair, while 45 believe it does not serve the best interests of a cohabitation arrangement. Ten slated no comment.

One student who did not directly answer the question said, "Money and property

agreements should be put in writing between two people, since actual trust doesn't seem to cover all the bases. I would like to see people get out of a relationship what they put into it. If they put in greed, perhaps what they will get out are lawsuits."

The general reasoning of students who think the law is fair is explained in this student's comment: "There are two lives involved. One life is no more important than another. No one should lose it all." Another stated, "If we both put equal time and money into everything, then we should at least get half of everything."

One student, however, thought the law is not quite this unconditional. "The partner should sue only if he/she is not getting back what they contributed." Another said, "A suit should only be filed if there's probably cause." Another student cited the importance of non-monetary contributions to a living arrangement. "I think the law is fair because both people contribute to a relationship. It may not be money, but it could be something that has just as much value."

Several students thought a contract should be agreed to prior to moving in together. "If you are not getting along, you should make an agreement beforehand of who gets what, over the split in purchases." Another added, "Everything should be worked out before moving in."

The large number of students who think the right (to sue after splitting up) is unfair had inconsistent statements. Two students said, because the couple has no legal obligation to one another, the law governing property settlements should not be valid. It should apply, they said, only in marriage situations. One thought the partner should keep possessions separated even if they are close, and have no mutual ownership of anything. "You are just living together," he said, "not married."

Another student disagrees with the law because it limits (continued on page 4)

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