

Cohabiting Men's Views of Abortion and Perceived Roles in Fertility Decision Making

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ABSTRACT

Rising numbers of men are fathering children within cohabiting unions. However, we know little about their feelings regarding pregnancy and their roles in fertility decisions should an unintended pregnancy occur. To address this gap, I use data from 61 qualitative interviews of working and middle class heterosexual cohabiting men, most of whom have no immediate desire for (more) children. I examine their views of abortion, desired outcomes, and to what extent they think their opinions will play a role should their partners experience an unplanned pregnancy. A sub-sample of eleven men from this group who have experienced a pregnancy with their current partners is used to explore men's actual roles in determining whether a conception was terminated or carried to term. In general, the strength of men's relationships with their partners and their perceived instrumental readiness for fatherhood shape their desired outcomes for pregnancy and views of abortion.

Sexual relationships outside of marriage have become increasingly common over the past several decades (Martin, Specter, Martin, and Martin 2003; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001). This trend is largely attributed to the increasing acceptance of pre-marital and non-marital sex and delays in first marriage (Pagnini & Rindfuss 1993; Thornton and Young DeMarco 2001). Further, onset of first sex occurs at a relatively young age, as about three-fourths of American men and women have experienced sexual intercourse by the time they are in their late teens (The Alan Guttmacher Institute 2006). Not surprisingly, the U.S. has also witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of non-marital births over the past several decades. As by 2002, one-third of all births were to unmarried women (Hamilton, Martin, and Sutton 2003).

Although a sizeable number of mothers are unmarried, many are not without partners. Nearly half of all new mothers who are unmarried are living with a romantic partner in a cohabiting union (Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan, 2002). In fact, the rise in cohabitation is largely responsible for the rise in non-marital births (Bumpass and Lu, 2000). Fertility within cohabitation also increased (Raley 2001). This is largely due to the fact that a greater proportion of women choose to cohabit in the 1990's than a decade prior. Although some cohabitators go on to marry upon conceiving a child (a practice most common among whites and Latinas), the least educated, lower earning mothers either often continue living together in unmarried partnerships or dissolve their unions (Graefe and Lichter, 1999; Manning 2004).

Birth control methods have become safer and more dependable over the years; however, the number of unintended pregnancies in the United States remains extremely high. Nearly 50% of all pregnancies at the close of the 20th century were reported as being unintended, a rate that has been consistent for the past four decades (Finer and Henshaw 2006). Unwanted or mistimed pregnancies are consistently higher for cohabitators (around 45%) than among married couples

(16%) (Seltzer, 2000). About half of all unintended pregnancies end in abortion (The Alan Guttmacher Institute 1999; Henshaw 1998). Due in part to the increase in unmarried pregnancy and childbearing since the 1980s, the child support enforcement system in the United States has been strengthened (McLanahan and Carlson. 2002.) Whereas child support is legally binding, regardless of whether the father wanted the pregnancy carried to term, the choice to have an abortion remains solely in the hands of women.

Since the *Roe vs. Wade* ruling in 1973, women have been able to legally terminate unwanted pregnancies. However, this Supreme Court Ruling remains one of the most controversial in United States history. Attempts to hamper or limit women's ability to choose have taken numerous forms since then, progressing from parental consent laws for minors to attempts at codifying the necessity for spousal consent (Brindis 2006). The appointment of Samuel Alito, Jr. to the U.S. Supreme Court has raised the question of a woman's right to choose once again. At the time of his nomination in 2005, controversy arose over Alito's (1991) stance that a married woman should have to receive permission from her husband to have a pregnancy terminated in the case of *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* in 1991. The case went to the Supreme Court, where *Roe v. Wade* was upheld by a 5-4 vote, on the premise that married women do not sign away their constitutional rights.

Alito's ruling might also be viewed as a strike against single or cohabiting father's rights. Conley (2005a) wrote a letter in support of Alito's position to the *New York Times*, asserting that men should be able to obtain an injunction against abortion, even when sexual partners are unmarried. For women, the choice remains to either terminate or carry out an unintended pregnancy. However, men have no such choice upon learning of a conception. If a woman wishes to abort a pregnancy, she may do so against the wishes of the father. Yet if a man does not wish to become

a parent, however, he is still legally obligated to financially support the child under state and federal laws should his partner choose to give birth. Others have also speculated on father's rights and abortion. Goldscheider (2000) suggests that women's complete power over pregnancy decisions serves as a barrier to true gender equality, and may also violate men's rights. She notes that that because women determine whether to become mothers, they also ascertain whether their partners become fathers. Her solution is to provide men the right to a "financial abortion," whereby they would have to decide, early on, if they wanted to support a child resulting from an unexpected pregnancy. Daum (2005) expanded this argument in a story that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, contending that if abortion is truly about 'choice,' then men should have the choice to sign off on their parental rights if they do not want responsibility for a child that they have fathered. Why should a man have to pay 18 years of child support when he did not 'choose' to have the child?

The purpose of this paper is to address these controversial issues by exploring men's views of abortion and choice. Apart from the views being presented by politicians and in the popular press, what are the preferred pregnancy outcomes of men who are involved in an intimate sexual relationship with women and thus at risk of experiencing unplanned pregnancies? Furthermore, what say do men feel they have in pregnancy outcomes and how do they feel about their (lack of) legal choice?

BACKGROUND

The role of fathers in the American family has evolved over the course of U.S. history. In the early years of the 19th century, men had complete legal control over their families (Blankenhorn 1995; Coontz 1992; Grossberg 1985; Popenoe 1996); fathers did not have to support or even acknowledge children born out of wedlock. This is not the case today. Most

child support laws require men to pay legal support to their offspring, at least through age 18. Challenges to men's role as the head of the family arose during the mid-19th century when the rhetoric that women were "natural" nurturers, and thus should be the primary caretakers of children predominated (Foster and Freed 1978). The idea that women are better suited to take care of children than men became reflected in the legal system; fathers could only obtain custody of their child(ren) if the mother was proven unfit. This has since changed. Divorced and unmarried men now have more rights to their children than in the past; however, these rights are often conditional, based on their behavior towards their children and the children's mothers (Rubin 1986). Despite this ideological change, women are still much more likely than men to take residential responsibility for children when they are divorced from or have never been married to the father. Over the past two decades, only around 15% of fathers have been awarded primary custody of their children (Grall, 2006; Lichter and Qian 2004).

Child support enforcement laws for men have become more stringent (McLanahan and Carlson 2002). Yet many men with non-resident children do not pay the full amount of child support ordered. Only 45% of custodial parents (the overwhelming majority of whom are women) with child support orders received the full amount owed to them in 2003 (Grall 2006). Such patterns have raised concern that men are increasingly disengaging themselves from family life and neglecting the children they father (Blankenhorn 1995; Goldscheider 2000; Popenoe 1996). Some suggest that men may increasingly choose to avoid parenthood or shirk parenting responsibilities, because the value of fatherhood has declined (Bernard 1981; Goldscheider and Kaufman 1996).

Women's increasing independence from men may account for at least part of the separation of men from their children. At the same time that family living arrangements were

rapidly altering, women's involvement in the work force increased, and fertility control through birth control and abortion became more readily available. Since Margaret Sanger opened the first birth control clinic in New York City in 1916, women's rights activists have worked to promote women's control over their fertility, including making female forms of birth control more available and advocating the right for women to make decisions regarding abortion. The belief that women should have complete control over their bodies with regard to making decisions about abortion may have affected men's views on childbearing in such a way that they may feel they have little or no control. Birth control technology and the legalization of abortion have better equipped women to decide when and with whom to have children. However, because the focus has been on women and their rights to abortion and fertility control, we know very little about men's views towards abortion and virtually nothing about whether they think their opinions matter when it comes to the outcome of an unplanned pregnancy.

Despite their lack of legal standing in making pregnancy decisions, many men still have strong opinions regarding abortion. A few small studies have compared males and females' views toward abortion. Miller (1994) finds that men's attitudes toward abortion are significantly more liberal than women's, especially in cases in which the woman's life or health is endangered by the pregnancy, or the pregnancy is unplanned. This sample, however, is primarily white, middle class, married couples living in the San Francisco Bay Area. Given the paucity of information on this topic, though, his work is a starting point.

Rosenwasser, Wright, and Barber's (1987) research extended Miller's findings. Utilizing two small samples of college students in Texas, they found that the majority of men and women believe that women should have the final say in abortion decisions; however, men were significantly less likely feel this way than women. Men were also significantly more likely than

women to believe that men should be able to prevent abortions legally and have an equal say in the outcome, and less likely to think that a man should have to legally support a child when he wanted an abortion. The level of intimacy was also found to be important in men's roles in abortion decisions, as all respondents thought that men should have more say over abortion if the couple was in an intimate relationship, compared to if they were just dating or had a one night stand (Rosenwasser et al. 1997). No research to date explores unmarried cohabiting men's views towards abortion and what say they think they should have in fertility decisions with their partners.

Although some family scholars have suggested that studies of modern day fertility should include the voices of men (Conley 2005a, 2005b; Goldscheider and Kaufman 1996), research on men's views of abortion remains scant. Men's fatherhood intentions and their commitment to their partners should be taken into account when understanding how men view fertility decisions (Goldscheider and Kaufman 1996). Data from unmarried couples suggests that when men report higher levels of commitment and warmth in their relationships and express more concern for their partners' welfare, couples use birth control more frequently and effectively (Inazu 1987). This suggests that other fertility decisions, such as those made when an unexpected pregnancy occurs, may also be affected by the strength of the couple relationship.

To address this gap, I draw on in-depth interview data from 61 unmarried men who are living with their partners in intimate, heterosexual relationships. Interviewing cohabiting men provides a sample of individuals that have differing levels of commitment to their partners, but have not (yet) committed to marriage (although some are engaged). Whereas past studies have explored what factors influence men's views towards abortion (Boggess and Bradner 2000; Lynxwiler and Gay 1994; Scott and Schuman 1988), we are not aware of any published research

that explores how men living in intimate relationships think about abortion and perceive their role in abortion decisions. This paper explores how the relationship context shapes men's views of pregnancy resolution, and whether they think they do have a say in the outcome if their current partner became pregnant. We ask the following questions: First, what are their opinions regarding abortion should a pregnancy occur? Do these men feel that they have a say in whether a pregnancy, planned or unplanned, is carried to term, or do they view the decision regarding the outcome of a pregnancy as solely belonging to their female partner's? Second what do these men think will be the outcome if their partner becomes pregnant? Finally, for men who have experienced pregnancies with their partners, how were the outcomes determined?

DATA AND METHODS

Our research is based on Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory and adds to our interpretive understanding of cohabitation and men's role in fertility. This analysis is part of a larger study exploring cohabitators' views of their relationships and family formation desires. Data are from 61 face-to-face interviews with cohabiting men in the Greater Columbus (Ohio) Metropolitan area. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews make it possible to explore cohabiting men's views of abortion and their perceived role in family planning decisions in greater depth.

Several sampling criteria are necessary to obtain a sample of cohabiting men at a life cycle stage when they are at risk of unplanned pregnancy and when childbearing discussions are being negotiated. All respondents were sharing a residence with a heterosexual romantic partner for at least three months and were between the ages of 18 and 36. Participants were recruited at a local community college and in various eateries in the downtown and suburban areas, via signs

posted on public information bulletin boards. Purposive sampling (Berg 2004) was employed to obtain a diverse sample with regard to parental status, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity.

Interviews were conducted by a team of three researchers, including the author, between July 2004 and February 2006. Although both members of the couple were interviewed simultaneously in separate locations to provide each partner with complete confidentiality, this analysis focuses on only the male partners' interviews. Interviews ranged from one to two and a half hours, depending on age, marital, parental, and employment status, and family history of the respondent. Men were asked about their readiness for fatherhood and how they think they will respond to a pregnancy. Further, they were asked to discuss past pregnancies and pregnancy scares. Interviews were digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were each coded by both authors and discussed until agreement was reached. Codes were then entered into AtlasTI to organize the data and facilitate axial coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Names of all respondents have been changed to ensure their privacy.

Transcripts were first open coded, then data was coded axially based upon the men's levels of education, ages, minority status, full time or part time work, incomes, current parental statuses, whether they want (more) children or not, whether they believe they will marry their current partner, and what form of birth control they are currently using. Appendix B provides a visual representation of these characteristics by group. In the interest of space, only those factors that distinguish the groups will be discussed.

Sample Information

Descriptive results of the entire sample (N=61) are presented in Appendix A. Although we interviewed a total of 61 men, one man had a vasectomy and the two other men's partners were currently pregnant. Another four men were not asked to elaborate on their views of abortion

because the interviewer felt it would damage rapport, either because they had already spontaneously expressed very strong, traditional religious views, shared their extreme excitement at the prospect of becoming a father or because they and their partners were trying to conceive. Some of these men are discussed in a later section of the paper but none are included in the main discussion of men's views of abortion.

The 54 men that compose the main sample are in their prime relationship and family formation years (their average age is 27) with a range between 18 and 36 years of age. Forty-two of them are white, five are black, three identify as Latino/Hispanic, and four are multiracial/multiethnic (two identify as white and Pacific Islander and two identify as white and Native American). The sample is fairly well educated, as half of the group was intentionally sampled on the basis of having a bachelor's degree for comparative purposes. Two men have less than a high school education, three have a high school diploma or GED, eleven have some college experience, nine have associate's degrees, twenty-two have bachelor's degrees, and seven have at least a master's degree. Most of the 54 men in this sample (43) work at least full time while nine work part time (seven of whom also attend school) and two are not currently working outside of the home. One of these non-working men is a stay at home father and one alternates between working full time and attending college full time. The average man in this sample earns around \$32,046 per year, though there is quite a bit of variation, (\$8,400 to \$110,000 per year.) Despite recruiting at a community college and in community areas near a large University, only 16 of the men are currently enrolled in school. Of these, half are only attending part time or are attending college intermittently.

RESULTS

We find that our sample of 54 cohabiting men express very diverse opinions regarding their desired outcome of an unexpected pregnancy, their views of abortion, and whether they think they will or should have a say in a pregnancy outcome. The largest group of men (n = 28) say they would want their partners to have the child. Many of these 28 men express significant anti-abortion sentiments, though a significant minority is unsure whether their partners would abide by their wishes should a pregnancy occur. Another group of men (n=9) feel that solely the woman should make the decision regarding pregnancy outcomes and argue that their own input should have no impact on the decision regardless of their personal opinions. A third group (n=10) is quite clear that they want their partners to have abortions if the women become pregnant; most of these men are confident that this would be the outcome. The remaining men (n=7) assert that it would be impossible for them to predict what would happen in the event of a pregnancy since they and their partners would need to make the decisions together at the time the situation arose.

It may be challenging to determine the outcome of a hypothetical pregnancy. However, social-psychological theories of reasoned action posit that individuals' attitudes towards particular topics are good predictors of how they will actually react or behave in a situation (Ajzen 1985; Ajzen and Madden 1986; Eagly and Chaiken 1992; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). The majority of the men we interviewed spoke with certainty about their predictions.

Men Who Hope Their Partners Will Have the Baby

Over half of the men in the sample whose partners were at risk of getting pregnant (n = 28) express strong preferences for carrying any pregnancy to term should their partner conceive. Although these men asserted that they want birth to be the outcome of a pregnancy, their personal views on abortion varied widely. The majority (n=18) of these men argued that they

were not categorically against abortion. Four of the 18 noted that they were pro-choice, but did not feel that abortion was the right decision for them. Asked if he would consider abortion if his partner became pregnant, Kevin (27) said, “No, not at this time.” When asked to elaborate he added, “I mean I’ve always said that abortion’s okay, it’s fine. But I think when it comes down to, when it’s your baby, it’s different, you know.” The remaining 14 of the 18 men relayed specific situations under which abortion might be a consideration, but noted that at this time, they would want their partners to give birth in the event of an unplanned pregnancy. Seven of these 14 men who would not want their partners to have an abortion now specifically connected this belief to their being in a good relationship. When asked if he would think about abortion in the event of a mistimed pregnancy, Derek (28) responded, “No, no. Um I mean 10 years ago I wouldn’t have been ready for kids and our relationship wouldn’t have been ready for kids. Now it probably is.” Other men hoped their partners would give birth because they felt excited about the prospect of becoming fathers, even if the timing was less than ideal.

Five of the 18 men who are avowedly pro-choice or who view abortion as a situational decision that is not right for themselves at this time have actually gone through the experience of abortion, either with their current partners (n=2) or with previous partners (n=3). For Max (29), a coach and soon to be high school teacher, an abortion with his current partner, Tameka, was an agonizing choice, but one they made because she was still in school at the time. With a breaking voice he revealed, “I mean it was hard. That was probably one of the hardest things in our relationship and I mean something that we really felt, we don’t even talk about it too much and so it would not be an option at all [now].” Although Sean (25) also chose abortion because he could not imagine becoming a parent at the time, he viewed an abortion with a previous partner differently than Max did. . He declared,

I got my high school girlfriend pregnant. She had an abortion...it's not something that lingers in my head but every once in a while or when I see somebody who's, hear about somebody who had kids really young, single parents, I think to myself, God, my life would have been fucked!

Sean would want his fiancé, Emily, to give birth if she became pregnant now, though, because, "I think just right now we're, we could make it happen. We could make it work out and we're together and we want kids. Maybe it's not the best time to have one but having one's still all right." For these men, decisions about abortion depend both upon their age/instrumental readiness for parenthood and on the partners they are dating.

One man among the 28 did not specify his personal views on abortion, but the other nine of the 28 men who would want their partners to give birth were personally opposed to abortion. Five of the nine men, for example, felt that abortion is a form of murder. Eugene (22) expressed his views with strong language, explaining, "I feel that if you stop somebody's heart from beating, you're killing them, regardless if, you know, they're out of somebody's womb or not, so. I feel that abortion is murder, or legalized murder." Miguel (27), a Mexican man who is in the United States on a student visa, concurred with Eugene, but conceded that the issue is complex, "I don't, I don't think you have the right to kill anyone, that's what I think. But uh, I think something hard is when there's a rape or something like that. That's a really hard issue." Other men were no less adamant about their beliefs, but were unable to articulate the exact reasons for their views. Brian, a 22 year old mechanic stated, "I have no particular reason for thinking it's wrong, I just think it's wrong. I just don't think you should do that."

Although all 28 men hope their partners will have the baby if she becomes pregnant, they relayed a variety of opinions on what they think their partners will *actually* decide. Over half (17 men) feel certain that their partners will carry a pregnancy to term, even if it is mistimed. Eight of these 17 men base their assumptions on discussions they have had about abortion in general or on the fact that their partners want children anyway. Nathan (24) noted that his partner felt the

same way he did about abortion, adding that they would not consider it "...because we're gonna be married and we're gonna have a family eventually so if it happens sooner than expected that would be something that happens...." Six other men mentioned that they were certain of their partners' views because they had directly discussed what to do in the event of a mistimed pregnancy in the past, either in isolation or in response to a pregnancy scare. Travis (29) said that because a former girlfriend had an abortion when he was 18, he and his current partner, Karen, discussed the issue early in their relationship.

...from early on, Karen and I had already talked about it that if, you know, it happened. Both of our parents want grandkids. We're both, we both can handle kids and we financially can handle kids, we mentally can handle kids, so we've already decided, you know, if it happens, we're just gonna go forward with it and just probably get married very quickly.

Another three of the 17 men added that their partners' stances against abortion made them certain that their girlfriends would choose to give birth in the event of a pregnancy. Jared (24) alone noted that his partner supported abortion politically but could not personally have an abortion, "I think she's pro [choice] but I don't think she would ever [have an abortion]....I think she's more pro for the sake of rights than for actually doing it."

Three men felt that their partners would have abortions against their wishes. Two (Ron and Caleb) base their outlooks on the fact that their partners had abortions previously. Anthony (21) also relayed a recent discussion in which his partner, Diana, voiced that she "might have to get an abortion" if she were to become pregnant again. The two had considered abortion when Diana was pregnant with their daughter, but Anthony says that when abortion came up this time, "I was just like 'no.'" He elaborates that, "After having one child and she's just so awesome I couldn't see, like how could you do that?" For him, having a child was a life altering experience that changed his personal views on terminating a pregnancy.

Of the 28 men, seven were unsure what their partners would choose to do if they became pregnant. However, all noted that they felt an unplanned pregnancy would be quite distressing for their partners. When asked how his partner would react, Edward (23) exclaimed, “She would panic!” Artie (28) assured the interviewer that his partner, Brandi’s response would be, “Oh shit!!” Eugene, who works 60 hours a week at a call center and as a grocery clerk is the only man in this group who thought his partner would be happy about the pregnancy, but, nonetheless, “she’s not gonna be able to pay her bills if she cannot work ‘cause she’s pregnant, so that may affect her as well.” Though unsure about what their partner’s would decide to do, the men’s own negative views on abortion signify that they hope their partners would have the child, despite not having legal backing to support their desires.

Regardless of these men’s particular views of abortion, current laws give them no real say in pregnancy outcomes, and two of the men specifically lamented this fact. Harry (32), for example, was torn between feeling that his partner should have control of what happens with her own body and what rights he has as a man. He states:

I wouldn’t want abortion . . . I don’t feel I have the right to tell a woman what to do with her body but at the same time I feel I have a right as a father and that’s why I’m kinda against it. You know how these women are like “it’s my body I can do what I want!” but you know, what about the father? He has rights to it [a baby] too.

Harry is caught between his own feelings towards abortion and how much of a say he thinks he has when it comes to the outcome of a pregnancy. Fortunately for him, he noted that his partner wants a child as well, so if she were to get pregnant they will have the child.

The 28 men who hope that their partners would choose to give birth tend to be fairly well educated in comparison to the rest of the sample, and most work full time. In addition, men who hope their partner would have a baby, even if it were mistimed, have higher average incomes

than the rest of the groups in the study, and a larger proportion of the men identify themselves as minorities. Most of these men intend to remain with their partners permanently. Further, nearly a third of them are fathers¹ and almost all (n=22) want children in the future. Five other men in this group are uncertain about whether having (more) children is right for them, but have not ruled out the possibility entirely. Only Peter (30), a Kenyan immigrant who already has two children with his current partner, feels certain that he does not wish to add to his family.

These men's desires for marriage and children, along with the fact that many are at a point in their lives where they can feasibly afford to be parents, may influence their hopes that their partners will not have an abortion. Not surprisingly, this group of men was one of the least likely to be using male forms of birth control such condoms or withdrawal². Although the men in this group are not necessarily using male forms of birth control (and only three of those six men who do not want or are uncertain about having any (more) children are primarily responsible for pregnancy prevention within their relationships through the use of condoms), the vast majority of couples (n=26) in this group are actively trying to prevent pregnancy. Since these men feel positively about having a child and an about the future of their relationships with their current partners, they may be less concerned about personally preventing conception. They either trust that their partners are consistently using birth control and/or are willing to become fathers should a mistimed pregnancy arise.

Men Who Hope a Pregnancy will be Terminated

Ten of the 54 men say they prefer that their partners have abortions if they become pregnant. These men are clear that they would not want to become fathers, at least in the near future, primarily for financial and maturity reasons. Josh, for example, a 22 year old part time library clerk who occasionally takes classes at the local community college said, "...ultimately I

realize that neither of us is in a position to have a kid and that having an abortion would be the best option financially or otherwise for us both.” These view it as irresponsible to have kids before they can support them. Shane (22) elaborates on this when he says, “I couldn’t take care of a kid financially. I couldn’t give them the doctor’s appointments they need. I couldn’t buy all the clothes and food they need.” In addition to financial reasons, these men don’t feel mature enough to have children. Josh says that his life is not “conducive to a child” because he likes to “go out on the weekends and party.” Mitch (25) is not ready to be a father, “because I need to put myself first. I couldn’t [put] my kid [first], I know I would resent it too much and that’s not a good environment for a kid at all... I’m just not mature enough of a person yet.” They feel that abortion is a better option because they would not make good parents at this point in their life.

The majority (7 of the 10) of the men who would prefer abortion feel that their partners would agree. Most base this on conversations they have had with their partners. Mitch (25), a chef, says that in a discussion with his partner, “...she said that she would get an abortion if she got pregnant right now...” The remaining two of the seven do not reference specific conversations with their partners, but past experiences. Both Robert (26) and Shane’s partners had previous abortions, which is why they believe this would again be the outcome. Shane (22) says, “...I’m pretty sure she would have an abortion, ‘cause she’s had one [in the past].”

The other three of the 10 men who hope their partners will have abortions are unsure of what the outcome will be or think their partners would give birth against their wishes. Brad (29) says that although he and his partner discussed abortion when they had been worried she was pregnant and she thought it was a good idea, “she didn’t know if she could do that or not”, so he is unsure of the outcome of a possible pregnancy. The remaining two men who hope their partners will opt for abortion feel certain that the women would give birth. Ben (30), thinks his

partner would have a baby because she told him that she has a medical problem that makes abortion unsafe; Evan's partner is pro-life. Though Evan (27) would prefer an abortion, "If she got pregnant now, I would have to think that we'd have it because I think she's pretty much deeply opposed to it, and we would just adjust our lives accordingly."

The ten men who hope a pregnancy will be terminated are quite distinct from the other groups. They are the least educated group overall, and on average, are about two years younger than the other men in the study. Only around half are working full time and their average income is the lowest of any other group. However, it is not as if these men never want children, despite not wanting them in the near future. One is already a father, and only one childless man explicitly said that he never wants children. The percentage of men in this group who want children is as high as the percentage of men who want children and who hope their partners would give birth. If most of these men eventually want children, what would lead them to choose abortion in the event of an unexpected pregnancy? Coupled with their current lack of instrumental preparedness for children, few of these men intend to marry their partners, (though two plan to stay in their cohabiting unions indefinitely). This is not surprising since they have been with their partners for less time than any other group in the analysis. Most are neither at the right point in their lives nor sure that they are with the right partner. Until that point, all believe that abortion is the best option should an unexpected pregnancy occur. Not surprisingly, male controlled forms of contraceptive use are highest among this group. These men do not currently want children, and are doing all they can to ensure that their partners do not get pregnant. Eight of these men say that their partners are using birth control pills; four of the eight are also using condoms to further decrease the risk of a mistimed pregnancy. One of the ten couples is relying

solely on condoms, and the final couple is not using birth control because the female partner was inconsistent in her usage and the male partner refuses to use condoms..

Those Who Are Clear That the Decision is Their Partners'

Nine of the men in this sample differ from the other groups in that they feel the power to decide whether to terminate or carry out a pregnancy rests in a woman's hands; consequently, they did not express their personal opinions on how they would prefer to respond to an unexpected pregnancy. Four of the nine men directly stated that the decision is completely their partners'. Jonathan (28) explained, "I don't believe that it's the man's right to do anything other than just support whatever the woman wants to do...I just don't understand men who are feverishly supportive of the Right to Life movement." Likewise, when expressing his view of abortion, Matthew (30) remarked, "I really think that it's the woman's right to choose. I don't think that should ever change. It doesn't matter whether it's rape or by choice. It's their body and they can do what they want with it." The remaining five men never directly stated that abortion is a choice that only women are able to make, but their use of pronouns solidified their views. Adam (28), for example, did not mention his preference for the outcome of a conception, but stated that abortion would not be an option because, "that's something *she* doesn't want to do" (emphasis added). Ray, a 31 year old bookkeeper noted that, although adoption might be a consideration that he and his partner Julie would discuss, "I guess the ball would mostly be in her court as to whether she'd want to have an abortion or if she could handle having a child and giving it up so it's a very emotional thing for a woman and she would have to make that decision." Like the other men in this group, Ray never mentioned his own preference.

Just as some men are more direct than others regarding "a woman's right to choose," some are more certain than others regarding what that choice would be. The majority of men in

this group (n=5) believe their partners would have the baby, even if unplanned. For example, Jerry (27) a manager of a retail store, said that, “she’s against abortion for herself or whatever so ...we would definitely have the kid.” Similarly, Matthew (30) said that if his partner becomes pregnant, “Well I think she’d have the baby, most certainly.” However, he added that this is “just a hunch” from watching his partner interact with children. Two others think their partners would have the child, in part because of past experiences with abortion. Chad said that if his partner became pregnant, “At this point, my guess is that she would want to keep it...she had an abortion when she was 18 and I think she still has some kinda hang-ups from that.” Jonathan, though, noted that both he and Janelle had experienced abortions with previous partners, so he felt that Janelle would opt for abortion again. Although few of these men have had an explicit conversation with their partners about how the women would handle a pregnancy, and three are still uncertain about the choices their partners would ultimately make, all feel that the women’s decisions are not up for debate.

Men who believe that the options for the outcome of a pregnancy rest solely with their partners are distinct in several ways. First, all but one of the men in this group have had at least some college education. Almost all are working full time; those who are not are full time students. This group of men’s average incomes are lower than the group that expresses they would want their partner to have the child; however, this is likely due to the fact that some of these men are working full time in low wage jobs while they attend college full time. Also, the majority of men (n=8) in this group are white. This group of men is very likely to say they believe they will marry their partners in the future. Together with their ambiguous ideas about fatherhood, their desires to marry their partners may indicate that a strong commitment plays a role in the decision to leave pregnancy outcomes up to the woman. Only one of these men is

currently a father, one man never wants children, and two others are uncertain if they view children in their future. It is possible that men who do not have strong feelings about fatherhood are more willing to defer pregnancy decisions to their partners. Eight of the nine men are currently in relationships where hormonal or barrier-method birth control is practiced. It is unclear how their contraceptive use is related to their willingness to allow their partners to decide the outcome of a potential pregnancy; their contraceptive consistency may be related more to their level of education than ideas about pregnancy outcomes (e.g., Forste and Morgan, 1998; Frost, Singh, and Finer, 2007)

Those Who Feel that they Must Decide Together

The remaining seven of the 54 men in the primary sample feel that they would have to wait until an unexpected pregnancy arose, then discuss possible outcomes with their partners before making a decision of whether to carry the baby to term or opt for abortion. Spencer (29), who has a child from a previous relationship, replied to the question about possible pregnancy outcomes by saying, “I can’t really answer that, ‘cause I’m not in that situation. I could lay out all the options on the table but I can’t say what we would do because she’s not here with me, because it would be a mutual decision.” Mason (31) admitted that he and his partner had discussed what might happen if she were to become pregnant. When asked about the outcome of the discussion, he compared pregnancy to combat, saying,

It wasn’t like there was a set specific plan because I think we were both being honest about the fact that when it finally comes down to it you won’t know until it’s a real decision, the corollary being then is that you never know how you’re going to act in war until it happens.

All of these men expressed sentiments that they were not opposed to any particular pregnancy outcome, save Terrell (23), a part-time dock worker. Terrell said that he was pro-life, but then discussed how he and his partner’s daughter was born four months premature, weighing less than two pounds. The emotional experience of the premature birth and their

daughter's subsequent medical problems led Terrell to assert that he and Aliyah would discuss all of their options if she became pregnant again, despite his views of abortion. Still, Terrell notes that he theoretically would not mind having a son someday since he already has two daughters (one with Aliyah and one from a past relationship), but that it is unlikely to happen since he wishes to remain with Aliyah, and the two do not plan on having any more children.

This group of men is distinct from the others in that it includes a high percentage of full time workers. Most intend to remain with their partners permanently, but this group is also unique in that very few of the men see themselves having (more) children in their future. Only Terrell, who wants a son that he can name "Junior" (but not with his current partner), and Mason, who would like a child but not with his current partner, are certain that they want to have children. For Terrell and Mason, decisions about parenthood rely as much on the partner they are with as their feelings about pregnancy outcomes. This group's general ambivalence about fatherhood and desires to have children but not with their current partners are perhaps the reasons that they feel couple-level decisions would need to be made only once an unintended pregnancy occurs. Their positions at the time, both in the stability of their intimate unions and in their instrumental preparedness for fatherhood will likely impact their future preferences.

Men Who have Already been through the Experience with their Partners

Eleven men in the full sample (N=61) were able to base their predictions about pregnancy outcomes on the fact that they have already conceived a child or children with their current partners. An additional nine men in this sample reported that they have children from a previous relationship or sexual encounter who they rarely see, if at all).

Their experiences with prior pregnancies sheds light on men's negotiations and perceived roles in actual pregnancy outcomes. Of the eleven men who mentioned past pregnancies with their partners, four men, Mark, Peter, Bill and Ron each experienced two pregnancies. For both Mark (31) and Peter, both pregnancies were carried to term. Bill, a 34 year old student and laboratory assistant, mentioned that his partner had an abortion after giving birth to the couple's first daughter. Ron's partner experienced two pregnancies; both were terminated, though the second was required because the pregnancy was ectopic. Before learning of the condition, however, Ron noted that she had already decided to have another abortion. Seven other men experienced a single pregnancy with their current partners. In three cases, abortion was the outcome and in the other four instances, the pregnancy was either carried to term or the couple was pregnant and planning to have the child when interviewed. Decisions over the outcome of a pregnancy were not made lightly and have colored these men's views towards the outcomes of future pregnancies.

A total of five of the 61 men experienced an abortion with their current partners. Robert and Shane's partners both became pregnant more than a year ago. Robert (26) notes that although the decision was his partner's, "neither one of us wanted to keep it." He states that he prefer that his partner to make the same choice if she were to get pregnant again in the future, "because I wouldn't be a good father." Shane echoes Robert's sentiments regarding feeling unready, but Shane's reasons are financial, not because he does not want to have a child. He said, "I would like a child but I feel better that, that she had it aborted instead of bringing it into this world and neglecting it and leaving it malnourished..." Ron, Bill, and Max spoke quite differently about their past abortion experiences with their partners. Ron, for example, felt

powerless when his partner decided to have an abortion. He said, “I mean what do I do, go file some order that she’s not allowed to have, you know? I wouldn’t even know what to do to stop it.” Bill was so unnerved by his partner’s abortion when an unexpected pregnancy occurred following the birth of their daughter that he got a vasectomy because, “I never wanted to have to make a decision like that again.” It is possible that other men had experiences that were similar to these five men; however, the men were not all directly asked whether they had experienced an abortion in the past. Instead, it is something that they often spontaneously volunteered. Perhaps only those men who were affected strongly, either positively or negatively, by past abortions with their current partners opted to mention the experience.

Seven (including Bill) of the 61 men in this sample ultimately decided to have the baby. Two of the men said abortion was never a consideration when their partners were pregnant. Bill discussed abortion with his partner when she was pregnant with their daughter, but said he never thought of the consideration as serious. Terrell’s partner brought up the possibility of abortion, but he was able to get her to abandon the topic. When asked if abortion was considered, he said,

Well we discussed it maybe once or twice about abortion. Yeah, I think she actually [said], “what do you think about abortion?” and I looked at her crazy and she started telling me a little about school and finances...I thought about it and I was like “We ain’t getting an abortion.”

His feelings about abortion have changed somewhat given the difficult and extremely premature birth of their daughter. The remaining three men voiced that early in the pregnancy they strongly preferred that it be terminated. However, their partners ultimately chose to have the children. Mark, for example, already had one child with his partner, Tracy. When his partner discovered she was pregnant for the second time he was unhappy because, as the primary caretaker, he felt that he would face more repercussions than did she and said he “considered suggesting abortion.” He is currently planning a vasectomy, against his partner’s wishes. By doing so, he would control the couple’s decision about future childbearing in the most effective way he sees

possible. The other two men did discuss abortion with their partners. Vic admits that he “argued stronger for having an abortion” but explained the difficulty of their decision:

...we were waffling there...she made the decision that maybe she wasn't going to be comfortable with aborting and that maybe she wanted it and then she sort of made up her mind that she wasn't going to have an abortion until she had thought about it and then I sort of was like, “yeah, that makes sense, you know, this isn't something that you just do overnight or, you know, even a week or two weeks or a month or whatever” because... it was almost two months before we were sort of like, “Ok. This is what we're going to do.” You know, so there was just sort of she had made up her mind there.”

Interestingly, when Vic spoke of the decision-making experience, he made clear that the decisions were made by his partner, and that the resolution to have the child only became a ‘we’ (mutual) decision once his partner definitively decided not to have an abortion. In contrast to Terrell, who was able to influence his partner’s choice about the outcome of the pregnancy, these three men ultimately ceded to the women’s decision to give birth. Further research should be done to determine under what circumstances men have the ability to influence the outcome of a pregnancy, even to the point where a man has the power to convince his partner to reverse her decision.

Conclusion

Evidence suggests that cohabiting men take a variety of stances on abortion. Clearly, individual opinions about abortion play a role in shaping men’s desired pregnancy outcomes. However, men’s views appear to be influenced not just by their personal ideologies but also by their relationships with their partners and instrumental and maturational readiness for fatherhood. Some assert that if the situation does arise, the power to make the decisions rest solely in the hands of their partners, since it is the women who have to bear the bulk of the physical burden of childbirth. Others say they would have to discuss the options with their partner should a mistimed pregnancy occur. Still other men take clear stances on the matter, either for abortion, or for their partner giving birth. Based on the results of this study, it appears that many men’s

opinions about abortion are based not necessarily on permanent stances on the issue but on their current situations, including the quality of their relationships with their partners, their instrumental preparedness in terms of their completed education and occupational situations, and their own evaluation of their maturity and readiness to become fathers (again).

Although most of these men consider their relationships to be less formal than marriage, only a few remarked on their cohabiting status when discussing desired pregnancy outcomes. Of those that did address this issue, their viewpoints centered on the fact that the couple intended to marry eventually which, for them, made parenthood a more appealing option than abortion. In contrast to union type, relationship quality was a common theme. Many of those men who would opt for abortion or who were unsure about the decisions they would make are not necessarily opposed to having children. Instead, they are opposed to having children with their current partners. This further highlights the need to treat cohabitators as a heterogeneous group, considering not just the role that cohabitation serves for them (a precursor to marriage, an alternative to marriage, or an alternative to singlehood) and their plans for the future of their relationships but also the quality of their unions *in situ*.

Very few men (2 of 61) specifically lamented the fact that they have no legal rights regarding terminating pregnancy, and those spontaneously volunteering that they would be willing to raise the baby themselves are equally rare. This suggests that many men either do not have strong enough feelings to press the issue should their own desires differ from their partners' or have never considered their lack of legal footing. Some men with strong opinions are able to influence their partner's decision making processes; others might initially express one desire, but ultimately be satisfied with alternative outcomes. However, men who did not want to

be fathers but whose partners had the baby may subsequently express satisfaction with being fathers, highlighting the operation of retrospective bias for men as well as women.

Others have suggested alternatives to provide men with more power to determine pregnancy outcomes. Alito (1991) and Conley's (2005a) positions that men would be able to prevent their wives or girlfriends from having abortions actually gives men a significant amount of power to change the lives of their sexual partners in ways that may not be anticipated. Since it is women who bear the brunt of childcare duties, whose work lives are most affected by parenthood, and who are much more likely to become custodial parents, a man's refusal to consent to an abortion (or his injunction to block the termination of a pregnancy), while resulting in a legal order for him to pay child support, could change his partner's life even more. It would be incredibly difficult to provide equal legal say to men and women in determining pregnancy outcomes, but alternatives do exist. Some have suggested affording unmarried men some financial rights to determine whether or not they become parents. The fact that nine men in this sample continue to pay at least some child support (though not all through the legal system) for children they rarely or never see suggests that at least some men would take advantage of this option. For them, "fatherhood" is primarily an economic duty. This alternative leaves does not provide a solution for those men who wish to become parents when their partners do not.

Efforts to bring unmarried men into the decision-making process upon learning of an unplanned or mistimed pregnancy should focus on enabling each partner to make a more carefully weighed, thoroughly informed, and mutually satisfactory decision within the context of their own relationship. Cohabitation, which is often typified by more egalitarian gender ideals than marriage, is the ideal location in which to examine these conversations as couples search for outcomes that are agreeable for both partners. Evidence from the men in this study who

experienced a pregnancy with their partners demonstrates that any decision that a woman or couple ultimately makes clearly will affect both partners, whether positively or negatively. Further research should focus on determining exactly what impact pregnancy outcomes have on men and uncovering the strategies those men who have strong feelings about pregnancy outcomes use to influence their partners.

Clearly these 61 cohabitators do not represent all men in the United States. Nonetheless, men's views are seldom represented in this area; in-depth interviews provide the best way to begin exploring this important topic. Considering that non-marital sexual involvement and cohabitation are now normative and nonmarital births show no signs of decreasing significantly, men's place in pregnancy decision-making should be in the forefront of public discussion. Longitudinal studies that qualitatively examines fertility desires at the couple-level both before and after a pregnancy occurs will help us understand how men's desired pregnancy outcomes impact actual decisions.

Appendix A: Demographic Characteristics of All of the Men			
	Entire Sample		
Number	61		
Age		Income	
Mean (years)	27.4	Mean income	\$30,834
		No reported income	2
Education		\$5,000-\$14,999	12
Less than HS	2	\$15,000-\$24,999	10
HS/GED	4	\$25,000-\$34,999	12
Some College (no degree)	14	\$35,000-\$49,999	17
Associate's Degree	11	\$50,000+	8
Bachelor's Degree	22		
Master's Degree	8	Marital Status	
		Both never married	50
Race		One never married, one previously married	11
White	48		
Latino	3	Plan to marry current partner	39
Black	6	Do not plan to marry current partner	16
Multiracial	4	Plan to stay with current partner, but never want to marry	6
Employment		Length of time dating partner (in months)	36.3
Full time worker	47		
Part time worker, not a student	2	Fatherhood Variables	
Part time worker and student	9	Have children	18
Not working for pay	3	Do not have children	43
		Certain they want (more) children	41
		Not certain they want (more) children	20
		Birth Control Use	
		Using female forms only	31
		Using male forms only or both male and female forms	23

Appendix B: Demographic Characteristics of the Four Groups

	Entire Sample	Want partners to give birth	Want partners to have an abortion	Completely up to the woman	The couple will decide together
Number	54	28	10	9	7
Age					
Mean (years)	27	26.8	25.3	27.2	29.6
Education					
Less than HS	3.7%	3.7%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
HS/GED	5.6%	3.7%	0.0%	11.1%	14.3%
Some College (no degree)	20.4%	3.7%	40.0%	44.4%	28.6%
Associate's Degree	16.7%	29.6%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Bachelor's Degree	40.7%	46.4%	30.0%	33.3%	42.9%
Master's Degree	13.0%	14.8%	10.0%	11.1%	14.3%
Race					
White	77.8%	71.4%	90.0%	88.9%	57.1%
Latino	5.6%	7.4%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Black	9.3%	14.8%	0.0%	0.0%	14.3%
Multiracial	7.4%	3.7%	0.0%	11.1%	28.6%
EMPLOYMENT					
Full time worker	79.6%	85.7%	60.0%	77.8%	85.7%
Part time worker, not a student	3.7%	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%	14.3%
Part time worker and student	13.0%	11.1%	30.0%	11.1%	0.0%
Not working for pay	3.7%	3.7%	0.0%	11.1%	0.0%
INCOME					
Mean income	\$32,046	\$35,052	\$20,470	\$26,747	\$43,373 ^a
No reported income	1.9%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
\$5,000-\$14,999	20.4%	7.1%	50.0%	44.4%	0.0%
\$15,000-\$24,999	14.8%	18.5%	10.0%	0.0%	28.6%
\$25,000-\$34,999	20.4%	22.2%	30.0%	11.1%	14.3%
\$35,000-\$49,999	27.8%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	42.9%
\$50,000+	14.8%	18.5%	10.0%	11.1%	14.3%
MARITAL STATUS					
Both never married	83.3%	78.6%	100.0%	77.8%	85.7%
One never married, one previously married	16.7%	22.2%	0.0%	22.2%	14.3%
Plan to marry current partner	63.0%	78.6%	30.0%	66.7%	42.9%
Do not plan to marry current partner	25.9%	14.8%	50.0%	33.3%	28.6%
Plan to stay with current partner, but never want to marry	11.1%	7.4%	20.0%	0.0%	28.6%
Length of time dating partner (in months)	35.3	34.0	27.8	35.4	50.7 ^b
FATHERHOOD VARIABLES					
Have children	25.9%	32.1%	10.0%	11.1%	28.6%
Do not have children	74.1%	66.7%	90.0%	88.9%	71.4%
Certain they want (more) children	68.5%	81.5%	80.0%	55.6%	28.6%
Not certain they want (more) children	31.5%	21.4%	20.0%	44.4%	71.4%
BIRTH CONTROL USE					
Using female forms only	51.9%	57.1%	40.0%	55.6%	42.9%
Using male forms only or both male and female forms	38.9%	37.0%	50.0%	33.3%	42.9%
Not using birth control	9.3%	7.4%	10.0%	11.1%	14.3%

^a Without the highest paid man in this group, a lawyer who earns \$110,000/year, the average is \$32,268

^b Without the man in this group who never wishes to marry (who has been with his partner for 192 months), the average is 27.2

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¹ In this instance, there is an intersection of fatherhood status and level of education. Only two of the nine fathers in this group, and 3 of the 18 fathers in the entire 61-person sample has at least a bachelor’s degree. This is not surprising given that unwed childbearing is more common among those with less education (Ellwood and Jencks 2004; Manning 2001; Martin 2004).

² The withdrawal method was included as a male form of family planning in this analysis because both The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI, 2002) and Planned Parenthood (2004) list the method as a contraceptive choice