

Sassler, Sharon and Amanda Miller. 2011. "Waiting to Be Asked: Gender, Power, and Relationship Progression among Cohabiting Couples" *Journal of Family Issues* 32:482-506.

PRIMARY ARGUMENT: The author argues that although cohabitation allows women to challenge traditional gender roles by initiating and taking control over relationship progression, men still play more dominant roles in these processes through their manifest, hidden, and covert power.

IMPORTANT DEFINED CONCEPTS:

- Manifest Power: This is overt power, often shaped by hidden and covert power, to always have the final say in a negotiation. This power is usually granted by the negotiation partner, not just assumed by the powerful person.
- Hidden and Covert Power: Hidden power is implicit forces (ex., social norms, traditions, etc.) that influence individuals' actions in negotiation. Covert power can suppress or delay negotiations (ex., bad timing, fear of rejection and failure, etc.).

PRIMARY FINDINGS:

1. Despite women's increased participation in the labor force and income, and recent shifts in social norms and gender expectations, women still do an unequal share of household labor even in informal unions like cohabitation.
2. Research findings suggest that in the early stages of their relationship, cohabiting couples still mostly follow traditional gender norms, where men are more likely to initiate the formation of a serious relationship — a sign of manifest power.
3. When deciding if they will move in together, women who take the initiation often face resistance or rejection from their partners, again showing men's manifest power, as they are the ones to decide whether the couple will actually move in together. Additionally, the motives for moving in also tend to be gendered. Women want to move in because of material/financial reasons, while men do it for convenience.
4. When deciding if they want to progress to marriage, findings again prove men's manifest and covert power. Women who intend to initiate marriage often fear such discussions will receive negative reactions from or be resisted by their partners. Men in the sample also showed more confidence in their partners' desire to marry and their own ability to control when they want to progress to the next step of their relationship.

KEY QUOTE: "Our findings suggest that cohabitation serves as an arena where normative gender roles are sometimes undone, at least when it comes to establishing cohabiting unions. Nonetheless, couples reinforce normative gender enactments at numerous relationship points, including initiating relationships and transforming them into more formal arrangements, such as engagement. Individuals' strategies to attain their desired ends highlight the persistence of men's dominant position, through the operation of manifest, covert, and hidden power" (p. 499).

QUESTION: When initiating relationship progression, do women fear resistance/rejection from their partners more than men? Is that why they're less direct?