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**A Case for Qualitative Methods in U.S. Family
Demography: Understanding the Meaning
of Unmarried Cohabitation**

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**A Case for Qualitative Methods in U.S. Family Demography:
Understanding the Meaning of Unmarried Cohabitation***

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Abstract

Demographic knowledge about the family in the United States has been grounded in quantitative data and analysis. This is both appropriate and unsurprising given that a central mission for family demographers is to attain understandings of family structures and processes that can be generalized to various populations. This paper argues, however, that to fully understand the family and particularly new family forms, it is important to include qualitative approaches as well. Using the example of unmarried cohabitation, we first develop a conceptualization of cohabitation, combining sociological understandings of the family as a societal institution with insights derived from symbolic interactionism. We then argue that our conceptualization implies that qualitative, as well as quantitative, research methods are necessary for understanding family forms. Finally, we discuss possible barriers to fully endorsing qualitative methods by demographers studying the United States.

Introduction

Demographic knowledge about the family in the United States has been grounded in quantitative data and analysis. This is both appropriate and unsurprising given that a central mission for family demographers is to attain understandings of family structures and processes that can be generalized to various populations. This paper argues, however, that to fully understand the family and particularly new family forms, it is important for family demographers to include qualitative approaches as well. Qualitative approaches have been used by demographers to study families in developing countries (e.g., Axinn, Fricke, and Thornton 1991; Caldwell, Hill, and Hull 1988; Glaser 1999; Greenhalgh 1994; Knodel 1995, 1997; Massey 1987; Knodel and Pramualratana 199; Massey 1987; Peracca, Knodel, and Saengtienchai 1998; Vanlandingham, Knodel, and Saengtienchai. 1998) and to study some family-related issues in disadvantaged populations, primarily poor single mothers and young nonresident fathers (Burton 1995; Burton et al. 1998; Edin 2000; Edin and Lein 1997a,b; Furstenberg 1995, 1996; Geronimus 1996; Jarrett 1993; Jarrett and Burton 1999; Waller 1999), but have not been employed in general demographic research on the U.S. family.

Using the example of a relatively new family form -- unmarried cohabitation -- this discussion paper argues that qualitative approaches would provide an important complement to the quantitative ones already pursued by family demographers.¹ Our paper is organized as follows. We first provide a brief background on cohabitation in the United States. Second, we develop a conceptualization of cohabitation as an institution, combining sociological understandings of the family as a societal institution along with insights derived from symbolic interactionism. We argue that our conceptualization implies that qualitative, as well as quantitative, research methods are necessary for understanding the meaning of a family form. Finally, we present some specific examples of how qualitative research could enrich the research literature on cohabitation.

Background

As is well known among family demographers and sociologists, heterosexual cohabitation has risen sharply in recent years in the United States. It has become so prevalent that the majority of marriages and remarriages now begin as cohabiting relationships, most younger men and women have cohabited or will cohabit, and two-fifths of children born in the early 1990s will spend time in a cohabiting-parent family (Bumpass and Lu 2000).

Alongside the upward trend in cohabitation, the amount of scholarship on cohabitation, with most researchers drawn from the closely allied sub-fields of family sociology and family demography, has also escalated in a very short time. Just 15 years ago very little was known about cohabitation. Since then, family sociologists and demographers have rapidly created a solid base of generalizable knowledge made possible by new data collection efforts associated with large-scale surveys and the Census (see Casper and Bianchi [forthcoming], Seltzer [2000], and Smock [2000] for reviews).²

¹ It is important to recognize that there is great diversity in qualitative methods and epistemologies (see, e.g., Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Lin 1998).

² Surveys began to obtain detailed information about respondents' past and current cohabitation experiences in the mid-1980s. These included the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) (Sweet, Bumpass, and Call 1988), the Detroit Area Study (Thornton 1988), the National Survey of Family Growth

From these data sources, we now know a good deal about cohabitation and its growth to prominence over the past few decades, with demographers and sociologists having done an excellent job describing overall patterns and producing a substantial amount of knowledge about important issues such as: (1) the effect of premarital cohabitation on marital stability (Axinn and Thornton 1992; Bennett, Blanc, and Bloom 1988; Booth and Johnson 1988; DeMaris and MacDonald 1993; DeMaris and Rao 1992; Hall and Zhao 1995; Lillard, Brien, and Waite 1995; Rao and Trussell 1989; Schoen 1992; Teachman and Polonko 1990; Teachman, Thomas, and Paasch 1991; Thomson and Colella 1992); (2) differences in the characteristics of cohabiting and married individuals and characteristics of their relationships (Blackwell and Lichter 2000; Brines and Joyner 1999; Brown and Booth 1996; Nock 1995, 1998; Qian 1998; Qian and Preston 1993; Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel 1990; Schoen and Weinick 1993); and (3) the role of cohabitation in nonmarital childbearing (Bachrach 1987; Brien, Lillard, and Waite 1999; Brown 2000a; Landale and Fennelly 1992; Landale and Forste 1991; Loomis and Landale 1994; Manning 1993, 1995, 2001; Manning and Landale 1996; Manning and Smock 1995; Musick 1999; Oropesa 1996; Raley 2001; Wu 1996; Wu, Bumpass, and Musick 1999).

Although we know a substantial amount about some aspects of cohabitation, our understanding is nonetheless limited to what we can glean from secondary analysis of existing data sets, with resulting gaps in knowledge. For example, in reference to (3) above, while we know that cohabitation is more commonly a site for childbearing and rearing among Hispanics than among non-Hispanic whites, we do not know what considerations, perceptions, and motives lie behind this pattern. Another example concerns the issue of when and why cohabiting couples decide to marry. Research has shown that cohabiting African Americans and whites are equally likely to state that they have plans to marry, but that the former are far less likely to make the transition to marriage. Drawing on the National Survey of Families and Households, (Brown 2000b) shows that about 70% of both African American and white cohabitators report marriage plans. Of these, 60% of the whites cohabitators actually went on to marry within five years compared to just 20% of the African Americans cohabitators. This is a large disparity. Brown's study, and some of our own research, is unable to account for this gap even after taking account of numerous economic, sociodemographic, and relationship-related variables (Brown 2000b; Manning and Smock 1995; Smock and Manning 1997). While demographers sometimes attribute such residual differences to "culture," there has been little exploration of those aspects of culture that influence individual and couple decision-making about cohabitation and the mechanisms by which they do so.

Below we present a conceptualization of cohabitation as an institution and argue that it provides a useful framework to systematically understand a family form such as cohabitation. More to the point, this conceptualization provides specific justification for qualitative explorations of cohabitation.

(Bachrach 1987), and the National Longitudinal Survey of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS-72). Direct identification of cohabitation became available in the Current Population Surveys (CPS), the Census, and a census-sponsored survey (the Survey of Income and Program Participation) in the 1990s (see Casper and Cohen [2000] for a review of data issues involved in the study of cohabitation). More recently, new data sources focusing on children (National Survey of American Families and the National Longitudinal Adolescent Study of Adolescent Health) and on nonmarital childbearing (the Fragile Families project; see McLanahan and Garfinkel [2000]) have become available that include questions about cohabitation.

Conceptualizing Cohabitation as an Institution

Our conceptualization of cohabitation as an institution combines two perspectives. The first is a macro-level approach that delineates the objective institutional properties of cohabiting unions. The second is a symbolic interactionist approach that investigates the subjective aspects of cohabitation as an institution, emphasizing the meanings and interpretations that individuals ascribe to this family form. These levels are complementary, and both, we believe, are requisite to understanding the meaning of social phenomena. As the sociologist Talcott Parsons wrote:

There are, I think, two main valid approaches to the theoretical treatment of institutions....I call them the "objective" and the "subjective," respectively. The former is their study from the point of view of the sociological observer, the latter from the point of view of the individual acting in relation to institutions. Unless one is to be a radical behaviorist, the inclusion of the latter point of view is essential to all the sciences dealing with human conduct.... (Parsons 1990:319-320).

The "Objective" Perspective

Sociological theory on the family emphasizes that the family is an *institution* – that is, a system of widely understood expectations, rules, and social roles that has great value because it performs various critical tasks (i.e., functions) for society. Other societal institutions include government, religion, and education.

The concept of institutionalization can also be applied to specific family forms. Over two decades ago, family demographer Andrew Cherlin coined the term "incomplete institutionalization" in reference to remarriage (Cherlin 1978). Cherlin argued that many of the problems confronting remarried adults and their children stemmed from a lack of standardized solutions to problems, or, in other words, from incomplete institutionalization. Examples included the lack of clearly defined rights and obligations for stepparents and the absence of kinship terms for all of the relationships formed through second marriages.

More recently, Steven Nock (1995) extended this idea to cohabitation, arguing that cohabitation and marriage are qualitatively different relationships, with this difference stemming from the degree of institutionalization (see also Burton and Jayakody 2001; Waite and Gallagher 2000). As Nock states, "Cohabitation is an incomplete institution. No matter how widespread the practice, nonmarital unions are not yet governed by strong consensual norms or formal laws" (p. 74). Nock identifies several ramifications of cohabitation's weak institutionalization, including fewer obstacles to ending the relationship than with marriage, weaker integration into important social support networks, and more ambiguity about what it means to be a cohabiting partner than to be a spouse. Indeed, Nock finds that cohabitators report lower levels of commitment and lower levels of relationship happiness than do married people (see also Thomson and Colella 1992). Nock attributes these findings, at least in part, to a lack of institutionalization.

We elaborate these conceptualizations by positing that there are four properties that are central to understanding any familial institution, including cohabitation; taken together, we argue, these four properties provide a rich and systematic framework for understanding family forms. These properties are: (1) configuration, (2) roles, (3) functions, and (4) processes of entrance and exit. Although we conceptualize these as unique properties, it is important to recognize that they are not fully separable conceptually or in practice and that there are important interrelationships between them.

The first and most basic dimension is *configuration*. By configuration we simply mean “who lives with whom” (i.e., household structure, including the presence of children, their number, and the presence of other relatives or nonrelatives). Household configuration is the most fundamental property in our conceptualization, and has long been a focus of family demography. An example of configuration that is common in the demographic literature is extended versus nuclear family households. Documenting configuration, especially comparatively across family types, represents a first step toward understanding a family form as an institution. While networks outside the household often provide social and emotional support to household members, the coresident household remains the major locus of primary relationships, the redistribution of resources, and the provision of care and companionship in the United States (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1989; Sweet and Bumpass 1987). Thus, household configurations and how these vary among subgroups have important implications for individual well-being and that of society as a whole (Sweet and Bumpass 1987; Yabiku, Axinn, and Thornton 1999).

The second property in our conceptualization is *roles*. This is a more complex institutional property than configuration. Roles are the set of rights and obligations (i.e., expected behaviors) associated with being in a particular position (i.e., status) in a social structure such as student, hospital volunteer, wife, or husband (Goode 1964; Heiss 1992). As applied to familial institutions, roles are the array of family rights and obligations associated with being a parent, a son, a husband, a wife, etc., that provide guidelines for behavior (Goode 1964). The key link between roles and individual behavior is social norms, with norms being defined as generally accepted expectations for behavior such as the norm that spouses pool resources or care for one another in sickness or health. As stated by Thornton and colleagues, “Roles are among the most central structural components of microsettings for behavior” (Thornton, Fricke, Axinn, and Alwin 2001:220).

Third, institutions perform *functions* of value to society or, as described by Cherlin, they provide “public goods” (Cherlin 1999). Almost 50 years ago Talcott Parsons posited that marriage fulfills several core functions: sexual regulation; economic cooperation; procreation; the socialization of children; and the provision of affection and companionship (Parsons and Bales 1955). More recently, family sociologist David Popenoe (1993) has argued that a good deal of the family’s strength as an institution lies in its effectiveness in carrying out its functions. According to Popenoe, the U.S. family is not only fulfilling fewer functions than it once did but fulfilling them less well.

The fourth property we delineate is *processes of entrance and exit*, that is, family formation and dissolution. An important feature of families is their fluidity in structure, and our conceptualization treats this dynamic as an institutional property.

The “Subjective” Perspective

Our conceptualization of cohabitation as an institution also incorporates the social psychological paradigm of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism posits that individual behavior is not based on *what is*, but on individuals’ interpretations of *what is* (Thomas and Thomas 1928). Human beings are continually categorizing their world and defining situations and it is these definitions that actually cue behavior (Mead 1934; Stryker 1972). According to this perspective, it is essential to determine the meanings that individuals ascribe to relationships. Most broadly, the symbolic interactionist paradigm yields the important insight that identifying subjective meanings is crucial to understanding behavior and societal institutions.

A Qualitative Approach to Understanding Cohabitation as an Institution

We thus propose that two levels of analysis are needed to study a familial institution: a level focusing on objective indicators and another focusing on meanings -- interpretations ascribed to social phenomena such as cohabitation. Qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, or ethnographic research are especially suited to the latter; meanings, motivations, beliefs and their linkages to action are not easily made numeric, particularly without first attaining an in-depth understanding afforded by qualitative inquiry (Lin 1998). To illustrate, below we briefly discuss the utility of qualitative approaches to examine three of our four institutional properties: roles, functions, and processes of entrance and exit. We focus on these because they are arguably the best candidates for qualitative research.³ Roles are explicitly *about* meanings and perceptions. While the functions of cohabitation may be observed in some way or assumed by social scientists, an understanding of *how* they are fulfilled and the extent to which individual perceptions about functions inform action requires more in-depth inquiry. As far as entrances and exits into and out of cohabitation, qualitative methods are extremely useful for understanding processes (Maxwell 1998; Morse 1994). More so than with stable ongoing situations, transitions can be best understood with detailed data describing processes and perceptions about how events unfold (Weiss 1994).

Roles in Cohabiting Unions

The perceived roles of husband and wife appear to be fairly well understood. Although actual behavior may depart from expected behavior, there is a basic cultural understanding that husbands and wives are to support one another economically, support and care for their children, engage in sexual relations only with one another, provide companionship and emotional support, and come to the aid of relatives of either the wife or husband when possible.

Family roles in cohabiting unions are not as well understood or articulated (Nock 1995; Waite and Gallagher 2000). What we do know about roles in cohabiting unions has largely been indirectly inferred from analyses of survey data. For example, the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Households asked both cohabiting and noncohabiting young adults about reasons one might want to cohabit. Respondents are asked to indicate the importance of each reason on a 7-point scale (from “not at all important” to “very important”):

Many couples these days live together without being married. Here are some reasons why a person might want to live with someone of the opposite sex without marrying: (1) it requires less personal commitment than marriage; (2) it is more sexually satisfying than dating; (3) it makes it possible to share living expenses; (4) it requires less sexual faithfulness than marriage; (5) couples can make sure they are compatible before getting married; (6) it allows each partner to be more independent than does marriage.

³ Configuration could also be investigated with qualitative methods. For example, household structure may be perceived differently by various household members. Additionally, there is some evidence that household configuration is more fluid in low income populations. Thus, the issue of “who lives in this household” may be more complex than usually assumed with no single correct answer.

Analysis of response patterns suggests that there are fewer rights and obligations associated with being a cohabiting partner than with being a spouse. While the most commonly selected reason was to test compatibility, some young adults also reported that cohabitation requires less sexual faithfulness than marriage and lower levels of commitment, suggesting lower expectations associated with the cohabiting-partner than spouse role (Bumpass, Sweet, and Cherlin 1991).

Other quantitative research relevant to roles in cohabiting unions has emphasized gender. Researchers have analyzed survey and Census data to examine assortative mating patterns, the division of domestic labor, and principals underlying relationship stability, leading most to conclude that gender roles are somewhat more egalitarian in cohabiting than in marital unions (Blackwell and Lichter 2000; Brines and Joyner 1999; Gupta 1999; Qian 1998; Qian and Preston 1993; Schoen and Weinick 1993; South and Spitze 1994; see also Blumstein and Schwartz 1983).

What we do not know is how roles in cohabiting unions are conceptualized and perceived in people's own words. What are the perceived rights and obligations associated with being a cohabiting partner? How might these differ from those of a spouse? Dating partners? Exploratory qualitative research such as semi-structured interviews or focus group interviews would be ideal for delineating the content and interpretation of roles (Bumpass and Sweet 2001). Additionally, qualitative inquiry could explore how cohabiting men and women negotiate gender roles in practice in cohabiting unions and whether and how these roles are linked to perceptions of the meaning of cohabitation. As Brines and Joyner (1999) argue, the negotiation of roles may be partly a result of the short-term time horizon of cohabiting unions.

Similarly, qualitative methods could be used to ascertain perceptions about the roles of cohabiting *parents*. Cohabiting couple households increasingly contain children and about two-fifths of children are likely to spend some time in such a household (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Manning forthcoming). Thus, it is important to delineate the rights and obligations of cohabiting parents to children as well as illuminate an important potential distinction in parenting roles – that based on the biological relationship to children. Almost half of children in cohabiting parent families are living with two biological parents and the other half are living with one biological parent and his/her cohabiting partner (Fields 2001). This is an important issue, not least because cohabiting families that include children from prior unions may face a double-institutional jeopardy because of the lack of both marital and biological ties. If both parents are biologically related to the child, views of the rights and obligations of parents may be quite similar to parenting roles in two biological parent married couples. If only one parent is biologically related to the child, then the perceived role of the partner may be more similar to a step-parent.

Even more fundamentally, as Nock (1995) notes, we do not even have accepted language to refer to cohabiting partners. Qualitative explorations could examine the language used to refer to cohabiting partners, inquire about interpretations of these terms, and how these interpretations may be linked to roles.

Functions

A central issue in the discourse about cohabitation is whether it is, or is becoming, a substitute for marriage, either generally or for particular subgroups (Smock 2000). One way to address this is to compare the two types of relationships in terms of fulfillment of functions. While functions, or what it is that the family accomplishes for society, have an objective dimension, we argue that individual perceptions about functions in part motivate decision-making about cohabitation.

Consider the functions of procreation and the socialization of children. As already noted, increasingly cohabiting unions include children. Further, most of the increase in nonmarital childbearing over the last two decades is due to fertility within cohabiting relationships (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Casper and Bianchi forthcoming; Manning forthcoming; Raley 2001). Quantitative approaches are, of course, most appropriate for describing population subgroup variation in childbearing and rearing within cohabitation and identifying predictors of these occurrences. What is missing from our knowledge-base is a detailed, in-depth understanding of *why* cohabitators do or do not have (or expect) children, thus illuminating the decision-making process surrounding childbearing within cohabitation.

Another function is sexual regulation. In the United States marriage implies a certain degree of sexual fidelity. The sexual behavior of cohabitators appears to be different than that married couples, with some research suggesting much higher levels of infidelity (Treas and Giesen 2000; Waite and Joyner 1999). And Bumpass et al. (1991) report that the most important reason young adults provided to *not* cohabit is that it requires more sexual faithfulness than dating. Qualitative research can be used to examine how cohabiting and married men and women articulate their feelings and beliefs about being sexually faithful to their partners, thus exploring why cohabiting couples may experience greater levels of infidelity.

Demographer and sociologist Kingsley Davis (1985) argued that several elements distinguish cohabiting from marital unions, and that these elements facilitate the fulfillment of family functions (see also Waite and Gallagher 2000). Two of these are the assumption of public recognition of the union and permanence, both characterizing marriage much more so than cohabiting relationships. Marriage generally ensures that the state as well as family and friends recognize the unions. To date, however, we know little about people's experiences with and beliefs about the views of peers, family, friends, and co-workers about cohabitation and how these may influence decision-making (including the decision to marry). Qualitative inquiries could provide this detail. Similarly, the short duration of cohabiting unions has been established in the literature and is commonly cited as a key feature of cohabitation (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Manning forthcoming). We can expand our knowledge of cohabitation by asking cohabitators whether they themselves view their unions as short and unstable; what kind of time horizon is being imagined? Additionally, cohabitators may have ways of interpreting relationship stability that are not parallel to married people. Interviews with both members of a couple would also illuminate discrepancies in these perceptions.

Processes of Entrance and Exit

There are at least two critical questions about processes of cohabitation formation and dissolution that qualitative methods could help to answer. The first concerns the "choice set" used as people consider whether or not to cohabit. Quantitative research has usually been based on the assumption that people choose between cohabitation and marriage, with researchers modeling "union choice" in a way that assumes that the two are alternatives (e.g., Axinn and Thornton 1993; Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, and Waite 1995; Clarkberg 1999; Thornton 1991; Thornton, Axinn, and Hill 1992; Thornton, Axinn, and Teachman 1995). Yet it may be, for example, that people are deciding either to cohabit or to live in some other arrangement, but that marriage is not perceived as an option and does not enter the calculus. Until we know more about the actual decision-making process, we may not be able to accurately model union formation and are thus misunderstanding the process.

The second area is the issue of precisely when cohabitations begin. Unlike marriage, there is no official marker to indicate the initiation of a cohabiting union. Yet surveys that collect life-history data routinely assume a discrete beginning of cohabitation and attempt to ascertain dates of initiation. It is unsurprising, then, that there are discrepancies in estimates of the prevalence of cohabitation based on different ways of ascertaining cohabitation in surveys and the Census (Casper and Cohen 2000; Raley personal communication). Just how is it that people come to see themselves as cohabiting? Qualitative inquiry can tap how and when relationships become defined as cohabitations and whether partners concur with this definition. This is important both for its implications for survey measurement and for understanding the process of union formation. Even the seemingly straightforward concept of cohabitation may need to be refined or elaborated; without open-ended conversations, it is difficult to do so.

Discussion

When conducting research in a poorly understood culture, qualitative work on how topics are conceptualized seems essential. We are *in* a culture which we understand poorly with respect to what intimate relationships of various types mean. Hence, we must begin afresh with qualitative explorations of how young people think about different types of relationships in order to design appropriate measures for our surveys (Bumpass and Sweet 2001, p. 297).

There is growing recognition in the demographic research community and among funding agencies that qualitative inquiries into the family are needed. Larry Bumpass, a Principal Investigator of one of the richest extant data sets on cohabitation, marriage, and the family (the National Survey of Families and Households), regrets the lack of exploratory qualitative research before the survey instrument's construction (Bumpass, personal communication). Family demographers at the recently-held National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) Planning Conference also strongly recommended qualitative research on the family to inform new surveys, help formulate new questions, or develop new modules that could be added to existing surveys (Institute for Social Research 2001). Moreover, the Demographic and Behavioral Sciences Branch of the NICHD has now explicitly recognized the importance of gathering qualitative data on topics related to marriage, cohabitation, and childbearing in the United States (Demographic and Behavioral Sciences Branch 1997, 1999; see also Bachrach, Hindin, and Thomson 2000; Thornton, Arnaudo, Marsiglio, Sugland, and Waite 1997).

Certainly, there are numerous reasons for doing and supporting exploratory qualitative research other than to elaborate the conceptualization of cohabitation developed here. These include better measurement of important demographic concepts and events, richer hypotheses and theories, and more accurate interpretation of findings from quantitative analyses of survey or Census data.

However, demographers often subscribe in theory to the importance of qualitative research but seem to be reluctant to fully endorse it. There are several sources of skepticism. One is that many in the demographic community are uncomfortable about entering into scientific inquiry without a theoretical or conceptual framework, even though these frameworks may blind us to what is actually there (Weiss 1994). The richest knowledge from qualitative inquiry often emerges precisely from discarding a priori assumptions, theories, and hypotheses about what one is studying. A second, related barrier is requiring "triangulation" wherein qualitative research has to be justified by being directly linked and integrated into quantitative methodologies, thus often forcing a priori assumptions. Third, the positivist bent of demography and quantitative social science more generally implies a belief that the real value of science

is the ability to generalize (Marshall and Rossman 1999); the value of knowledge gained from atypical, nonrepresentative, and small numbers of cases is thus suspect.

We argue, instead, that proper understanding of social phenomena actually requires the depth achieved through rich and detailed examination of a few cases, and that this effort to understand, and not just describe, is critical to the scientific enterprise and the accumulation of knowledge.⁴ While the positivist tradition in which most demographers work can provide us with the “what” -- that two or more variables are related and that there may be a credible causal story -- it cannot necessarily provide us with the “how” and the “why” (Lin 1998). That is, it is one thing to observe an association between variables that is credibly causal. It is another thing entirely to understand in detail the mechanisms producing this relationship.

To return to the example discussed earlier about when and why cohabitators marry, research has shown that good economic situations are associated with higher chances of marriage, but we don't understand the precise mechanisms by which this occurs. What aspects of economic resources translate into a desire to marry? Why does marriage appear to cost more than cohabitation? Whose expectations are involved? What are other important conceptual domains of motivations to marry? How do these interact with one another? We may not even know all of the relevant variables. In sum, it is important to ensure that our causal stories aren't, in fact, correlation stories, and this is something that qualitative inquiries can help to accomplish.

⁴ Ragin (1994:89) argues that there are at least two ways to advance theory. One is ascertaining new information about broad patterns, but the other is achieving in-depth knowledge based on a few cases about how different elements of a phenomenon fit together.

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