

Premarital cohabitation as a pathway into marriage.

An investigation into how premarital cohabitation is transforming the
institution of marriage in Ireland.

Athlone as a case study.

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'Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.'

Marcel Proust, French novelist (1871-1922).

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Summary

The purpose of this study is to investigate how premarital co-habitation is transforming the institution of marriage in Ireland. I conducted forty-one in-depth interviews in Athlone in 2007. The sample comprised cohabiting couples with plans to marry, cohabiting couples with no plans to marry, as well as couples who married without living together first. Respondents also filled in an event history calendar, recording key events in their lives, since the age of 16 years.

Using a life course analysis methodology, the findings make a major contribution to the debate in sociology over the dynamics of change in the transformation of the institution of marriage. Interview thematic analysis and event history calendar information demonstrate that it is the interplay between structural constraints and individual decision making in relationship development, and how that plays out in people's lives that produces innovative family formation patterns, such as premarital cohabitation. The wider societal changes associated with modernisation have created a paradox at the level of individual lives. This 'marriage paradox' means that factors, such as education, career opportunities, flexible family formation patterns which tend to liberalise relationship development and create more committed informal relationships, can result in the deferment of the formalisation of those relationships through marriage. This is a paradox because marriage continues to be the ideal outcome of relationship development for most people.

Although there are various pathways to marriage in the current, fluid social environment in which we live, the institution of marriage was still highly normatively valued for respondents in this study. Being 'ready' to marry often coincided with self-actualisation through other life goals, but emotional satisfaction within the relationship is crucial. Emotional satisfaction is now on an equal footing with self-actualisation.

Marriage as a social institution is valued in a different way. Periods of co-habitation are entered into as a means of trying to preserve that institution. Instead of marriage becoming de-institutionalised, or losing its intrinsic social status, it is instead becoming re-institutionalised. This study identifies the new social values and norms on which marriage is now based.

Introduction

Setting the scene

Premarital cohabitation is a relatively new phenomenon in Ireland. Until recently, relationships went through very clear stages of development. Boyfriend/girlfriend was the first stage, followed by engagement, marriage, living together, setting up home and children. Now, that is not necessarily the case. Increasingly, couples live together before marriage, while some couples continue to live together without marrying. My study explores why people live together in their relationships, prior to **first** marriage and then why in those relationships, they decide to marry or not. It examines how and in what way, premarital co-habitation is transforming the institution of marriage in Ireland, by becoming a socially accepted stage in heterosexual relationship development. It will not include part-time cohabitation, weekend, holiday cohabitation or post divorce cohabitation if one is in a new relationship. For this study, premarital cohabitation is defined as living together as a couple, without being married, at a shared address.

My interest in doing this study arose from a conversation with a friend, Frances¹ in 2004. Frances was in a very serious relationship. Her boyfriend Mark¹ asked her the previous evening if she would like to move in with him. She immediately agreed and was delighted at the prospect. When telling me the next day, she emphasised how committed her boyfriend was to the relationship. For Frances, moving in together was a

¹ Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

definite sign of Mark's commitment to her. Within a week, they found a suitable apartment to rent and moved in together shortly afterwards. At the time, when I had this conversation with Frances, I was 5 years married. It seemed to me that things had changed in a very short period. When I was going out with my husband before we got married, living together was not as popular. Certainly, I knew couples who were living together, but also a lot of couples who were not. After the conversation with Frances, it was as though, I suddenly awoke to the fact that premarital cohabitation had become very important in relationships and most couples who were in relationships were also living together. In 2004, when developing a research proposal for this study, I spoke to other friends and colleagues about how their relationships had developed. All of those who were in serious relationships were also living together. They all agreed that living together before marriage was very important to them and they could not imagine getting married, without first living together. Those I spoke to who were not living together, were in new relationships. In a very short period, what had once only really been an avant-garde phenomenon in Ireland, was now customary, and indeed, almost expected in relationships. Interestingly, Frances and Mark subsequently married and now have three children. Shortly before their marriage, Frances remarked that she was very traditional and would like to have children within marriage. Neither marriage nor having children, were part of the decision to live together prior to marriage, although interestingly, children were very definitely part of the decision to marry. The 2006 Census of Ireland identified that premarital cohabitation is the fastest growing family type in Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2006b). Cohabitation rates are rising in Ireland, but so too are marriage rates (Central Statistics Office 2006b), which means that marriage is still a desired outcome of relationship development.

There has been much recent political and national debate on the family and changing family formation patterns in Ireland. On July 19th 2010, the Civil Partnership

and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010 was passed into law in Ireland. It heralds much lobbied for macro social change in response to the diversity of relationship preferences in individual lives. Importantly, it is a distinctive piece of rights based legislation providing people in cohabiting and same-sex relationships with many of the rights of married couples, such as succession rights and eligibility for similar social welfare provision. My study is a very focused and timely study. It is focused because it provides an intimate and sociologically informed account of relationship development in Ireland, exploring how and why the decision to live together and how and why the decision to marry is made. This exploration takes place at the level of the individual, from the perspective of the individual. It is timely because premarital cohabitation is becoming an important stage in relationship development for an increasing number of couples in Ireland.

My research was framed within the life course paradigm as elaborated by Giele and Elder (1998). This perspective takes cognisance of all the possible factors that may impinge on decision making at any time, such as our location in time and place, the timing of those decisions in our lives, how other people affect decisions, and how the relationship meets our needs. I conducted forty-one (21 couples) in-depth interviews in Athlone in 2007. The interviews explored the views of cohabiting couples with plans to marry, cohabiting couples with no plans to marry, as well as couples who married without living together first. They included both a qualitative component, in which respondents framed their life history according to the events, circumstances and interpretations that were significant to them, but also importantly, included a systematic component, using an event history calendar to provide comparable data across cases. In so doing, this research peeled back all the layers of relationship development, by exploring the social factors, which people feel affect their decision making in a relationship and importantly, what they want themselves out of the relationship.

This work adds a new dimension to the sociological challenge of understanding the interplay of structure and agency in people's lives. I will argue that neither structural constraints (Luhmann 1997), nor individual agency (Giddens 1984) adequately explain how relationship decisions are made. Neither is it helpful to focus on the tensions between structure and agency in seeking a determination in relation to decision-making practices. Rather, it is how an individual interprets social events in the context of what they as autonomous beings want in their life, and in their relationship, that results in a decision to live together, and possibly a decision to marry. Individuals are no longer expected to follow a normative life course. Now, as autonomous beings, we can decide on our life path and our relationship trajectories. Respondents in my study had to manage their intimate relationships, while trying to avail of the range of choices and options made available by wider societal changes associated with modernisation. Because of the wider societal changes associated with modernisation, there is now a paradox at the level of the individual lives. Modernisation has increased the range of possibilities open to people, but that in turn, has created new structural constraints on marriage and when it happens, if at all, in a relationship. This 'marriage paradox', which will be expounded on in chapter 4, means that the decision to marry in a relationship, can therefore, be deferred. Premarital cohabitation facilitated intimacy in a relationship, which was important to an individual and a couple, while individuals availed of other social opportunities, such as education and career goals. Although the decision to marry emerged as the relationship developed and there was no 'goal' to marry at the start of the relationship, or when the couple moved in together, it was still the desired outcome of relationship development for respondents in my study.

In Chapter 5, I discuss respondents interpretations of their own social reality and how they made the decision to live together and/or marry. One of the central findings of my study is that marriage is being re-institutionalised in Ireland. This appears to be

contrary to what is happening in the U.S.A., where Cherlin (2004, p.848), argues that marriage is becoming de-institutionalised, whereby there is a '*weakening of the social norms*' associated with marriage. My study found that in Ireland, marriage is now based on a different set of norms and values, and is not weakening as an institution, as it is elsewhere. An implication of the 'marriage paradox' and one of the ways in which marriage has become re-intitutionalised, is evident in the way people have responded to new social constraints on marriage by reframing the content and meaning of commitment as a fluid process that develops organically within their relationship. Premarital cohabitation before marriage forms part of this fluid process for an increasing number of people. Flexible commitment is a way of coping with the 'marriage paradox' i.e. being able to self-actualise in other areas of one's life and still have a close interpersonal relationship, which can be marked by marriage later on, if there is a strong emotional attachment. One of the overarching characteristics of modern marriage is an increased level of emotional commitment.

Respondents identified that premarital cohabitation acted as a way of minimising risk in a 'risk society' (Beck 1992). Living together provides a way of finding out how well-matched couples are, as well as testing how strong the relationship potentially is. This might then reduce the risk of divorce, if the couple were to marry. Marriage remains highly normatively valued – indeed the 'test' for marriage may now be higher- everything must be just 'right'.

Marriage no longer fulfils an economic function in society. It is no longer expected that husbands provide for their wives through marriage. They may do so, but women now continue to work after marriage. Children are no longer expected to contribute to the household income by doing chores which assist the family in generating a household income, or themselves working to contribute to that income. Procreation, although respondents identify it as a preferred function of marriage, is no

longer a primary function of marriage. Yet, existing and future children did form part of the decision making for cohabiting respondents in my sample. Marriage is now primarily symbolic of the emotional commitment in a relationship, as well as an indicator that respondents anticipate that their relationship will last. In spite of my sample not being very religious, all respondents wished to have a Catholic wedding because they felt there was a social expectation on them to do so.

In Ireland, pathways to marriage have become de-institutionalised, but marriage as a social institution is intact, albeit different. This augurs very well for the future of marriage as a social institution in Irish society. Therefore, pre-marital cohabitation rather than devaluing marriage as a social institution may well preserve marriage.

Chapter One

Premarital cohabitation and marriage in Irish society: A new social terrain

We have come to know that an individual lives, from one generation to the next, in some society; that he lives out a biography, and that he lives it out within some historical sequence. By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove.

(Mills 1959, p.7)

1.1 Introduction

Deciding to live together in a relationship and deciding to marry has both a social and personal context. As macro social change gives people more choice and options generally in society, we start to see more choices and options emerging in family formation patterns for the individual. Likewise, when innovative behaviour replaces habitual or traditional patterns of behaviour in relationship development, we see an eventual change at the macro level in society. This means that private lives have public significance, and correlatively, that social trends have individual consequences (Collard and Mansfield 1991).

This chapter sketches a portrait of the new social terrain in Ireland, in which premarital cohabitation has emerged as an optional pathway in relationship development. I will discuss changes to marriage rates, the emergence of premarital cohabitation as a new family form and fertility outside of marriage as changing family

patterns in Ireland. How modernity as a post-traditional order (Giddens 1991), is the social context for all these changes will be reviewed. I will argue that modernity creates a contradiction in people's lives, by creating a range of social opportunities, which in turn, delay or prevent marriage for some couples. Premarital cohabitation then is a temporary solution in relationship development.

Part of the research question for my study is to assess how premarital cohabitation is transforming the institution of marriage in Ireland. Although it has been argued that marriage is becoming de-institutionalised in America (Cherlin 2004), I contend that the pathways to marriage are actually becoming de-institutionalised, in that multiple pathways now exist. Premarital cohabitation has emerged as one of those pathways. As a consequence, marriage as a social institution is becoming re-institutionalised.

1.2 Changing family patterns in Ireland

The sociological concept of 'institution' refers to relatively stable normative patterns of individual behaviour. The concept implies '*the existence of agencies that regulate behaviour as well as models of normality that function as background expectations for such regulations*' (Leisering and Schumann 2003, p.193). The family is a changing institution (Heffernan 2005, p.5). For example, industrialisation in the 1800s and 1900s in Europe and America heralded serious changes to family life. A primary function of the family was economic production. With industrialisation, the work activities of family members take place outside the home in factories and offices. By the beginning of the twentieth century, this type of 'new' work was only for men and unmarried women. Married women, excluded from many of their previous economic activities, focused on taking care of home and children (Thornton *et al.* 2007). Of course, this

changed subsequently, as the dual earner family household became a more common family type (Thornton *et al.* 2007) in the industrial world. This section discusses changes to marriage patterns in Ireland as well as, new emerging family formation patterns, such as fertility outside marriage and premarital cohabitation.

1.2.1 Changing marriage patterns in Ireland

'Two demographic trends, known as demographic transitions' (Heffernan 2005, p.2) capture the effect of moving from a traditional to a post-traditional social order for marriage and the family. These demographic changes occurred in Western Europe and the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries. The first demographic transition was characterised by large declines in mortality and fertility (van de Kaa 1987). By the 1930s, the industrialised world had reached the last stages of this first demographic transition that began around the 1870s, from high birth rates and high death rates to a pattern of low birth and death rates (Kennedy 2001, p.3). At the time of Irish Independence in 1922, Britain was the most industrialised country in Europe, while Ireland was predominantly an agrarian society, in which the small farm provided the economic base for a majority of families. Marriage and family formation was synonymous in Ireland. Marriage rates in Ireland were especially low in the 1930s in Ireland, when over half of the 30-34 year olds in Ireland were single and 27% of the 50-54 year olds were single (Fahey and Layte 2007, p.167). Fahey and Layte (2007, p.168) emphasise that in the 1930s, when the marriage rate dropped in Ireland, the average age at marriage was 33 years for men and 28 years for women. So not only were marriage rates historically low in the 1930s in Ireland, people were also older when marrying. Indeed, whether marriage took place or not, or at a later stage in peoples lives was often interpreted as a reaction to economic conditions (Guinnane 1997). Other western

countries experienced a surge in marriage rates in the 1950s, as did Ireland, but not on the same scale.

Lesthaege and van de Kaa (1986) and Lesthaeghe (1995) propose that the mid 1960s marked the beginning of a second demographic transition in Europe because of the large-scale family changes that subsequently occurred.

This second demographic transition comprised several elements:

- *The transition from the 'golden age of marriage' to the 'dawn of cohabitation'.*
- *The transition from the child as the main element of a family to the couple as the main element.*
- *The transition from 'preventative contraception' (to avoid third and fourth children) to "self-fulfilling conception" (whenever conception is desirable).*

(Raley 2001, p.60)

Each of these transitions also happened in Ireland, but slightly later than the rest of Europe. Heffernan (2005) argues that the Republic of Ireland had for much of the 20th century been struggling to complete the initial demographic phase, even though the rest of Europe had completed, or was in the process of completing the second demographic transition. The characteristics which marked family life until the 1960s in Ireland – low marriage rates combined with high fertility of those who did marry, together with a high incidence of permanent bachelorhood and spinsterhood – marked Irish demography as unique (Government of Ireland 1956; Coleman 1992). Relationship development typically followed the pattern of couple meet, engagement, marriage, post-marital cohabitation and children. Emigration, late marriages and the form of morality advocated by the Catholic Church, controlled family formation patterns. However, while the distinctiveness of family patterns in Ireland meant that

Ireland was at one point categorised as '*a special case*' (Ardagh 1995, p.1), Ireland is now better described as a '*late starter*' (Kennedy 2001, p.3).

Ireland has experienced very rapid economic, social and cultural change, in recent decades (O'Connor 2006; Fahey and Layte 2007). The year 1958 was '*one of the most significant milestones in the evolution of Irish society. A turning point in the nature and rule of the Irish state*' (Breen 1990, p.1). It was the year, in which the First Programme for Economic Expansion was published, signifying direct government intervention in the economy and the creation of a job market in Ireland to stem the increasing rates of emigration from Ireland. It opened the economy to foreign investment, committed the state to free trade and began a process of offering generous incentive packages of capital grants and tax concessions to foreign industry to locate in Ireland. Education and employment opportunities improved in Ireland, especially employment in the industries which had been targeted by the Industrial Development Authority, such as pharmaceuticals and chemicals. By 1979, The Financial Times newspaper (London) described Ireland as the '*miracle economy*' of Europe (cited in Lee 1989, p.154).

The marriage rate peaked in Ireland in 1974, with the '*highest annual figure, of 22,833 recorded*' (Central Statistics Office 2006a, p.76). At this time, the age at marriage was younger (just over 26 years of age for men and 24 years of age for women) (Fahey and Layte 2007, p.168), compared to previous decades. However, by the mid 1980s, Ireland was in a recession and high outward migration characterised this period until the mid 1990s. The number of marriages subsequently fell from 21,792 in 1980 to 18,174 in 1989 and the trend continued downward until the mid-1990s (Central Statistics Office 2007c, p.1). In the 1980s, the most dramatic decrease in marriage rates was in the 25-29 year age group (55.8% to 18.5%) (Central Statistics Office 2007c, p.1).

This is markedly different to the 1930s for example, which saw an overall low marriage rate and an older age at first marriage. In the 1980s, we start to see the beginning of marriage postponement, rather than the start of a marriage abandonment trend.

Postponement of marriage is evident in Ireland since 1996. Interestingly though, it has also been accompanied by an increase in the marriage rate. Almost half (49%) of females marrying for the first time were aged thirty or over, compared with 44% and 28% in 2002 and 1996 respectively. Almost two thirds of males marrying for the first time (64%) were aged thirty or over in 2005 compared with 59% in 2002 and 42% in 1996 (Central Statistics Office 2005b, p.1). *'This is probably best interpreted as a consequence of catch-up among those who deferred marriage during the 1980s and early 1990s and then crowded into marriage from the mid 1990s onward.'* (Fahey and Layte 2007, p.168). The catch-up achieved was not complete, since it did not prevent the proportion single among those aged in their 20s and early 30s, which had started to rise in the early 1980s, to continue to rise throughout the 1990s. However, between 2002 and 2005, the increase in single-hood began to slow down and among those aged over 35 actually turned into a decline (Central Statistics Office 2008a). This highlights that marriage is occurring, but is happening later (early 30s), rather than sooner (mid 20s) for couples, in Ireland.

Overall, during the 1990s, the marriage rate fluctuated in Ireland, but has been rising steadily since 2000 (Central Statistics Office 2007c). However, with the revised description of Ireland as a first world industrial economy (Allen 1997, 2000; Kirby 1997, 2002), and the unprecedented economic growth in the years of the Celtic Tiger (1990s-2001/2002), continuing intermittently to 2008, it is also interesting to note that during this time, marriage rates overall increased, as they did during the good economic times of the 1970s. In 2007, the number of marriages in Ireland was 22,544 (Central

Statistics Office 2007c, p.1). While Fahey and Layte (2007, p.168) argue, *'the rise in marriage rates followed hard on the heels of the economic boom and makes it hard to avoid the conclusion that the latter was a major cause of the former'* (Fahey and Layte 2007, p.168), the economic boom is not the only cause. Divorce, for example was introduced into Ireland in 1997, which meant that marriages registered after that year could include second marriages (i.e. where at least one of the spouses had been married previously). Some 14,000 people entered into second marriages between 1996 and 2002 (Central Statistics Office 2007c). Therefore, some of the increase in marriages is a result of the now available option to marry again. It also has an effect on the rising rates of premarital co-habitation, where people may choose to live with a new partner, rather than re-marrying. However, as I will outline below, premarital cohabitation tends to be a feature of younger cohorts, prior to first marriage (Halpin and O' Donoghue 2004).

Fluctuating marriage rates are not the only characteristic of changing family patterns in Ireland. A number of other factors have also contributed to the contours of family change. The emergence of premarital cohabitation as a new family form and the increase in fertility outside of marriage are examined below.

1.2.2 The emergence of premarital cohabitation in relationship development in Ireland

'Since the 1970s, alternative pathways to marriage and alternative forms of partnering have become more accepted' (Penman 2005, p.34). Many sociologists and demographers who foresee a continuation of the upward trend in alternative family forms (Smock 2000) have documented the growth of premarital cohabitation in industrialised societies. Popenoe (2008, p.2) when comparing couples cohabiting as a percentage of all couples shows that the highest rate of premarital cohabitation in

Europe is in the Nordic countries, such as Sweden at 28.4%, followed by Denmark at 24.4% and Canada at 18.4%. In the Nordic countries, premarital cohabitation has emerged as an alternative to marriage, rather than a precursor, amongst a substantial proportion of the population. Many Northern and Western European countries seem to be following the Swedish and Danish patterns of rising premarital cohabitation (Prinz 1995). In the United States the proportion of all first unions that started as premarital cohabitation rose from 46% for unions formed between 1980 and 1984 to almost 60% for those formed between 1990 and 1994 (Bumpass and Lu 2000). The number of cohabiting couples almost tripled between 1977 and 1994 (Casper and Cohen 2000). For Seltzer (2000) approval of premarital cohabitation in the U.S. is also likely to increase in the future, as younger cohorts who are supportive of premarital cohabitation experience replace the older ones. Studies of British respondents suggest a similar tendency (Seltzer 2000; Barlow *et al.* 2005).

Ermisch and Francesconi (2000) using data from the British Household Panel Survey collected, during the last quarter of 1992, completed histories of all spells of marriage and premarital cohabitation from a representative sample of 9,459 adults aged 16 years and over throughout Great Britain. The study focused on people born since 1930. They found that co-habitation has become a much more important route into first partnership. By their 24th birthday, more than two-fifths of the women in the most recent cohort (1963-1976) had entered premarital cohabitation, compared with a fifth of the previous cohort. The proportion of women who went directly into marriage fell from 54% to 21%. Similarly, in Australia, 75% of all partners married in 2003, had cohabited before marriage (Australia Bureau of Statistics 2004).

Cohabiting couples represented 11.6% of all family units in Ireland in 2006 (Central Statistics Office 2006b, p.1). This compares with 8.4% in 2002 (Central Statistics Office 2002, p.13). The number of children living with cohabiting parents

increased from 51,700 in 2002 to 74,500 four years later (Central Statistics Office 2006b). The majority of cohabiting couples without children i.e. 81.7 per cent were unions in which both partners were single, while in a further 5 per cent of cases both partners were either separated or divorced (Central Statistics Office 2006b). Given that divorce was legalised in Ireland in 1997, this is not surprising. The corresponding proportions for cohabiting couples with children were 68 per cent and 8.5 per cent respectively. Over 53 per cent of females in cohabiting partnerships were aged less than 30 years while the corresponding proportion for males was 40.8 per cent (Central Statistics Office 2006b). It may be the case that marriage deferral, rather than '*marriage avoidance*' (Fahey and Layte 2007, p.169) is a more appropriate description of what has been happening in the Irish context. Halpin and O' Donoghue (2004, p.6) in their analysis of Labour Force Survey data and European Community Household Panel Survey data conclude that premarital cohabitation is becoming more frequent in Ireland. When they analysed 238 distinct relationship histories in Irish European Community Household Panel Survey data, they found that for four out of every five relationships, where premarital cohabitation was a feature of that relationship, marriage followed premarital cohabitation. Premarital cohabitation in Ireland tends to be a feature of younger cohorts and has a much shorter duration than marriage (Halpin and O' Donoghue 2004). Premarital cohabitation '*is most often a temporary arrangement found mainly among young urban adults that either dissolves after a relatively short period or leads on to marriage*' (Fahey and Layte 2007, p.169). It therefore seems most likely that relationship development has changed rather than that there has been a decline in the significance of marriage itself in Irish society. The fact that marriage is still occurring, indeed even rising in Irish society, gives credence to my view that marriage is still an important part of a relationship development, but so too is premarital

cohabitation. Premarital cohabitation has emerged as an optional pathway in relationship development and, may or may not, result in marriage.

1.2.3 Fertility outside marriage

Overall, trends in industrial societies have been in the direction of greater ambiguity about, or tolerance towards diversity in intimate relationships. A study by Francis Castles of the Australian National University suggested that cross-national variation in the relationship between modernisation and fertility in the 1970s *'was hugely influenced by the differential adoption of modern contraceptive practices; fertility in Ireland, Portugal and Spain was elevated by the fact that they were in the rearguard of modern contraceptive use'* (Castles 1998, p.17). Ireland, while not the first country in Europe to make contraceptives illegal, was the last to legalise their use. Thus, we can see declines in fertility occurring at a later stage. During the 1960's and 1970's the total fertility rate was always above 3 children, and was always above 2 children during the 1980's. It dropped to a low of 1.85 children in 1995 (Central Statistics Office 2004, p.1). More recently in 2006, the total fertility rate, in Ireland is at 1.9, just below replacement level (Central Statistics Office 2006d, p.1). This decline is also something we see in most of Europe, where the overall average fertility rate is 1.4 (Population Reference Bureau 2006).

Following a peak rate of births in Ireland in 1980 (74,064) (Central Statistics Office 2007a, p.1), a decline set in that continued until 1994, when births decreased to 48,255 for that year (Central Statistics Office 2008a, p.14). Then a recovery occurred, and by 2004, annual births had risen to almost 62,000, an increase of 26% since 1994 (Central Statistics Office 2007a, p.1). The Central Statistics Office (Ireland) Vital Statistics Report 2007 (Quarter 1) indicates an annual birth rate of 15.8 per 1,000 of the population, 0.7 above quarter 2 of 2006 (Central Statistics Office 2007d), while the E.U.

average in 2006 was 10.5 (McCárthaigh 2006). The increase in Ireland was due in part, to an expansion of the numbers of women of child-bearing age, which in turn '*reflected the maturation of the large baby boom generation of the 1970s*' (Fahey and Layte 2007, p.162). Although more babies were born per year, in the 2002–2006 period, the average number of babies per woman (fertility rate) decreased (Central Statistics Office 2006d, p.1). Along with changing migration patterns, the average age of women at first birth has also been increasing to 28.5 years and there were a greater number at that age, in 2006 (Central Statistics Office 2006f, p.1). This is higher than the average age of first-time mothers in 1998 (27.1 years) (Central Statistics Office 2007d, p.1).

Marriage traditionally facilitated sexual activity and childbearing. However, sexual activity before marriage is now customary. Between 1980 and the end of the 1990s, non-marital births as a proportion of all births increased six fold, rising from 5% in 1980 to 31% in 2000 (Fahey and Layte 2007, p.169). Hannan and Ó Riain (1993) in the 1990s showed that non-marital fertility was associated with early school leaving and poor employment prospects among young mothers and young fathers. Since 2000, the surge in non-marital births has levelled out at between 31-32% (Central Statistics Office 2008a, p.4). Halpin and O'Donoghue (2004) emphasised that cohabiting couples are far more likely than married couples to be childless, though less likely than the never-married. In the Census of Ireland 2006, we see that while about a third of all cohabiting couples have children, this compares to nearly 70% of married couples (Central Statistics Office 2006c). It demonstrates the emergence of alternative family patterns, rather than a 'breakdown' in the family itself. Almost half of the 4,200 births outside marriage in the third quarter of 2007 were to cohabiting couples (Central Statistics Office 2008a, p.4).

Raley (2001) using data from the 1987-1988 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) and the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) for the U.S., shows that most of the growth in the proportion of births to those cohabiting is the result of increases in the proportion of women cohabiting, rather than changes in union formation behaviours surrounding pregnancies. Therefore, premarital co-habitation occurs in its own right and is not just a reactive response to pregnancy. This raises the question though, have we shifted from a normative position that for example, valued staying in a marriage for the sake of the children, towards one which values people looking after their own emotional needs? Does that mean that if a couple face an unplanned pregnancy, they are less likely to marry if that relationship doesn't satisfy their own emotional needs? Also do children within a relationship influence a decision to live together and then perhaps a decision to marry? The extent to which pregnancy and the presence of children are part of the decision making process for an individual, or a couple is presently unclear. As the focus of this research is to determine, how and in what way, premarital cohabitation is transforming the institution of marriage in Ireland, then this is a crucial question.

1.3 Modernity as the social context for relationship development in Ireland

The emergence of premarital cohabitation in Ireland as the newest and fastest growing family form (Census 2006) presents an interesting sociological conundrum. Although premarital cohabitation is becoming more popular in relationship development, the institutional framework still supports marriage in Ireland. The Irish Constitution defines the family as '*founded on the institution of marriage*' (Constitution of Ireland, 1937 Article 41). The All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution in 2006, decided against changing this definition. Implied here is that marriage precedes living

together and having children. Statistics from the 2006 Census of Ireland show that people now live together before marriage, they marry later, rates of fertility outside the institution of marriage are at an historic high, and people will avail of a divorce, if a married relationship no longer meet their expectations, for whatever reason (Central Statistics Office 2006b). Although no constitutional change was recommended by The All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution (2006), it appears that for a growing number of people the Irish family is no longer *'founded on the institution of marriage'* (Article 41 Irish Constitution).

Premarital cohabitation, while recognised by the institutional framework in Ireland is not recognised in the Constitution. The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010 passed by the Oireachtas in July 2010 allows same sex couples to register their civil partnership for the first time. It also provides cohabiting couples with succession rights, protection of a home that couples share, plus maintenance rights in the event of a separation. On registration, civil partners have the same entitlements to social welfare as a married couple. Social policy provision has always been a 'grey' area for cohabiting couples, with cohabiting couples not receiving recognition in the same way as married couples. The Minister for Justice Dermot Ahern described the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010 as *'one of the most important pieces of civil rights legislation to be enacted since independence. This Act provides enhanced rights and protections for many thousands of Irish men and women. Ireland will be a better place for its enactment.'* (cited in Taylor 2010, p.1)

The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010 represents macro social family change. It formally endorses the range of relationship trajectories and types of relationships occurring in Irish society and now

facilitates them. The institutional framework in Ireland supports premarital cohabitation as a viable relationship trajectory, but still places a higher value on marriage, so much so, that marriage remains enshrined in the Irish Constitution as being integral to family life. However, social change as provided for by legislative reform is itself a response to collective individual behaviour change. Developments in the field of life course research suggest that to produce social change, an innovative individual has to depart from the norm substituting constructive alternative patterns. In the process, they must exercise their own agency in the face of powerful social forces that otherwise would reproduce the existing social order (Giele and Holst 2004). While a person's own agency has serious implications in the context of social structure, the power of human agency itself is a reflection of the social order in which it occurs. Traditional societies are characterised by pre-determined relationship patterns, whereas modern/post-traditional societies emphasise the importance of human agency through the effort of individuals to take control in a world of choice. Therefore, modernity is an important emerging social terrain for relationship development in industrialised societies.

Ireland is an interesting case study, in that *'two social processes have partly overlapped in Ireland in the last two decades: one is a general modernisation, with its greater individualism and secularism; and the other is a tremendous surge in economic growth, with its spiralling materialism, consumerism and increased choice'* (O'Connell 2001, p.7). Modernity as a post-traditional order (Giddens 1991) reflects a 'categorical break' between the modern situation and historical times (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) report that traditional rhythms of life are now being questioned and the 'normal biography' of marriage and family has become disrupted.

The impact of modernisation on personal relationships dates back at least a century. Tonnies ([1887] 1957) for example, described the societal shift from *gesellschaft* (small-scale neighbourhood communities) to larger and more competitive *gemeinschaft*. *Gemeinschaft* refers to a situation of moral unity, rootedness and kinship. *Gesellschaft* is a state of individualistic, impersonal anomie. According to Tonnies ([1887]; 1957), processes of industrialisation and urbanisation have resulted in a shift in the make up of social relations from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*, with a subsequent passing of ‘community’. Changes in the social and economic structures of urban areas have produced profound changes on communities within them. Urbanisation, the separation of home and workplaces and the feminisation of the workforce led to the break up of locality-based ‘community’ social settings. The demands for individual freedom have undermined the integration associated with shared value communities. People’s day-to-day relationships then change, as does the social order in which those relationships occur. As traditional sources of identity such as class, religion and community lose influence, one’s intimate relationships become central to self-identity.

Analysing the World Values Survey, which comprised global data collected in a series of waves; first in 1981 (as part of the European Values Survey) and subsequently in 1990, 1995 and 2001, Inglehart (1997; 2003), identified two major trends in values changes. He pointed to a change from traditional to secular/rational values (reflecting a move away from traditional religion) and from survival to self-expression values (a shift in priorities to well-being, rather than concerns for simple survival). Traditional societies were characterised by social conformity, traditional family life with male dominance and deference to parents (Inglehart and Baker 2000). Such societies were largely intolerant of abortion, divorce and homosexuality. *‘An emphasis on survival meant an atmosphere of distrust and little tolerance of out-groups, with a strong*

emphasis placed on traditional gender roles and sexual norms' (Inglehart and Baker 2000, p.21). Goodwin (2009) emphasises that personal lives are now restructured and social networks renegotiated or diminished. Many traditional theories of privatisation emphasise how this new modern world order disrupted traditional family allegiances and common solidarities (Allan 2001).

As we can see, modernity brings about major changes in the external social environment of the individual, affecting marriage and the family as well as other institutions. This is not surprising though, considering that according to Giddens and Pierson (1998) modernity involves the following:

1. Transformation of time and space (alteration of the conditions for the articulation of social relations across wide spans of time-space, up to and including global systems).
2. Disembedding mechanisms (the separation of interaction from the particularities of locales and the propulsion of social life away from the hold of pre-established precepts and practices).
3. Reflexivity refers to the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to continuous revision in the light of new information or knowledge.

(Giddens and Pierson 1998)

The immediate social context in which we make our relationship decisions is now more fluid and we do not necessarily follow traditional pre-determined trajectories. The loosening of the traditional hold of the Catholic Church on morality, state and family life means that there are now more liberal attitudes to sex before marriage (Layte et al 2006). Fertility rates outside marriage increased in Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2008a) steadily in the last few decades, and of course, premarital cohabitation emerged

as the newest family form in Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2006b). Marriage is occurring, but is happening later. We now live in an Ireland where there are a myriad of social opportunities, such as increased female labour force participation and more career paths for men and women (Central Statistics Office 2007b), as well as more educational opportunities (Dept of Education and Science 2006) and these can all compromise relationship development. The effect of these on relationship development will be discussed in chapter 2, but suffice it to point out here, that often trying to achieve success in these areas may mean that marriage is deferred in a relationship. All of these 'opportunities' facilitated by structural social change determine, how and when, relationships decisions are made at the level of the individual. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choices filtered through abstract systems. Relationship development takes place in the midst of this multiplicity of choice. The reflexive project of the self therefore, incorporates numerous contextual happenings and forms of mediated experience, through which a course must be charted (Giddens 1991).

Self-actualisation, realising one's own identity through personal and social encounters, precisely because tradition and custom no longer guarantee who we are, is a basic condition of modern social life. It is a condition that promotes personal autonomy from socially embedded expectations and thereby means a break from tradition. Whilst earlier societies with a social order based firmly in tradition would provide individuals with (more or less) clearly defined roles, in post-traditional societies we have to work out our roles for ourselves. As Giddens (1991, p.70) puts it: *'What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity - and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour.'* Self-actualisation is possible by

being authentic and true to oneself. It includes references to other people only within the sphere of intimate relationships – although this sphere is highly important to the self. With modernity has come the emergence of the *'rhetoric of intimacy'* (Giddens and Pierson 2002, p.119), a characteristic of a post-traditional world where emotional communication becomes crucial to the sustaining of relationships inside and outside of marriage. In struggling with intimate problems, individuals help actively to reconstruct the universe of social activity around them (Giddens 1991, p.12).

Giddens' 'pure relationships' came into existence primarily in the domains of sexuality, marriage and friendship (Giddens 1991). The pure relationship is based on mutual trust between partners. Since, it is so closely connected to intimacy, trust implies the same balance of autonomy and mutual disclosure necessary to sustain intimate relationships. Self-identity is negotiated through linked processes of self-exploration and the development of intimacy with the other. Such processes help to create shared histories of a kind potentially more tightly bound than those characteristic of individuals who share experiences by virtue of a common social position. Trust must somehow accommodate itself to the different trajectories of development that partners must follow. *'To trust someone means forgoing opportunities to keep tabs on them or force their activities within some particular mould'* (Giddens 1992, p.140). Coontz (2005, p.301) notes that *'over the past century, marriage has steadily become more fair, more fulfilling, and more effective in fostering the well-being of both adults and children. Most women are no longer willing to stay in unequal relationships and most men no longer want a weaker, subservient partner.'* Giddens (1992, p.152) argues that marriage has been largely undermined by the rise of the pure relationship and what he terms *'plastic sexuality.'* This is *'decentered sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction'* (Giddens 1992, p.2). Yet, we know in Ireland that marriage rates are robust and people still want to marry. Therefore, it seems that premarital cohabitation

relationships are a little more than just pure relationships, existing for their own justification and mutual satisfaction of the partners involved. With the emergence of premarital cohabitation in relationship development, it may be that the pathways to marriage are changing, as well as the nature of marriage itself as a social institution. This will be investigated in more detail below. According to Cherlin (1991, p.14), referring to the United States, premarital cohabitation is not a lifelong alternative to a marital union, *'but rather a stage of intimacy that precedes (or sometimes follows) marriage.'*

Because we live in society with increased choice, there is also increased risk. Ulrich Beck (1992) sees individualisation as fundamental to the development of contemporary society. He also calls this a 'risk society'. In a risk society, the restrictions and restraints of ascribed status and the associated conventional ways of doing things, no longer constrain people. There is a *'compulsion to lead your own life and the possibility of doing it'* (Beck 2000, p.165). Underpinning Beck's emerging 'risk' society is reflexive modernisation, a social form involving continuing self-consciousness or self-reflection. There are therefore, numerous opportunities to self-actualise *'to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming'* (Maslow 1943), but that also means there has to be a balance between opportunity and risk (Giddens 1991) on an individual level. We no longer have to pass through stringent and clearly marked stages of the life course, but make choices and negotiate risks on matters such as, whether to marry or have children. Accepted patterns of behaviour such as meeting, having a relationship, getting engaged and then marrying is no longer the only 'way' for relationships to develop. The uncertainty that has come to be attached to marriage is considered by some researchers to be one of a range of factors involved in the growth in premarital cohabitation (Cutrona 2004; Kiernan 2004). In terms of the psychological needs that can be derived

from social connections such as marriage, the greater propensity to separate has undermined the role of marriage in providing the type of emotional connection from which a sense of security can be derived (Cutrona 2004), and heightened the sense of risk associated with investing in a marital relationship (Kiernan 2004). Premarital cohabitation may well be a safeguard against ‘risk’ in relationship development: a way of ensuring continuation of the relationship, a way of maintaining intimacy in the relationship without the commitment of marriage, a way of testing if emotional satisfaction and self-actualisation can be derived from the relationship, as well as a way of testing the strength and durability of the relationship, which might then act as a bulwark against divorce. Interestingly, while it may certainly be a choice, rather than a necessity, for those who want intimacy, marriage remains a desired outcome of relationship development in Ireland (Census 2006b).

However, if one is constantly negotiating and re-negotiating decisions in relationships that heretofore were pre-determined and not really flexible, while being aware of the range of possible relationship trajectories available and all the other social factors which can affect relationship decisions such as education and career opportunities, can that not become overwhelming for the individual? The lifestyle options made available by modernity offer many opportunities for appropriation, but can also generate feelings of powerlessness (Giddens 1991). With the ‘disenchantment of the world’ (Weber, 1985) comes a new state of ‘inner homelessness’, of being all alone in the vastness of the cosmos (Berger *et al.* 1973: *passim*). Is it not within this social nexus that we try to find some way of coping with our relationship needs, while engaging with all the social opportunities that are available to us? If self-actualisation i.e. realising one’s own identity through personal and social encounters is to be achieved, then it would seem that we have to find a way to cope with the multiplicity of choice, while maintaining and deriving emotional satisfaction from our personal

relationships. It is the process of negotiation and re-negotiation in the face of increased opportunities, which can determine when decisions happen in a relationship, if at all. Can it also be the case that this negotiation and re-negotiation actually maintains the relationship and facilitates the continuation of an intimate relationship, until other aspects of one's life are sorted out – education, career etc.

I argue that the wider societal changes associated with modernisation have created a paradox at the level of individual lives. By increasing the range of choices and options available to people, has that in turn created new constraints on the process of relationship development? Does premarital cohabitation provide an interim solution in relationship development, while 'new' social opportunities such as, educational opportunities, career, fertility outside marriage are availed of? They may well delay the decision to marry, if individuals even decide to marry at all. The effect of one's social context and how that affects us as individuals cannot be under-estimated. It may well be that *'holding out the possibility of emancipation, modern institutions at the same time create mechanisms of suppression, rather than actualisation of self'* (Giddens 1991, p.6). In my opinion, how individuals embrace broader macro social changes with self-determinism within their relationships for example, ultimately dictates how that relationship will play out for them, and all significant others (partners and children).

The self forms a trajectory of development from the past to the anticipated future. The individual appropriates his past by sifting through it in the light of what is anticipated for an (organised) future. The trajectory of the self has a coherence that derives from a cognitive awareness of the various phases of the life-span. Any analysis of relationship decisions then must be done with a look back on what has happened to date and what one hopes will happen in the future. As Ulrich Beck puts it: individuals *'must learn, on pain of permanent disadvantage, to think of themselves as action*

centres, as planning offices in relation to their own lives, their own capacities, orientations, relationships and so on' (1992, p.217). For Beck-Gernsheim (2002) this means individuals are '*forced into the future*' and it would seem that calculative personal relationships are a consequence of this. '*Where everything is uncertain, where old norms and traditions have less and less currency, people want to create commitment, security and reliability in their own domain (that is, in their personal life as a couple). Here at least, they want to make the future calculable*' (Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p.50). Premarital cohabitation would certainly seem like a calculative relationship. It offers flexibility in relationship development, while still maintaining the integrity of the relationship, and perhaps for some, even the actual continuation of the relationship. In a world of alternative lifestyle options, strategic life planning becomes of special importance. Life planning is a means of preparing a course of future actions mobilised in terms of the self's biography (Giddens 1991). Has premarital cohabitation become part of a typical relationship plan for some couples? Why does this happen for some and not for others? Can there ever really be a grand relationship plan in a world of social choice? It would seem more logical that relationships develop organically in the midst of this social choice.

1.4 De-institutionalisation of marriage in Ireland?

Social institutions, by the very fact of their existence, control human conduct by setting up pre-defined patterns of conduct, which channel it in one direction, as against the many other directions that would theoretically be possible. For Calhoun *et al.* (2002) the typifications of habitualised actions that constitute institutions are always shared ones. They are available to all the members of the particular social groups in question, and the institution itself typifies individual actors as well as individual actions. The

reality that ordinary people inhabit is constituted by these legitimations of habitualised conduct e.g. marriage and premarital cohabitation.

Cherlin (2004, p.848) refers specifically to a de-institutionalisation of marriage meaning '*the weakening of the social norms that define people's behaviour in a social institution such as marriage.*' While others also observe that marriages have become de-institutionalised, marriage as seen above, is also currently based much less on social norms, laws, and religion, than on the quality of the emotional bond between couples (Cherlin 2004; Coontz 2005; Hill 2007). Consistent with the idea of de-institutionalisation, Giddens (1991; 1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 2002) note the declining power of social norms and laws as regulating mechanisms for family life, and they stress the expanding role of personal choice. This fits perfectly with modernity as a new social terrain for relationship development. For Beach *et al.* (2007, p.319) '*this may, of course, be just another way of saying that modern, Western marriage has become more subject to the demands of an individualistic calculus.*' Lamanna and Reidman (2008) see marriage having changed from a social institution to now a personal relationship. However, given all the social change that has been outlined in the previous section, one cannot say '*modern, Western marriage has become more subject to the demands of an individualistic calculus*' **only**. Marriage and family formation patterns are shaped by **both** social forces and individualistic calculus. It is only by understanding how social forces and individualistic calculus interact in people's lives, that we can also understand the formation of innovative patterns of social behaviour, such as premarital cohabitation.

It may be that there is no '*explicit opposition to the institution of marriage itself*' (Seddon 2000, p.321). Huston and Melz (2004) note that Americans still value marriage, but are doing it less because, amongst other things, of problems in finding a

viable mate. This phenomenon also occurs in Australia (Qu and Soriano 2004). the European Values Study (n=1,013) showed that 77% of people in Ireland disagreed with the statement *'marriage is an outdated institution'* (European Values Survey Foundation/Tilburg University 2010), whereas 23% saw it as an outdated institution. Kiernan (2004) refers to the redrawing of the boundaries of marriage, with marriage increasingly moving towards a ceremony confirming a union, rather than one at the commencement of this union.

If marriage rates and premarital cohabitation rates are rising in Ireland, does that mean that marriage is still highly valued in Irish society? Do people now value marriage so highly, that they are less willing to enter into marriage, without a period of premarital cohabitation and certainty that the relationship will work? Cherlin suggests *'what has happened is that although the practical importance of being married has declined, it's symbolic importance has remained high, and may even have increased. It used to be the foundation of adult personal life, now it is sometimes the capstone'* (Cherlin 2004, p.855). There is an interesting contradiction here though. Modernity provides a multiplicity of choice in a fast changing social order. Self-reflexivity is necessary to make sense of all those changes. The modern social order, although based on rationality, because of the overwhelming range of choice available, is almost confusing in itself. People strive to make sense of everything and achieve self-actualisation. Marriage represents an ability to connect on a deep level with another individual and the ability to make a commitment. Marriage symbolises stability in a person's life, at least outwardly and is very much associated with a stable self-identity, but the process of relationship development to get to marriage because it is full of choice, can also be full of uncertainty.

Families of choice, greater diversity in personal relationships and the de-traditionalisation of marital life have freed people from previously constrained roles and unconditional, sometimes problematic ties (Goodwin 2009). At the same time, the search for love and intimacy is ever greater, but maybe harder to attain (Gillies and Edwards 2005). Is there then something of a confusing set of dialogues (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) in the sociological literature on marriage? On the other hand, is it that premarital cohabitation is not transforming the institution of marriage, but rather is transforming pathways to marriage, by providing an alternative? If there was a *'weakening of the social norms that define people's behaviour in a social institution, such as marriage'* (Cherlin 2004, p.848), then I would expect marriage rates to be falling in Ireland and very little social or personal importance to be attached to marriage by couples in serious relationships. However, the evidence shows that people wish to marry (Brown 2003), premarital cohabitation is often a precursor for marriage (Halpin and O'Donoghue 2004) and marriage rates are rising in Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2006b). Premarital cohabitation is one possible option in a range of possible relationship trajectories, but at the same time does not transcend marriage as being the capstone of relationship development. Rather than a de-institutionalisation of marriage in Ireland, there is instead a re-institutionalisation of marriage. By re-institutionalisation, I mean there is now a different set of values and norms associated with marriage. This means that there are various pathways to marriage, compared to the traditional boyfriend/girlfriend, engagement, marriage, post-marital cohabitation and children. Procreation is now longer associated exclusively with marriage. Very definite career and education opportunities are available to both men and women, which change the nature of gender roles in relationship development. Importantly though, it means that premarital cohabitation is now a stage in relationship development which may or may not lead to marriage.

However, just as marriage is not de-institutionalised, neither is premarital cohabitation institutionalised. Manning and Smock (2005), who conducted 115 in-depth interviews, with a sample of young men and women with recent premarital cohabitation experience in the U.S., point out that that this is reflected in the language used by co-habiting partners when referring to each other. They find that there may be no commonly used term to refer to cohabiting partners.

Our findings suggest that cohabitators frequently refer to their partners as girlfriend/boyfriend or fiance(é), although there appears to be no universally accepted term or language. Having a child together sometimes makes it easier to define the relationship because the partner becomes the mother or father of the child (Smock 2005, p.996).

1.5 Conclusion

In the social context of modernity, in which we live, relationships no longer have a pre-determined trajectory, but are too characterised by choice and options. The next chapter explores in more detail the social and individual factors which affect the decision to marry. Interestingly, while each of these social factors influence flexible relationship development and are ‘new’ social opportunities, they also act as a constraint on when marriage happens, if at all, in a relationship. As a consequence of living in a modern world order, individual agency is now also very important relationship decisions, especially as relationships no longer follow pre-determined trajectories, but are too characterised by choice and options. The extent to which individual agency affects relationship decisions will also be considered.

Chapter Two

The determinants of marriage

2.1 Introduction

The macro social changes facilitated by modernity have created a world of choice for individuals. It is within this myriad of choice that we now make our relationship decisions. In this chapter, I will discuss changing economic conditions, the loosening of the traditional hold of the Catholic Church on morality and family life, increased access to education and couple career paths as social factors, which affect a couple's decision to live together and/or marry.

In the context of modernity, individuals are not just at the mercy of current social forces, but can use their own agency to create their own life path and relationship trajectories. I will explore how romantic love, interpersonal commitment and commitment to a serious relationship, the effect of previous relationships on current relationship decisions, unplanned pregnancy, family of origin and peer group influences, affect decisions made in relationships. A perennial sociological problem - is it social structure or human agency that determines human social life, or a tension between the two is debated. The central theme of this chapter will be that the emergence of premarital cohabitation as a stage in relationship development is not just the result of macro changes to social institutions or state policies, neither is it the result of people spontaneously changing their minds about how to live and change occurring at micro-sociological levels. Rather, it is the delicate interplay between changes at an institutional level and increased individualistic calculus, which allows premarital cohabitation to be a viable relationship trajectory for an increasing number of couples.

2.2 Social factors shaping relationship development in Ireland

This section will discuss changing economic conditions in Ireland, the loosening of the traditional hold of the Catholic Church on morality and family life, increased education opportunities and the availability of couple career paths as factors that affect relationship development in Ireland.

2.2.1 Changing economic conditions and relationship development

We have already seen that Ireland has experienced fluctuating economic conditions since the 1960s. There was somewhat of an economic boom in the 1970s, and a recession in the 1980s with massive outward emigration. At the time of the fieldwork for my study, Ireland was experiencing the ‘Celtic Tiger’. This is a term used to describe the period of rapid economic growth in Ireland that began in the 1980s and slowed in 2001, only to pick up pace again in 2003 and then slowed down, once again by 2007 with further contraction in 2008. In the 1990s, the Celtic Tiger replaced outward emigration with inward migration and *‘high levels of respect for authority gave way to an increasing awareness of corruption in the institutional Church, the economic system and the State’* (O’ Connor 2006, p.6). At the moment, Ireland is in a recession. On 1st January 2009, the Irish Times in an editorial declared that: *‘We have gone from the Celtic Tiger to an era of financial fear with the suddenness of a Titanic-style shipwreck, thrown from comfort, even luxury, into a cold sea of uncertainty.’* In the fourth quarter of 2009, Ireland’s unemployment rate of 12.6% was 3.7 percentage points higher than the EU-27 average unemployment rate of 8.9% (Central Statistics Office 2010). Ireland, which until recently was solvent, is currently experiencing a budget deficit, supported by extensive borrowing three times the recommended European Commission rate (RTE News 2010). Budget 2010 (Dept. of Finance, Ireland) was characterised by a continuation of public sector pay cuts and reduced social welfare provision.

The economic backdrop against which this research was carried out was altogether different to the situation which prevails today. In a review of the Irish economy published in Washington D.C. on August 7th, 2006, the International Monetary Fund said that economic growth was strong, unemployment was low and labour participation rising, and government debt reduced dramatically over the past two decades (International Monetary Fund 2006). Nevertheless, it observed that growth was increasingly unbalanced in recent years, with heavy reliance on building investment, sharp increases in house prices, and rapid credit growth, especially in property-related sectors. The proportion of household borrowing in June 2006, secured on housing in the euro-area countries was highest in the Netherlands, followed by Ireland (Irish Central Bank 2007). The new Celtic Tiger economic climate in Ireland brought with it increased consumerism and improved access to debt to finance lifestyles. The Central Statistics Office (Ireland) in 2005, in its Construction and Housing in Ireland Report outlined that construction output was up 80% in 5 years and mortgage debt increased from €33bn in 2000 to €100bn in 2005. We see then an increase in the number of houses available and mortgage availability. This trend continued until 2008.

This raises an interesting question for my study. Marriage is all about setting up home, whether one rents or buys. In the 2008 European Values Survey, an overwhelming majority (89.6%) of Irish respondents (n= 1,013) felt that '*good housing was important for a successful marriage.*' (European Values Survey Foundation/Tilburg University 2010). While we do not get a sense of whether buying or renting is more important, we do get a sense of how important respondents see housing for a successful marriage. Premarital cohabitation is also all about setting up home. Again, a couple can rent or buy. Hakim (2003) points out that the rewards of home ownership may not in itself include a decision to marry. Interestingly, while marriage may be all about setting up home, setting up home may not necessarily be about marriage. She suggested '*the*

rewards of home ownership and the constraints of having a home loan mortgage to repay are sufficient to ensure that men and women in this situation maintain higher full-time work rates than people in other tenures. (Hakim 2003, p.226). However, Hakim does emphasise that overall, the impact of a mortgage on work rates is smaller than the impact of lifestyle preferences, but it is a separate and parallel effect. The decision to buy a home can tie women into continuous employment, as effectively, as work-centred attitudes. The key issue here though, is to what degree does it shape the decision to live together and then the decision to marry?

Being in a financial position to marry is a factor which can affect the marriage decision in relationships. Smock *et al.* (2005), in a study of working- and lower middle-class cohabiters, 55% of whom have either biological or stepchildren with their cohabiting partner, found that cohabiters believe they should marry once they have reached a certain level of financial status. Children within a relationship were also a factor in Smock *et al.*'s (2005) study. In Ireland, the increase in children outside of a marital relationship is partly due to the loosening of the traditional hold of the Catholic Church on morality and family life. The next section explores this as a social factor affecting the decision to live together and the decision to marry.

2.2.2 The loosening of the traditional hold of the Catholic Church on morality and family life

The loosening of the traditional hold of the Catholic Church on morality, state and family life has meant that there are now more liberal attitudes to sex before marriage (Layte *et al.* 2006). *'In fact, the evolution of sexual norms closely parallels the shift in religious norms. The overlap with religion is not surprising, since Irish sexual attitudes and behaviour cannot be understood without understanding the influence of the*

Catholic Church.' (O'Connell 2001, p.77). Prior to the 1960s, emigration, late marriages and the form of sexual morality advocated by the Catholic Church, controlled family formation in Ireland. In Ireland, the high point of religious commitment had already passed by the late 1960s and signs of decline had appeared, for example, by the diminishing authority of the churches in the political sphere and the drying up of vocations to the religious life (Inglis 1998a; Fuller 2002).

Reporting on the 1981 European Values Study, Fogarty (1984, p.8) found that: *'every indicator of belief, informal and formal practice and attitudes to the Church or Churches, shows that Irish people, North and South, to be far more inclined to religion than those of other countries in Europe.'* By 1990, according to Hornsby-Smith and Whelan (1994), there were some signs of a shift away from religion among those aged less than 40 years. However, overall, it seemed that Ireland remained exceptionally religious by European standards and there was *'no evidence of a general process of secularisation operating throughout the 1980s'* (Hornsby-Smith and Whelan 1994, p.42). Inglehart and Baker's (2000) comparison of 37 mainly western societies in 1990-91 confirmed this view by placing both the Republic and Northern Ireland at the upper end of the international range in terms of both regular Church attendance and the importance people attached to God in their daily lives. In spite of surveys conducted which reveal a drop off in mass attendance (TNS/MRBI survey for Prime-Time 25th September 2003) the majority of the population in Ireland still declare themselves to be Catholic i.e. 86.6% of the population (Central Statistics Office 2006e, p.9).

From the 1970s onwards, there is evidence of a loosening of the traditional hold of the Catholic Church on morality and family life. Between 1973 and 2005, the proportion of Irish people agreeing that sex before marriage is 'always wrong' fell from 71% to 6%. (Layte at al 2006, p.96). We also see very similar trends internationally, albeit earlier. For example, disapproval of premarital sex declined rapidly in the late

1960s and early 1970s in America. By the mid 1970s, only 30% of all American adults believed that it was always wrong for a *'man and woman [to] to have sex relations before marriage'* (Thornton 1989, p.883).

In the early 1990s, the Irish Republic experienced a watershed in sexual morality with the introduction of legalisation deregulating the sale of condoms and obliging health boards to provide family planning services, (Health (Family Planning) Amendment Act, 1992), the decriminalisation of homosexuality (Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 1993), providing a right to information on abortion (Regulation of Information (Services Outside the State For Termination of Pregnancies), 1995) and legalising divorce (Family Law (Divorce) Act (1996)). All this legislation in the 1990s followed national debates in the Republic about contraception in the 1970s, abortion, and divorce in the 1980s. It caused divisions among Catholics and revealed widening gaps between what the Church taught and what significant proportions of the people were willing to accept (Hug 1999). McDonnell and Allison (2006) point out that the Irish Catholic hierarchy's handling of clerical child abuse and sexual scandals within the church has created a serious institutional crisis for the church. The power it once held over matters of personal and sexual morality (Inglis 1998a; Fuller 2002; Smyth 2005) is now very weak, as people become disillusioned with the discrepancy between church teachings and the now documented maltreatment of children. It is not surprising then that Catholic religious practice is diminishing in Ireland.

Research shows that those who claim a religious affiliation often do not regularly attend religious services (De Graaf and Need 2000). It may then be that people use an a la carte Catholicism (Inglis 1998b), whereby they choose elements to suit their individual preferences or lifestyle, but there is with an ongoing detachment from the institutional church. Inglis (2007) explicated this description even further by observing that an orthodox adherence to institutional rules and regulations appears to be

giving way to a collective identification with a religious heritage. This may explain why people identify themselves, although they do not practice Catholicism according to traditional Church dogma. What was once defined as an *la carte* Catholicism seems to be giving way to a what Inglis has termed as a *smorgasbord* approach in which Catholics not only pick and choose which institutional rules, beliefs, and practices they prefer, but increasingly mix this with other religious traditions and beliefs (Inglis, 2007). These findings suggest a new typology of Irish Catholics, one in which the ‘new’ Irish Catholic is now more discerning about religious practice, spirituality and what that means for lifestyle preferences.

Availability of choice has a knock-on effect on sexual morality by allowing more sexual freedom and thereby legitimating premarital cohabitation as a stage in relationship development. However, it may also remove the importance of the spirituality dimension of marriage and perhaps affect when marriage occurs in a relationship, if at all. This may explain, at least in part, the increase in the number of civil marriages in Ireland. In 2006, civil marriages accounted for 23% of all marriages, compared to 6% in 1996 (Central Statistics Office 2009a, p.1). The number of Roman Catholic marriage ceremonies was 73% of all marriages in 2006, compared with 74% in 2005 and 90% in 1996 (Central Statistics Office 2009a, p.1)

If people are not as religious, does that explain the more flexible family formation patterns emerging in Irish society? Hakim’s study in 2003 comparing political, religious and other influences on lifestyle preferences in Britain and Spain revealed that in Spain, religiosity does make a difference in relationship decisions, but only a relatively small one, and the association is stronger among older people, who are more religious and prefer the role segregation model of the family. These findings applicable to Catholic secularising Spain are very interesting, in the light of a somewhat similar process of secularisation in Irish society. If religiosity is important in decision

making for couples, one would expect that premarital cohabitation rates would not be rising, as they are in Ireland, especially as *'persons who are religiously active, often have a closer association with tradition and will thus be more likely to marry'* (Duvander 1999, p.703).

2.2.3 Increased access to education

Increased educational participation for men and women facilitated increased labour force participation for both men and women. Educational levels of women have increased more dramatically though. In 1975/1976 there were 53 female students per 100 male students in higher education compared to 2002/2003 when there was 126 female students per 100 male students (Dept of Education and Science 2006: Section 8.10). In a study of the role of education in the postponement of maternity in Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, Gustafsson *et al.* (2001) conclude that educational expansion is a major reason for the postponement of maternity in all of the countries studied. The strongest educational effects were in Britain and the Netherlands, where highly educated women have considerably later maternity and higher rates of ultimate childlessness than less educated women rate. Hakim (2000; 2003) suggests that higher education serves as a superior market as well as a source of training and personal development.

Halpin and O'Donoghue assessed the impact of educational attainment on relationships decisions in Ireland in 2004. In their analysis of Labour Force Survey data, it emerged that 12.8% of males and females cohabiting, had achieved a third level degree in Ireland, compared to 10.1% of married males and 6.4% of married females (2004, p.5). If women now have more access to careers etc., does this mean that marriage is something that can be postponed for a certain period, or indefinitely? Does education therefore, also act as a constraint on marriage in a relationship?

2.2.4 Couple career paths

In chapter 1, I referred to all family change being set in the context of broader social change. I provided an example of how industrialisation in the 1800s and 1900s in Europe and America moved the work activities of men and unmarried women to factories, offices and other bureaucratic organisations, while married women, increasingly cut off from many of their previous economic activities became more focused on taking care of home and children (Thornton *et al.* 2007). In Ireland, the social subordination of women was '*natural*', '*inevitable*' and '*what women want*'. (O'Connor 2000, p.84). The family has since changed again, to allow the emergence of dual career households as a family norm (Thornton *et al.* 2007). The lifting of the Marriage Bar in Ireland in 1973, which prohibited women from continuing to work in the public sector once married, really paved the way for the entry of women into the workforce in Ireland. The Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004 further facilitated feminisation of the work force.

Until recently, before the current economic recession, female labour force participation rates were increasing in Ireland. The employment rate for women in Ireland was 60.3% in the second quarter of 2007 compared with 45.9% in 1997. The employment rate for men was 77.2%, which was well above the average 2006 EU rate of around 71.6%. (Central Statistics Office 2007b, p.1). In 2007 then, if there are increasing numbers of women working in Ireland (Tovey *et al.* 2007) and keen to establish careers/financial independence before marriage, is co-habitation perhaps a solution at a particular stage of relationship development? Perhaps premarital cohabitation is a way of maintaining a relationship, while focusing on career/financial independence. Cherlin (2000) claims that the bargaining position of women has improved and that women are using their improved bargaining position not just to search for men with higher earning potential, but also to search for a partner who will

share more equitably in home production: housework and child care. Although Cherlin (2000) refers to an American context primarily, increased education participation by women and follow-on increased female labour force participation in recent decades in Ireland makes this also applicable to an Irish context. Irish women too might be incorporating premarital cohabitation into the search and bargaining processes because co-habitation provides a better opportunity to observe men's skills and preferences for home production. Does that mean that some couples and perhaps more so women, are using premarital cohabitation as way of 'testing' a relationship prior to marriage? Since modernity is characterised by both choice and risk (Giddens 1991), relationship development no longer has a pre-determined trajectory. There is therefore, an increased risk in relationships now as the individual and the couple plot the course of their relationship in their 'open choice' social world. Premarital cohabitation therefore, may allow time in a relationship to assure that risk is minimised.

In the previous chapter, I pointed out that marriage deferral, rather than '*marriage avoidance*' (Fahey and Layte 2007, p.169) might be a more appropriate description of what has been happening in the Irish context. For Lloyd (2006, p.997), we must observe the '*difference in marriage timing and marriage prevalence noting that marriage delayed until relatively late in a woman's life course, is not equivalent to marriage forgone.*' This appears to be the case in Ireland, where people marry at a later age than they did in the 1960's and 1970's, but the prevalence of marriage is currently increasing in Ireland, rather than declining. Marriage is important, but takes place later, rather than earlier, in the life course. Does co-habitation satisfy the intimate needs of a relationship, but without the career restrictions that may be associated with marriage and possibly, children? To what extent then, does career affect a decision to cohabit, or postpone a decision to marry in Ireland? If people want to avail of this opportunity, does that mean that career opportunities also pose a constraint on the decision to marry?

As Beck (1992, p.116) puts it, the situation of reflexive modernisation is moving to the point where the *'option of not deciding is tending to become impossible', where the taken-for-granted is challenged.* The next section will examine the influence of human agency in decision making in relationships and how people manage to derive what they need out of a close intimate relationship in a world of social possibilities.

2.3 Individual agency and decision making in relationships

The section will explore the micro-sociological context of relationship development. Romantic love and relationship development, as well as interpersonal commitment within relationships will be discussed. Previous relationships, unplanned pregnancy, family of origin and the influence of peers also shape relationship development on an individual level. They too will be reviewed in this section.

2.3.1 Romantic love and relationship development

Romantic love is in our culture the single most important motive for marriage. Prior to the late eighteenth century, if love was referred to in marriage, it was as companionate love, linked to the mutual responsibility of husbands and wives for running the household or farm (Cancian 1987). In pre-modern Europe for example, most marriages were contracted, not on the basis of mutual sexual attraction, but economic circumstance. As stated previously, this was evident in Ireland up to the 1930s. The themes of growing intimacy, privacy and equality within marriage and the family date back to at least the 1940s (Burgess and Locke 1945) and are part of the orthodox account of how the modern family developed (Jamieson 1987).

Coontz (2005) argued that the ascendance of romantic love as the *raison d'être* of modern marriage represents a dramatic break from the rest of human history. During the nineteenth century, the range of a woman's life was restricted to the home. This is not currently the case, with educational opportunities and career paths being available now for both men and women alike. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) outline the factors influencing the changes in love are as follows:

- 1. Career opportunities for both men and women, mean that economic restraints are reduced, making love the main bond between the partners.*
- 2. There is an increase in the number of couples from different backgrounds, so that finding and keeping common ground to halt the centrifugal force of two very different biographies lies exclusively in the hands of the men and women involved.*
- 3. Couples rarely know or understand each others work situations so that there is little shared experience to bind them together.*
- 4. The state and the Church are retreating from their roles as law-givers for marriage and close relationships, so that love has more scope to develop its inherent conflict potential as a radical, self-administered search for intimacy.*
- 5. Individualisation – that is to say being dependent on one's training, mobility, commitment to the labour market and impersonal regulations –makes love seem the best answer to loneliness, holding out the promise of a meaningful and satisfying physical and emotional experience.*

(Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, pp.195-196).

As the regulation associated with traditional precepts and practices diminish in people's lives, people feel increasingly disoriented. Love has emerged in intimate relationships as a way of achieving emotional self-actualisation. It is now an integral component of

marriage, rather than an unlikely or hoped for by-product. *'It is an ideal combining romantic and permanent love growing from the close emotional bond between two partners and giving their lives substance and significance.'* (Beck and Gernsheim 1995, p.49). One feature of modernity is the managing of relationships amidst the array of social opportunity that is also available. The constant re-negotiation that inevitably takes place is probably essential given that one characteristic of modernisation is the fact that male and female biographies initially develop in quite different directions. The social reflexivity which results means that we are constantly managing or challenging the risks and opportunities that we ourselves have created, by availing of all the choices. Relationships decisions are not necessarily predictable, but are a choice amidst a myriad of other relationship decisions, while also taking cognisance of other social opportunities, such as educational opportunities and career paths etc. Whereas in post traditional societies, marriage was an economic necessity, now personal compatibility, with romantic love being an essential component, often after a period of premarital cohabitation is crucial. It is also no longer for life, as we have also seen previously with the increase in divorce rates.

For Beck and Gernsheim (1995), the fundamental theme behind marriage is not just the social structure of our lives; it is also increasingly a matter of identity. Marriage has now become a central factor in the social design of reality (Berger and Kellner 1965). Modernity presents a myriad of social opportunity, which on the one hand creates choice, but on the other hand can be overwhelming and chaotic on an individual level. The more other reference points have slipped away, the more we direct our craving to give our lives meaning and security towards those we love. It may also be that premarital cohabitation is now becoming more popular, from this long emerging emphasis on the idea of love, as being the main basis for an intimate relationship. That might even explain why some couples do not marry, but it does not explain why there is

an increase in marriage rates in Ireland, as well as premarital cohabitation rates. It may be that marriage is now the capstone of relationship development and it is therefore, highly valued because of its intrinsic social status. Romantic love detaches individuals from wider social circumstances (Giddens 1991). *'It provides for a long-term life trajectory, oriented to an anticipated yet malleable future; and it creates a 'shared history' that helps separate out the marital relationship from other aspects of family organisation and give it a special primacy'* (Giddens 1991, p.45).

Drawing on contemporary films and novels, as well as historical material, Swidler (1980) argues that changes in the meaning of love reflect shifts in how the life course is structured and how the self is understood. *'Romantic love introduced the idea of a narrative into an individual's life'* (Giddens 1992, p.39). This narrative is a story about two individuals with little connection to wider social processes. Giddens connects this development with the simultaneous emergence of the novel - relatively early form of mass media, suggesting ideal (or less than ideal) romantic life narratives. These stories did not construct love as a partnership of equals, of course - instead, women were associated with a world of femininity and motherhood, which was supposedly unknowable to men. However, Beck and Beck-Gersheim, who see love as a *'radical form of democracy for two'* (1995, p.192) emphasise that *'the meaning of love, of togetherness, is always at risk. The lovers have two levers to two trap doors; the end can come very suddenly, on the decision of the other, and there is no appeal'* (1995, p.193). Giddens stresses the freedom, the likely equality and the possibilities of mutual growth and development (Morgan in Allan and Jones 2003). Bauman's *'tourists'* and *'vagabonds'* imply a somewhat more desperate view of the human condition under late or post-modernity (Bauman 1990). In contrast to the *'pilgrim'* where some long-term process of self-knowledge and self-understanding is linked to some wider structured order, the *'tourist'* consumes sights and relationships without much in the way of

further moral commitment. The premarital cohabitation relationship though, would not seem like a *'tourist'* type relationship, especially if there is commitment and the relationship is a long-term relationship.

Romantic love depends upon projective identification, the projective identification of *'amour passion'*, as the means whereby prospective partners become attracted and then bound to one another (Giddens 1994, p.44). *'Romantic love has long had an egalitarian strain, intrinsic to the idea that a relationship can derive from the emotional involvement of two people, rather than from external social criteria.'* (Giddens 1992, p.62). The emotional involvement of two people though depends on mutual disclosure by both individuals within the relationship. Emotional disclosure is often considered more challenging for men than women. The next section considers whether mutual disclosure is a challenge to masculinity and indeed, whether masculinity is a challenge to mutual disclosure.

2.3.2 Modernity and mutual disclosure as a challenge to masculinity?

Sociological research studies in Ireland on masculinity focuses on homosexuality and homophobia (Inglis 1998a ; McKeown *et al.* 1999), fatherhood and being child-centered (Corcoran 2005), as well as the marginalisation of men from the family, especially non-resident fathers (NESF 2001), reflecting the changing roles that men have in family life. However, with premarital cohabitation now emerging as a stage in relationship development and the marriage decision being deferred, changes to masculinity within intimate relationships is also an emerging research issue. Giddens (1992; 1994) suggested that one of the most important trends occurring in the present is the *'democratisation of emotions'*. This does not mean that sexual equality in marriage and premarital cohabitation has been achieved, or that intimate relationships today are

free from power, violence and manipulation. Rather, Giddens (1992; 1994) proposed that there is a tendency for such relationships to depend more on negotiation and open exchange than on traditional expectations, roles and norms. Cancian (1987) observed that within current marital ‘blueprints’, there is a greater emphasis than previously on notions of ‘partnership’, emotional fulfilment and intimate disclosure (Duncombe and Marsden 1993; Hawkes 1996).

Weeks (2005, p.64) argues that new narratives of masculinity that are emerging *‘speak of vulnerabilities as much as of power. They speak of fear and anxiety as much as of strength’*. The feminisation of education and work has greatly improved life outcomes for women in general and has considerably altered the female biography. By changing the traditional inequality between men and women, the male biography too has changed. This too has implications for relationship development and the roles of men and women within intimate relationships. There is now an increased expectation on men for example, to become involved in household chores and be more proactive in child-minding. McGinnity and Russell (2008), in their analysis of time diaries from just over 1000 men and women, aged 18 to 97, as part of the Irish National Time Use Survey 2005, found that the distribution of paid and unpaid work is highly gendered both in terms of time spent on paid and unpaid work by women and men and in terms of the types of unpaid work carried out by men and women. Women’s total workload is higher than men’s, with women working on average around forty minutes longer per day than men including paid and unpaid labour. In dual-earning couples the division of labour is less gendered. However, parenthood brings a reallocation of time for both men and women, leaving a more traditional division of labour.

Socialisation of young men into traditional masculine roles inhibits their capacity to share their feelings with others, and in some cases, can lead to suicidal tendencies (Cleary 2005). According to Cleary (2005, p.155), *‘constant performative*

work was required to project an image of strength and to conceal growing levels of distress. When extreme, this challenged their sense of coherent self-identity'. Therefore, there is a poor fit between men's internalised understanding of masculinity and changing social realities. In a world of changing social realities, it is also logical to assume that '*democratisation of emotions*' (Giddens 1992; 1994) is more challenging for men than it is for women. That would seem to imply that relationship development and making decisions, such as living together and/or marriage too may be more problematic for men. Emotional commitment in a premarital cohabitation relationship can also be an indicator of emotional commitment in a marriage relationship. Perhaps premarital cohabitation relationships act as a way of testing out emotional commitment before marriage, as well as a way of assessing if both individuals can provide and derive emotional satisfaction within the relationship? If this is the case for Irish women and men, then premarital cohabitation may also turn out to be a way to reduce the risk of divorce later on in a relationship, as well as a check on compatibility within a relationship.

2.3.3 Interpersonal commitment and commitment to the relationship

Interpersonal commitment and commitment to a serious heterosexual relationship is directly related to the development of a relationship and decisions, individuals and couples make within that relationship trajectory. Interpersonal commitment is important in understanding co-habitation patterns for three reasons:

1. It is strongly associated with relationship quality.
2. It may be more related to relationship outcomes than either commitment to the institution of marriage, or the forces of constraint commitment.

3. It is plausibly related to the development of effective intervention strategies for couples at increased risk.

(Magdol *et al.* 1998; Stanley *et al.* 1999)

The level of commitment is like a hallmark of relationship quality in the modern social order. According to Giddens (1991), love in the sense of contemporary romantic love, is a form of commitment, but commitment is the wider category of the two. Someone entering into a relationship recognises the risks involved in modern relationships, but is willing to take a chance on it. A person deciding to marry is even more willing to take a chance in a relationship, therefore there must be as Giddens (1991) implies, a different level of commitment in a marriage. The force of love can to some extent control commitment, but a person only becomes committed to another when, for whatever reason, she or he decides to be so (Giddens, 1991). In general, commitment should increase as the value of the relationship increases (Rusbult 1980). However, I wonder if there can be different gradients of commitment at different stages of relationship development, and what are the implications for decisions made within the relationship?

In a companion paper, to Smock *et al.* (2005), study of working and lower middle-class cohabitees, over half of whom have either biological or stepchildren with their cohabiting partner, Porter *et al.* (2004), found that people who cohabit want to develop aspects of their relationship or individual characteristics such as maturity before marriage. Since income pooling and the benefits of an intimate relationship occur within a cohabitating relationship, Cherlin (2000) proposes that '*enforceable trust*' and '*social status*' are motivators to marry. One of the advantages marriage has provided is enforceable trust: because a commitment made in public before family and friends, and perhaps in a religious setting, is more difficult to break, partners can feel more confident about their investment in the relationship (Cherlin 2004). However, with premarital cohabitation becoming more common and widely accepted and acquiring many of the

rights once attached only to marriage (Parker 2005), the power of those external forces may diminish, and the capacity of marriage to strengthen enforceable trust may increasingly rely on the weight partners give to the public commitment (Cherlin 2004).

In the New Zealand Commitment Study (Pryor and Roberts 2005), married participants were asked why they married. It is not clear the extent to which premarital cohabitation has preceded marriage or not, but the answers do give an insight into the motivation to marry. The most frequent response from married respondents was that it was a stage in the life course. It was the '*next step*' or the '*next step in commitment, or something they had always expected to do*' (Pryor and Roberts 2005, p.24).

This all raises questions for this study. Do people cohabit because they feel committed to a certain degree to their relationship, but feel more committed when they decide to marry? How does this change come about? If it is as Cherlin (2000) has proposed, that social status is motivation to marry, then is marriage a final, crowning statement of relationship commitment, or perhaps the only significant such statement?

2.3.4 Previous relationships

For Morgan (cited in Allan and Jones 2003, p.201) '*the history of the relationship might be spoken of retrospectively, or as part of a process of ongoing monitoring, as having 'stages.'*' The history of the relationship therefore is very important in terms of understanding key decision within the relationship e.g. whether a couple should co-habit and then marry and whether a couple should marry and then co-habit. So too are previous romantic and sexual relationships. It is reasonable to assume that the quality of a previous relationship will affect how committed a person is to their current relationship and therefore, how they make relationship decisions, such as the decision to live together and the decision to marry. Stets (1993) identified that previous

relationships may be related to ongoing attitudes towards relationships or unresolved issues.

The most painful and stressful break-ups follow highly emotionally involved, committed, and satisfying relationships (Feeney and Noller 1992; Fine and Sacher 1997). Past relationships characterised by high levels of closeness and involvement are the most painful following their termination. Past relationships tend to have an impact on future relationships (Frazier and Cook 1993); it is possible that individuals leaving close relationships would find it difficult to regain that level of closeness with their next partner. In contrast, Merolla *et al.*'s research in 2004 showed that the closeness of past relationships only negatively affects future relationship commitment and satisfaction when break-ups are mutual. This study was based on a sample size of 204 (85 men, 117 women, four did not provide sex) undergraduates enrolled in two introductory communication courses in an American university. Eligible participants had to be currently involved in a romantic relationship and experienced a dissolved romantic relationship preceding the current one. Although the study does not provide information on how this may influence a decision to live together or marry, it does suggest that mutual break-ups are the most difficult for individuals to overcome when entering a new relationship.

A stable self-identity reflects a person's life, actions and influences which makes sense to them, and which can be explained to other people without much difficulty. It 'explains' the past, and is oriented towards an anticipated future. Therefore, it makes sense that previous relationships from part of an individual's biography and may affect relationship decision making.

2.3.5 Unplanned pregnancy

A pregnancy can be described as planned when multiple criteria are met, such as clear intentions to become pregnant, non use of contraception, and partner agreement (Barret *et al.* 2004). Some studies indicate that cohabiting women's pregnancies are less likely to be planned than those of married women (Korenman *et al.* 2002; Bouchard 2005; Finer and Henshaw 2006). Despite the association between pregnancy planning and marital status, it is worth mentioning that more than half of cohabiting couples' first pregnancies are planned (Musick 2002), while about 20% of married couples' first pregnancies are unplanned (Seltzer 2000). Those cohabiting are also less likely than married couples to report their pregnancies as planned (Musick 2002) which may suggest that they did not intend to have children together, or did not intend to begin childbearing so soon. Other studies showed that both premarital cohabitation (Woo and Raley 2005; Reed 2006) and unintended pregnancies (Bouchard 2005; Grussu *et al.* 2005) are associated with lower educational levels, lower earnings, and poorer subjective well-being.

Cohabitees' more flexible lifestyle (Horwitz and Raskin White 1998; Lapierre-Adamcyk and Charvet 1999) does not seem to constitute an asset for partners facing unplanned pregnancies. An unintended pregnancy has a disruptive effect on individuals' well-being (Bouchard 2005). Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard's (2009) results show that unplanned pregnancy had surprisingly more of a disruptive effect for married couples than it had for premarital cohabitation couples. Interestingly, for cohabitees the pregnancy status per se did not make much difference. This implies that there is no ideal marital context to deal with an unplanned pregnancy (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2009).

Since premarital cohabitation relationships are not as stable as married relationships, it is also reasonable to assume that an unplanned pregnancy in a

cohabiting relationship may have a serious effect on relationship quality. Traditionally an unplanned pregnancy or unexpected pregnancy meant that a couple had to marry. This is no longer the case. In a study of unmarried parents, Waller (2001) finds that when their child is born, over 90% of cohabiting mothers report at least a fifty-fifty chance that they will marry their partner and half report that they will almost certainly marry their baby's father. Pregnancy is often a secondary reason for marriage though. Smock *et al.* (2005) found that cohabiting couples even if children are present in the relationship, marry only when they are in a financial position to do so.

Porter *et al.* (2004) found that the actual or anticipated effects of children on a cohabiting relationship is different for parent and non-parent couples who are cohabiting. Non-parents tend to see cohabiting relationships as a space for developing and testing their relationships before marrying and having children. In contrast, those who already have biological or stepchildren acknowledge that a pregnancy may speed up the marriage process for them, but few think they should marry simply because children are involved in the relationship. Unmarried parents usually disapprove of 'shotgun' marriages (Edin *et al.* 2003).

According to Reed (2006), there was a close relationship between pregnancy and premarital cohabitation for couples. Reed used a sub-sample of 44 couples who were cohabiting around the time of their child's birth, from the 'Time, Love and Cash in Couples with Children Study', a qualitative, longitudinal, intensive interview study of 48 unmarried and 26 married couples who had a child together in 2000. This study is itself a sub-sample of the 'Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study', which investigates non-marital births in the urban United States. Although all couples were living together around the time of their child's birth, a substantial majority, 73%, began their premarital cohabitation experience with a 'shotgun' cohabitation, moving in during their first pregnancy together, or just after the child's birth. For them, premarital

cohabitation was not a relationship decision, but instead a response to pregnancy. A study by Gibson-Davis *et al.* (2005) exploring barriers to marriage among unmarried parents provides important context for the present analysis. Similar to Reed (2006), their sample draws from the 2000 'Time, Love and Cash in Couples with Children Study. Although Gibson-Davis *et al.* (2005) do not limit their sample to cohabiting couples; about three fourths of their unmarried parents are cohabitees, making the samples quite similar. On the basis of interviews conducted shortly after their child's birth, Gibson-Davis *et al.* find unmarried parents have a high regard for marriage and would like to marry, yet feel they need to overcome financial obstacles and reach a high level of relationship quality first. Fear of divorce also emerged as an additional barrier to marriage. The authors (Gibson-Davis *et al.* 2005) note that unmarried parents view premarital cohabitation as a test for marriage and that children do not feature in their parents' discussions about marriage.

2.3.6 Family of origin

Childhood interactions with parents or parent surrogates provide people with their experiences in intimate loving relationships (Gopnik *et al.* 1999). Early experiences may also influence marriage through beliefs about the importance, or likelihood of marital stability. An individual from an intact family may be socialised into emphasising family and stability, and thus be more likely to marry. On the other hand, an individual who has experienced family dissolution may be more concerned over the permanence of the union and thus choose to marry, rather than cohabit (Duvander 1999). Maternal attitudes about marriage and parenting can influence children's own attitudes (Axinn and Thornton 1992; Starrels and Holm 2000). It is reasonable to assume that they also affect attitudes about living together too.

Using the Swedish Family Survey of 1992, as well as the register data of marriage and births for the following two years, Duvander (1999, p.702) demonstrated that '*the effect of family composition in childhood, showed that women who grew up in a family with two biological parents, or adoptive parents, were more likely to marry than others, supporting the transmission of family stability*'. Via socialisation and role modeling, parent histories affect the values and attitudes that children possess concerning marriage. Familial socialisation does not necessarily affect ones' expectation of relationship stages though. Using an analytic sample (n = 715) from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth (U.S.), Manning and Smock (2002) found that family structure at age 14 is not significantly associated with expectations for marriage. This minimises the socialisation effect of family of origin on relationship expectations.

Research demonstrates that parental divorce is associated with an earlier age at marriage, particularly for women (Thornton 1991; Axinn and Thornton 1993; Cherlin *et al.* 1995;) and premarital birth (Wu and Martinson 1993; Wu 1996). The intergenerational transmission of divorce, sometimes referred to as the 'legacy of divorce' has been well documented (Wallerstein *et al.* 2000). Diekmann and Schmidheiny (2008), drawing on the cross-national data from female respondents in the Fertility and Family Survey, collected in the early 1990s in 13 European countries, Canada, and the United States, investigated the intergenerational transmission of divorce. They established that the intergenerational transmission of divorce is a widespread phenomenon, occurring in the 13 European countries which they analysed, as well as in Canada and the United States. This is in spite of different historical, institutional, and cultural contexts (Diekmann and Schmidheiny 2008). Women whose parents had divorced were, in all countries, also more likely to cohabit with the men they eventually married than women who grew up with both of their parents (Diekmann and Schmidheiny 2008).

However, Teachman (2004) emphasises that women who experienced life in an alternative family form, contract marriages with characteristics that are more prone to stress and subsequent marital dissolution. *‘Specifically these unions are more likely to be characterised by early age at marriage, low education of both spouses, premarital fertility, and premarital co-habitation’* (Teachman 2004, p.105). Future relationship behaviour and decisions made within relationships by an individual can be influenced by socialisation experiences. Couples from nontraditional families are more likely to dissolve their relationship (Tzeng and Mare 1995; Veroff *et al.* 1995) than couples who lived with both biological parents when growing up.

2.3.7 Peer group influences

While the family is a primary socialising agent, peers are a secondary socialising agent, acting as a reference point for behaviour and thinking. Nazio and Blossfeld (2003, p.52) in their study of the diffusion of premarital cohabitation among young women in West Germany, East Germany and Italy perceived that experiences of peers (what they call the *‘cumulative peer group adoption of cohabitation’*) exerts in general more influence on the decision to cohabit than the past adoption of this very behaviour by earlier generations (*‘cumulative pre-cohort adoption’*). This indicates that peers can have a very definite influence on the decision to cohabit/marry, especially if individuals model their own behaviour on that of their peers. It also raises an interesting research question for this study – to what extent does the behaviour and views of peers influence the decision to live together and the decision to marry?

2.4 A perennial sociological debate: social structure and/or human agency in decision-making

Classical social theorists emphasised the importance of social context in all human activity and sought to analyse the characteristics of emergent modern society (King 2004). Comte's sociology for example, seeks to demonstrate the decisive role which the social context plays in all human activity. For Durkheim, social relations are 'sacred'; humans develop a powerful emotional attachment to each other, which binds them together, inspiring them to particular forms of activity. In the course of social interaction, humans mutually transform each other to produce a completely new level of reality. Weber described sociology as '*a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of "social" action*' (Weber 1978, p.4). He specified that '*action is 'social' insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course*' (Weber 1978, p.4). Marx argued that humans could never be considered separately from the social relations, in which they existed; '*for only to social man is nature available as a bond with other men, as the basis of his own existence for others and theirs for him, and as the vital element in human reality*' (Marx 1990, p.90). In classical social theory therefore, we get a sense of the importance of social relations between humans as being a primary focus of sociology.

Contemporary social theory emerged as a distinctive sub-discipline within sociology in the 1970s to become particularly prominent in the 1980s and 1990s and with it, the focus of sociology changed. Much of the contemporary social theory debate centres on the primacy of social structure or human agency in the reproduction of the social order. Realism represented most prominently in Britain by Roy Bhaskar and Margaret Archer has an increasingly important position. From their perspective, society consists of a dual or stratified ontology in which the individual reproduces an already existing social structure. Thus, Archer (1995, p.75) insists that '*it is fully justifiable to*

refer to structures (being irreducible to individuals or groups) as pre-existing them both.' Bhaskar (1979, p.46) also emphasises that *'there is an ontological hiatus between society and people.'* Blau's (1964, p.338) dialectical social theory argues that the social structure is reproduced and transformed by the individual in the process of social exchange: *'structural change, therefore, assumes a dialectical pattern.'* Stones (1996) advocates that social theorists must recognise that individuals are reflexive about the objective conditions of their existence, but that these individuals are themselves confronted by certain real structural conditions. This seems to imply that while individuals can be reflexive about the conditions of their existence, they are however, restrained by the structural conditions in which they find themselves, so therefore, do not really have autonomy.

Giddens (1984) theory of structuration proposes that it is human agency, which continuously reproduces social structure. It is a prime example of the ontological dualism of contemporary social theory. He suggests human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other, and it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents, which reproduce the structure. This means that there is a social structure - traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established ways of doing things; but it also means that these change when people start to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently. Certainly, we can see this happening with premarital cohabitation in Ireland, where there have been definite political moves over the last while to acknowledge premarital cohabitation as an increasingly popular stage in relationship development. The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010 2010, Ireland is an example of this.

Other theorists such as Luhmann (1995) accept that any social system is comprised of individuals and their actions, but reject the argument that sociological analysis can limit itself merely to human social interaction (Luhmann 1997, p.47).

Decisions are not just the result of macro sociological forces on an individual, nor are they solely the product of micro-sociological forces, such as individual agency. Luhmann (1997) is concerned ultimately with the dialectic between the social system and the environment in which that system exists. For Callinicos (2004), society consists of structure and agents and the purpose of social theory is to reconcile the two distinct elements. Sztompka's (2008) development of a third sociology perspective is a way of doing that. First sociology is the sociology of '*social wholes – organisms, systems*' (Sztompka 2008, p.25). These organisms and systems determine social life. In comparison, second sociology sees social life as a collection of behaviours and actions (Sztompka 2008). In reality, we are neither completely determined, nor are we completely free. Third sociology takes as its ultimate '*object of inquiry social events: human action in collective contexts, constrained on the one hand by the agential endowment of participants and on the other hand by structural and cultural environments of action*' (Sztompka 2008, p.25). It looks at the level between structures and actions, where the constraints of structures and dynamics of action produce the real, experienced and observable social events. It is here that we can see the interplay between structural constraints and individual agency and how that plays out in people's lives. Therefore, it is here that this current study will be situated. This work will make a substantial contribution to our theoretical understanding of the interplay between structural constraints and individual decision making in the formation of innovative patterns of social behaviour, such as premarital cohabitation and how that is affecting the social institution of marriage in Ireland.

However, decisions to engage in different kinds of relationships rebound on the state policies, the behavioural expectations and the communal networks that are the social contexts and conditions of personal life. '*The transformation of intimacy signals positive changes in personal relationships even at the same time as the changes*

generate difficulties and problems for people and institutions alike' (Martin cited in Giddens and Pierson 2002, p.22). The social reality of relationship development in Ireland is not just about the institutional framework and how that facilitates relationship development, neither is it collective individual action in relationship development, which brings about premarital cohabitation as a stage in relationship development. It also not just about the dialectic between the social system and the environment in which that system exists that creates premarital cohabitation as a new family form in Ireland. Rather, it is how an individual experiences and interprets social events, in the context of their own personal history, and their current relationship, that determines whether a couple will live together or not before marriage, and whether they will marry or not in that relationship. Therefore, it is the relationship between structural constraints and individual agency, how that plays out in individual lives, and how individuals interpret them, that determine a couple's relationship trajectory, and the decisions they will make in the evolving social order in which we live.

2.5 Conclusion

Although this study is only interested in the decision to live together and whether or not a decision to marry follows out of that, prior to first marriage, and of course, what that means for marriage as a social institution, it is clear there are a great many influencing variables. We know about the social and personal context of decision making in relationships, but we know little about how they affect individuals in their lives to bring about a decision to live together, and then a decision to marry. Therefore, an understanding of the interplay between structural constraints and individual decision making in the formation of innovative patterns of social behaviour, such as premarital cohabitation is essential to appreciating how premarital cohabitation has become a stage in relationship development and what affect that has had on the institution of marriage.

The next chapter discusses the use of a life course approach as a methodological strategy for understanding how these levels of analysis intersect in individual lives. A life course perspective delineates core concepts of roles, role configurations and pathways, specifies the links between them and highlights the importance of linked lives and structural context. *'It's [life course research] decisive contribution to current sociology is a dynamic research perspective that allows us to study the interdependence between micro-social biographical processes and macro-social structural change'* (Sackmann and Wingers 2003, p.93).

Chapter Three

Sociological investigation of premarital cohabitation as a pathway to marriage: A methodological approach.

*I can address myself only to my experience of the world, to that blending
with the world that recommences for me each morning as soon as I open
my eyes, in that flux of perpetual life between it and myself, which beats
unceasingly from morning to night.....'*

(Merleau-Ponty and Lefort 1968, p.35).

3.1 Introduction

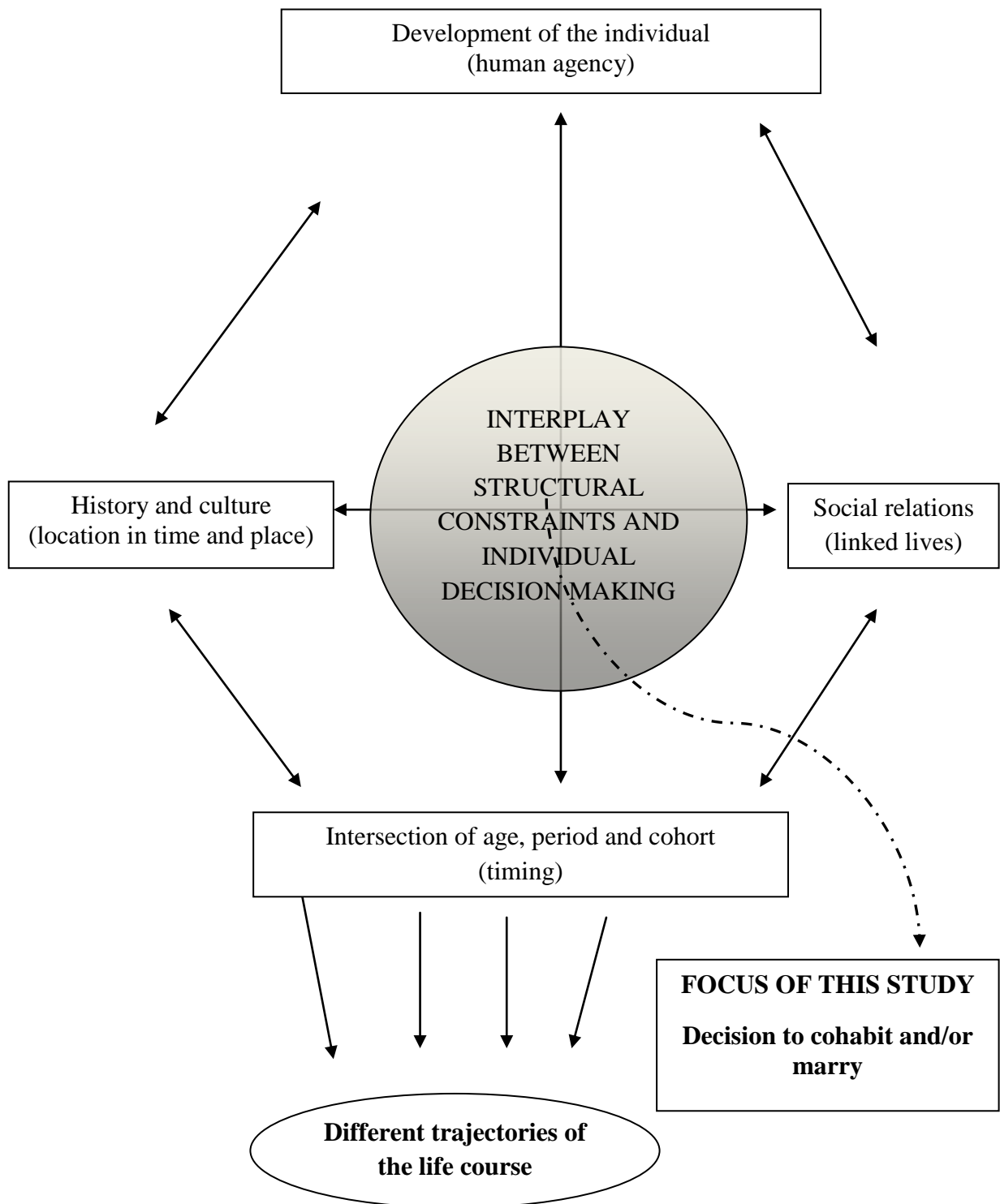
In the previous chapters, I reviewed the contours of family change in modern Ireland. We know about the personal and social context of relationship development. We know about how linked lives can affect relationship development, and we know how the timing of the decision-making can be very important, as well as the personal needs of the individual in the relationship. This study is not focused on how each of these individual elements impinge on relationship development, but rather how all these processes come together at the level of the individual decision making to produce a decision to live together or marry. The challenge then was how to measure the relationship between structural constraints and individual agency in decision-making. This was resolved by adopting a life course perspective, as the methodological framework, used to shape this study. This chapter explicates how the life course

paradigm, as elaborated by Giele and Elder's (1998), is an ideal rubric to study how the constraints of social structures and the dynamics of action produce premarital cohabitation and a decision to marry or not. The great merit of the qualitative life history approach, which this study adopts, is that it allows for the possibility of developing an understanding of how all levels of analysis intersect in individual lives. It will allow the respondent to frame their life history according to the events, circumstances and interpretations that are significant to him or her, at the point when they decide to live with their partner and when they decide to marry. I will also discuss the research process followed to complete my study.

3.2 Life course analysis as a methodological framework for this study

Figure 1 presents Giele and Elder's (1998) four key elements of the life course paradigm, as adapted for this study.

Figure 1: Four key elements of the life course paradigm



Source: Adapted from Giele and Elder 1998, p.11

Use of a life course methodology for this study means reviewing the social, structural, person historic, and individual issues that merge when individuals in a couple engage in a decision to live together and then a decision to marry. If we understand the social world as one that simultaneously holds meanings for its members and is, at least in part, reproduced and transformed by them, then any sociological account of the world must recognize, so Giddens (1991) argues, that ordinary people's views of it are themselves sociologies of a kind. Looking at what is happening for respondents at key points in decision making and how that is interpreted by respondents will identify how decision are made within serious heterosexual relationships.

The life course of individuals is embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime. Historical studies elsewhere, demonstrate for example, a pattern of rising non-marital cohabitation in response to housing shortages in Stockholm from as far back as the late 19th Century (Matovic 1984; 1990). How an individual experiences history and culture shapes relationship decisions. Social expectation i.e. what way relationships should develop is also a useful way to assess what respondents perceive as normative expectations for relationship development.

For Settersten, '*with cross-sectional data, age, period, and cohort effects are hopelessly entangled*' (1999, p.122). Recent methodological advances have provided a way to deal with the age-period-cohort problem. Some of these developments attempt to disentangle age, period and cohort effects a priori through research designs. In particular, Settersten (1999) heralds the cross-sequential research design, which means combining both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs to minimise developmental assumptions, as an ideal design for disentangling these effects. Schaie (1992), one of the pioneers of the cross-sequential design, argues that it is always prudent to

commence with an age comparative cross-sectional design. However, in those instances where such a design cannot answer the question of interest, additional data must be collected across time within a cross-sequential framework. This was not necessary for my study. My sample comprised of couples who are cohabiting with plans to marry, couples who are cohabiting with no plans to marry, and couples who married without living together first in 2007. Therefore, it reflected a single cohort within a defined historical period.

In 2007, Ireland was still at the height of a boom predicated on an expanded property market, rising house prices and high levels of consumer expenditure. Since the Celtic Tiger was a time of increased consumerism in Ireland, it is reasonable to assume that it had an effect on how relationships developed. Couples may for example, have lived together while advancing in their careers and saving for a deposit for a mortgage, before making a decision to marry. Here we can see how life course processes come together at the level of the individual decision-making to determine a relationship trajectory. The life course perspective is often seen as a way of offering conceptual tools for understanding the collective impact of historical change (Cohler and Hostetler 2003), but it can also be used as a way of studying inter-cohort or intra cohort variation in the ways in which socio-historical circumstances are related to particular lives. George (1996), Rosenfeld (1999) and Settersten (1999) observed that members of a given cohort react in diverse and often unpredictable ways to social and historical circumstances. That may explain why various pathways to marriage exist. People wish to achieve emotional satisfaction in their relationships, but at the same time have to balance that within structural constraints or opportunities.

Lives are lived interdependently and social historical influences expressed through this network of shared relationships. Within a relationship, the interaction of intentional actors co-produces the social system at both micro and macro levels and the self-hood

or social (human) nature of the actors themselves (Dannefer 1999). The initiation of new relationships can shape lives as well, by fostering 'turning points' that lead to a change in behaviour or by fostering behavioural continuity. How does s/he feel about the relationship? Does s/he wish to get married? Do I wish to have children? Do we wish to have children? Because lives are lived interdependently, transitions in one person's life often entails transitions for other people as well. Being in love in a relationship reflects how we are getting on in that relationship, and the satisfaction we are deriving from it. Previous research showed that children may influence a decision to live together and a decision to marry (Musick 2002; Wu and Musick 2008). Family and peer and family relationships can have a huge effect on how we make our decisions. Of course, previous intimate relationship experiences also have an effect on whether or not to live together, or whether or not to marry.

How age, period and cohort, as well as history and culture, and social relations all come together at the level of the individual, now form part of the self-reflexive project of the self. We all make choices and compromises based on the alternatives, as we perceive them. We are therefore, the architects of our own biographies, but only in the context of the variety of social processes, as we experience and understand them. The self also forms a trajectory of development from the past to the anticipated future, as we create our biographies. *'Biographical action refers to the fact that individuals attempt to link their experiences to transitional decisions and that they interpret their options not only in respect to subjective utilities and social norms, but in terms of the legacy of their personal past'* (Heinz 1996, p.56). Therefore, if researching why people decide to live together and then why they decide to marry or not, it is logical to review their personal life history to fully appraise the personal and social factors affecting decision-making.

3.3 Choice of research tool to conduct a life course analysis

Living together is definitely a turning point in relationship development. In its very simplest form, it means a change in living arrangements. As Elder and O’Rand (1995, p.456) highlight, ‘*when transitions disrupt habitual patterns of behavior, they provide options for new directions in life, a turning point.*’ So too does marriage. Studies such as Pryor and Roberts (2005) commitment study, show that marriage is associated with increased long term commitment to the relationship. The challenge in studying turning points though, is who classifies them as turning points, how are they classified as turning points and how accurate is that perception. Although turning points are subjectively experienced, they are also often tied to context and depend on whether contexts are chosen or assigned, whether contexts provide opportunities for the development of the self and that of others, and whether contexts serve to protect individuals from other negative settings and relationships (Clausen 1995). The importance of turning points for relationship development is really defined by the individuals within the relationship. Individuals themselves can best determine if living together and/or deciding to marry is a turning point at all in relationship development, and if is, what that means for relationship development. This is one of the opportunities presented by the qualitative life history approach used in my study, as quantitative approaches must pre-define significant turning points, whereas a qualitative life history approach allows respondents to identify them. Thereby, it can tap in very easily to an individual’s reflexive project of the self and identify how they are crafting their relationship trajectory, in the midst of their life biography. Couples planning to marry and couples with no plans to marry are interviewed in this study. How couples are selected for inclusion is discussed later in this chapter. During the interviews for this study, which will also be discussed later, I asked respondents about this directly i.e. how important making the decision to live together/get married was for the relationship?

What did living together before marriage and/or making the decision to marry mean to individuals, the couple and the relationship?

The study of a person's life story, life history (Atkinson 2002) or autobiography (McAdams 2001) provides the theoretical and methodological complement to life course study and is necessary for understanding the course of individual lives (Cohler and Hostetler 2003). While cohort or generation represents the more general level at which culturally and historically embedded plots of the life course are enacted, intra cohort variation and idiosyncratic life events give shape to the differential developmental trajectories (Savin Williams 2001) that make each life story unique. Again, a qualitative life history approach allows respondents to frame their life history according to the events, circumstances and interpretations that are significant to him or her. Hendry (2007, p.490) found that as he '*worked to develop life history narratives of women teachers, it became increasingly clear that it was not the stories that they told that illuminated teaching, but the meanings they gave to them that highlighted important aspects of their experience*'.

The research strategy used in this study comprised qualitative interviews with cohabiting couples who were planning to marry, cohabiting couples with no plans to marry, as well as couples who married without living together first. The interviews included both a qualitative, ethnographic component, in which the respondent frames the life history according to the events, circumstances and interpretations that are significant to him or her, but also importantly includes a systematic component through the use of an event history calendar to provide comparable data across cases. Holliday (2007, p.8) suggested that '*whereas the rigour in quantitative research is in the disciplined application of prescribed rules for instrument design, the rigour in qualitative research is in the principled development of strategy to suit the scenario being studied*'. This research develops a particular methodological procedure for

identifying influences on the decision to live together and then the decision to marry in Ireland, in 2007. Exactly how this '*principled development of strategy to suit the scenario being studied*' (Holliday 2007, p.8) was developed, is outlined in the next section of this chapter.

3.4 Choosing a research site

Athlone, County Westmeath, is classified as a large town in the centre of Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2007e). Increasing urbanisation is most evident in the growth of small and medium-sized towns, rather than of cities, in Ireland. This pattern is evident in Athlone since 2002 (Central Statistics Office 2007e, p.1). Like other large towns, Athlone has experienced a sustained pattern of population growth since 2002. In 2007, when conducting this research, Athlone compared to similar urban centres, had moderate levels of unemployment, a slightly higher proportion of males to females and average rates of premarital cohabitation and marriage (Central Statistics Office 2007c). Really, Athlone is quite unremarkable! For that very reason, I chose it as a case study site. It is similar to other large towns and gives an insight into the large town, as a bounded system (Ragin 1992), rather than a larger urban centre, such as a city, or Ireland itself as a country.

3.5 Identifying respondents

Fieldwork was approached with the intention of opening an '*observation window*' (Heinz 2003, p.82) at the point when couples are living together and are about to marry after living together, or have no plans to marry. The following steps were used to identify respondents for inclusion in the study:

3.5.1 Step one

Accord, a national voluntary Catholic organisation, which provides mandatory pre-marriage courses, allowed me to have access to all couples attending their pre-marriage courses in Athlone in 2007. The year 2007 became my '*observation window*' (Heinz 2003, p.82) timeframe. Since 86.6% of the population in the Republic of Ireland is Catholic (Central Statistics Office 2006e, p.9), accessing couples through Accord provided access to a major section of the 'marrying' population in Athlone.

A presentation was made at each pre-marriage course in Athlone in 2007 (7 courses in total), outlining the nature of the study and what involvement would mean (interview with each member of the couple). The presentation outlined that the research was looking at stages of relationship development and how decisions were made leading up to the decision to marry in relationships. I made no reference to premarital cohabitation. I invited couples rather than individual respondents to participate. I gave careful consideration when designing the research, as to whether the couple as a unit should be interviewed, or whether both individuals within the unit, should be interviewed. Hertz's study (1995) of 95 dual earner couples found that in the pilot phase of the research '*where spouses were interviewed as a couple, one spouse did most of the talking and the other spouse only commented occasionally, leaving me to feel that I was getting an official family account, rather than individual views on the process of decision making*' (Hertz 1995, p.5). Brown (2000, p.837) emphasises that '*consideration of both partners' evaluations of the relationship is not only necessary to evaluate the role of gender in cohabitators' relationship assessments, it also provides a richer perspective by highlighting the significance of couple accordance in relationship stability.*' In the exploratory focus group, facilitated before starting fieldwork and discussed below, participants said they would prefer an individual interview, rather than a joint interview with their partners, although they would be interested in seeing if their

partners would come up with the same answers. Hence, I decided to interview each partner in the couple separately, rather than interview the couple as a unit. This was a good decision for my study. Some respondents in the research expressed a concern that their answers might be different to their partners. Their answers, if interviewed together as a couple, might well have yielded careful answers, rather than real ones. Sorcha (cohabiting with no plans to marry, couple 18)) at the end of her interview said, *'God, I just hope he comes up with similar answers to me'*, while Eamonn (cohabiting with plans to marry, couple 8) inquired as to what way his partner had answered a particular question *'Did she say the same thing as me?'*

Interestingly, all the couples who emerged from the Accord pre-marriage courses were in cohabiting relationships. This in itself is an informal indication of how popular premarital cohabitation is becoming in Ireland for Catholic couples. However, it also raised a possibility of bias in my study in the absence of other information. To minimise bias, a number of other measures were taken to identify other 'types' of couples in Athlone. This is discussed in step 3 below.

The total number of possible couples that could have been included, if they had opted into the research, was 120 couples (240 individuals). Of those 120 couples (240 individuals), 28 (56 individuals) couples supplied their contact details for further contact. However, when subsequently contacted, half were unavailable, or had decided not to become involved. The final yield was 14 couples (28 interviews). This represents 11.6% of all couples/individuals that could possibly have opted in. In order to determine how reflective the individuals who opted in are, of the total group who attended the Accord pre-marriage courses in Athlone, Accord was subsequently contacted to see if a profile of all pre-marriage course participants in 2007, could be provided. However, I was informed that only participant's names, addresses and dates of birth are recorded on application to do a pre-marriage course. This personal

information is not retained by Accord, once the course is completed. Therefore, it was not possible to assess how representative those individuals were of people within their social group in general. However, when we look at their profile as presented below, we see that the general characteristics of respondents emerging from the Accord pre-marriage courses are similar to general characteristics for this age group in the wider population.

The cohabiting couples with plans to marry who opted in to this study were born between 1970 and 1984. The age range in this group is 23-38 years, with the average age being 30 years. As I procured the sample through the Accord pre-marriage courses run in Athlone in 2007, respondents were all Roman Catholic. Only five women in the sample attended religious services regularly, the rest all attended on an occasional or irregular basis. Seven respondents left school before their Leaving Certificate; six were male and one was female. According to the Annual School Leaver's Report (2006), 82% per cent of students in the general population completed the Leaving Certificate, compared to 60% in 1960 (McCoy *et al.* 2007). For the other respondents, the highest education attainment ranged from completed Leaving Certificate to postgraduate qualification. In their analysis of Labour Force Survey data, it emerged that 12.8% of males and females cohabiting, had achieved a third level degree in Ireland, compared to 10.1% of married males and 6.4% of married females (Halpin and O' Donoghue 2004, p.5). It is therefore not surprising to see cohabiting couples in this sample with third level qualifications. All cohabiting respondents with plans to marry were in employment. This is not surprising either, given unemployment is very low at this time in Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2008b). Two women were working part-time and one woman was job sharing. In 2007, female labour force participation was rising in Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2007b, p1). All couples, except two who were renting, owned their own homes. For one respondent in this study, his parents had separated, a

year before participating in this study. For three women and five men in the sample, this was their second cohabiting relationship. A profile of respondents is provided in Appendix A.

3.5.2 Step two

This Accord opportunity sample was then supplemented by a snowball sampling strategy to identify a comparative group of respondents living together, but with no plans to marry. Snowballing has been used in previous research studies (Duggan 2000; Noy 2008) as a tried and tested method of gaining sample access, when a researcher does not have direct access to the group, or may be outside the social boundaries of the group, which they are trying to access. I asked couples planning marriage if they would ask other couples who were living together, but had no plans to marry to become involved in the research. If they were willing to become involved, they provided their contact numbers and I subsequently rang them to arrange an interview date and time. Through this snowball sampling technique, it was possible to identify an additional five cohabiting couples. Including the respondents who opted in from the Accord pre-marriage courses in 2007, this meant that there were now 19 couples (38 individuals) in the study.

This group was notably younger than the cohabiting couples with plans to marry. They were all born between 1976 and 1986, with the average age being 26 years. Interestingly, they were all Roman Catholic, as well. None in this group attended religious services regularly. Compared to the engaged couples, there were no early school leavers in this group. Highest educational level attained ranged from Leaving Cert to postgraduate degree, with one respondent still in education. Three out of nine respondents, achieved, or were in the process of achieving a postgraduate

qualification, compared to 1 out of 28 cohabiting respondents with plans to marry. This is consistent with Halpin and O'Donoghue's (2004) finding in their analysis of Labour Force Survey data, that those cohabiting were more likely to have achieved a third level degree compared to those who were married. Although the numbers in my study are probably too small for this to be meaningful, it does indicate that the profile of my sample is consistent with larger representative data sets. All respondents in this group were working full-time. All couples, except two, owned their own house. For one respondent in this study, his parents had separated, a year before participating in this study. For all other couples, their parents were married. For some, this current relationship was their first serious relationship, but for one respondent in the sample, this was his second cohabiting relationship. He was also engaged before. Detail on all of these respondents is provided in Appendix B.

3.5.3 Step three

While accessing potential respondents through Accord, provided access to a major section of the 'marrying' population in Athlone and snowball sampling identified couples living together with no plans to marry; I was concerned that there may be a Catholic bias in this sample. To avoid that, I tried to include other religious groups. However, this was problematic. During the process of contacting other religious groups in Athlone, it transpired that many had very small numbers overall in their congregation, or small numbers of the age group that would typically be marrying. Low numbers in a congregation or low numbers about to marry raised an ethical issue of whether or not, anonymity could be maintained, even if these congregations had eligible couples. I decided at this point, that because the numbers were so low in all of these groups, that even if there were eligible couples, this made the inclusion of other

religious groups unethical and therefore, inappropriate. As I will show in the next chapter, participants in my sample were not necessarily very religious. In fact, as we will see, religion had no part to play in relationship decision making for cohabiting couples.

3.5.4 Step four

As the fieldwork progressed, it became apparent that for all cohabiting couples, religion was not important in people's lives, or important in relationship decision making. Even for those who attended religious services regularly, religion was not part of the decision making within relationships. This will be explored in chapters 4 and 5. In chapter 2, we saw that changing sexual experiences and attitudes and diminishing religiosity on the part of an increasing number of Catholics is interlinked. But still for me, the issue of religion remained. What if religion was very important to an individual, could that affect relationship decisions? To test this out, I included two Jehovah Witness couples in the sample, who had married within the last two years of my observation window (2007). The Jehovah Witness religion prohibits premarital cohabitation, as indeed do other religions, including Catholicism, but premarital cohabitation occurs very infrequently, rather than commonly. Marrying two years before the fieldwork was completed was recent enough to allow accurate recall of relationship development stages, but also allowed the possible inclusion of enough couples to protect the anonymity of the two couples who participated.

I contacted a Jehovah Witness Elder living in Athlone, who approached a couple and asked if they would like to participate. Their contact details were subsequently passed on to me. This couple identified the second couple (snowball sampling) included in my sample.

The Jehovah Witness respondents were born between 1968 and 1983, with the average age being 28 years. All attended religious services regularly. The highest educational level attained ranged from Leaving Cert standard to primary degree. Three out of four were working full-time, with one respondent choosing not to work. One couple owned their own house and one was renting. For one respondent in this study, her parents had separated, a few years, prior to her participating in this study. For the others, their parents were married. All had relationships before this one, but none were cohabiting relationships. No one was previously engaged. These respondents are profiled in Appendix C.

3.5.5 Step five

An attempt was also made to interview couples who were having a civil marriage in 2007. A letter describing the study and inviting participation was sent by the Registrar of Marriages for Counties Longford and Westmeath with their receipt of registration to all couples who registered for a civil marriage between October and December 2007. This time span was recommended by the Registrar, as it tends to be the busiest time for registration of marriages in a year. Unfortunately, no couples opted in.

In summary, the final sample size was 42 individuals (21 couples) and the final number interviewed was 41 individuals (21 couples). For one of the cohabiting couples with no plans to marry, Peter and Michelle (couple 17), it was unfortunately, not possible to interview Michelle for this research, in spite of numerous attempts to arrange a suitable time, due to her busy schedule. I conducted 28 in-depth interviews with cohabiting respondents with plans to marry (14 couples), 9 in-depth interviews

with cohabiting respondents with no plans to marry (5 couples) and 4 in-depth individual interviews with two Jehovah Witness couples.

3.6 Fieldwork

This section discusses the fieldwork process which I followed.

3.6.1 Exploratory focus group

Before conducting interviews, I held an exploratory focus group, with people all living with their partners in relationships, some of whom were engaged. It was also a male/female mix. The group comprised of individuals I work with in Athlone Institute of Technology. I wished to get a sense of why people chose to live together and then why they decided to marry. One of the main findings to emerge from the focus group discussion was that people do not have ‘intentions’ to live together, or get married. Participants in the focus group also agreed that there was no ‘plan’ as such in their relationship development. A decision to live together and then perhaps marry, emerges as the relationship evolves, and within the context of the relationship. This was similar to the findings in Manning and Smock’s study (2005) using 115 in-depth interviews with a sample of young men and women with recent premarital cohabitation experience. The transition into premarital cohabitation was often described as a gradual or unfolding process that occurs over weeks or even months. Other studies too found that that marriage is not necessarily a goal in the minds of those who decide to live together. Sassler (2004) found that finances, convenience, and housing needs are the usual reasons for premarital cohabitation and that couples in her study did not mention wanting to try out a relationship before marriage as a reason for moving in together. This was the start of the germination of one of the main findings of this research: that relationships develop organically, according to the wishes of the individuals involved and their social circumstances. It also affirmed the life story approach for this study. If

there was no plan in relationship development, it seemed to me that each relationship had its own story and that the interview should facilitate that story to emerge, rather than assuming there is a predetermined outcome in relationship development.

3.6.2 In-depth interviews

I asked each respondent to tell me about themselves, their life story and the story of their relationship, from when they had met to present, if that had not emerged. A discussion of a multitude of events in people's lives and in their relationships unfolded, facilitating '*thick descriptions*' (Geertz 1973) of the social life of respondents to emerge.

The in-depth interviews elucidated:

- (a) Present relationship history.
- (b) Mechanisms and meanings of the present relationship.
- (c) Mechanisms and meanings of previous relationships.
- (d) Mechanism of premarital cohabitation as a stage in relationship development.
- (e) Meaning of premarital cohabitation as a stage in relationship development.
- (f) How decisions within the relationships were arrived at.
- (g) Interpretive information about the stages of relationship development and how these stages interacted with other life course events.

The interviews were primarily unstructured, with questions only posed to ensure elaboration, if necessary.

3.6.3 Conducting the interview

As part of the presentation made at the Accord pre-marriage courses and when subsequent contact was made with those who opted in or were identified through

snowballing, I gave respondents a choice for the interview to be conducted in their own home, or a neutral location, such as Athlone Institute of Technology, accessible to me as I work there. The majority of interviewees choose for me to go to their own home (32 out of 41 interviewees). For the other nine, it was more convenient for them to come to Athlone Institute of Technology, on their way home from work, for example. At the end of Barry's (Couple 2) interview held in A.I.T., he commented '*I really enjoyed doing the interview.*'

From the standpoint of the interviewer, the success '*of an interview is marked by the ability of the two participants to dissolve-their social difference to maximize communication*' (Manderson *et al.* 2006). It raised a dilemma when conducting the interviews though, of how much information and what type of information I should share. I summarised my professional and educational background at the initial presentation to the Accord participants. This was to assure participants that the study was a credible study. I decided in all interviews, to provide personal information, if it was sought, e.g. my own marital status, whether or not I have children, but evaded questions such as, stages my own personal relationships went through, so as not to indicate a preference for a type of relationship development. It is impossible to remove the effect of the researcher presence from an interview, by the very fact that the interviewer has to be present! When the tape was switched off after Carrie was interviewed (couple 14), she asked, '*Did I answer those questions the way that you wanted me to? Is there anything else you'd like me to say?*' While this showed a concern by her to provide socially desirable answers, it also indicated that she was unsure if she had given them or not.

Interviews took 1-1½ hours to conduct, with the filling in of the event history calendar taking additional time at the end. The cohabiting couples with no plans to

marry and the couples with no living together experience tended to have shorter interviews (1 hour on average), compared to cohabiting couples with plans to marry (1½ hours). This was because the latter group had more relationship development stages to discuss. Respondents generally had a high degree of self-reflexivity. Being self-reflexive meant managing all the social choice available, while at the same time being able to derive emotional satisfaction from personal relationships. Couples did this in two ways: they took time in their relationships to avail of social opportunities available and then they decided if they needed to mark the emotional satisfaction derived from their relationship with marriage. Flexibility around relationship development by living together before marriage, for example, means that couples can sustain a coherent biographical narrative while constantly revising it to meet their needs, within the context of multiple choices characteristic of the modern social order in which we live. Of course, it could be argued that by interviewing them they were forced to be reflexive. However, I feel their reflexivity was more than the result of being interviewed. Very little probing was needed in the interviews and most respondents naturally volunteered their reflections on the complexity of their decision making.

Hoffmann's (2007, p.333) study looking at worker's strategies for resolving workplace problems observed that *'by asking my interviewees to reach back in their memories and share these unpleasant situations with me, I was exerting a certain amount of power.'* This was also the case in the current study. All respondents answered the question about having previous relationships, how serious those relationships were and if those relationships had any affect on their current relationship. Respondents were uncomfortable talking about previous relationships (demonstrated by body language/hesitation in answering question). Some interviewees lowered their voice when discussing previous relationships, some did not use their ex boyfriend/girlfriend's name until the event history calendar was being filled in, and it

was requested. Respondents seemed to feel uncomfortable reflecting about how religion came into their decision to live together (demonstrated by body language/hesitation in answering question/coughing). None of the respondents exercised the option presented to them, at the beginning of the interview, to refrain from answering a question, if they did not wish to.

3.6.4 Emergence of a natural saturation point during my observation window time

Saturation point (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was reached after Couple 15 was interviewed (30 individual in-depth interviews). After this point no new information emerged. However, since Accord had granted access to their pre-marriage courses in Athlone, for the full year, 2007, and my '*observation window*' (Heinz 2003, p.82) was still open, I decided to continue to access couples for the remainder of the year. The additional 6 couples achieved (post saturation point) acted as a double check, that saturation point had, in fact, been reached. Analysis of these interviews also served to further corroborate themes identified from previous interviews.

3.6.5 Transcription and thematic analysis

I conducted a full transcription of all interviews verbatim. *'The notion of a verbatim transcript, therefore, is limited to a faithful reproduction of an aural record, the latter being taken as the embodiment of truth as an indisputable record of the interview (problems with tape quality excepted'* (Poland 1995, p.291). It took one hour to transcribe ten minutes of tape. While I found the process of personally transcribing all interviews an arduous one, it facilitated reflection on interview material before I commenced formal thematic analysis. I recorded possible themes and links between

different interviews as comments during transcription. This helped to form themes as the analysis progressed.

I used NVivo 7 to analyse data. Initially, I established tree nodes around the following areas:

- (a) Present relationship history.
- (b) Mechanisms and meanings of the present relationship.
- (c) Mechanisms and meanings of previous relationships.
- (d) Mechanism of premarital cohabitation as a stage in relationship development.
- (e) Meaning of premarital cohabitation as a stage in relationship development.
- (f) How decisions within the relationships were arrived at.
- (g) Interpretive information about the stages of the relationship and how these stages interacted with other life course events.

I used free nodes for loose ideas not conceptually related to other ideas in the project. However, as coding proceeded, I expanded tree nodes to incorporate child nodes, reflective of the emergence of 'new', but related codes. As I completed more interviews and transcriptions, it was possible to expand child nodes further. Repeated readings of transcripts revealed additional themes. I placed coded phrases from interviews under each of these themes. A process of analytical coding was finally used i.e. the process of interpreting and reflecting on the meaning of the data to arrive at new ideas and categories. Recording respondent's priorities and their reflections was central to this whole process.

3.6.6 Handling recall bias in this study

In-depth interviews, required respondents '*to reach back in their memories*' (Hoffmann 2007, p.333) to tell their life story and the story of their relationship. This raises the

possibility of recall bias though. In life stories, people do not always order memories chronologically. To minimise the effect of recall bias and have a chronological record of events as they happened in respondents lives, an event history calendar was also used.

3.6.7 Event history calendar

An event history is a longitudinal record of *when* particular events have occurred for a sample of individuals (Elliott 2002). Here in this study, I used an event history calendar to capture what was happening in life course domains and to provide comparable data across cases in as follows:

- ✓ Living arrangements (including moves around Ireland)
- ✓ Educational history
- ✓ Work history (including apprenticeships)
- ✓ Religious attendance/activities
- ✓ Previous relationship history (including living together/children)
- ✓ Abroad/travelling
- ✓ Stages of current relationship development
- ✓ Other significant life changing event

Settersten (1999) argues that life course events must not only cover multiple domains (e.g. family, work, education), but it must link domains together, as well as, outcomes and consequences of earlier conditions and experiences. Therefore, *‘what happens along one trajectory likely has an effect on what happens along another, and roles held along each trajectory are often coordinated with roles along another’*

(Settersten 1999, p.19). I was therefore, able to compile an individual biography for each respondent.

I designed the event history calendar as a large table, laid out in poster format (Appendix D). The columns on the table represented year, in which an event occurred, month in which it occurred, age interviewee was at the time, where interviewee was living, education, work, regular religious attendance, relationship, serious relationship, part-time living together, full-time living together, marriages, children (births) and who children were living with. The rows represent the months in each year in which events occurred, from when an interviewee was 16 years old. I took 16 years of age as a starting point for recording information on the calendar. This is typically when people start having serious relationships. I filled in the event history calendar with the respondent. The poster format provided a visual aid to respondents, to see each aspect of their life history at once. It also assisted memory recall, with top-down associations, sequential associations and parallel associations. For example, during Lauren's interview (cohabiting with plans to marry, couple 9), as the work history aspect of the event history calendar was filled in, she remembered, for example '*I worked as a Nurse's Aide in Dublin after my Leaving Cert. God, I had forgotten about that.*'

Because the event history calendar was in a poster format, it was easy to see where changes in various life course domains had an effect on relationship decisions. Conversely, it was also possible to see how relationship decisions had an effect on other life course domains. For example, for couple 6 in the study – Seamus and Joan, Seamus decided to start his own business shortly after he moved in with Joan. Although this meant time apart for the couple, because he felt the relationship was now serious and he was committed to it, he felt it was a good financial decision.

3.6.8 Data analysis

Data from event history calendar studies is typically analysed quantitatively (Blossfeld and Rohwer 2002; Steele 2005; Tumwesigye *et al.* 2008). Event history analysis is well suited to an analysis of life course transitions (Wu 2004), as it has been described as an ideal way of developing a causal understanding of social processes because they allow changes in future outcomes to be related to conditions in the past (Blossfeld and Rohwer 1997). Event history analysis especially allows the researcher to focus on duration effects or temporal dependencies in the social process under investigation and allows us to evaluate the relative importance of a number of different explanatory variables, or ‘covariates’, for predicting the likelihood of an event occurring (Elliott 2002). In the case of the cohabiting couples with plans to marry, interviewed in this study, we know that the ‘event’, the decision to live together and then the decision to marry, within that relationship has occurred. For the other cohabiting couples, the decision to live together has occurred, but there is no decision to marry. Perhaps there will not be a decision to marry, or perhaps it just has not occurred yet?

Earlier in this chapter, I stated that the interviews for this study will include both a qualitative, ethnographic component, in which the respondent frames the life history according to the events, circumstances and interpretations that are significant to him or her, but also importantly includes a systematic component through the use of an event history calendar to provide comparable data across cases. Rather than testing the statistical relationship between variables as is typically done in event history calendar analysis (Belli 2007), I used the calendar to tell the story of the couples who participated in this research. While the interview allowed respondents to frame their life history according to the events, circumstances and interpretations that were significant to him or her, the event history calendar complemented this, by detailing precisely what happened and when in people lives, and how that affected decision making. It was

possible to ascertain what was happening in **all** life course domains **at once**, when key relationship decisions, such as living together and marriage were made. We will see in chapter 4 that often changes in the life course or domains of the life course triggered changes in relationship development e.g. finishing education, having regular or permanent work, being in a strong enough financial position to marry.

3.6.9 Triangulation: in-depth interviews and event history calendar

Use of the event history calendar also served to validate the findings of the interviews. Event history calendar data corroborated the outlining of events in a person's life, which they discussed in the interview. The interview and event history calendar also provided an internal consistency check on partner's data. Through the telling of their own relationship story and filling in an event history calendar with respondents, respondents verified their partner's account of relationship development. Because respondents were interviewed separately, rather than as a couple, the general outline of events and rationale for living together and then making a decision to marry was similar. As one would expect, some interesting differences emerged as well. For example, cohabiting men felt that marriage was more important to their partners, than it was to them.

3.7 Ethical framework for this study

Ethical approval for this research was sought in December 2006 and granted by the National University of Ireland Maynooth, Ethics Committee in January 2007 (Appendix E). The ethical framework used in this study is outlined below.

3.7.1 Voluntary participation

Participation in this study was voluntary. Cohabiting couples with plans to marry opted in after the presentation at the Accord pre-marriage course. Other cohabiting couples were identified through a snowballing sampling method. They were approached by the cohabiting couples with plans to marry, who had already opted in. If they wished to participate, their contact details were passed on. One Jehovah Witness couple was identified by an Elder in the Athlone Jehovah Witness community. This couple then asked the second Jehovah Witness couple to participate.

My study is based on research among those we classify as generally happy, who enjoy relatively high levels of 'well-being'. All interviewees were in long-term fulfilling relationships and those who have opted in to the study wished to share their experiences. Respondents were given the opportunity to reflect on why they chose to live together, and if relevant, why they decided to marry. Respondents viewed these as positive decisions in their relationships.

3.7.2

In Jan. 2007, the Director of Accord granted permission to recruit respondents for this research using Accord pre-marriage courses in Athlone over the period of a year: 2007. A consent form for respondents explained the purpose of the study, the methodology and the ethical framework of the study (Appendix F). Participants read, signed and retained a copy of the consent form. No one to date has requested to be withdrawn from the study. I requested permission to use a Dictaphone. No one objected.

3.7.3 Storage of information

The information gathered in the research will be kept in a secure location for five years. After five years, it will be destroyed. The information will be used only for the purpose outlined in the consent form.

3.7.4 Respect

The dignity of the individual was maintained throughout the interview by continually checking with respondents that they were happy with how the interview was going. Respondents were also given an option to withdraw from the study at any time, if they so wished.

3.7.5 Prevention of harm to respondents

The research used methods that would not be harmful in any way to participants. However, open-ended interviews demand especially challenging emotional labour, since the interview is not constrained to a narrow set of questions but often develops into areas that the researcher did not anticipate (Hoffmann 2007). This is especially the case with in-depth interviews. It occurred during Maireád's (couple 11) interview when she spoke with emotion about how her father was refusing to speak to her, due to his disapproval of the relationship. Maireád became visibly upset in the interview, when talking about father's opposition to her upcoming wedding with her partner, Conor. I asked if she wished to stop the interview, but said that she wished to continue. She emphasised that although she became upset thinking about that particular issue, she was *'actually enjoying the interview'*.

I offered a copy of the completed research to all couples on completion of the study. Only three couples requested a copy.

3.7.6 Anonymity

Anonymity of respondents was ensured by taking the following steps:

- ✓ Respondents names were changed to protect their anonymity.
- ✓ Socio-economic groups were used rather than real occupations.
- ✓ Level of education was used rather than specific course names.
- ✓ Ages were used instead of birth dates.

3.8 Limitations of the study

While this study then doesn't provide a total 'picture' of all groups who may experience premarital cohabitation over their life span, it does provide a comprehensive 'picture' of the group in Ireland, most likely to experience premarital cohabitation during their life span – younger cohorts prior to first marriage (Halpin and O' Donoghue 2004).

This study is not nationally representative. The bounded system (Ragin 1992) for this study is Athlone in 2007. Cohabiting couples with plans to marry and cohabiting couples with no plans to marry, provide us with an insight into how the decision to live together is made in their relationship and then why they decide to marry or not. This supplemented with the reflections of couples who did not live together before marriage because of their religious beliefs, means that we can learn how structural constraints and individual decision mix in people's lives to bring about the decision to live together and a decision to marry. We learn how these particular decisions are made, and can probably assume that other couples go through a similar decision making process. That similar decision making process is one, which reflects an ongoing interplay of structural constraints and individual decision making in relationships, unless as will be shown, traditional structural constraints such as religion, wield an influence over people. That is the value of this study; not how nationally

representative, or otherwise it is. It captures the decision making of couples during their relationship development in 2007, and generates new hypotheses that may be taken up in the future in larger representative studies.

3.9 Conclusion

The chapter discussed how the research for my study was conducted. Looking at the effects of social change and how that plays out in individual lives, while taking cognisance of the individual being active in his/her own decision making, I provide an understanding of the relationship between structural constraints and individual decision making in the context of an exploration of premarital cohabitation. The following chapters discuss my research findings.

Chapter Four

The marriage paradox

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I....

I took the one less travelled by,

And that has made all the difference.

Extract from Robert Frost 'The Road Not Taken'

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses what is happening in people's lives when are deciding to live together and again when making the decision to marry. As the fieldwork progressed, it became evident that there was considerable variation across the couple's life course trajectories. I was not surprised to find this. In fact, I hoped I would find it! I wanted my sample to reflect the diversity of life course trajectories 'out there' and all the factors that can affect relationships as they develop. To illustrate this, couples are categorised under a number of different models depicting the 'types' of couples which appear in the sample. Each model type captures the complexity of individual decision-making, in the constantly changing social environment in which we live.

Two Jehovah Witness couples were also included in the research. The Jehovah Witness religion prohibits premarital cohabitation, as indeed do other religions, including Catholicism, but premarital cohabitation happens infrequently, rather than

commonly for Jehovah Witnesses. This chapter will show that religion strongly frames decisions made within those relationships, including the decision **not** to live together and the decision to marry for Jehovah Witnesses. In this way, we can see how a traditional structural constraint, such as religion, can determine how relationships develop. In comparison, I discovered that there is constant interplay between ‘newer’ social constraints and individual decision making in relationship development for the cohabiting couples in the study, as couples and individuals grapple with choice in modernity. The wider societal changes associated with modernisation have created a paradox at the level of individual lives: they have created the range of choices and options available to people which encourages premarital cohabitation as a stage in relationship development. Premarital cohabitation acts as a way of maintaining and continuing the relationship. Paradoxically though, this can constrain when marriage happens, if at all, in relationships. In this sense then, newer social opportunities can in fact metamorphise into constraints in themselves on the life course trajectory. They are simply ‘newer’ constraints replacing traditional constraints which have become defunct over the years.

4.2 Models of relationship development

This section outlines the categorisation of couples into different models reflecting different relationship trajectories and relationship types in the sample.

4.2.1 Model 1 The ‘child as a route towards relationship formalisation’ model

Indicative couple: Gareth and Lisa (couple 1)

The ‘child as a route towards relationship formalisation’ model symbolises changing trends in family formation patterns in Ireland. Couples in this model all have children, of varying ages from 6months to 14 years old. One respondent was pregnant at the time of interview. For some couples, unplanned pregnancy triggered a decision to formalize the relationship, usually with living together, if not already doing so. For others, existing children had an influence on relationship decision making. All couples in this model in my study were cohabiting with plans to marry. In Gareth and Lisa’s story discussed here, we see how an unplanned pregnancy accelerated events within the relationship.

Table 4.1 presents the event history calendar information for Gareth and Lisa. It provides a clear timeline of events in the couple’s relationship and documents changes in life course domains for individuals. Using the event history calendar information and interview data, I compiled the couple’s story. Gareth and Lisa met when they are both quite young, had a child early on in their relationship, lived together in Lisa’s parent’s house after their child was born, subsequently bought a house together, and later became engaged. They both felt that their relationship was serious.

Table 4.1: Relationship development phases and life course domains - the ‘child as a route towards relationship formalisation’ model

Gareth			Lisa		
Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains	Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains
April 1996 (19 years old)	START OF RELATIONSHIP WITH LISA	Living at home with parents (parents married) Education: Leaving Certificate Employed: Full-time contract S.E. grouping: Unskilled manual Occasional religious attendance 1 previous relationship	April 1996 (17 years old)	START OF RELATIONSHIP WITH GARETH	Living at home with parents (parents married) Education: Leaving Certificate year (school) Employed: Part-time S.E. grouping: Unskilled manual Occasional religious attendance No previous relationship

Gareth			Lisa		
Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains	Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains
April 1999 (22 years old)	RELATIONSHIP WITH LISA 'SERIOUS'	Employed: Permanent contract S.E. grouping is now skilled manual. <i>'I got a lot of training on the job. I have the same job still and you always have to do courses and keep yourself trained up.'</i> All other life course domains remain the same.	April 1999 (20 years old)	RELATIONSHIP WITH GARETH 'SERIOUS'	Leaving Certificate completed Started night course previous September. All other life course domains remain the same.
May 2001 (24 years old)	BABY BORN (UNPLANNED PREGNANCY)	Periods away because of work <i>'Having a baby definitely fast-tracked things for us, but we didn't make any big decisions (living together/marriage) until we were sure.'</i> All other life course domains remain the same	May 2001 (22 Years old)	BABY BORN (UNPLANNED PREGNANCY) LISA AND HER BABY LIVE WITH HER PARENTS	Night course completed Part-time job has now become full-time job. All other life course domains remain the same

Gareth			Lisa		
Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains	Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains
Oct 2002 (25 years old)	MOVES INTO LISA'S HOME	Gareth wanted ' <i>to be there</i> ' for Lisa and baby All other life course domains remain the same	Oct 2002 (23 years old)	GARETH AND LISA MOVE IN TOGETHER (LISA PARENTS HOME)	All life course domains remain the same
Jan 2003 (25 years old)	LIVING TOGETHER (BUY OWN PLACE)	Couple needed their ' <i>own space.</i> ' <i>'Mam helped us to find a place. She was very encouraging.'</i> All other life course domains remain the same	Jan 2003 (23 years old)	LIVING TOGETHER (BUY OWN PLACE)	Starts another night course (Professional diploma completed by time of interview in 2007) Couple needed their ' <i>own space.</i> ' All other life course domains remain the same.
Jul 2004 (26 years old)	DECISION TO GET ENGAGED	Periods spent abroad because of work. Returned from one period abroad in July 2004. Triggered decision to get engaged All other life course domains remain the same	Jul 2004 (24 years old)	DECISION TO GET ENGAGED	<i>'I really missed him when he was away. Makes you realise what you have, doesn't it?'</i> All other life course domains remain the same

At the time of the interview, Gareth and Lisa were in their relationship for nearly 11 years. Gareth was 29 years old and Lisa was 27 years old. As we can see from Tabel 4.1, they were living together for almost 5 years and engaged for the last 3 years. They met when Lisa was in her Leaving Certificate year in school and Gareth had completed his Leaving Certificate. When they met, they were both living at home with their parents. Both of their parents were married. Gareth was in full-time contract work (unskilled) and Lisa was working part-time while completing her Leaving Cert. They met in a nightclub in Athlone. Both of them attended religious services occasionally and this remained the same over the course of their relationship, up to the time of the interview. Gareth had one previous relationship, prior to meeting Lisa, but he said in the interview that this *'wasn't really a major relationship'*. Lisa had no previous relationships.

Four years into their relationship, Lisa became pregnant. This was unplanned. The couple went away for weekends and holidays, but did not live together at this stage. By this time, Gareth had procured permanent work, which included on the job training, but also periods away from home. Lisa had completed her Leaving Certificate and her part-time job had become full-time work. They both said independently in their interview and during the completion of the event history calendar that while they felt the relationship was serious, they were nervous to make any *'rash decisions'* (Gareth) based on the pregnancy, such as buying a house or getting engaged. For that reason, when the baby was born, Lisa and the baby lived with her parents and Gareth moved in shortly afterwards. However, they found as a couple that they had little privacy and they looked into buying their own house. Buying a house only happened in the relationship because the couple felt the relationship was a serious relationship and a long-term one.

As Lisa recalled:

'We were actually still living at home when Joe (son) was born as well, but we knew we were going to be moving out at a certain stage but.....I think like.....that was mainly it, but I think the whole thing ...we knew we were going to be together and X was the best thing that happened.....It made more sense to keep us all together under the one roofthat was probably really what happened...before that happened, we wouldn't have talked about it at all.....it was just that we went on holidays together and had the usual fun' (bursts out laughing).

There is no evidence of 'shotgun cohabitation' (Reed 2006) here. On their event history calendars, the couple document that their child was born on May 2001, after which Lisa and her baby live with her parents. It is not until October 2002 that the couple actually live together in Lisa's parent's home. Instead, with this couple and within this model, we can see the dramatisation of the reflexive project of the self. A continuously revised, biographical narrative takes place over the duration of their relationship to date, reflected often in the fact that there was no rush to move in together, neither was there any rush to marry in the relationship. Initially at the start of their relationship, they focused on what their individual needs are. This changed to what their individual needs were when their baby was born. Reflecting on their current situation and lack of privacy sparked the decision to buy their own home. For Gareth and Lisa, premarital cohabitation is a relationship decision, rather than a response to pregnancy

Gareth and Lisa purchased and moved into their own home in 2004. They did not buy their own home though until they felt sure about their relationship. By 'sure about their relationship', I mean that they felt the relationship was serious and long-

term. Gareth acknowledged that his mother helped them to find their present home by going to auctioneers and checking out house prices in various areas in Athlone. Gareth's work remained unchanged over this period, as did Lisa's. Lisa commenced a night course and achieved a professional qualification within the next three years. She was still in the same job at the time of interview that she had been in for the last number of years. Although Gareth's work remained unchanged during this period, he did have a long period away from Lisa and their child, due to work. This was for both of them, a turning point in their relationship. While he acknowledged that having a baby moved the decision to live together and buy a house forward, spending a long time away made him realise that he:

'...was going to get engaged.....obviously Lisa was waiting at home here for me ...I missed her and she missed me.....I felt something that I hadn't felt if I was living here...so I decided yeah this is it ...it's goin' to work, or I'll make it work anyhow. So that's how I came about getting engaged.' The time away was also significant for Lisa *'I think the fact he went away brought us.....when he came back then...the time apart kinda made you appreciate each other a little bit better you know ...it helped too.'*

The period between buying their home and the decision to marry is characterised by Gareth maintaining full-time permanent employment, with on the job training, while Lisa studied part-time and became full-time in her work. Marriage came much later in the relationship, when it was felt by both that everything was just right for them in their relationship. For couples in this model, there is definite sense of an individualistic ethic, characterised not so much by self-actualisation through achieving career or educational goals, but rather characterised by achieving a stage of development in a relationship that should be marked by marriage. The pinnacle of emotional satisfaction

in relationships may now be symbolised by marriage, rather than marriage just fulfilling the traditional functions such as procreation and family formation, which it also continues to do. Synonymous with this stage of development is increased commitment. Differences in commitment when a couple live together and when they decide to marry, will be further explored in the next chapter.

For Gareth and Lisa having a baby triggered the formalisation of their relationship as it provided the impetus for them to live together, but this did not happen straight away. This happened for other couples in the study too, but in a slightly different way. For example, Liam and Evelyn (couple 5) acknowledged that existing children also helped to formalise the relationship by facilitating the relationship to move from living together to marriage. They acknowledged that the birth of their second child, put '*pressure*' (Evelyn) on them to marry. They wanted both of their children to be raised in what Liam referred to as a '*proper family home with both of the kids parents married.*' Having a second child and with eldest child becoming older and questioning his parents about their relationship, and whether or not they would ever marry, encouraged the couple, although they were living together anyway, to formalise their relationship even more through marriage. Here we can see negotiation and re-negotiation not just in the face of increased opportunities, but also in the face of changing social circumstances, which determine how and when the decision to marry happens in a relationship. Children are now a factor in the decision to marry, rather than a consequence of the decision to marry. Although, procreation is no longer a function of marriage, nurturing and caring for children is. Changing family formation patterns such as increased fertility outside of marriage allows time to explore relationship options, mostly through a period of premarital cohabitation. Once a

relationship meets a couples emotional needs, then marriage is a logical outcome of relationship development.

4.2.2 Model 2 The ‘prolonged courtship’ model’

Indicative couple: Damien and Louise (couple 19)

In the ‘prolonged courtship’ model, premarital cohabitation represents an extended period of relationship development. It characterises both cohabiting couples with plans to marry and cohabiting couples with no plans to marry. Couples were in their relationships for a number of years (average 10 years) and had no children.

The indicative couple for this model, Damien and Louise met when they are quite young: Damien was 22 years old and Louise was 18 years old. When interviewed Damien was 30 years old and Louise was 26 years old. They were in their relationship for 8 years. They lived together for 5 years, before buying their own home. They had no objection to marriage, but they did not see it as being important to them. Two factors determined their prolonged courtship: their young age when they met, and their view that *‘we are grand the way we are’* (Damien) and *‘if it’s not broken, why fix it’* (Louise).

Table 4.2: Relationship development phases and life course domains – The ‘prolonged courtship’ model

DAMIEN			LOUISE		
Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains	Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains
Oct. 1999 (22 years old)	START OF RELATIONSHIP WITH LOUISE	Living at home with parents (parents married) Education: Post Leaving Certificate course Employed: Permanent job S.E. group: Non-manual Occasional religious attendance 1 previous relationship	Oct. 1999 (18 years old)	START OF RELATIONSHIP WITH DAMIEN	Living at home with parents (parents married) Education: Leaving Certificate year (school) Employed: Not working S.E. group: Student Occasional religious attendance 2 previous relationship

DAMIEN			LOUISE		
Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains	Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains
Dec. 1999 (22 years old)	RELATIONSHIP WITH LOUISE 'SERIOUS'.	All life course domains remain the same.	Dec. 1999 (18 years old)	RELATIONSHIP WITH DAMIEN SERIOUS	<i>'I finished up in a relationship I was having shortly after meeting Damien. I didn't two-time my ex-boyfriend; the relationship was really finished when I met Damien. They overlapped a little really.'</i>
Oct. 2000 (23 years old)	RENTING HOUSE WITH OTHERS, BUT AS A COUPLE.	Relationship with Louise serious. All other life course domains remain the same.	Oct. 2000 (19 years old)	RENTING HOUSE WITH OTHERS, BUT AS A COUPLE.	All other life course domains remain the same. Relationship with Damien serious. Leaving Certificate completed. Working part-time. All other life course domains remain the same.

DAMIEN			LOUISE		
Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains	Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains
Apr. 2004 (27 years old)	DECISION TO BUY HOUSE WITH LOUISE		Apr. 2004 (23 years old)	DECISION TO BUY HOUSE WITH DAMIEN	Started third level course, but didn't complete it. Employed: Contract work, with continuous on the job training <i>'We needed our own space and privacy. Definitely though getting the job I have now was a great help because financially we were able to go for a mortgage. You need to have two incomes really for a mortgage.'</i>
Oct 2005 (28 years old)	MOVE INTO HOUSE WITH LOUISE	All life course domains remain the same.	Oct 2005 (24 years old)	MOVE INTO HOUSE WITH DAMIEN	All other life course domains remain the same. All life course domains remain the same.

Damien was 30 years old and Louise was 26 years old. When they were interviewed, they were in their current relationship for the last 8 years and have been living together for 7 years. They were both living at home with their parents, when they met. Damien completed a Post Leaving Certificate course and was working on a regular full-time basis (non-manual). Louise was in Leaving Certificate year in school. They met in a nightclub in Athlone. He attended religious services occasionally and she attended religious services regularly. This remained the same over the course of their relationship. He had one previous relationship and she had two previous relationships.

A year into their relationship, they decided to house share with friends and live together. For both of them this was a serious relationship. They went away for weekends, but did not stay over with each other during the week or week-ends, as they were both living at home. At this time, Damien was in full-time permanent work. All his other life domains remain unchanged. Louise completed her Leaving Cert and was working part-time (non-manual). All her life domains remain unchanged. Damien stated that the main reason for them to live together was to give them space as a couple. He recollected: *'We were in each other's houses at home, so we decided to get a place of our own, but we didn't have the money at the time to buy a house so, we.....eh.....rented'* (Damien). Similarly Louise also stipulated: *'It's not the best idea going down to the parents and sitting there looking at each other.'*

Modernity theorists, such as Beck Gernsheim (2002) stipulate that people want to make the future calculable, especially when old norms and values have less value. For couples within this model, premarital cohabitation is a calculative relationship. For Damien and Louise, it offers them a way to maintain their relationship, without having to commit to marriage. Importantly though, it happened organically for this couple. As Louise emphasised *'the opportunity just arose.'* This corroborates the findings of the

exploratory focus group conducted initially as part of this study. It emerged there that premarital cohabitation was not really part of a grand plan in relationship development, but rather something that happened naturally. Even though couples in the ‘prolonged courtship model’ were not planning to marry, already they have had discussions about it, and there has been some level of negotiation and perhaps even re-negotiation. Louise, for example, acknowledges her young age as being a barrier to marriage. Being in a financial position to marry was also identified by both Damien and Louise as being important. Smock *et al.* (2005) in a study of working and lower middle-class cohabiting couples and Gibson-Davis *et al.* (2005) exploring barriers to marriage among unmarried parents have similar findings.

Four years later, they bought their own home. Their life domains remained changed except that Louise is now working in a full-time, contract position (skilled manual). She started a third level course, but didn’t complete it. Both Damien and Louise emphasise that Louise’s full-time job was essential for them to be able to buy their own home. Damien stated: *‘Ah yeah well you can only live with people for so long like. Eventually that wore....it’s own path away, so we decided to buy somewhere then.’* Louise felt it was important:

‘..to have your own company really cause when you come in the evening and there’s another couple there and there’d always be people in and out, you’d never have a minute do you know that kind of way and you could never discuss things in comfort, do you know that kind of way.’

Having one’s own home was very important for this couple. Again, there is a sense here of the scene being set for marriage and everything having to be just right.

The importance of everything being ‘just right’ is highlighted within the ‘prolonged courtship’ model. The decision to marry only happened in the relationship,

when couples felt that their relationship was solid, and would not break up. This importantly, was after a period of premarital cohabitation. The marriage decision was very much negotiated within the relationship, even more so than the living together decision. This is also very evident in the Damien and Louise's story, where the couple recounted effortlessly moving from being boyfriend/girlfriend to living together. Marriage however, was much more serious and required negotiation.

With other 'prolonged courtship' couples, we see a dualism operating in their lives. On one hand, couples want to enjoy an intimate relationship, which is facilitated by premarital cohabitation. On the other hand, they wish to avail of social opportunities such as careers and owning one's own home, before deciding to marry. Peter (couple 17) recounted: *'Although we have the house 'n' all, I just think really it's more time. Michelle is studying at the moment and my job is new, I'd really like to get a bit more set up in it, do ya know what I mean'* Sorcha (couple 18) too felt she did not *'feel ready. I think it would be nice, but I have a not more living to do.'* It appears that individuals in the 'prolonged courtship model' face an either/or type situation: social opportunities or marriage. Premarital cohabitation is functional in relationship development, but it does not have the social status as marriage. Therefore, it can serve as an interim solution in relationship development. Marriage has such an intrinsic social status; the scene has to be set; it cannot be entered into lightly. Among 'the prolonged courtship' couples I did not find that people were living together because they had decided **not** to marry. Rather, because they started their relationship when they were younger than other couples in my study, premarital cohabitation was for them a way of coping with the opportunities to self-actualise (as separate individuals), as well as achieving intimacy in a personal relationship (as a couple).

4.2.3 Model 3 The ‘dinky’ (double income, no kids yet) model

Indicative couple: Joe and Sandra (couple 16)

The ‘dinky’ model straddles both those cohabiting with plans to marry and cohabiting couples with no plans. It represents couples who prioritised their careers and deferred or are deferring marriage until later on in their relationship.

In Table 4.3, I summarise the event history calendar information for Joe and Sandra. It provides a clear timeline of events in the couple’s relationship and changes in life course domains. They met just less than two years before the interview, when Joe was 26 years old and Sandra 28 years old. They are both higher professionals. Sandra owns two businesses and has plans to expand them. They both own property and jointly own their own home. They see marriage as an outcome in their relationship, especially if they wish to have children later on. Presently though, their priority is to establish their careers.

Table 4.3: Relationship development phases and life course domains – The ‘dinky model’

JOE			SANDRA		
Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains to date	Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains to date
Oct 2005 (26 years old)	START OF RELATIONSHIP WITH SANDRA	Living away from home (parents separated) Living in rented accommodation Owns 1 investment property Periods spent abroad, prior to meeting Sandra Primary degree qualification S.E. group: Higher professional Full-time permanent work Occasional religious attendance 2 previous relationships Bought apartment with partner in relationship 2	Oct 2005 (28 years old)	START OF RELATIONSHIP WITH JOE	Living away from home (parents married) Living in rented accommodation in another city. Owns 2 investment properties Periods spent abroad, prior to meeting Joe Primary degree qualification S.E. group: Higher professional Full-time permanent work Occasional religious attendance 2 previous relationships

JOE			SANDRA		
Timeline	Relationship development phase	Change in life course domains	Timeline	Relationship development phase	Change in life course domains
Oct 2005 (26 years old)	RELATIONSHIP WITH SANDRA 'SERIOUS'	All life course domains remain the same	Oct 2005 (28 years old)	RELATIONSHIP WITH JOE 'SERIOUS'	All life course domains remain the same
Nov 2005 (26 years old)	STAYING OVER OCCASIONALLY	All life course domains remain the same	Nov 2006 (28 years old)	STAYING OVER OCCASIONALLY	All life course domains remain the same
Mar 2007 (28 years old)	LIVING TOGETHER (BUY OWN PLACE)	Relationship deemed serious by Joe All other life course domains remain the same	Mar 2007 (30 years old)	LIVING TOGETHER (BUY OWN PLACE)	Change of job: self-employed S.E. Grouping: Own account worker Relationship deemed serious by Sandra <i>'As they say, if you want to know me, come live with me.'</i> All other life course domains remain the same

Joe and Sandra live in a four bedroom semi-detached house in a new housing estate in Athlone, which they bought three months before the interview. The interview and filling in of the event history calendar takes place with each of them individually in their sitting room, after I have a cup of tea with the couple.

Joe was 28 years old and Sandra was 30 years old at the time of interview. They were in their relationship for almost 2 years and living together for 4 months. When they met, Sandra owned two properties, both of which she rented. She worked in X (city in Ireland) and rented accommodation there during the week. Sandra's parents were married and Joe's parents separated ten years previously. They both have primary degrees. They were in full-time permanent work (higher professional). They met when Joe was renting an apartment from Sandra. He also had an investment property. He joked: '*Sandra was my landlady.* (starts laughing). *I was the first man ever to meet the mother before the girlfriend*'. However, their relationship didn't start until a year later, when they were both at the same house party. Sandra recalled: '*We just got together that night and we just clicked and that was it*'. At the time, Joe also owned an investment property. Both of them attended religious services occasionally and this remained the same over the course of their relationship. They both spent time abroad, before meeting each other. Joe had two previous relationships, prior to meeting Sandra. His last relationship was a premarital cohabitation relationship and he bought an apartment with his ex-partner. However, he emphasised that he '*was in love and fell out of love...there was no other person in the background, that was it.*' Sandra has two previous relationships.

The reciprocal relationship between the individual and society and the way in which they shape each other are evident here in the 'dinky' model. For this couple, living together came about very naturally in their relationship, a progression from

staying over with each other occasionally, and a feeling that their relationship was serious. Seventeen months into their relationship, they bought their own home. They decide to buy, rather than rent because *'if you are renting, you are paying dead money on rent'* (Joe). Since the start of their relationship, there have been no changes in Joe's life domains. Sandra however, was no longer living in X (city in Ireland), after spending three months commuting to work from Athlone. Subsequently, she gave up this job and became self-employed. She was living in one of her own apartments before the couple decided to buy their own home. They both saw the relationship as being very serious and were staying over with each other occasionally. Sandra commented:

'There was no kind of big sit down chat, or lets move to the next step or anything like that....it just moved along..it was so, so much going between houses and that, that it just seemed like the right thing to do.'

Joe asserted that *'it was something that made sense to us like.'* Here again, we find that they were not living together because they had decided **not** to marry. They simply wished to prioritise their careers before marriage. In this, we see a couple confronted with a range of social opportunities: career, business development, investment opportunities, buying own home, which they wish to avail of, while at the same time wishing to achieve emotional satisfaction in their relationship.

Premarital cohabitation provides an interim solution in relationship development for 'dinky' couples as a way to maintain their relationship and a way to achieve emotional satisfaction. The reflexive project of the self incorporates numerous contextual happenings and forms of mediated experience, through which a course must be charted (Giddens 1991). Here we can see Joe and Sandra doing exactly that. Relationships decisions are not necessarily predictable, but are a choice amidst a myriad

of other relationship decisions, while also taking cognisance of other social opportunities, such as educational opportunities and career paths etc.

Both Joe and Sandra saw marriage as very likely in their relationship '*as things were going that way. It would be important for children*' (Sandra). Joe emphasised that '*we both have a couple of career things that we need to get sorted out first, but yeah, I would see it down the road.*' In fact, their wish to have their careers sorted out before marriage, gives a sense of setting the scene before marriage. Joe and Sandra both as individuals and a couple are engaged in a continuous reflexive project of the self. Premarital cohabitation allows them to sustain a coherent biographical narrative, while coping with the multiple choices characteristic of living in a modern social order. Consequently, the marriage decision is deferred, but not removed from relationship development.

With the emergence of premarital cohabitation as a stage in relationship development and an increase in fertility outside the institution of marriage (Central Statistics Office 2006b), marriage lost many of its traditional functions. However, the nurturing and caring for children seems to be solidly intact. We saw this with the 'child as a route towards formalisation model', where children can accelerate events within a relationship. Surprisingly, we see this too in the 'dinky model'. Although couples in this model are very career driven and relationship oriented, children are still important to them. For example, both Sandra and Joe expressed a preference to have children within marriage, but later on in their relationship. This fits with the changing Irish national profile that marriage is still happening for couples, but later (early 30s), rather than sooner.

4.2.4 Model 4 The ‘intricate family’ model

Indicative couple: Conor and Maireád (couple 11)

The intricate family model represents the complexity of family arrangements that are becoming more common in Irish society today. I considered calling it the ‘blended family’ model. However, it represents more than just blended families. Rather, it symbolises blended and mutually existing families. Several couples in the study had children from previous relationships; some lived within the current relationship; some lived with the ex-partner. In some cases, families merged to create a blended family type, but for other couples mutual families co-existed. All couples within this model were cohabiting with plans to marry.

The relationship development of Conor and Maireád, as an indicative couple, captures the diversity of family life and family connections. When the fieldwork for this study took place in 2007, Conor and Maireád’s relationship was on and off, over a period of ten years. Conor was 30 years old and Maireád was 29 years old. During the times when they were not in a relationship, Conor had three other children who lived with his ex-partner. For Conor and Maireád, buying their own home triggered the decision to get married. Maireád’s father strongly disapproved of her relationship with Conor. Although this did not affect relationship development for her and Conor, she found the lack of approval very upsetting.

Table 4.4: Relationship development phases and life course domains – The ‘intricate family model’

CONOR			MAIREÁD		
Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains	Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains
June 1997 (20 years old)	MET MAIREÁD	Living at home with parents (parents married) Education: Left school early S.E. group: Unskilled manual Occasional religious attendance 1 previous relationship	June 1997 (19 years old)	START OF RELATIONSHIP WITH CONOR	Living at home with parents (parents married) Education: Full-time third level S.E. group: Student Regular religious attendance 1 previous relationship

CONOR			MAIREÁD		
Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains	Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains
SEPT 2005 (28 years old)	START OF RELATIONSHIP WITH MAIREÁD	All life course domains remain the same	SEPT 2005 (27 years old)	RESTART OF RELATIONSHIP WITH CONOR	S.E. group: Higher Professional
	RELATIONSHIP IS IMMEDIATELY SERIOUS			RELATIONSHIP IS IMMEDIATELY SERIOUS	Occasional religious attendance
JULY 2006 (29 years old)	DECISION TO LIVE TOGETHER	Period of short term living together on a fulltime basis with Maireád Relationship deemed serious by Conor Maireád stays over occasionally	JULY 2006 (28 years old)	DECISION TO LIVE TOGETHER	All life course domains remain the same Period of short term living together on a fulltime basis with Conor Promotion in job
		All life course domains remain the same			Relationship deemed serious by Maireád Conor stays over occasionally
OCT. 2006 (29 years old)	DECISION TO GET ENGAGED	Triggered by moving into own place All life course domains remain the same	OCT. 2006 (28 years old)	DECISION TO GET ENGAGED	All life course domains remain the same Triggered by moving into own place All life course domains remain the same

When they were interviewed, Conor was 30 years old and Maireád was 28 years old. At the time of interview, they were living together for just over a year and engaged for the last year. They met for the first time 10 years previously, when Maireád was starting her primary degree. Conor left school before his Leaving Certificate and was working (semi-skilled manual). Maireád was living at home with their parents and Conor was living in rented accommodation. Both of their parents were married. They met through a mutual friend. Conor attended religious services occasionally and this remained the same over the course of their relationship. Maireád attended religious services regularly at the start of the relationship, but this diminished to occasional attendance over the next few years. Over the next 8 years, this relationship was on and off. Table 4.3 Relationship development phases and life course domains – The ‘intricate family model’ table shows that the start of Conor’s relationship with Maireád was in August 2005, whereas Maireád saw August 2005 as the re-start of their relationship. In her interview, she said the relationship was not an official relationship, but outlined that they kept in contact and stayed over with each other occasionally during that 8 year period. Conor was in another relationship during that time and had three children. All three children live with their mother. He lived with his ex-partner for a short period after his third child was born for the children’s sake, but *‘could not make the relationship work just for the children’* (Conor). Prior to meeting Conor, Maireád had one previous relationship.

Two years ago, when the relationship began again, Maireád was working in a permanent job (lower professional) and Conor was in full-time contract work (unskilled manual). However, Conor’s other relationship put a strain on Conor and Maireád’s relationship. Maireád stated:

'so with this girl there's always tension with us from years ago and ...eh.....em.....it ended up with me and him going back out and we said lookwe kept coming back to each other and we kept going back to each other.'

The relaxing of social norms around fertility outside the institution of marriage, as well as macro social level change such as social policy changes around fertility outside the institution of marriage really plays out here. All of these macro and micro social changes shape the development of the 'intricate family model' which captures the fluidity of family formation patterns in Ireland today, as well as the complexity of relationship development. Interestingly here, this co-existing family affected Conor and Maireád relationship. Conor felt *'there was the whole kind of trust thing and eh... but it kind of threw it off (relationship with Maireád) for awhile.'* Maireád remembered that they *'had a serious talk and we said look it's time and we give it a 110% and I said be it either of us that decided to walk away, we know we've give it a 110% so after that.'* Here too we can see what is a new social opportunity i.e. flexible relationship development, relaxed social norms around fertility outside the institution of marriage, supported by macros social level change, but how that can pose a problem for current relationship development. It also affected Maireád's relationship with her father. Maireád was very upset during the interview, as she spoke about her father's disapproval of her fiancé Conor. She was unsure if her father would *'walk her down the aisle'*. She emphasised:

'So I honestly don't know....it's literally.....literally at a stage now....where I see myself walking down the aisle now by myself....amm.....and if Dad doesn't come around, Mam probably won't be allowed to go, so that's.....that's.....where we are at.'

At this point in the interview, she started to cry and excused herself to get a tissue. When she returned, she was composed. I asked her if she would like to stop the interview, but she said she was happy to continue. She stated:

'In fact, I would like to, because I can really see how far myself and Conor have come, and I'm so happy that things have worked out like this. I just find it upsetting, that I don't know what's going to happen at my wedding and it's supposed to be the happiest day of my life.'

In the following year, the couple had an opportunity to house sit for two weeks. For both of them, this was a turning point in their relationship. *'While we were house sitting, we got our own space and got a feel for what it was like living together and the whole lot'* (Maireád). They subsequently bought their own home and the decision to get married for Conor followed on logically.

'Well I had planned asking Maireád about 6 months previous and the I said no I'd hold off for a while...you know to see what way things are going . And when I started working...I was working with X (name of employer) on...the construction of these (house they are living in) and I seen these and we sat down and talked about them and I brought her out and we had a look around and we decided then you know. So, it wasn't long after that I started thinking...well I'll ask her and we'll see.'

For Maireád, after 10 years of the relationship being on and off, it was *'now or never.'* Similar to the 'child as a route towards formalisation model', the 'prolonged courtship model' and the 'dinky model' being able to buy in a house in the buoyant economic climate of Ireland of 2007, was again a feature of relationship development.

'Risk' features in all the decision making for all the models in my study. For example, the risk of not achieving educational or career goals, the risk of not achieving

self-actualisation in the context of a relationship and the risk of marriage not fulfilling the need for emotional attachment are all part of the social reality of relationship formation in modern Ireland. Risk increased further in the intricate family model, because not only have the couple to negotiate their own relationship trajectory, in the context of all the social opportunities out there, but they also have to negotiate their relationship in the context of a co-existing family. This adds another dimension to social reflexivity. Not only have ‘intricate family’ couples to cope with trying to achieve self-actualisation through their relationships and maximise their own potential through all the social opportunities out there, but they also have to manage their current relationship, alongside a parallel family unit.

4.3 Religion and premarital cohabitation

For the Jehovah Witness respondents, religion as a structural constraint, strongly frames decisions made within relationships, including the decision **not** to live together and strongly frames the decision to marry. This model represents couples who do not live together for religious reasons.

4.3.1 Model Five ‘Prohibition on cohabitation’ model

Indicative couple: Daniel and Maura (couple 21)

As with the other four indicative couples presented in this chapter, I brought Daniel and Maura’s story together using event history calendar information and interview data. Daniel and Maura got married within the last two years of being interviewed. They did not live together before marriage. Their religious beliefs determined all decisions in their relationship. The only event outside of their relationship and their religious beliefs, which affected their relationship development was a sudden illness experienced

by Maura. Because the couple were living in different parts of Ireland, this accelerated their wedding date, so that Daniel could live with Maura to take care of her.

Table 4.5: Relationship development phases and life course domains – The ‘prohibition on cohabitation’ model

DANIEL			MAURA		
Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains	Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains
Jul 2005 (23 years old)	START OF RELATIONSHIP WITH MAURA	Parents married Leaving Certificate standard Part-time work and voluntary pioneering S.E. group: Unskilled manual Living at home with parents Period spend living abroad, prior to meeting Maura Regular religious attendance 2 previous relationships	Jul 2005 (22 years old)	START OF RELATIONSHIP WITH DANIEL	Parent’s divorced Completed third level course Part-time work and voluntary pioneering S.E. group: Lower professional Rented Accommodation Periods living abroad, prior to meeting Daniel Regular religious attendance 2 previous relationships

DANIEL			MAURA		
Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains	Timeline	Relationship development phase	Life course domains
Jul 2005 (23 years old)	RELATIONSHIP WITH MAURA 'SERIOUS'	Living in another part of Ireland All life course domains remain the same.	Jul 2005 (22 years old)	RELATIONSHIP WITH DANIEL 'SERIOUS'	Living in Athlone All life course domains remain the same.
Dec 2005 (23 years old)	Maura – serious illness	Accelerates decision to marry. <i>'I was living too far away to see her everyday, so it made sense to marry and I could take care of her. We were going to get married anyway.'</i> All other life course domains remain the same	Dec 2005 (22 years old)	Serious illness	Unable to work All other life course domains remain the same
Feb. 2006 (24 years old)	MARRIAGE LIVING TOGETHER (RENTING)	Move back to Athlone Marriage to Maura All other life course domains remain the same.	Feb. 2006 (23 years old)	MARRIAGE LIVING TOGETHER (RENTING)	Marriage to Daniel All other life course domains remain the same.

Daniel was 25 years old and Maura was 24 years old when they were interviewed. They were in their relationship for just under 2 years. They met through mutual friends. Table 4.3.1 show that when Daniel and Maura met, Daniel was living with his parents, Maura with her mother. Maura's mother and father separated and divorced, a few years before she met Daniel. Because religion was so important for this couple and all their relationship decisions were made in terms of what was correct or incorrect for their religion, relationship decisions had a religious reference, rather than a parental example reference. Therefore, for Maura, her parent's divorce did not affect her relationship with Daniel. They were both working part-time (Daniel – unskilled manual; Maura – lower professional) and doing volunteering work. Daniel said career was not important because he *'work[s] to live, not live to work.*² (Daniel). Daniel attained Leaving Cert standard of education and Maura completed a third level qualification. Both of them attended religious services regularly and this remained the same over the course of their relationship, up to the time that they were interviewed. They each had two previous relationships, before meeting. Both Maura and Daniel recorded their relationship as becoming serious immediately. They were engaged a few months later and married within a year of meeting. When interviewed, they were living in rented accommodation.

This relationship development pattern is similar to all cohabiting couples in the sample, except that there is no period of part-time or full-time premarital cohabitation. Maura and Daniel did not live together for religious reasons. Maura recounted that

'Well in the Bible it talks about marriage as being something...well I suppose sex is only something you have when you are married to somebody so, we didn't feel that we could actually do that ...we couldn't go against our biggest belief...our strongest desire was to please our God Jehovah and so to have his

blessing and to look to him for support we couldn't act against him at the same time...we really tried not to be hypocritical in what we do so ...it's never been an option...we never even considered it...so.....we never did...'

She also emphasised that living together is the exception, rather than the norm in relationship development in the Jehovah Witness community.

'.....definitely it's an exception (premarital cohabitation) and it would be very much frowned upon, even if the person wasn't removed from the congregation, they would be kind of distanced for a while until people saw that they were coming back to a good level, because people especially if you had teenagers 'n' that, you would be very protective of your children and not want them to be influenced by that sort of attitude or that it was O.K. to do that.'

Daniel viewed marriage as being *'the goal of relationship development.'*

Couples in the 'prohibition on cohabitation' model had shorter relationships compared to the cohabiting couples in the sample. Both couples in this model were married within a year of their relationship starting. A relationship must have marriage potential, otherwise, it is terminated.

Religion as a structural constraint affects relation development for couples in the 'prohibition on cohabitation' model. Clearly here for this Jehovah Witness group, religion is a structural constraint that determines how a relationship will develop. What is important though is that it only affects relationship development because respondents choose it too. Similarly, Duvander (1999) asserted that people, who are religiously active, tend to marry. It does not affect the other respondents in the study (cohabiting couples) because religion is not important to them in their lives. In the context of diminished religiosity in Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2006e), religion is a

traditional structural constraint on marriage in a relationship. It has no modern relevance in decision making for all the cohabiting couples in the sample.

4.4 The marriage paradox

The models described in this chapter show that couples move over and back between two ethics. The first is an individualistic ethic, which is about achieving one's own personal self-actualisation through achieving career or educational goals. I contend that this is an inevitable consequence for the vast majority of people living in a world of choice, characteristic of modern society. However, it is not the only way to achieve self-actualisation. Self-actualisation also includes references to other people only within the sphere of intimate relationships – although this sphere is highly important to the self. This makes the sphere of intimate relationships very important. Premarital cohabitation is a pathway to self-actualisation because through it, the strength of a relationship is tested and a high level of emotional satisfaction guaranteed if couples marry. Couples in my study were highly self-reflexive. Premarital cohabitation as a calculative relationship forms part of this self-reflection. In the fluid social order in which we live, premarital cohabitation makes the future calculable (Beck-Gernsheim (2002), at least the relationship trajectory. The second ethic, which has developed, is a collectivist or communal ethic through which couples wish to marry to commit more fully to the other. Marriage is like the capstone of relationship development, based no longer on just intrinsic social or economic status, but now on emotional attachment. This heightened level of emotional attachment is a way to achieve self-actualisation and premarital cohabitation is a relationship mechanism to test if that will happen in marriage.

Individualistic calculus and social forces **both** shape marriage and family formation patterns. At different times in Irish history, when traditional structural constraints were strong, they were a strong indicator of relationship behavior and family formation patterns. For example, the Catholic Church in Ireland strongly controlled sexual behavior and attitudes and therefore family formation patterns, up until the 1980s in Ireland. For some religious groups, religion still strongly frames decisions made within relationships, including the decision **not** to live together and strongly frames the decision to marry. In the ‘prohibition on cohabitation’ model, religion determined individual decision making in relationship development. However, for the other models in my study, the traditional structural constraints, such as religion and gender roles within the homes, no longer control family formation patterns. Instead, better economic conditions (International Monetary Fund 2006), increased educational opportunities (Dept of Education and Science 2006), more career paths for men and women (Central Statistics Office 2007b) and even social flexibility about fertility outside the institution of marriage (Central Statistics Office 2008a) are indicators of social change, which affect relationship development and family formation. Easier access to mortgages and owning ones own home (International Monetary Fund 2006) can facilitate living together. When discussing the interplay between social opportunities and individual decision-making, the important word is interplay. This is where this study has uncovered an interesting marriage paradox. Giddens (1991) outlines that modern institutions may create mechanisms of suppression, rather than facilitate actualisation of the self. Foucault (1974) and Bourdieu (1984) refer in their writings to how oppressive the social order can be to individuals. It may well be that what is considered to be the hallmark of our progressive modernisation: liberal attitudes, couple career paths, life long learning, diverse family formation patterns, such as fertility outside marriage and

the emergence of premarital cohabitation in the last 20 years in Ireland, are in fact, all marriage constraints in themselves. To a greater or lesser degree, they all encourage premarital cohabitation and therefore, flexible relationship development, but they place a constraint on marriage, when it will happen, if at all. Marriage rates are increasing in Ireland, as are premarital cohabitation rates (Central Statistics Office 2006b), so we know marriage is still a desired outcome of relationship development. However, marriage is so highly valued that everything has to be just right. Marriage remains highly normatively valued, and periods of co-habitation entered into as a means of trying to preserve that institution. Premarital cohabitation is also a way of trying to derive emotional satisfaction and intimacy from a relationship, while also availing of the myriad of social opportunity available for both genders.

Alternatives, choice and pluralism (Jamieson 1998; Lamanna and Reidmann 2008) are the hallmarks of family life, but herein also lies the paradox in current relationship development in Ireland: that which liberalises relationship development also, in fact, constrains marriage in a relationship. These new social opportunities are now in themselves structural constraints on marriage as a social institution in Ireland.

4.5 Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, the decision to marry is much more complex, than the decision to live together. Everything has to be just right to marry, such as for example, being sure of the relationship, having one's education finished, having a career path established etc. whereas living together is a much more fluid type decision in relationship development. In the next chapter – how cohabiting couples view their own social reality will be examined. We will see that the institution of marriage remains

highly normatively valued in Ireland and marriage is in the process of being re-institutionalised.

Chapter Five

Maybe I will, maybe I won't:

The re-institutionalisation of marriage in Irish
society.

'Love is not love

Which alters when it alteration finds,

Or bends with the remover to remove.

O no, it is an ever-fixed mark

That looks on tempests and is never shaken;

It is the star to every wand'ring bark,

Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.'

Shakespeare, W. *Sonnet 116, Lines 2–8.*

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine respondents' interpretations of how social reality and their own individual agency intersect to produce a decision to live together, and then intersect to produce a decision to marry. This chapter is divided into three separate parts. In the first section, I discuss the interplay of social and personal factors, which affect relationship trajectories leading to the decision live together. Life stage determined respondents 'readiness' to marry. I will show how respondents have reframed the content and meaning of commitment as a fluid process that develops organically, as

their relationship develops. Because of the ‘marriage paradox’, premarital cohabitation transpired as a way of maintaining a relationship and of ensuring that one can derive emotional satisfaction from it, eventually in marriage. It is also a way of having an intimate relationship, while achieving for example, career and educational goals. Commitment is an adaptable process, depending on the needs of the couple. I will also explore emotional attachment at the living together stage. Premarital cohabitation as a way of testing for compatibility was important for respondents in my study. As demonstrated in both the ‘children as route towards formalisation’ model and the ‘intricate family’ model, children emerged as an influence on decision-making. Although, marriage is no longer based on the traditional function of procreation, my analysis will show that it is still a preferred function. Once a couple can derive emotional satisfaction from their relationship, then children become a very important part of the decision making process. Previous relationships and peer influences were also influential on the decision to live together. Religion had no effect on the decision to live together, but availability of education and career opportunities did. How premarital cohabitation as a relationship mechanism enabled respondents to cope with risk in modern society will be determined.

The second part of this chapter will examine how macro and micro social forces in individual’s lives combine to bring about a decision to marry. Importantly in this section, marriage emerges as the capstone of relationship development. Everything has to be just ‘right’ for couples to marry. Increased commitment in the relationship, being in a financial position to marry and owning one’s own home were also very important. Children again were influential, but this time marriage was also as a way to formalise the relationship legally. As with the decision to live together, the emotional needs of the couple had to be first met within the relationship. Religion has a minimal effect

here. Respondents identified that a religious ceremony was a social norm to mark the marriage, rather than a religious practice to do so. In this section, I will discuss gender differences in formalising relationships, identified through thematic analysis, as well as the extent to which respondents felt there was a social expectation on them to formalise their relationships through marriage. Lastly, I will review marriage as the capstone of relationship development.

Throughout the chapter I will refer to how marriage is being re-institutionalised. The third part of this chapter will draw together all the ways in which marriage is being re-institutionalised in Irish society.

5.2 Part One: Making the decision to live together

5.2.1 Life stage and relationship decisions

Importantly cohabiting couples with no plans to marry did not have plans not to marry. Notably, they are younger than the cohabiting couples with plans to marry in the study are. The age of individuals cohabiting with no plans to marry ranged from 21 years to 31 years, with the average age being 26 years. In comparison, the age of individuals with plans to marry ranged from 23 to 38 years, with the average age being 30 years. In Chapter 2, I suggested that marriage deferral, rather than ‘*marriage avoidance*’ (Fahey and Layte 2007, p.169) is an apt description of what is happening in Ireland. We know that non-marital premarital cohabitation rates are rising, but so too are marriage rates (Central Statistics Office 2006b). We also know that between 2002 and 2005, the increase in single-hood began to slow down and among those aged over 35 turned into a decline (Central Statistics Office 2008a). In this study, we see a mirror image of what is

happening on a national level - marriage is occurring, but is happening later (early 30s), rather than sooner (mid 20s), for couples in Ireland.

Many of the cohabiting with no plans to marry couples, featured in the 'dinky' model or 'prolonged courtship' model elaborated on in the previous chapter. Many of the 'dinky' couples were trying to establish their careers and some were finishing education. Both Malcolm and Sorcha (couple 18) for example, enjoyed the stability of premarital cohabitation, but did not wish to '*settle down*' into marriage. Sorcha elaborated on this as follows: '*Em...it's easy going...em...it's..there's a lot of love there, we do things together, it's great cause we are on the same wavelength...em..I like where we're at at...at the moment, we're comfortable with each other, yet there's still a bit of excitement.*' Her partner Malcolm also spoke about himself and Sorcha being at the same life stage: '*It seems to be the best part about it, we both at the same part so our life, in that we both went to college at the same time, we both did our Master's and our first serious job, our first career step and we're kind of helping each other through that way, again that comes down to the compatibility of it.*'

Importantly, cohabiting couples with no plans to marry are not necessarily a different category of couple. Some were just at an earlier stage of relationship development. For Louise (couple 19) in the 'prolonged courtship' model she identified her '*younger*' age, as a deterrent to marriage: '*We haven't really discussed it. I think because I'm a bit younger than Damien. I know he's only 30 like. He'd probably wait for me to get into late 20s to get married like. He probably thinks I don't want to be*

bogging² Louise down either ...that's the feeling I get anyway. I can see us staying together like soul mates at this stage.'

As will be discussed below, all cohabiting couples with no plans to marry stated that marriage was possibly an option '*down the road*' (Andrew, couple 15), but it was just not important at their current life stage. Malcolm emphasises: '*Like that it's not important to me at the moment, but I think in 3 or 4 years time, that will change and my aim, well not my aim, I'm not sure if that is the right word to use, I hope to get married in a couple of years time*'.

On the other hand, all the cohabiting respondents with plans to marry in their interviews echoed Maureen's view (couple 12) that '*it's right for us, right now*'. For the life stage they are at, premarital cohabitation provides a way to continue with their intimate relationship, while also giving time to get everything 'just right' in other life course domains. They were marrying because everything was just right for them, either in their relationship, or in other life course domains, such as education and career. This is similar to Porter et al (2004) who found that couples cohabiting want to develop aspects of their relationship, or individual characteristics, such as maturity before marriage.

5.2.2 Premarital cohabitation as an organic stage of relationship development

In Manning and Smock's study (2005), using 115 in-depth interviews with a sample of young men and women with recent premarital cohabitation experience the transition into premarital cohabitation was often described as a gradual or unfolding

² Metaphorical or colloquial expression for tying someone down in a relationship i.e. committing them, or restricting them to the relationship.

process that occurs over a week or even months. Manning and Smock (2005, p.995) described the decision making as a *'slide into cohabitation'*. When I think of the term *'slide'*, I think of movement, which can be smooth, but also which can be without control. While movement into premarital cohabitation was for all cohabiting couples in this study smooth, in that there was no real decision making involved, it was not without control. The term *'slide into'* also gives me an impression of movement downwards. In fact, it was often a practical way to maintain the relationship while other social opportunities are availed of. For cohabiting 'dinky' couples for example, this rationale especially was applied to relationship development. Veronica (couple 3) explained: *'it wasn't a conscious decision to say we're gonna move in together.....it just made sense becausehe was working one place and I was working another and we needed.....we weren't seeing each other so we decided to live together ...we'll make the point, we'll live together.'*

This was the same for cohabiting couples with no plans to marry in the 'dinky' model. Sandra (couple 16) recalled: *'there was no kind of big sit down chat, or let's move to the next step, or anything like that....it just moved along.'* For couples in the 'prolonged courtship' model, Louise (couple 19) reflected that: *'the opportunity just arose, when a friend just asked her, if we would move in with her, so it was handy, I suppose. At the time we were both working in town and just wanted to be together more and it's not the best idea going down to the parents and sitting there looking at each other.'* It served to maintain intimacy within the relationship. However, as we saw in the 'child as a route towards relationship formalisation' model, unplanned pregnancy brought the decision forward. Gareth (couple 1) stressed that the process *'was spontaneous, there was no set plan, we just went with it'*, while Liam (couple 5) emphasised that *'it was very much a skeleton put together.'*

All cohabiting couples saw their relationship development as being organic and living together as an organic stage of relationship development. While the transition to living together is smooth, the movement is not downwards. Couples do not '*slide into cohabitation*' (Manning and Smock 2005, p.995), but rather wish to experience living together as part of the organic process of relationship development. Living together was just something that happened in the relationship – it was '*no big deal, not in the way getting married is*' (Eamonn, couple 8). This means that premarital cohabitation has become a natural part of the normative process of relationship development and it was not defined as a turning point in the same way that marriage is. At this point in the relationship, marriage was also not defined as a goal of relationship development. Plans for marriage were generally abstract and emerged later on in the relationship, after a period of cohabitation. Manning and Smock (2002) find that most couples who cohabit see their unions more as an alternative to being single than as a substitute for marriage.

5.2.3 A change in commitment?

Jamieson *et al.*'s (2002) research has indicated that the desire to commit is the most frequent reason for deciding to live together. In this study, for cohabiting couples with plans to marry, premarital cohabitation reflected increased commitment in a relationship '*we just became a little bit more committed to each other and a house actually came up in an area*' (Greta, couple 7). It also means security within the relationship. This was elaborated on by Lisa (couple 1) who explained premarital cohabitation satisfied a need for companionship, thereby increasing personal security and security within the relationship '*It's good as it means there is somebody there the whole time do ya know that kinda way, good for companionship.*' Couples felt that the relationship had to

reach that stage. Dara (couple 3) emphasised that reaching that stage meant that there was stability and regularity in the relationship. He stated:

'Eh.....I think some sort of stability in that we were both sort of ready toI wouldn't like to live with a girl if that wasn't true or I wouldn't like to live with a girl if I didn't feel that I was ready myself...I'd feel under pressure so I suppose we had both sort of got to that stage....It was the relationship as opposed to anything else. I would say that is a good enough reason to live together.' (Dara, couple 3)

For cohabiting couples with no plans to marry, commitment in a living together relationship was defined as *'feeling more serious about Sandra'* (Joe, couple 16) *'wanting to spend more time with Joe'* (Sandra, couple 16) and *'wanted to learn more about each other'* (Andrew, couple 15). Commitment is a fluid process that develops organically as the relationship develops.

5.2.4 Premarital cohabitation as way to test compatibility within this relationship

Living with someone prior to marriage, was a way to get to know someone. Cara (couple 8) felt: *'Yeah, I think to know someone you need to live with them'*. Similarly Michael stated: *'If you want to know me come live with me...That was in my head all the time'* (Michael, couple 4). Terry (couple 10) *'I just think we needed to give it a bit more time, just find out our strengths and weaknesses, both the pros and cons of our relationship and the way we work together, but there was more pros than cons, more pros than cons and the cons you can work through. It was time then to take it that step further, after living together.'*

Cohabiting couples with plans to marry saw living together as a test for the relationship. Other sociological research studies also found that young adults view premarital cohabitation as a good way to test a relationship (Axinn and Thornton 2001; Gibson-Davis *et al.* 2005). In my study, it was also a test for what marriage might be like, but only as the relationship went on. Carrie observed that she got *'to know him better and to understand where he's coming from and where I'm coming from and our backgrounds, which I think is important before you take any step further.'* Evelyn (couple 5) stressed that *'you know when you have been so long with someone...it's like...you'd be surprised if there's any changes (when married)...you'd be wonderin', why is there changes...(starts laughing)...what's goin' on?'*

Like cohabiting couples with plans to marry, cohabiting couples with no plans to marry felt that living with someone was a way to get to know them *'you get to know each other inside out and your ways of going on'* (Louise, couple 19). Joe (couple 16) identified premarital cohabitation as a test of the relationship: *'I suppose we have our own time, getting to know each other's habits and if we can stick each other.'* Lara (couple 15) also referred to living together as a trial period *'we wanted to live together and there's no point in putting it off. I mean you could go out for two years and then move in, and realise you can't hack that.'*

Other studies of cohabiting couples found that the majority report plans to marry their partners (Manning and Smock 2002; Lichter *et al.* 2004:), suggesting that premarital cohabitation is best viewed as a precursor to marriage (Halpin and O'Donoghue 2004). However, premarital cohabitation in this study was more a trial basis for compatibility within the relationship, rather than for marriage. All the couples in this research, both the cohabiting couples with plans to marry and those with no plans to marry, did not enter into a premarital cohabitation relationship with the view to

marrying their partner. That decision emerged later on as the relationship progressed. This makes sense given the ‘marriage paradox’, which affects people’s lives. People have responded to the ‘new’ social constraints by reframing the content and meaning of commitment as a fluid process that develops organically, as other areas of ones life develop. Premarital cohabitation before marriage forms part of this fluid process for an increasing number of people. This reframing of commitment implies two things. First, premarital cohabitation is like a coping mechanism, a way of enjoying an intimate relationship, without having to commit to marriage, while trying to achieve self-actualisation in other areas of ones life. Second, because certainty of the relationship was a big factor, before deciding to marry, this meant that the ‘test’ for marriage was higher for respondents. Marriage remains highly normatively valued, implying that it is in the process of being re-institutionalised, rather than de-institutionalised.

5.2.5 Achieving emotional satisfaction in a cohabiting relationship

In chapter 2, I observed that love is now an integral component of marriage, rather than an unlikely or hoped for by-product. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) argue that because of modernity, people felt increasingly disoriented. Because traditional precepts and practices are no longer available to refer to, we direct our craving to give our lives meaning and security towards those we love. In modernity, we are constantly managing or challenging the risks and opportunities that we ourselves have created, by availing of all the choices, while at the same time trying to ensure we have emotional fulfilment in our lives. Love in intimate relationships is a way of doing this.

For respondents in my study being in love is not exclusive to the marriage relationship. For example, Damien (couple 19) stressed that his relationship with Louise *‘is set in stone at this stage and it’s not will we do it, it’s when we’ll do it (marriage).’* Peter (couple 17) also confirmed that he would see Michelle and himself

'staying together obviously; I would see us having more children. Whether or not we get married.....it may happen, it may not happen.....it's not one ofit's not an absolute priority and it's not necessary, although it's unusual...it's not necessary to maintain our relationship.' He also stated: *'we're quite happy in the relationship that we're inhow marriage would improve that I don't know.'* Therefore, marriage acts as a hallmark of the existing emotional attachment in a relationship, rather than signifying an increase in emotional attachment.

In living together a man and a woman build up a shared image of the world, which is continuously being negotiated, shifted, replaced, questioned and reaffirmed (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). This is essential given that male and female biographies are developing now in much different directions to the way in which they would have developed traditionally. A relationship now has to be managed by the couple in the midst of all the social opportunity available. The relationship itself is also unpredictable as there are now multiple relationship trajectories, which it can take. For example, cohabiting relationship can go on indefinitely, couples can become engaged for long periods and not marry, couples may marry, or in a worst-case scenario, the relationship may dissolve. If a couple live together before marriage, they show some level of social reflexivity, characteristic of the modern social order, in which we live. As premarital cohabitation was part of the organic development of the relationship for the cohabiting couples in this study, I assumed that emotional attachment is also something that also builds up over the course of the relationship.

Nearly all cohabiting couples with plans to marry said they were in love with their partner. Donal (couple 9) expressed this as follows: *'Sure, of course I love her'*, while Veronica (couple 3) declared: *'I just love him'* (couple 3). *'It's hard to describe like. I just felt we were right like, we were...we have theright opposite, if you know*

what I mean like.' (Keith, couple 12). As Sorcha (couple 18) pointed out: *'our relationship works because we are on the same wavelength'*.

Being in love is also essential for cohabiting couples with no plans to marry in their relationships. As Peter (couple 17) emphasised: *'Well I'm in love with her. We have a ...she has a very good sense of humour and we share a good sense of humour.'* Sandra (couple 16) emphasised *'I just know for me anyway, the more I got to know him the more I knew I loved him.'* Louise (couple 19) even referred to Damien as her *'soul mate'* and she *'wouldn't be with him, if I didn't love him'*.

'Marriage is an ideal combining romantic and permanent love' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, p.49). For the couples in my study, being in love was not enough to encourage marriage. Premarital cohabitation provided a way to give time to allow a relationship develop and an individual opportunity to avail of social choices, but marriage could not be entered into until it was likely that people could achieve self-actualisation through marriage.

5.2.6 Children and relationship development

Over half of the cohabiting respondents with plans to marry i.e. 16 out of 28 individuals in this sample have children, either within the current relationship, outside the current relationship, or both. For the mothers in my sample, the child lives with them in their current relationship, but for all men, the child lives with their ex-partner. Compared to the cohabiting with plans to marry sample, there was a lower prevalence of non marital childbearing for cohabiting couples with no plans to marry. Peter (couple 17) was the only respondent who had a child in his current relationship and his partner Michelle also had another child, from a previous relationship, who lived with them.

In 2004, Halpin and O'Donoghue (2004) found that cohabiting couples were far more likely than married couples to be childless, though less likely than the never-married. Yet, by the third quarter of 2007, we can see a change in national statistics. Almost half of the 4,200 births outside marriage were to cohabiting couples (Central Statistics Office 2008a, p.4). The increase, even between 2004 and 2008 is notable, and reflected in the Athlone sample. The fertility rates of the sample here outside marriage, are perhaps slightly higher than national averages, but are by no means out of sync with national trends. Importantly, it afforded an opportunity within my study to determine the effects of children on relationship development, especially on the decision to marry.

5.2.6.1 Unplanned pregnancy

Both the 'child as a route towards formalisation' model and the 'intricate family' model capture how complex relationship development can be once children are present or anticipated (pregnancy). This section discusses what emerged as a major theme in the study: unplanned pregnancy and the effect it had on relationship development.

For the majority couples in the study, the term 'unplanned pregnancy' was not used to describe their children. It was only used by Greta and Robert (couple 7), as Greta was pregnant at the time of the interview. This was her second child and unplanned. However, this provided an impetus to the couple to formalise the relationship, as they saw it, through marriage. I chose to use the term here because pregnancy was not a strategy used consciously by women to alter the trajectory of the relationship. Rather, it was simply unplanned. Liam and Evelyn (couple 5) both worked in a chip van early on in their relationship. They drove this chip van to various locations around Ireland and stayed over in it at night. Shortly after, Evelyn became

pregnant. She recalled: *'I was kind of hit and miss with the Pill – I think I was just so young too'*. Liam joked during the interview *'Zach (name of child) was a chip off the old block.'* For couples like this, it was not the case that there was clear intention to become pregnant and neither was there a non-use of contraception, more there was a misuse of it. However, this couple planned their second child and that triggered the decision to marry. For all couples in first pregnancies like this, when the couple was younger, the woman was 'caught out'.

While a non-marital pregnancy may accelerate relationship development, such as in the 'child as a route towards formalisation' model, it only does so once other social opportunities have been availed of and couples are sure of being able to derive the emotional satisfaction they require from the relationship. In the 'child as a route towards formalisation' model, we saw that children have a secondary effect on formalising a relationship, mainly through premarital cohabitation and later on marriage, if the emotional needs of the couple are met. However, all couples in this model were younger when they met and their first child at least, was unplanned. A pregnancy is planned when multiple criteria are met, such as clear intentions to become pregnant, non-use of contraception, and partner agreement (Barrett *et al.* 2004).

For Peter (cohabiting with no plans to marry, couple 17), the decision to live together for him and his partner Michelle, centered on trying to create a sense of family for themselves and the children within the relationship. Michelle had a child with Peter, but also a child from a previous relationship. They [children] were *'a massive part of it'* for Peter and Michelle. Peter recalled: *'It was a move for the family not a move for the two of us. We wanted to move into together as a family'*.

The more flexible lifestyle associated with premarital cohabitation (Horwitz and Raskin White, 1998; Lapierre-Adamcyk and Charvet, 1999) does not seem to constitute an asset for partners facing unplanned pregnancies and an unintended pregnancy has a disruptive effect on individuals' well-being (Bouchard, 2005). Yet, in my study, although premarital co-habitation occurs in its own right, it may also be a reactive response to pregnancy. By reactive response to pregnancy, it is as Gareth (couple 1) has emphasised '*I think that would have happened anyway, but it got fast tracked anyway because X (name of child) was born.*' Unplanned pregnancy is not just a motivation to live together, but it does influence the decision to live together. Couples with unplanned pregnancies were more likely to live together than marry, until they are sure of their relationship (e.g. Joan and Seamus (couple 6), Keith and Maureen (couple 12), Vernon and Carrie (couple 14)).

We have shifted from a normative position that for example, valued staying in a marriage for the sake of the children, towards one, which values people looking after their own emotional needs first. Later on in this chapter, when looking at what is happening in respondent's lives when they decide to marry, we see that while children very often encouraged a decision to marry, relationship quality was a primary consideration i.e. was the father/mother of the child a potential marriage partner? Premarital cohabitation was therefore, a way to assess that.

5.2.6.2 Children from previous relationships

Children from previous relationships also had an effect on the current relationship. The complexity of this was highlighted in the 'intricate family' model. Contact with an ex-

partner posed a tension initially in the current relationship for Conor and Maireád (couple 11). *'There's no niggling at anybody [now] so....which is good...it took a whole lot to get it...for it to come around, but it did at the end of the day like'* Conor (couple 11). It also caused a tension for couple 19, but in a different way. Maureen worried that the two children Keith (couple 12) had from a previous relationship, would affect her parent's view of the relationship. However, it did not affect any of the couple's relationship decisions.

Conversely, the presence of children made a parent cautious in a new relationship, when the partner was not the mother/father of the child/children. Greta (couple7) highlighted: *'...I suppose I wouldn't be as quick to rush into things as maybe....I'd have a lot more to lose if anything went wrong and I think that's where I was very cagey for the first yeareven the first two years.'*

Having children within a relationship, still affects decisions, but now there is greater flexibility about timing and sequencing. It may be that couples now have increased resilience to cope with unplanned pregnancies because of the looser social norms about it. Couples no longer have to stay in a marriage or relationship for the sake of the children. This was evident in the 'intricate family' model, where parallel family units may exist. Individuals now exercise their own agency and try to achieve self-identity by making sure their intimate relationship is highly rewarding emotionally. We saw this for the cohabiting couples with plans to marry, children often triggered the decision to live together, but more importantly, once the relationship was viable and suited the emotional needs of the adults (parents) in it, the children very often encouraged the marriage decision.

5.2.7 The effect of previous relationship(s) on relationship decisions

Self-identity is a person's own reflexive understanding of their biography. It explains the past, and is oriented towards an anticipated future. Discussing previous relationships provided an interesting way of linking the past, what is currently happening and doing all that in the context of an anticipated future, which in the case of all cohabiting couples is the continuation of the relationship and possible marriage. Therefore, it makes sense that previous relationships form part of an individual's biography and may affect relationship decision making.

Of the 28 cohabiting individuals with plans to marry in the study, 23 respondents had previous relationships. Of that group, two women and five men had one previous cohabiting relationship, while two men had three previous cohabiting relationships. Two were previously engaged. Of the 9 cohabiting individuals with no plans to marry in the study, 8 of them had previous relationships, one of whom had a previous cohabiting relationship and an engagement. With all the previous relationships, separation may have been due to irreconcilable differences, or indeed have been amicable, but the relationship trajectory did not follow the expected, or hoped for path. The expected course of events did not occur.

Previous relationships acted as a testing ground for learning what one does not want in a relationship. Respondents compared their previous relationships with their current one, and used that as a benchmark, to gauge compatibility within their own relationship. For Veronica: *'that relationship taught me what a relationship is not to be.....you know.... claustrophobic type of thing.'* (Veronica, couple 3). Previous relationship experience makes an individual more discerning in terms of suitable relationship characteristics in a future partner.

Eamonn (couple 8) emphasised:

'Mostly because....I was more aware of what I wanted and what I didn't wantnot just meeting Cara but meeting anybody you know. Em.....yeah I suppose I knewI knew a few things to look out for.....more like signals.....more like certain things I wanted and certain things that I didn't want and so that helped I suppose.....that I didn't just go in and coast and get into a bit of a rut and sort of just say like ...this'll just do for awhile, but you are really not happy and you really don't realise that until you have the benefit of hindsight.'

In this way then, previous relationships form part of the formative relationship learning process, where someone can learn what they want in a relationship based on individual desire and need, but also socially accepted norms around relationship development.

For those who have lived with their previous partner(s) that experience of living together shaped the likelihood of marrying and staying married (Lichter and Qian 2008). Johnson (2008) points out that cohabitation may have unintended effects. For example, the day-to-day experiences of living together as an unmarried couple may exacerbate unforeseen problems with the relationship, engender new dissatisfactions, and diminish the likelihood of marriage (Brown 2000). McGinnis (2003) in fact found that premarital cohabitation negatively affects the perceived costs and benefits of marriage — the experience of cohabitation itself discourages marriage. This was the case for Greta (couple 7) who referring to a previous relationship, emphasised: *'we just couldn't live together, we just didn't get on. We only moved in for the sake of Jessica (name of child) and it just didn't work. We knew that very early too. I mean I was often left sitting in on my own and I didn't know where he was.'*

Joan (couple 6) observed: *'he kept leaving mugs all over the apartment and I felt I was running around trying to mind him and constantly washing mugs. I just didn't think I could live with someone like that.'* Robert felt that living together in a previous relationship was: *'The best thing we ever did. It was real obvious, real soon, that we couldn't live together, we just kept getting on each other's nerves. Just as well we didn't get married, we would definitely have got divorced. We did split up anyway a few months after moving in, but I think that would have happened anyway. Living together just made the problems obvious really.'* Premarital cohabitation discourages a marriage decision, if there is some reservation about the relationship itself.

For other respondents, previous relationship(s) had no effect on their current relationship because as Michael (couple 4) pointed out: *'there was a kind of a ...that was then and this is now kind of eh...feeling to it you know.'* Denise (couple 10) elaborated on this time lag effect between finishing a previous relationship and starting the current one. It can determine the effect the previous relationship had on the current one. *'No, because I think I was kind of finished with him for about 2-3 years, do you know that kind of a way, so I wasn't all full of emotions, or heartache, or whatever...'* However, Seamus (couple 6) drew attention to: *'if you were hurt, you wouldn't tend to open up as much...especially...if you ...especially if you invest a lot of time in a relationship, and it doesn't work.....'* For Sandra (couple 16), her current relationship, was the only one she termed as serious because none of her other relationships *'were really of any consequence.'* Although at the time it may have felt as though it was a serious relationship, in comparison to her current relationship it was not. In the cohabiting couples with no plans to marry group, only Joe (couple 16) had been engaged in a previous relationship, which was also a cohabiting relationship. However,

he stipulated that this relationship had just come to a natural end: *'I was in love and fell out of love...there was no other person in the background. That was it.'*

5.2.8 Peer group influences

For cohabiting with no plans to marry, while some friends were single, most peer relationships were either living together based relationships, or marriage based. Conor (couple 11) referred to *'one [a friend who is single]...the majority are living with their partners ...the whole group seem to be moving forward and everyone is living with their partners.'* The term *'moving forward'* implies progression, but also gives a sense of a whole cohort, not just the sample in this study, very naturally in his or her own relationships, moving to the next stage of relationship development, from going out to living together. For some cohabiting with no plans to marry, if friends were living together, it provided an example of how a relationship may develop, but did not necessarily determine that relationship. Louise (couple 19) explained:

'Em....yeah I know a friend who was living with her boyfriend beforehand and she said you really have to live together to find out. Then we decided to live together and I was happy then because ...not happy but I was glad to move in together to see the change like.....it was much better....you become much closer and stronger like.' (Louise, couple 19)

This is similar to Nazio and Blossfeld's (2003) findings where they found that the experiences of peers exert in general more influence on the decision to cohabit. While peers may provide examples of possible relationship trajectories, observation of peer behaviour also indicates what is peer appropriate. If there is a whole cohort of people behaving in this way and providing peer example for stages relationships should go

through, this confirms norm expected and norm determined behaviour, in relationship development. This indicates what is normatively appropriate for stages of relationship development. However, not everyone lives together before marriage. Multiple pathways to marriage now exist. What is important is that living together before marriage is now normatively appropriate and an optional pathway, but couples use their own individualistic calculus to determine their own relationship trajectory according to their needs, as well as their individual and joint life paths.

5.2.9 The effect of diminishing religiosity on the decision to live together

All cohabiting couples were Roman Catholic. Levels of religiosity ranged from regular attendance at religious service to not attending at all. For the majority, this was not attending at all. For most couples who engaged in religious activities regularly while living at home, this diminished to occasional religious attendance, once they moved out of home. Hakim's study in 2003 comparing political, religious and other influences on lifestyle preferences in Britain and Spain showed that in Spain, religiosity does make a difference in relationship decisions, but only a relatively small one, and the association is stronger among older people, who are more religious and prefer the role segregation model of the family. In my study, it made no difference. The average age of cohabiting couples with plans to marry is 30 years old and the average age of cohabiting with no plans to marry is 26 years. All couples said that religion did not affect their decision to live together, or their decision to get married.

It may be as Inglis (2007) has observed that an orthodox adherence to institutional rules and regulations appears to be giving way to a collective identification with a religious heritage. Here in this study we see couples identifying with a religious heritage, in that they identify themselves as being Catholic, but they pick and choose the

institutional rules and practices, which they prefer. This will be expanded on below, when we see that all cohabiting couples wish to have a Church wedding because they see it as a social norm, rather than it being an accepted rule and regulation of a Catholic marriage.

Religion was only important for couples in the ‘no living together model.’ In that model, we saw that if religion is important to a couple, then and only then, will it frame relationship decisions.

5.2.10 Increased access to education

The highest level of education attained for cohabiting couples with plans to marry, ranged from leaving school prior to completing the Leaving Certificate to postgraduate degree. Seven men left school prior to their Leaving Certificate, with one of these seven leaving school early to start an apprenticeship. Of those who left school early, 5 out of 7 worked in construction as labourers. There was record employment in this sector in 2007 (Central Statistics Office 2009b). In comparison, for cohabiting with no plans to marry, the highest levels of education attained ranged from a post Leaving Certificate course to a Master’s Degree qualification. Halpin and O’ Donoghue’s (2004) findings show that cohabiting couples in Ireland had higher levels of educational attainment than married couples had. This implies that those who have higher levels of education are more likely to live together before marriage. Yet, in the study here, seven had left school, prior to their Leaving Certificate and were living with their current partner. Of these, two had been in previous premarital cohabitation relationships. Perhaps in the early 2000s, when premarital cohabitation rates were lower and it still was an avant-garde phenomenon, in Ireland, it emerged among those with higher levels

of education. It is now though, an established optional pathway for relationship development, irrespective of educational background.

Premarital cohabitation acted as an interim solution in relationship development for those in education. Cohabiting couples with plans to marry reflected that the completion of full-time education by an individual, or partner, was essential for their relationship to progress to marriage. For example, Mary (couple 13) did her postgraduate study abroad and did not wish to marry until she had secured employment in Ireland. Both Carrie and Vernon (couple 14) saw marriage as *'impossible'*, while Carrie was finishing her degree. Vernon highlighted: *'We really needed to wait until Carrie had finished her degree.'* Cohabiting with no plans to marry also saw incomplete education as a constraint on marriage. As Andrew (couple 15) verified: *'I can't really make any plans cause I am just finished my course and I need to see if I get the job I want to get in October. But then there'll be training with that, so we'll have to see.'*

Increased access to education is a positive aspect of social change, one that eventually facilitates increased career opportunity. Here we see an elaboration of the 'marriage paradox' i.e. education, career and better economic chances act as a constraint on the decision to marry. Factors which tend to liberalise relationship development resulting in more informal committed relationships, such as premarital cohabitation, paradoxically can result in the deferment of the formalisation of those relationships through marriage.

5.2.11 Couple career paths

All cohabiting individuals with plans to marry were satisfied with their jobs and/or their career development to date. Greta (couple 7) claimed: *'work has always been a big factor and it has come into decisions that we have made.'* She explained this in the interview, as meaning:

'I know now, Robert, there are times when he has been thinking about changing his job and that has had a big impact on our relationship, because you know, you don't really feel like going ahead and making wedding plans, or going ahead and having more children, or doing anything.'

Here it is evident that premarital cohabitation is a way of maintaining a relationship, while career/financial independence can also be focused on.

With a focus on career, we can see that premarital cohabitation for cohabiting with no plans to marry is pragmatic. These mainly dinky couples live together because it suits a particular lifestyle. Both Malcolm and Sorcha (couple 18) are career driven, enjoy the stability of premarital cohabitation, but do not wish to settle down as they see it, into marriage. Sorcha stressed that her career was important to her 'cause I like it', while her partner Malcom, affirmed that 'the two of us are very tied to our jobs.' This is the same for Sandra and Joe (couple 16). In her interview, Sandra said that she had just opened a second business and that premarital cohabitation was 'just perfect at the moment' for their relationship development. Her partner, Joe emphasised that work *'like currently it's important. I'm into my 6th year now with the current crowd and I'm 4 years in the job I'm in, so I got it at 24, so I had to fight tooth and nail to get it and it'll take blood to get it off me. I have 2 factories under me wing, so I'm not going to let that go without a fight now.'*

Andrew and Lara (couple 15) were also similar, as Andrew has just finished postgraduate study, and said that marriage was *'somewhere down the line'*. Again, paradoxically, what is a characteristic of social change and heralds a new liberalisation in lifestyle and attitudes, actually facilitates flexible relationship development, but defers the marriage decision in a relationship.

Marriage is so highly valued that everything has to be just right as argued previously, before a decision to marry can take place. Malcolm (couple 18) stated: *'Well I suppose there is only one.....there is only one thing and that is to settle into a career and settle in a job...em...I'd like to be a job 4 or 5 years, I'd like to go up the career ladder a few more steps and be comfortable. It's just I'd like to know what I'm doing with my career, before I commit to getting married'* (Malcolm, couple 18). We can see here that cohabiting couples with no plans to marry wished to establish themselves in a definite career to have future stability, but importantly to be able to engage in progressive decision making within a relationship (engagement and marriage). Work is given a different priority for cohabiting couples with no plans to marry. A time investment is important to develop it. Perhaps this is because respondents were trying to establish themselves career-wise, whereas the cohabiting couples with plans to marry, who were included in this study, were working and felt they were established in their work/career. This adds weight to the argument that marriage is not at all de-institutionalised in Ireland, but in fact, has become re-institutionalised. Premarital cohabitation provides a way to concentrate on relationship development, but not in a way that compromises career and the unpredictability of not yet being 'set up' in a career. This is important so that everything can be just right, when couples decide to marry.

5.2.12 Premarital cohabitation as a way of coping with ‘risk’ in modern society

According to Giddens (1991), love in the sense of contemporary romantic love, is a form of commitment, but commitment is the wider category of the two. Someone entering into a relationship recognises the risks involved in modern relationships, but is willing to take a chance on it. Yet, couples are not willing to risk marriage, until they have lived together. I will explore premarital cohabitation as a way of coping with risk in modern society in more detail below.

Mary (couple 13) saw premarital cohabitation as a way of preventing relationship dissolution that may occur, if a couple got married, without a period of cohabitation. She stressed: *‘I wouldn’t consider getting married to someone I didn’t live with cause I’d feel I didn’t know them at all and I’d be very anxious about that if I hadn’t lived with Jim before. Oh no what’s he going to do, is he going to be.....you know....so....I don’t know how anyone could get married to somebody they hadn’t lived with before.’*

Gibson-Davis *et al.* (2005) also identify fear of divorce as a barrier to marriage. Without premarital cohabitation, divorce becomes a higher risk factor. For Liam (couple 5): *‘You kinda you have to be sure too, don’t you?’* The reason for *‘hav[ing] to be sure’* is that a living together relationship can be more easily dissolved than a marriage relationship. If the co-habiting relationship works, as defined by both individuals, then the expectation is that marriage will work. Dara (couple 3) refers above to *‘writing it in black and white, once you are married.’* This implies finality. Ciara (couple 4) said she would never like to go through a *‘break up like. You see some people and they take it so blasé like, I’d hate.....that would be my worst nightmare like a failed marriage.’* Living together was a way of reducing the risk of divorce and because as Liam (couple 5) emphasised above *‘you have to be sure’*. Later in her

interview Ciara explained her fear of divorce was because her *'family would look down on that'* and *'some people do have a stigma about marriages that break up 'n' whatever like that.'* Therefore, living together provides a way of testing the strength and durability of the relationship which might then act as a bulwark against divorce. Likewise, for cohabiting couples with no plans to marry, the consequences of a marriage not working out were considered to be far greater, than a living together relationship not working out. Without premarital cohabitation, divorce for respondents becomes a higher risk factor. Sandra drew attention to this as follows: *'Marriage is such a big thing and it's forever and I still hold the view it's not that I disagree with divorce, but it's not something I'd hope would happen to me do you know that kind of way...seeing how we get on in case it all goes pear shaped. You are getting what you want without making the big.....jump!'* Here it seems that couples are being self-reflexive in their decision making by using premarital cohabitation as a way to derive emotional satisfaction and intimacy from their relationship, until they are 'ready' to marry.

Wagner and Weiß (2006) in their findings from a meta-analysis of European longitudinal studies suggest that marriages preceded by cohabitation are more likely to end in divorce than those that were not preceded by cohabitation. In explaining the variation of effect sizes between European countries, they contend that in countries where more rigid marriage norms prevail cohabitation has a stronger effect on marital stability than in countries where marriage norms are weaker (Wagner and Weiß 2006). Jose *et al* (2010) in their meta analysis study examined studies in the PsycINFO (1887-2008) and SocIndex (1895-2008) bibliographic databases. They also found that cohabitation had a significant negative association with both marital stability and marital quality. However, the negative predictive effect on marital stability did not

remain when only cohabitation with the eventual partner was analysed, suggesting that these cohabitees may attach more long-term meaning to living together. Premarital cohabitation is also associated with lower marital satisfaction (Brown and Booth 1996), higher rates of wife infidelity (Forste and Tanfer 1996), and lower commitment to the partnership (Stanley *et al.* 2004). It may be that when researchers point to the greater likelihood of cohabiting relationships ending in separation – compared to marriages – they are not comparing like with like. Furthermore, it may be true as some research as suggested – that marriages preceded by cohabitation are more likely to end in divorce than those that were not, but this may not be comparing like with like. It does not follow that if those who had cohabited first had not done so, that their marriages would have been more likely to endure. In my study, relationship development is initially organic and then marriage is considered, once it is highly likely to provide emotional satisfaction. I put here ‘highly likely’, because of course, there are no guarantees.

Premarital cohabitation allows individuals to avail of increased choice, afforded by increased social opportunity. That also allows time in a relationship to make sure the relationship will work, thereby reducing the risk associated with relationships. Cherlin (2000) suggests that women might be incorporating premarital co-habitation into the search and bargaining processes because co-habitation provides a better opportunity to observe men’s skills and preferences for home production. However, as previously established marriage was not a premeditated goal of relationship development for respondents in my study. All respondents in the study emphasised that relationship development for them was organic and marriage emerged as the relationship went on, rather than it being a goal from the start. People decide what they want out a relationship, as the relationship develops (Manning and Smock 2005). How respondents used marriage as a test for compatibility in the relationship and a way if

minimising 'risk' emerged in thematic analysis. Premarital cohabitation as an opportunity to observe men's skills and preferences for home production is a by-product of the cohabiting relationship. It is an important one though, as couples who could not live together in previous relationships inevitably split up. Being 'ready' to marry often coincides with self-actualisation through other life goals, but emotional satisfaction within the relationship is crucial.

5.3 Part Two: Making a decision to marry

In making the decision to marry, cohabiting couples with plans to marry again demonstrate a high degree of reflexivity. Whereas the decision to live together was more organic and happened naturally within the relationship, I found that the decision to marry centered on negotiation within the relationship.

5.3.1 Another change in commitment?

While Giddens (1991) outlines that commitment can to some extent be determined by how much in love a person is, a person only becomes committed to another when, for whatever reason, she or he decides to be so. Commitment for marriage was determined by when couples felt ready to marry. For some it was when time had passed in the relationship, when they had finished education, had a stable income, acquired their own home, felt sure of the relationship itself, while for others it was a mix of all of these. Respondents defined commitment in marriage differently to the way they defined commitment in premarital cohabitation. The latter was more about getting to know someone and testing compatibility within the relationship. However, Veronica (couple 3) specified commitment in marriage as: *'Not walking out at the first stage of trouble you know ...you see that's kinda what I mean by commitment.'* It was anticipated by

Dara (couple 3) to herald a new transition in their relationship development: *'Although we're living together, I felt that you're sort of writing it in black and white, once you are married.'* Keith (couple 12) saw marriage as: *'just that final commitment...it's just like that sort of thing to say yeah this is yet, this is what I want to do, this is where I want to be, you're who I want to be with.'* The difference in the type of commitment for couples when they are at the living together stage and when they are at the marriage stage is confirmation of a collectivist or communal ethic through which couples are directed towards marriage to commit more fully to each other. People have responded to this by reframing the content and meaning of 'commitment' as a fluid process that also develops organically. *'We just became a little bit more committed to each other'* (Greta, couple 7). This is very similar to findings in Pryor and Roberts (2005) Commitment Study in New Zealand where the most frequent response from married respondents was that it was *'the next step'* (Pryor and Roberts 2005: 24).

There was no ideological opposition to marriage among cohabiting couples with no plans to marry. During the interviews, Sandra (couple 16) referred to how *'big'* a decision it is. She and Joe haven't *'really discussed marriage'*, but she did envisage it later on, in the relationship. Sandra stated:

'...like it's a big commitment, but it's probably...I don't know in time if everything works out we will probably get married and have a family...take it as it comes...we're enjoying it ...well I'm enjoying it (starts laughing). We have enough at the minute, there's no rush for anymore, but in time I do see it going that road.'

Here again, we see time being important for the relationship to develop, which may partly explain the protracted length of relationship in the 'prolonged courtship model'. What is also important though is that it is a different type of commitment, than that

associated with marriage. Sandra (couple 16) in the quote above anticipates marriage as a '*big commitment.*' Andrew (couple 15) sees it as '*a commitment to the person for the rest of your life.*' It is interesting that it emerges in this way for both groups.

Marriage is highly valued, socially and personally and is the capstone of relationship development. One of its overarching characteristics is an increased level of commitment. There is an interesting parallel here with older sociological studies on marriage and commitment. For example, Mansfield and Collard (1988) conclude from their research with 65 newly wed couples in London in the 1970s that marriage crystallises a sense of the future, as it is a commitment for life. This does not seem to have changed for the couples in my study. Marriage has social and personal importance, bound up with the perception that it is still a lifetime commitment. This fits with couples' fear about divorce and making sure everything is just right for marriage, which in turn, ensures continuation of the marriage relationship. Mansfield and Collard (1988) also found that the young couple's commitment in planning their weddings seemed to reach far into the future; indeed, they seemed to be planning who they would become. This, however, is no longer the case as my evidence shows. Men and women, especially women, no longer have to self-actualise through marriage. Now, they can do so by achieving education and career goals. However, marriage is now also increasingly a matter of identity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). For cohabiting couples with plans to marry, marriage was a central factor in the social design of reality (Berger and Kellner 1965). It is a public marker of the emotional attachment in the relationship by both the men and the women in the study. In Mansfield and Collard's study (1988) the women generally entered marriage seeing it as an exchange of intimacy, which would allow them to feel valued as individuals. Men on the other hand, saw marriage as a '*life in common*', home based rather than relationship based:

'somewhere and someone to set out from and return to.' (Mansfield and Collard 1988, p.179). Women were therefore, often disappointed. This is also no longer the case, as premarital cohabitation acts as a test for compatibility in a relationship by providing an opportunity to live with someone prior to marriage. It also seems that the expectations of men and women in relation to marriage are less gendered and have over recent years converged.

One of the advantages marriage has provided is *'enforceable trust'*: because a commitment made in public before family and friends, and perhaps in a religious setting, is more difficult to break, partners can feel more confident about their investment in the relationship (Cherlin 2004). Louise (couple 19) referred to the public commitment of marriage during her interview. It was not needed to strengthen the relationship, but to *'show people that your relationship is that bit stronger. You are not just going along. People think they are living together because they are comfortable. Not to prove it, I suppose, but it's because we love each other and have a family and stuff and it would be nice to be married when you have your family and that.'*

5.3.2 Being in a financial position to marry

For cohabiting couples with plans to marry, the *'big deal'* with getting married for Eamonn (couple 8), was the financial cost: *'We both kind of knew for a long time anyway, but it was just being in a financial position to be able to do so.'* Barry (couple 2) strongly agreed: *'Definitely have to be secure financially to get married...I wouldn't get married if I wasn't.'* Once this was resolved, then marriage was a possibility in the relationship. It was only a possibility though. Cohabiting couples with plans to marry also had to feel that they were achieving or on the way to achieving self-actualisation through achievement of career and educational goals, house ownership and emotional attachment in their relationships.

Being in a financial position to marry was also a concern for cohabiting couples with no plans to marry. Andrew (couple 15) referred to this specifically: *'Eh....you are financially set like. I think that is very important like.....that you have your work like ...the whole lot and your college finished. If I got married now, I wouldn't even be able to afford a wedding like.'* ...Louise (couple 19) also identified this as a particular barrier: *'I mean you'd love to get married, but from a money point of view....eh...like it's not, it's very hard like.'*

Malcolm (couple 18) points to the fact that everything has to be just right before marrying i.e. *'financially secure', 'good job', 'have your travelling done and your living done.'*

5.3.3 Home ownership

Home ownership was not an important factor to live together, but it was an important factor for marriage. Nearly all of the cohabiting couples with plans to marry lived in and owned their own homes, prior to their decision to marry. Ciara (couple 4) recalled:

'well at first that was a bit of a joke like, it was just said in passing. 'let's get a house' (laughs) and then....we applied for the mortgage, got the mortgage, went shopping on a Friday and put the deposit down on the Saturday, but it was just like we had a joint bank account cause we used to get paid at different times, so we thought well it'll be a good idea to have a joint bank account, and then when we had the joint bank account, we were saving, so the savings were there, so we said we'd go for the mortgage.'

The decision to marry for Ciara and her partner Michael came after the decision to buy their own home. Donal (couple 9) stated: *'the house maybe...once we had the*

house...everything was pumped into the house at the start and to get it finished and now we're ready to go again...spend more money (laughing)', while Greta (couple 7) highlighted:

'would have an absolute obsession with owning my own house.....I just nearly went crazy with that and for me that was a huge part of it.....that I really wanted to own and I felt that I really wanted to have and people'd say Oh when are ye getting married and I'd say well first of all I want to make sure that we can provide for the future and life and that just seemed more logical to me that we'd kind of setwe'd have the house 'n' stuff in place 'n' that first and that we'd have money sorted out first.'

In contrast, only two cohabiting couples with no plans to marry owned their own homes. For the others, house ownership prior to marriage was ideal: *'Em...well.....I.....I ...it could be naïve, but I think we will be together anyway for a long time, if notso...eh ...eventually maybe buy a house together and eh.....'* (Lara, couple 15).

The social context of the Celtic Tiger is crucial here. It is a time of increased construction output and increased mortgage debt (Central Statistics Office 2005), as well as unsurpassed economic growth and opportunity in Ireland. This played out in respondent's lives by deferring the decision to marry, until they had their own home, for example. Hakim (2003) emphasises that the decision to buy a home can tie women into continuous employment, as effectively, as work-centered attitudes. This may be true, but in this study, it is symbolic of the potential longevity of a couple's relationship as they see it, and the marking of that with a financial commitment through a joint house purchase.

5.3.4 Children and relationship development

Children also formed part of the marriage decision making, but only once the emotional needs of the couple were met.

Overall, children within cohabiting relationships often triggered the decision to move from living together to marriage. For Robert (couple 7), Greta's pregnancy within their relationship was partly a stimulus to marriage: *'Well, Greta got pregnant and I suppose that was a kind of a determining factor.'* This study found that in all cases, they have a very strong influence, and in some cases, even encouraged the decision to marry. Vernon (couple 14) highlighted that the decision-making was because of their son **and** the relationship quality: *'I think mostly because of the fact of Mark (child's name) but it is a fact that the two of us get on well. If it didn't feel right for either side it wouldn't have happened you know.'* Carrie (couple 14) corroborated this as follows: *'... it made me think about it more and think about benefiting the child, what was good for him and what was good for us...you know.....'* One of the traditional attributes of marriage as a social institution was procreation. Liam (couple 5) explained this as meaning: *'Years ago, if you met a girl, people thought well they are gonna get together and they have to get married, if they got pregnant you have to get married....'* Now it is based less on procreation, but on a different set of norms and values, of which the emotional needs of the couple are central. This shows another way in which marriage has become re-institutionalised. Procreation is no longer a function solely of marriage. The emotional needs of the couple are now primary, even if children are present. The couple look primarily at their own needs, then the needs of their family unit, all within the social context in which they lives and all the social opportunity available to them.

Cohabiting couples with plans to marry saw future children as being a determining factor in the marriage decision making process. When I asked Donal (couple 9) what motivated his decision to marry, he replied: *'Em... I'd say children.'* As he had a child from a previous relationship and hadn't been married before, I asked how he would feel if he had another child outside of marriage. He responded: *'No it wouldn't make a difference to me, it isn't.....I'd prefer to be married, but it wouldn't bother me, if I wasn't.'* This was the same for Eamonn and Cara (couple 8). Their main motivation to marry was to have a child within marriage, especially as Cara was now approaching her mid thirties. Cara stressed: *'I'm 33 next week, so we were kinda going Jesus will we have a baby, which is kinda.....big...a big discussion, which it is obviously for anyone, a big step.'*

A child within marriage was the ideal for cohabiting couples with no plans to marry. Joe (couple 16) for example, stated: *'like to think the marriage would come before the children and it's not a society driven thing, but it's probably good for the children. I mean if your child is 3 and they are a page boy or page girl....you know, and later on in life, they mightn't understand it, you know.'* However, this group felt: *'if you are considering a family, or if you are living together for 6 years should you commit to one another, or should you drive on, do you know that kind of way?'* (Sandra, couple 16). In Andrew's (couple 15) opinion, *'marriage is only really beneficial for kids.'*

Here again, procreation is no longer a function solely of marriage, although importantly, it is a preferred function. For cohabiting couples with no plans to marry, the couple's emotional needs are central and then marriage and children follow, if there have not been unplanned pregnancies in the relationship.

Cohabiting couples with plans to marry also cited 'legal reasons' as a motivator for marriage. Those who referred to it were parents, but also considered it as being important for their relationship. It is only part of the decision making process through. For Carrie (couple 14)

'to me living together, because I've been living with Vernon for so long...it's fine.....but you are not legally with him as such, and you are not a couple...you are a single person really, whereas, I want more of a couple do you know.....'

while Robert (couple 7) also emphasised legal reasons as being part of the decision making process. *'I mean if you are living together for that long, you might as well put it to bed, shall we say, well we're legally together as well now. But that's very cold isn't it?'* This is an interesting observation, especially in light of The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010. As this Act provides cohabiting couples with succession rights, protection of a home that couples share, plus maintenance rights in the event of a separation, I wonder if it will have a future effect on marriage decision making. I suspect if it does, it will only have a small effect though, as legal reasons as a motivator for marriage were only part of the decision making process and were not cited as a primary reason by any of the respondents.

5.3.5 The effect of diminishing religiosity on the decision to marry

I was surprised to discover during the fieldwork that all couples with plans to marry wished to have a religious wedding, in spite of all respondents saying that religion had no importance in relationship decision making for them. When the rationale for this was investigated in the interviews, Donal (cohabiting with plans to marry, couple 9) described it as: *'A symbol, you are there, you are in front of everyone that knows you, you are letting everyone know like that you are committing yourself for the rest of your*

life.’ For Seamus (couple 6): *‘Marriage is important to eh...in everyone else’s eyes to cement the relationship...I suppose the wedding ceremony itself.... it’s a Church ritual, so you have to go through it.’* For cohabiting couples with no plans to marry, the symbolic nature of marriage also emerged in interviews, even though the decision to marry had not been definitely made within the relationship. Louise (couple 19) asserted that a religious ceremony associated with marriage, meant that the relationship is *‘stronger’* and *‘you’re not just getting along’*. Tradition also played a part. Cara (cohabiting with plans to marry, couple 8) explained that she *‘wouldn’t have it any other way than get married in a Catholic Church, cause that’s the culture we live in, and that’s the way I was brought up so....’*

Yet there was an expressed contradiction between diminished religious values, premarital cohabitation and wishing to have a religious wedding for all cohabiting couples. Even those who were religiously active, i.e. attending religious services regularly, such as Cara (cohabiting couple with plans to marry, couple 8), still felt that *‘it’s contradictory’* but *‘you’d be crazy to get married and not live with someone first.’* Andrew captured the views of cohabiting couples with no plans to marry in his statement: *‘Well....well...obviously ...like might sound hypocritical like, but I would still like to get married in a church.’* Andrew (couple 15). We see that what was a religious norm – a church wedding with an expected level of spirituality, has now become a social norm where spirituality is optional, if even required. For both cohabiting groups, although there was an expressed contradiction between religious values and their own relationship decisions, there was no confusion about possible relationship trajectories. Although the lifestyle options made available by modernity offer many opportunities for appropriation, and can also generate feelings of powerlessness (Giddens 1991), here I found no sense of powerlessness. Rather couples were very pragmatic about their

relationship decision-making, prioritising their own intimacy needs, over attachment to an institutional church. They claimed attachment to a religious heritage (Inglis 2007), but maintained a personal a la carte Catholicism (Inglis 1998b).

5.3.6 Family of origin

Early experiences can influence marriage through beliefs about the importance, or likelihood of marital stability. Conor (couple 11) saw his parents ‘*great marriage*’ as a standard for relationship development. He affirmed: ‘*They have a very strong marriage... I hope that when it comes around to me being that age (age his parents are now), it’ll be the same thing.*’ For him then, his family of rearing had an influence on the perception of how relationships should develop.

Manning and Smock’s (2002) concluded after studying the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth (U.S.), that family structure at age 14 is not significantly associated with expectations for marriage. I assume that as people mature and experience long-term committed relationships what they would like out of those relationships will also change, irrespective of family experiences. Most cohabiting couples with plans to marry grew up in a family with two biological parents. Michael (couple 4) is an interesting exception. After his mother died, when he was a teenager, he went to live with relations in another country. Subsequently and right up to the time of the interview, he had very little contact with his immediate family and stipulated that they had very little influence on his relationship decisions.

Michael explained:

'Basically, I left school and went to England and I'd ring them up once or twice a week or whatever...well not even that, I suppose...I don't visit them that often...I get on well with them, but I would not.....I wouldn't dream of asking them for permission about anything and they wouldn't dream of getting involved....I basically brought meself up...so they wouldn't have an influence really.'

(Michael, couple 4)

An individual who has experienced a family dissolution may be more concerned over the permanence of the union and thus choose to marry, rather than cohabit (Duvander 1999). Eamonn's (couple 8) parents separated recently (within the last year of the interview). This did not influence the decision to marry for Eamonn, which occurred after a 2-year period of cohabitation. His and Cara's main motivation to marry was to have a child within marriage, especially as Cara was approaching her mid thirties. Eamonn in his interview said that they did not want to *'live together for years and then find it's too late.'* Joe (couple 16), whose parents separated after 25 years of marriage, five years before this research, found that it actually had a positive effect on his own relationship and being mindful of his partner's feelings. He described this as follows:

'Do you know, you can remember instances from your childhood where you'd do hmm... they are arguing and you know when you think back now, when you are older, there was times, when there was selfishness on either of their parts, which probably led to a decision over the years to separate. I suppose thinking about it, you can't just...you have to think about your partner, or the partnership we'll call it, you have with someone else, you have to be respectable to their thoughts, what their idea of a quiet week-end is, or their idea of a week-end away, cause it's not a week-end away and you find a gang of lads in a pub, and you disappear off (starts laughing), so I suppose from that point of view, maybe

because Dad would have been prone to going off on his ear with beer and coming back, and Mam would not have been happy.’ (laughing).

Children again, have a very defining role on relationship development, this time through their grandparents. Living together was generally encouraged by parents when children were born. Gareth (couple 1) pointed out that his mother provided assistance to find a house to live: *‘How can I say ...would have helped...as regards kinds getting a place and kinda getting ourselves here on our own, you know that type of thing.’* Greta (couple 7) expressed a concern that having more children within the relationship without being married, would have meant: *‘My own Mum and Dad would have been very disappointed, if we had gone on to have children without, and that would have played heavily on my mind at this stage’* and while *‘they probably would have accepted it and passed no remarks to some extent, but eh.....I don’t know if they would have actually said they were disappointed. I think they would probably have felt that it was too loose.....’*

5.4 Gender differences in approaches to the formalisation of relationships

Although I considered in chapter 2 that modernity poses a challenge to traditional masculinity, in that this can mean that the socialisation of young men into traditional masculine roles inhibits their capacity to share their feelings with others (Cleary 2005), here most men were very open about their feelings towards their partner. While most men spoke about how lucky they felt or how much they loved their partners, Jim (couple 13) said: *‘Well sure I like Mary very much and sure we get on fairly well 80% of the time and I suppose we enjoy the making up.’* He was also more distant in the interviews. He frequently referred to how much money he earned and was dismissive

of his partner at times during the interview. At one point he said: *'I'm not really into all the feelings things. You either get on, or you don't. That's the way I see it anyway.'*

All respondents wanted to marry and as outlined above no-one opposed marriage, but in my study and contrary to previous studies (Bumpass *et al.* 1991; Brown 2000; Waller and McLanahan 2005), women emerged as the drivers behind the decision to marry. Cohabiting men with plans to marry felt that marriage was more significant for their partners than it was for them. Barry (couple 2) felt: *'She put the pressure on me, but I'm glad you know, it's important, but if it was left to me, we wouldn't be getting married. I just keep putting things on the long finger you know.'* Barry was not opposed to marriage, but neither was he in a rush to marry. Eva (couple 2) pointed out: *'Well I think the subject of marriage for meif we were living together for me and it was going nowhere ...he wasn't interested in getting married then ...I suppose something is wrong'*. Dara (couple 3) pointed out: *'For me personally it's not ...but I think it is for Veronica and it is for most girls...that doesn't mean I'm not for marriage ...I think it's more important for Veronica, than it is for me...'* Women felt that if pre-marital co-habitation becomes protracted beyond their expectations, then the relationship must move to the next stage, or possibly dissolve. Veronica (couple 3) believed: *'That if you are living together for a certain period of time and your views on marriage is that you do want to get married, and you are of a certain age that you'd probably have to, I don't know...ask questions, as to why you are not progressing in that way.'*

Cohabiting men with no plans to marry also felt that marriage was more important for their partners than it was for them in their relationships. Damien (couple 19) attested that it would mean *'very littlea piece of paper. That basically is what it would mean. It'd just mean I'd be married and what it would mean on paper, but that*

would be it.' When queried in the interview, as to why he would consider marriage at all in his relationship, he replied: *'To keep Louise happy, but yeah well like, I wouldn't like to be just going out with her for over 20 years, so obviously yeah, I want to get married. I know Laura does so yeah...'* Malcolm (couple 18) too attested: *'I dunno, if it's a female thing or not, but I think she thinks about it more than I do cause she does mention the big day, and then her brother got engaged recently, so it has kind of brought it on, thoughts wise and that.'* This shows how marriage is becoming re-institutionalised. It is now an option among options for women.

5.5 Social expectation to marry

This work investigated the extent to which respondents felt that there was a social expectation on them to marry and if there was, how did that affect relationship development. Interestingly, all couples said that there was no expectation on them to stay living together. However, cohabiting couples with plans to marry stipulated that there was an expectation on them to get married. When examined in the interview, it emerged that this expectation was from parents and their partner's parents, who intimated that marriage was an expected outcome and an advisable one, especially if there was a child in the relationship. Carrie (couple 14) recalled: *'Well I know when we had Mark [name of child] years ago it was probably expected more of the oldereh.....relations and probably my Mam and his Mam at the time, and my parents at the time probably expected me to get married after Mark, but I do think it's them and their age, do you know what I mean?'* Cohabiting couples with plans to marry did not see this as being influential in decision-making.

Gareth (couple 1) identified a 'general' social expectation that a premarital cohabitation relationship leads to marriage.

'I didn't have expectations on myself to get married but other people would have had you'd always hear someone say 'Are you every going to get married?' You know that type of thing in passing maybe aunts or uncles that type of thing but generally it would be kinda in good heartedness too, it wouldn't be 'When are you ever going to get married, or Are you going to get married? It wouldn't be in your face but would be in general .I think at the end of the day it was my decisionit took me forever to make the decision, but I finally got there.'

Louise (couple 19) too experienced *'feel[ing] a bit pressurised like, especially at a wedding 'Oh you are next', and you feel a bit uncomfortable'*. Sandra (couple 16) elaborated on the social expectation of progressing from living together to marriage in relationship development:

'I know it's passing jokes and all the rest, but it's kind of nearly expected once you start living together everyone is waiting for the engagement ring or whatever and it's like when you get married everyone is wondering when you are going to have a baby do you know. Eventually then it's almost like we are going to break up. People are just waiting for you to get engaged.'

Her partner, Joe felt: *'There wasn't a pressure but there is an ...expectation ...maybe more from Sandra's friends, than my friends ...the ring is coming, the wedding is coming.'* Damien (couple 19) although he believed that the marriage would not necessarily improve the quality of the relationship, considered that *'progressively.....it's the next step eventually. If you live together, you'd be seen to get*

married.' (couple 12). Here Damien acknowledges his perception of what the social expectation is regarding appropriate decisions and stages in relationship development.

In this, we have the most obvious way in which marriage has become re-institutionalised. Marriage should now follow cohabitation, rather than cohabitation following marriage.

5.6 Marriage as the capstone of relationship development

Jamieson (1998, p.19) stipulates that in post-modern societies the family based on marriage is losing, or has lost, its importance. I did not find this to be true in my study. Although relationships in this study develop organically and respondents do not enter into the relationships with a 'grand' plan to marry, marriage was the ideal outcome of relationship development. Marriage was a very serious decision for cohabiting couples with plans to marry. Joan (couple 6) stressed: *'Ya know it's not something I take lightly.'* Michael (couple 4) said that he did not see himself ever getting married: *'...I was engaged before...but I was pushed into that now.'* Until he met Ciara (couple 4), *'the right woman'* as he called her, marriage was not an option. Ciara on the other hand highlighted: *'I always wanted to be married, you know that sort of a way, that would be my goal would be marriage and kids 'n' all that like.'*, but living with Michael was essential for her: *'To make sure that surely the mistakes that happen during marriage could be picked up before marriage, and like alarm bells don't ring, just when you're in the marriage, surely something has to click outside the marriage before you commit to that.'*

Liam (couple 5) *'was always going with as many girls as I could and I'd be gone.....'n' things like that. I would never get married but ah sure things change...'* Change for Liam meant a growing closeness to Evelyn in their relationship, living together and the

arrival of two children. In comparison, his partner Evelyn emphasised: *'I always wanted to get married ...I come from such a big family and settled family. Mammy and Daddy are together years and there's 6 girls and 1 boy in our family and our family is a big thing...has always been a big thing, so it's really important.'* This fits with Halpin and O' Donoghue's (2004, p.6) assertion in their analysis of Labour Force Survey data and European Community Household Panel Survey data, that *'co-habitation as a precursor to marriage is becoming more commonplace.'* Marriage is so highly valued that, as mentioned above, everything has to be just right.

For cohabiting couples with no plans to marry, there were no reservations towards marriage in principle, no ideological objections to marriage as a social institution. In fact, the opposite was true. Lara (couple 15) said she *'would like to get married...eventually'*, while her partner Andrew described marriage as *'the end product of everything like ...eventually everyone would want to end up being married like.'* Peter (couple 17) affirmed: *'I don't think we haven't got married for any particular reason. I just think everything has been fine and it has worked O.K., so like if it's not broken, don't fix it type thing.'* The value of marriage is therefore, confirmed. It is a public marker of commitment, an indicator of emotional satisfaction with the relationship, a way of achieving emotional self-actualisation.

5.7 Part Three: How marriage has become re-institutionalised in Irish society

'Natural progression is marriage and family...not necessarily in that order' (laughing)

Joe (couple 16) – Cohabiting with no plans to marry

Cherlin (2004, p.848) refers specifically to a de-institutionalisation of marriage meaning *'the weakening of the social norms that define people's behaviour in a social institution such as marriage.'* In Ireland, it appears that there is no weakening as such, of the social norms that define people's behaviour in a social institution, such as marriage. Marriage remains highly normatively valued. It is now just based on different norms and values. Various pathways to marriage now exist. While pathways to marriage have become de-institutionalised, marriage is being re-institutionalised, rather than de-institutionalised.

This section will identify each of the ways this occurred for respondents in my study as follows:

1. Marriage now follows cohabitation, rather than cohabitation following marriage, if the emotional needs of the couple are met.
2. If an individual's religious beliefs are strong, that may affect whether or not a couple live together or not.
3. Marriage symbolises emotional satisfaction in a relationship and is a marker of achieving that level of emotional satisfaction

Procreation and family formation are no longer solely features of marriage. Although a preferred function, marriage is now a way of showing self-actualisation in relationship

development. These findings are similar to the findings of other studies that argue marriage is increasingly valued for its symbolic significance. Cherlin (2004) argues that people view marriage as a marker of prestige and personal achievement and that marriage has become something to work up to, rather than the foundation for adult life. Edin and Kefalas (2005) report that unmarried mother's value marriage as a way to express their achievement of a high-quality couple relationship. Bellah *et al.* (1996) argue that an increasing emphasis on personal growth and self-fulfillment has transformed marriage from an institution that is based on roles and obligation into one based on personal satisfaction and psychic rewards.

4. There was no ideological opposition to marriage.

There was no plan to marry at the start of a particular relationship. Nor was there a plan to marry when a couple were deciding to live together. Neither was there any objection to marriage in the relationship. The decision to marry comes about later in the relationship. Many chose to live together because for example, it was a natural step in their relationship, they needed time to allow their relationship to develop, they wished to achieve educational and/or career goals, they wished to have financial security first or buy their own home. There was such personal and social importance attached to marriage by respondents that everything had to be 'just right.'

5. Premarital cohabitation is a way of testing relationship compatibility, rather than as a trial period before marriage.

For some commentators, marriage is also currently based much less on social norms, laws, and religion, than on the quality of the emotional bond between couples (Cherlin 2004; Coontz 2005; Hill 2007). In my study, cohabiting couples with plans to

marry saw living together as a test for the relationship. It was also a test for what marriage might be like, but only as the relationship went on.

6. Commitment is a reflexive process that increases as the relationship develops.

Flexible commitment is a way of coping with the 'marriage paradox' i.e. being able to self-actualise in other areas of one's life and still have a close interpersonal relationship, which can be marked by marriage later on, if there is a strong emotional attachment. One of the overarching characteristics of modern marriage is an increased level of emotional commitment.

7. Procreation is no longer a primary function of marriage, but it is a preferred function.

Children often triggered the decision to marry, but only once a relationship met the emotional needs of the couple. Couples with unplanned pregnancies were more likely to live together than marry, until they are sure of their relationship. Unplanned pregnancy or having children outside marriage no longer means that a couple has to marry. We have moved from a normative position that for example, valued staying in a marriage for the sake of the children towards one, which values looking after the emotional needs of the couple. Procreation is no longer a primary function just of marriage. It is certainly a desired function, as testified by cohabiting respondents, but not a primary function.

8. Premarital cohabitation is a way of minimising risk in a 'risk society' (Beck 1992).

Living together provides a way of testing the strength and durability of the relationship which might then act as a bulwark against divorce.

9. Everything being just right was the most important factor on the decision to marry.

Marriage was so highly valued by the respondents in the study that everything has to be just right. This 'just right' means that what is happening in other life course domains is taken into consideration such as career, financial stability, finishing education, having own home, the needs of children if they are present in the relationship, as well and most importantly, the emotional needs of the couple.

10. A Catholic wedding is now more of a social norm than a religious norm.

It may be as Inglis (2007) has observed that an orthodox adherence to institutional rules and regulations appears to be giving way to a collective identification with a religious heritage. Respondents wished to have a Catholic wedding because they felt there was a social expectation on them to do so.

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, we saw that decisions within relationships reflect the social context in which people live their lives and their own self determinism in trying to craft a relationship trajectory, as well as a coherent life path. Because of the 'marriage paradox' premarital cohabitation was an interim stage in relationship development until the couple was 'ready' to marry. Because of the enduring importance of marriage in Irish, respondents did not wish to marry until they were 'ready' to marry. This augurs very well for the future of marriage as a social institution in Ireland.

Concluding comments

The future of marriage as a social institution in Ireland

No sooner met but they looked;

No sooner looked but they loved;

No sooner loved but they sighed;

No sooner sighed but they asked one another the reason;

No sooner knew the reason but they sought the remedy;

And in these degrees have they made a pair of stairs to marriage.

Shakespeare, W. *As You Like It*. Act V. Scene I. The forest.

National trends in Ireland show increasing cohabitation and marriage rates (Central Statistics Office 2006b) which reflect a cumulative shift in relationship development and family formation patterns. This study provides a unique and personal sociological account of how decisions to live together and marry are made, within intimate relationships. In providing a close up view of decision making from the perspective of cohabiting couples with plans to marry, cohabiting couples with no plans to marry, as well as couples who married without living together first, this study generates new hypotheses that may be taken up in the future in larger representative studies.

As Ireland has modernised the social context in which people live their lives has changed dramatically. As social change gives people more choices and options in society generally, we start to see more choices and options emerging in family formation patterns too. Diminished religiosity (Central Statistics Office, 2006b),

economic influences (International Monetary Fund, 2006), increased educational opportunities (Dept of Education and Science, 2006), increased female labour force participation and more career paths for men and women (Central Statistics Office, 2007) and fertility outside the institution of marriage (Central Statistics Office, 2008) were all identified as indicators of social change, which affect relationship development and family formation. While wider societal change associated with modernisation has increased the range of choice and options available to people through which, they can achieve their full potential, at the same time, people still want to have intimacy within emotionally fulfilling personal relationships. For respondents in my study, progressive social change constrained relationship development by causing respondents to defer a decision to marry. Respondents coped with this interplay of structural constraints and individual agency in their relationship decision making by living together. A marriage paradox has emerged because marriage continues to be desired by most people. Structural constraints are constantly exerting pressure on us as individuals, which affect relationship development, even newer progressive modernising ones. In fact, what we see is that newer social opportunities can in fact transform into constraints in themselves on the life course trajectory.

Marriage followed later on in the relationship, and often, as a consequence of that living together experience. My study established that marriage deferral, rather than '*marriage avoidance*' (Fahey and Layte 2007, p.169) is a more appropriate description of what has been happening in the Irish context. Interestingly, for respondents in my study, premarital cohabitation actually protects marriage as a social institution. It serves to test relationship compatibility and although, marriage was not necessarily part of a grand plan in relationship development, respondents felt that living together gave them an indication of what marriage would probably be like. For many, a period of

premarital cohabitation gave an indication that a marriage relationship was likely to last. However, there is no guarantee. A longitudinal study tracing relationship development from when a couple decide to live together, to a number of years after they marry would definitely establish the strength of the correlation here. Indeed, a comparison of couples relationship trajectories who lived together and those who did not would provide further invaluable insights. A cross-national comparison of gendered emotional attachment in relationships in industrialised countries and what that means for paradigms of masculinity could also be investigated. My findings tentatively suggest that both men and women can engage in mutual disclosure in intimate relationships. This suggests that traditional masculine roles are changing. Relationship development as it plays out in modernity requires mutual disclosure, especially if a couple is negotiating and re-negotiating relationship decisions in the light of what is happening, or what has happened in other life course domains. A more representative, cross-cultural comparison is necessary to investigate this issue more thoroughly.

Premarital cohabitation rates are rising in industrialised countries (Popenoe 2008 etc.). In particular, premarital cohabitation in the Nordic countries has emerged as an alternative to marriage, rather than a precursor, amongst a substantial proportion of the population (Popenoe 2008). Certainly, while we can see premarital cohabitation emerging as an alternative to marriage in Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2006b), and indeed, in other European countries, it is not emerging as a long-term alternative for a substantial proportion of the population. Rather, increasing numbers of people are living together before marriage, but increasing numbers of people are also marrying (Central Statistics Office 2006b). Neither, is premarital cohabitation a long-term alternative in Ireland. Even cohabiting couples with no plans to marry did not have plans not to marry. In comparison, in the United States, premarital cohabitation tends to

be a precursor to marriage instead of an alternative to it (Cherlin, 2004). For my respondents, it is not necessarily a precursor to marriage, as some respondents had previous 'failed' premarital cohabitation experiences. I use the term 'failed' as those relationships did not lead to marriage. Instead, premarital cohabitation was a way of achieving companionship and intimacy in a relationship in the midst of new, progressive and modernising social change, until a couple felt 'ready' to marry.

It may well be Ireland is following its own trajectory in regard to intimate relationship formation and development patterns. Caplow's *'Principle of Singularity'* states that the sharing of trends by national societies does not imply shared outcomes, because of differences in institutional contexts and other considerations (historical context for example) (Caplow, 1998). Schmidt's (2006) concept of *'multiple modernities'* proposes that modernity and social change are unique to the institutional context in which they occur. This implies that characteristics of modernity, such as changing family patterns, are too unique to the country in which they occur. The findings of this study also suggest this. The benefit of using a life course analysis approach in my study was that it gave respondents an opportunity to identify what structural constraints affected their relationship development, as well as how structural constraints and individual agency affected relationship development in relationship decision making in an Irish social context. Structural constraints are constantly exerting pressure on us as individuals, which affects relationship development, even 'newer', progressive and modernising ones. In fact, what we see is that newer social opportunities can in fact transform into constraints in themselves on the life course trajectory. Respondents cope with the interplay of structural constraints and individual agency in their individual lives within their intimate relationship trajectories by living together. However, their particular cultural and institutional characteristics are unique

to the country in which they occur. Therefore, the interplay between structural constraints and individual agency and how that played out in respondents' lives in my study is unique to the Irish context in which this study was conducted. If comparing the findings of this study with research in another country it is not really comparing like with like. Ultimately, the findings have to be context reflective. At best, we can compare rates of premarital cohabitation and identify national and international trends, but the true explanation of them lies in how the institutional context of a country is interpreted by individuals within their lives. The fieldwork for my study was conducted in for example, the midst of the Celtic Tiger boom years, a distinctive period in Irish history which saw unprecedented economic growth and improved lifestyle options for an overwhelming majority of people in Ireland. It is how what is going on in someone's life and what they want out of life and their relationships that determine when and if a couple will live together, and when and if they will marry. Premarital cohabitation and marriage then is a consequence of the merging of structural constraints and individual agency in individual lives.

While being 'ready' to marry often coincided with self-actualisation through other life goals, emotional satisfaction within the relationship was crucial for respondents. This provides something emotionally tangible for individuals in the fast changing social world in which we live. In the recent European Values Survey 2008, 77% (n= 1,013) of the Irish population felt that '*marriage was [not] an outdated institution*', compared to 23% who felt it was outdated (European Values Survey Foundation/Tilburg University 2010). Importantly, in spite of premarital cohabitation emerging as an optional pathway in relationship development, my study shows that marriage as a social institution is still intact; it's just different. The dilemma of the marriage paradox which respondents experienced was the result of an incongruity

between the structural constraints and the individual as an autonomous being in the modern social order in which we live. Cohabiting respondents resolved this incongruity by living together. For the two Jehovah Witness couples, this incongruity did not arise, as their religious beliefs determined their relationship trajectories. This is a significant advance for our knowledge of the meaning of family and family life in Ireland. Marriage is now based on a different set of values and norms, ones that are reflective of the ever-changing social reality in which we live. Therefore, at least for the moment, marriage has both relevance and importance in people's lives.

In modernity tradition and custom no longer guarantee who we are. Self-authenticity is instead crucial in establishing self-identity and self-actualisation is a key characteristic of modernity (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991). I maintain that rather than this being something an individual resolves for themselves within their own social and personal nexus, new precepts and practices are necessary to replace the traditional ones in people's lives. This allows people to cope with all the social choice available to them. In the case of relationship development, this meant that premarital cohabitation emerged as a temporary solution for respondents in my study, as they explored other social opportunities. This resulted in relationship trajectories becoming re-defined and marriage becoming re-institutionalised in people's lives. I argue that modernity, rather than being characterised by disembedding mechanisms (the separation of interaction from the particularities of locales and the propulsion of social life away from the hold of pre-established precepts and practices) (Giddens and Pierson 1998), should also be characterised by re-embedding mechanisms. Certainly with marriage, we see not only a break away from pre-established precepts and practices, but a replacement of them with 'new' norms and values. I suggest that this could also be applied to other social processes, such as secularisation, for example. Even though Irish society has become

increasingly secularised, this might not necessarily herald the demise of religion as a social institution. In chapter 2, I referred to the ‘new’ Irish Catholic who is now more discerning about religious practice, spirituality and what that means for lifestyle preferences. Perhaps the result of secularisation will not actually mean the de-institutionalisation of religion, but that religion will instead become re-embedded in people’s lives. A national study comparing a range of religious groups and how religion is possibly becoming re-embedded in people’s lives, as well as identifying what that means for different religious groups would be a very interesting follow-on piece of research to this study. Secularisation does not seem to have affected all religious belief systems in the same way. Some religious belief systems seem to be more robust in the face of rapid social change. For example, this study showed that the Jehovah Witness couples in my sample did not live together before marriage because of their religious beliefs. Future research investigating how religiosity affects family formation patterns would also provide invaluable information on this aspect of family formation patterns in Ireland.

An interesting and unexpected finding of this work was how important children are in couple decision making. Previously, children were the outcome of marriage, now they have a central role in moving the trajectories of their parents forward from premarital cohabitation to marriage. This is a significant marker in what has become a major social shift in how children are viewed in society. More traditional roles which saw them as workers in the household to financial contributors to dependents (Zelizer 1985) who must be cared, loved and protected (European Values Survey Foundation/Tilburg University 2010; Williams *et al.* 2009) has now changed to the child not being a consequence of marriage, but paramount in the decision making in relationships before marriage. The findings of this study show that children now have a

voice in couple relationship decisions. Therefore, their wellbeing is considered in relationship development. It would seem that a new layer to rights based theories (theories emphasising the rights of children) childhood has actually emerged as a consequence of my study. While we don't see formal acknowledgment of the rights of the child as such, we do see acknowledgment by the parent(s) of what will be best for the child and how that has implications for relationship development for a couple. While I emphasised that the emotional needs of the couple are crucial in decision making, a decision to marry will only come about if that is also a positive decision for children. Respondents did not claim that they would marry for the sake of their children only. Therefore, children rather than being passive in relationship development are instrumental to it. In this we can see children as being *'active, creative social agents who produce their own unique children's cultures while simultaneously contributing to the production of adult societies'* (Cosaro 2005, p. 3). On this informal level, the rights of the child, as a family member are also being acknowledged on a new level. This too is a significant advance for our knowledge of the meaning of family and family life in Ireland, especially the role of children in the formation of family units.

In conclusion, my study captures the experiential knowledge and personal reflections of couples on their decision to cohabit within their relationships, and then why they decided to marry within that relationship. Its' distinguishing characteristic is that it explores all the factors that impinge on the decision to live together and the decision to marry from the individual's perspective. It adds to the existing sociological body of knowledge on family and family life in Ireland by establishing that premarital cohabitation emerged in relationship development for respondents, as a consequence of the complexity of living in modern Ireland, but contrary to what might be expected, the durability of marriage as a social institution remains.

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Appendix A Profile of cohabiting couples with plans to marry

Couple 1 – Gareth and Lisa

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Gareth	29 years old	Eleven years	Lived together for almost five years Engaged for the last three years	Yes, joint purchase	Leaving Certificate	Skilled manual Full-time permanent work	Occasional	One previous relationship	One child together	n/a
Lisa	27 years old	Eleven years	As above	Yes, joint purchase	Third level degree	Non-manual Full-time contract work	Occasional	No previous relationships		n/a

Couple 2 – Barry and Eva

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Barry	33 years old	Eight years	Lived together for four years Engaged for last two years	Yes, joint purchase	Third level degree	Self-employed Full-time work	Occasional	One relationship	Child with Eva	n/a
Eva	32 years old	Eight years	As above	Yes, joint purchase	Postgraduate qualification	Higher professional Maternity leave.	Regular	One relationship	Child from previous relationship Also child with Barry	n/a

Couple 3 –Dara and Veronica

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Dara	31 years old	Five years	Living together for last three years	Yes, owned own home before selling and buying joint home with Veronica	Postgraduate qualification	Higher professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	One previous relationship	None	n/a
Veronica	29 years old	Five years	As above	As above	Postgraduate qualification	Higher professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	One previous relationship	None	n/a

Couple 4 – Michael and Ciara

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Michael	36 years old	Two years	Moved in together two months after meeting. Got engaged four months later.	Yes, joint purchase	left school early before completing the Leaving Certificate	Skilled manual Full-time contract work	Irregular	Three serious relationships The second one was a cohabiting relationship. Michael was engaged in that relationship.	None	Michael's mother died when he was young. He left school and went to England to work afterwards. He has had very little contact with his family since.
Ciara	28 years old	Two years	As above	Yes, joint purchase	Post-Leaving Certificate qualification	Higher professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	One serious relationship, which was a cohabiting relationship. Ciara was engaged in that relationship.	None	

Couple 5 – Liam and Evelyn

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Liam	30 years old	Twelve years	Living together for eleven years Engaged for the last three years	Yes, joint purchase	Left school early before completing the Leaving Certificate	Unskilled Full-time contract work	Occasional	Casual relationships	Two children together One born before they started living together	n/a
Evelyn	26 years old	Twelve years	As above	Yes, joint purchase	Left school early before completing the Leaving Certificate	Unskilled Part-time work	Regular	One previous relationship	living together and one after.	n/a

Couple 6 – Seamus and Joan

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Seamus	37 years old	Twelve years	Living together for two years Engaged for the last year	Yes, joint purchase	Postgraduate qualification	Higher professional Full-time contract work	Occasional	Two previous relationships	None	n/a
Joan	32 years old	Twelve years	As above	Yes, joint purchase	Post Leaving Certificate course Currently studying for third level qualification	Lower professional Part-time work – job share	Irregular	Three previous relationships The first of these was a cohabitation relationship, out of which, her child was born	One	n/a

Couple 7 – Robert and Greta

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Robert	38 years old	Five years	Living together for the last 3 years Engaged within last 6 months	Yes, joint purchase	Postgraduate qualification	Lower professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	Two previous relationships The first of these was a cohabitation relationship	Greta pregnant with their baby	n/a
Greta	28 years old	Five years	As above	Yes, joint purchase	Primary degree	Lower professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	One previous relationship Greta lived with her partner for a short time, after her child was born	One child, from previous relationship. Greta pregnant with Robert's child.	n/a

Couple 8 – Eamonn and Cara

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Eamonn	31 years old	Four years	Living together for 3 years Engaged for 4 months	Renting	Primary degree	Unskilled Full-time contract work	Occasional	One previous relationship	n/a	Parents separated, a year before being interviewed
Cara	33 years old	Four years	As above	Renting	Primary degree	Higher professional Full-time contract work	Regular	One previous relationship	n/a	n/a

Couple 9 – Donal and Lauren

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Donal	30 years old	Five years	Living together for four years Engaged for the last two years	Yes, joint purchase	Left school before the Leaving Certificate Completed an apprenticeship	Skilled manual Full-time permanent work	Occasional	Two previous relationships. In Donal's last relationship, he lived with his partner briefly (a few weeks).	A child was born out of last relationship. The child lives with her mother. Donal has regular contact.	n/a
Lauren	27 years old	Five years	As above	Yes, joint purchase	Post Leaving Certificate course	Non-manual Full-time permanent work	Occasional	Two relationships Engaged in the last relationship.	None	n/a

Couple 10 – Terry and Denise

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Terry	33 years old	Eight years	Four years into their relationship, they decided to live together and bought their own home. Engaged a year later	Yes, joint purchase	Leaving Certificate completed on the job training and secured a number of promotions	Lower professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	Three previous relationships	None	n/a
Denise	29 years old	Eight years	As above	Yes, joint purchase	After completing her Leaving Certificate, Denise started a third level course, but did not complete it.	Lower professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	One previous relationship	None	n/a

Couple 11 – Conor and Mairead

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Conor	30 years old	Relationship was on and off over an ten year period	Living together for just over a year Engaged for the last year	Yes, joint purchase	Left school before the Leaving Certificate	Unskilled manual Full-time contract work	Occasional	One other relationship Lived with his ex-partner for a short period of time after his third child is born for the children's sake, but could not make the relationship work just for the children	Three children when relationship was off with Mairead. All three children live with their mother	n/a
Mairead	28 years old	Relationship was on and off over an ten year period	As above	Yes, joint purchase	Primary degree	Higher Professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	One previous relationship	None	n/a

Couple 12 – Keith and Maureen

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Keith	27 years old	Eight years	Moved in together seven years ago Engaged for the last two years	Yes, joint purchase	Left school before completing the Leaving Certificate avails of on the job training where possible	Lower professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	One previous relationship	Two children from previous relationship. Two children in current relationship	For years Keith had no contact with either his ex-partner or his children. Today, he has limited contact only.
Maureen	25 years old	Eight years	As above	Yes, joint purchase	Leaving Certificate	Non-manual Part-time contract work	regular	No previous relationships	Two children in current relationship	n/a

Couple 13 – Jim and Mary

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Jim	35 years old	Knew each other since school, but only started their relationship five years ago	Living together for two years Engaged for two months	Yes, joint purchase	Left school early and completed a trade type course	Semi-skilled manual Self-employed	Occasional	Two previous relationships, before he met Mary. The last of these was a cohabitation relationship	None	n/a
Mary	35 years old	As above	As above	Yes, joint purchase	Postgraduate qualification	Higher professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	No previous relationships	None	n/a

Couple 14 – Vernon and Carrie

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Vernon	35 years old	Eleven years	Living together for ten years Engaged for the last ten months	Renting	Leaving Certificate and did an apprenticeship afterwards	Skilled manual Full-time permanent work	Occasional	One previous relationship	One child together	n/a
Carrie	30 years old	Eleven years	As above	Renting	Primary degree	Lower professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	No previous relationships		n/a

Appendix B Cohabiting couples with no plans to marry

Couple 15 – Andrew and Lara

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Andrew	26 years old	A little over a year	Six months	Renting	A year left to complete on a postgraduate course	Non-manual Full-time work	Occasional	Two previous relationships	None	n/a
Lara	22 years old	A little over a year	Six months	Renting	post Leaving Certificate course	Non-manual Full-time contract work	Occasional	No previous relationships	None	n/a

Couple 16 –Joe and Sandra

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Joe	28 years old	Two years	Four months	Yes, joint purchase One investment property (rented out)	Primary degree	Higher professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	Two previous relationships. Joe's last relationship was a cohabitation relationship and he bought an apartment with his ex-partner.	None	Parents separated, a year before being interviewed
Sandra	30 years old	Two years	Four months	Yes, joint purchase Two investment properties, (rented out)	Primary degree	Own account worker Self-employed	Occasional	Two previous relationships	None	n/a

Couple 17 – Peter and Michelle

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Peter	29 years old	Nine and a half years	Three years	Yes, joint purchase with Michelle	Third level (non-degree) Professional qualification	Lower professional Full-time contract work	Occasional	One previous relationship	Michelle has a child from a previous relationship, who has always lived with her and Peter. They also have a child together.	n/a
Michelle	Not available for interview									

Couple 18 – Malcolm and Sorcha

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together and engagement	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Malcolm	25 years old	Four years	Living together for just over two years	Renting	Postgraduate course	Higher professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	Two previous relationships	None	n/a
Sorcha	25 years old	Four years	Living together for just over two years	Renting	Postgraduate course	Higher professional Full-time permanent work	Occasional	Two previous relationships	None	n/a

Couple 19 – Damien and Louise

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Living together	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Damien	30 years old	Eight years	Seven years	Yes, joint purchase	Post Leaving Certificate course	Non-manual Full-time permanent work	Occasional	One previous relationship	None	n/a
Louise	26years old	Eight years	Seven years	Yes, joint purchase	Leaving Certificate	Skilled manual Full-time contract work	Occasional	Two previous relationships	None	n/a

Appendix C Couples who married with no premarital cohabitation experience

Couple 20 – Daniel and Maura

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Marriage	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Daniel	25 years old	Two years	Engaged a few months after meeting Married within a year of meeting	Renting	Leaving Cert standard of education	Unskilled manual Part-time work Volunteering work	Regular	Two previous relationships	None	n/a
Maura	24 years old	Two years	As above	Renting	Third level qualification (non-degree)	Lower professional Not working for health reasons Volunteering work	Regular	Two previous relationships	None	n/a

Couple 21 – Darren and Valerie

Name	Age	Length of relationship	Marriage	Home owner	Highest educational attainment	Socio economic group and work status	Religious attendance	Previous relationship history	Children	Other significant event
Darren	39 years old	Two years, although they know each other for some time before	Engaged a few months later and married within a year of meeting	Valerie moved into Darren's house after their wedding	Leaving Certificate standard of education	Skilled manual Self-employed Working part-time Volunteering work	Regular	Four previous relationships	None	n/a
Valerie	24 years old	As above	As above	As above	Primary degree	Unskilled manual Working part-time Volunteering work	Regular	Two previous relationships	None	n/a

Appendix D Event History Calendar

Appendix E

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, MAYNOOTH
MAYNOOTH, CO. KILDARE, IRELAND

RESEARCH & GRADUATE STUDIES
Dr Carol Barrett
Enterprise Officer.

Ms Ashling Jackson
Department of Sociology
NUI Maynooth



NUI MAYNOOTH
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

14 February 2007

RE: Application for Ethical Approval for a project entitled:
**“The re-sequencing of serious heterosexual relationship trajectories in Ireland: Pre-marital
co-habitation and/or marriage. Athlone as a case study.”**

Dear Ashling,

The Ethics Committee evaluated the above project for ethical approval and we would like to
inform you that ethical approval has been granted.

With kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carol Barrett', written over a horizontal line.

Dr Carol Barrett
Secretary to the Ethics Committee

Appendix F

Consent Form

Title of Research Project: The re-sequencing of serious heterosexual relationship trajectories in Ireland: Pre-marital co-habitation and/or marriage. Athlone as a case study.

Researcher Name: Ashling Jackson **Tel:** 090 6471815

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Jane Gray, Senior Lecturer, National University of Ireland, Maynooth. **Tel:** 01 708 3596

The **purpose** of the research is to find out how people's relationships develop over time, and affect their choices about cohabitation and/or marriage.

If you agree to participate in this research project, you will take part in an in-depth interview. This interview will focus on the stages of development your relationship has gone through and how your relationship has moved from one stage to the next. It will last for one hour to an hour and a half.

The information gathered will be used by the researcher for the purposes of completing her PhD dissertation, and as the basis for published academic scholarship. However, all the information you provide will be treated as strictly confidential. This means that you will not personally be identifiable in any public dissemination. False names and place-names will be used to protect your confidentiality. All data from interviews (tapes/transcripts) will be kept in a locked cabinet. Data are available to you on request at any time (tapes/transcripts).

You may withdraw from the study at any time or up until the work is published.

Please note that interviews do not constitute any kind of counselling.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given here have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at pgdean@nuim or 01 7086018. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

I agree to participate in the study under the terms outlined above:

Signature: _____ Date: _____