Consensual Partering in New Zealand: Evidence from Three Censuses

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Abstract

Since the mid-1960s consensual partnering, or in the parlance perhaps familiar to New Zealanders, living in de facto relationships, has become increasingly common throughout Northern and Western Europe, North America and Australasia. While New Zealand has been slower than other countries to gather survey data on this phenomenon, it does have data from the 1981, 1986 and 1991 Censuses of Population. These data are analysed, attention being paid to 1981-91 trends in consensual partnering by age, sex, major ethnic group and urban/rural residence, and to 1991 differentials in the propensity to be living in de facto unions by legal marital status, ethnicity (a more refined classification), religion, labour force status and level of education.

CONSENSUAL PARTNERING IN NEW ZEALAND: EVIDENCE FROM THREE CENSUSES

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INTRODUCTION

Consensual partnering, cohabitation or, in the terminology likely to be most familiar to New Zealanders, living in a de facto relationship has become increasingly common in the More Developed Countries (MDCs) since the mid-1960s (Carmichael, 1995). Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa (1986) (see also van de Kaa, 1987, 1994; Lesthaeghe, 1992) regard the trend as one of the principal manifestations of a 'second demographic transition' in the MDCs; a series of demographic developments which, underpinned by high living standards, unprecedentedly reliable contraception (frequently supported by readily accessible abortion) and increased economic independence for women, allegedly reflect a major shift in societal values towards greater individualism, secularism and post-materialism.1 Answering criticism of the attributing of these developments to 'individualistic tendencies' (Cliquel, 1991), Lesthaeghe (1992: 4) asserts the key concept to be 'individual autonomy', or 'individual freedom of choice' and the non-acceptance of external authority or morality. While allowing that this increased during the first demographic transition, he contends that it did so only 'very quietly', the 'act of dissent' (adoption of contraception) being very private. What distinguishes the current transition is the far more public and, in confronting all forms of institutional authority, pervasive assertion of individual autonomy, and openly living together unmarried has been a prominent dimension of this.

1 The author is indebted to Mansoor Khawaja, Chief Demographer, Statistics New Zealand for patience beyond the call of duty in meeting requests for data and answering queries related to data used in this paper.

2 The concept of post-materialism was advanced by Inglehart (1977). Post-materialist values develop when 'a rising level of affluence ... removes worries about satisfying basic material needs such as food and shelter. ... the emphasis shifts from survival to satisfaction, from being to having; and an ideology stressing personal fulfilment becomes dominant' (Cherlin, 1990: 152).
The rise of consensual partnering in New Zealand has received limited attention. Certainly no survey comparable to several undertaken in Australia, Canada, the US and a range of North and West European countries has yet investigated the phenomenon (see Carmichael (1995: Table 1) for a summary of evidence yielded by these surveys), although work in progress at the Population Studies Centre, University of Waikato may shortly do so. The one previous New Zealand study (Carmichael, 1984) used a then novel data source; marriage registration records, which allowed comparison of the addresses of couples applying for marriage licences. Searches of the 1961 and 1976 New Zealand Marriage Registers revealed that the percentage of marriages in which bride and groom were premaritally coresident had increased from between 10 and 15 at the earlier date to between 29 and 32 at the later date, the lower limits of these ranges capturing cases where addresses were identical down to house number, and the upper limits adding those with identical, but less precise, addresses. For brides marrying for the first time the increase was from between 8 and 12 to between 25 and 28 per cent (grooms 8-13 to 25-28 per cent), while for brides remarrying following divorce it was from between 34 and 42 to between 58 and 64 per cent (grooms 27-35 to 57-62 per cent). Levels of co-residence at marriage and 1961-76 changes therein also were examined by age, age within marital status categories, relative marital status of bride and groom, relative marital status and age, relative age of bride and groom, and relative age and both marital status and relative marital status.

Through a laggard in mounting survey research, New Zealand was among the first countries to attempt to gather census data on consensual partnering. It introduced a question in 1981, and also asked about consensual unions in 1986 and 1991. This paper analyses data from these three censuses, and especially from the 1991 Census.

APPROACHES TO DATA COLLECTION

The three New Zealand censuses that have sought to monitor consensual unions have used different questions. The 1961 question was an adjunct to the marital status question. Part A of this question asked respondents to indicate their marital status by ticking the relevant box;

Part B then asked for another box to be ticked If living in a de facto relationship (as husband/wife) (upper case in original). This approach had two, possibly three, flaws. First, it discouraged the consensually partnered from indicating their legal marital status in addition to their de facto status. It was not clear that two responses were required; instructions on how to complete the census 'Personal Questionnaire' made no reference to this question; and consequently almost 48 per cent of those who indicated that they were living in a de facto relationship failed to specify a marital status. It is therefore impossible to analyse the formal marital statuses of the consensually partnered, although the youth of members of this group who failed to specify marital status compared to those who did specify it suggests that they were disproportionately 'Never married'.

The second problem in 1981 was the parenthetic 'as husband/wife'. A considerable body of evidence indicates that consensual unions often are characterized by less than marriage-like commitment (see, for example, Hoem, 1988; Leridon, 1990; Rindfuss and VanderHeiden, 1980; Bumpass et al., 1991), and any suggestion in the wording of a question that a relationship needs to be perceived as a form of marriage, or as marriage-like, to be relevant runs the risk of seriously underestimating the extent of consensual partnering. How real this risk is is difficult to estimate; it depends on how widely those who would acknowledge living in a de facto relationship baulk at the further suggestion of that relationship being a form of marriage.

The third, more tentative, problem with the 1981 question is linked to the first. Some consensual unions are, very definitely, perceived to be marriages in all but legal detail, and in that circumstance sensitivity to perceived societal disapproval of consensual partnering and/or a desire to confer on it an appropriate level of commitment is apt to see the relationship 'misrepresented' as a formal marriage. The scope for confusion as to whether one or two answers were called for in 1981 may have encouraged such 'misrepresentation'.

3 This phrase is not quite accurate in that one of the marital status options was 'Married but permanently separated', which is not a legal status but a subcategory of a legal status.

4 An analysis of the quality of data on de facto couples obtained at the 1986 Australian Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1991) found an incidence of reporting a 'husband/wife' relationship within the household in conjunction with a marital status other than 'married' that was 8 per cent of the number of individuals who reported a 'de facto partner' relationship together with such a marital status. Those in the former group were disproportionately older.
At the 1986 Census respondents were asked separately 'What are your living arrangements?' and 'What is your present marital status?'. Two response options for the former question were 'Living with legal husband or wife' and 'Living with a partner as a couple (de facto marriage)' (italics in original). Asking separately numbered questions greatly reduced non-response to the marital status question among those acknowledging de facto relationships (to less than 2 per cent), but the inference that such relationships should be perceived as forms of 'marriage' remained, if arguably in a milder form. In 1991 separate questions were persisted with, but the 'living arrangements' question became more detailed. A multiple response question asked 'Who are the persons that usually live in the same dwelling as you?'; two response options being 'My husband/wife' and 'My partner (such as de facto spouse, boyfriend)' (italics in original). Finally there was recognition that consensual unions might involve less than marriage-like commitment. Conceivably using the word 'boyfriend' could have over-corrected; a boyfriend or girlfriend could be co-resident (perhaps in the parental household of one party) without sharing sleeping quarters with the respondent, in which case many definitions of 'consensual union' would not be satisfied. In this circumstance the key would be whether the boyfriend or girlfriend was perceived to be a 'partner'. The ideal question is elusive.

CENSUS TRENDS IN CONSENSUAL PARTNERING

Trends by Age and Sex

Figure 1 plots, by sex, percentages of successive age groups recorded as living in de facto unions in 1981, 1986 and 1991. Except at ages 15-19, patterns of persistent increase across the decade are evident. For males, 20-24 year-olds (marginally) recorded the peak level of consensual partnering in 1981, but by 1991 25-29 was the age group in which the lifestyle was most common, with one in seven men (14.2 per cent) living in de facto unions. Among women, age group 20-24 was at all three censuses the main cohabiting age group; the ratio of cohabiters having risen from one in ten (10.1 per cent) to one in six (15.9 per cent) over the decade studied. Lower percentages of both sexes in de facto unions at ages 15-19 in 1986 and male, men among them being at all ages much more likely to claim to be 'never married', and much less likely to claim to be 'separated', than women.

than in either 1981 or 1991 may well reflect a combination of the particularly difficult economic circumstances to which radical economic reforms implemented in the years following the 1984 election gave rise, and the explicit admission of less committed (boyfriend/girlfriend)
relationships by the form of question used in 1991. The former, actually more severe by 1991 than they were in 1986, must have made setting up independent households especially difficult for the very young, but the latter seems likely to have admitted to the ranks of the consensually partnered couples who, had the 1986 question been used again, would not have identified as living in de facto relationships.

In Figure 2 the prevalence of consensual partnering is examined relative to that of total (consensual plus marital) partnering. At all ages and for both sexes the propensity to cohabit among those living in unions rose through the 1980s, in several instances more than doubling. Thus percentages of men aged 20-24, 25-29 and 30-34 in unions who were in de facto unions rose from 28.4 to 58.6, 11.7 to 27.2 and 7.2 to 14.8 during 1981-91, corresponding increases for women being from 19.8 to 45.2, 8.9 to 20.5 and 5.8 to 11.5 per cent. Predictably, for men and women alike, the propensity to be in a consensual union if in any union was a negative function of age at all three censuses. By 1991 consensual partnering was closing in on 90 per cent monopolies of total partnering among the minorities of 15-19 year-old males and females who were in unions. And given that only 1.8 per cent of males and 4.9 per cent of females were in de facto unions, prevalences of formal marriage at these ages were very low indeed.

At the 1971 Census 8.6 per cent of females aged 15-19 had ever married; by 1991 the figure was 1.1 per cent. At the height of the post-war marriage boom in the early 1970s 34 per cent of New Zealand females married before reaching their twentieth birthdays (Carmichael, 1982); by 1993 the figure was less than 3 per cent.

Trends by Major Ethnic Group
Refinement of this analysis by major ethnic group produces some intriguing results, but it is necessary to preface discussion by noting that the basis of ethnic classification of the New Zealand population was not uniform over the 1981, 1986 and 1991 Censuses. In 1981 'ethnic origin' was based on blood fraction; the Maori 'ethnic group' comprised persons who were 50 per cent or more New Zealand Maori, while the population of Maori 'descend' added those

* The qualifier 'New Zealand' before 'Maori' is needed to distinguish New Zealand Maori from Cook Island Maori. New Zealand Maori are the indigenous inhabitants of New Zealand.
except that persons with 50/50 Pacific Island and Maori origin were classified ‘Maori’. In 1986
the ‘solely New Zealand Maori’ population consisted of respondents who ticked only ‘New
Zealand Maori’ when asked ‘What is your ethnic origin?’, the population of Maori ‘origin or
descent’ including in addition those who ticked ‘New Zealand Maori’ in combination with one or
more other response options. ‘Sole’ and ‘origin or descent’ Pacific Island populations were
similarly defined, with persons of mixed Maori and Pacific Island origin being classified to both
‘origin or descent’ populations. Identical principles were applied in 1991 in defining the ‘sole’
New Zealand Maori and Pacific Island populations, and the broader New Zealand Maori and
Pacific Island ‘ethnic groups’, but the ‘tick box’ question asked was ‘Which ethnic group do you
belong to?’ This represented a move away from the notion of biological descent to one of
ethnic identity. Note, too, that between 1981 and 1986 data on consensual partnering by
Pacific Islanders change from a ‘Pacific Island Polynesian’ to a ‘Pacific Island’ base. The latter
population aged 15 and older was about 4 per cent larger than the former on an ‘origin or
descent’ basis in 1986, the difference consisting mainly of persons of Fijian ethnic origin.

Data for Maori presented hereafter use the broader ‘descent’, ‘origin or descent’ and ‘ethnic
group’ concepts employed in 1981, 1986 and 1991, respectively. Numbers of persons aged 15
and older enumerated in these populations were 222,200, 247,000 and 271,800,
respectively, figures which, at least superficially, do not ring alarm bells over intercensal
comparability, although there is no way of measuring degrees of comparability. In the
absence of any alternative, data for Pacific Islanders use the narrow ‘at least 50 per cent
blood fraction’ concept in 1981, then the broader ‘origin or descent’ and ‘ethnic group’
concepts in 1986 and 1991. Comparability between 1981 and the two later dates thus is
particularly suspect because of the addition at the latter (i) of persons with more marginal
degrees of Pacific Island ethnic origin or affiliation, (ii) of those of mixed Pacific Island and
Maori ethnicity who formerly were classified only as ‘Maori’, and (iii) of those of non-
Polynesian Pacific Island ethnicity. At all three dates the non-Maori/Pacific Island group is an
overwhelmingly Pakeha (European) residual encompassing anyone outside the other two
groups as defined for the relevant year who answered the ethnic origin/identity question.

Carmichael (1984) demonstrated using 1981 Census data that Maori were much more likely
than either Pacific Islanders (who formed an intermediate group) or the non-Maori/Pacific
Island majority of the population to live in de facto unions at all ages. Though having widely
adopted Pakeha marriage forms, Maori are culturally well attuned to consensual partnering.
McEwen (cited by Interdepartmental Committee on Ex-nuptial Births, 1969: 20-21) writes of
Maori ‘customary’ marriage:

The old Maori society had no formal marriage. All that was necessary to constitute a
marriage was an intention by the parties to live together and public acceptance of the
situation. . . . A formal divorce was unknown to Maori society and it is apparent that even
today it is looked upon as a quite superfluous European practice. Normally if a marriage is
unsuccesful the parties simply separate and take another partner.

Phillips (1966: 172) identifies ‘customary’ marriage as one of three traditional forms of Maori
marriage which was ‘common among the lower classes’, while Metge (1976: 139) observes
that ‘Modern Maoris . . . neither condemn nor ostracize couples who are not legally married . . .
[arguing] that if Pakehas had not introduced registration, de facto unions would be valid by
Maori standards.’ This cultural background rendered Maori prone to cohabit even when to do
so was held by most Pakeha to be the height of immorality, and Figure 3 confirms that at all
ages, in 1986 and 1991 as well as in 1981, Maori more often lived in consensual unions than
either Pacific Islanders or the rest of the population. What are interesting in Figure 3,
however, are the different trends in consensual partnering for the three ethnic groups. The
majority non-Maori/Pacific Island population clearly has been mainly responsible for the rising
age-specific incidences of cohabitation shown in Figure 1, the strength of the trend among
males aged 25-29 largely accounting for this age group having by 1991 emerged as the
overall peak age group for consensual partnering by men. Among Maori and Pacific Islanders
percentages cohabiting at ages 15-19 and 20-24 actually declined during the 1980s, despite
the census question asked in 1991 conveying a broader concept of consensual partnering. At

This immigrant, or of immigrant origin, ethnic group comprised 4 per cent of the population
aged 15 and older at the 1991 Census. It was predominantly (81 per cent) at those ages
Samoa, with Cook Island Maori (22 per cent) and Tonga (13 per cent) the next largest
groups, followed by Niueans (8 per cent), Fijians (3 per cent) and Tokelauans (2 per cent).
New Zealand Maoris at the 1991 Census comprised 11 per cent of the population aged 15 and
older.
Figure 3
Percentages of Major Ethnic Groups Living in De Facto Unions by Age and Sex 1981-1991

Non-Maori/Pacific Island Males

Non-Maori/Pacific Island Females

Maori Males

Maori Females

Pacific Island Males

Pacific Island Females
ages 25-29 trends for males in these two groups and for Pacific Island females are confused, although increasing trends are evident for Maori females aged 25-34, Maori males aged 30-39, Pacific Island females aged 30-34 and Pacific Island males aged 35-39. At ages 40 and older little or no change generally is evident.

When levels of consensual partnering among those in either marital or consensual unions are plotted by age and sex (Figure 4), the anticipated increasing trends for the non-Maori/Pacific Island group emerge. At ages 20-24 the percentages in unions who were in de facto unions rose from 24 to 57 (males) and from 17 to 43 (females) between 1981 and 1991; at ages 25-29 the increments were from 10 to 25 per cent and from 8 to 18 per cent, respectively. Among Maori the incidence of consensual partnering among those in unions was at all ages, for both sexes, and at all three censuses higher than for either of the other two ethnic groups. What is more notable, though, is that other than at more advanced ages it, too, consistently increased during 1981-91. Age group 20-24 is especially interesting: the percentage of Maori males living in consensual unions fell from 22 to 17, but the percentage of Maori men in unions who were consensually partnered rose from 48 to 71; likewise the percentage of Maori females in de facto relationships fell from 22 to 18, but the percentage their unions formed of all unions attributable to the cohort increased from 39 to 63. Declines in the incidences of consensual partnering obviously occurred in conjunction with even steeper declines in marital partnering: percentages of 20-24 year-old Maori currently married fell over the decade from 24 to 7 (males) and from 34 to 12 (females).

Only slightly less spectacular declines in marital partnering at ages 20-24 occurred among the non-Maori/Pacific Island group as well; among males the percentage married fell from 21 in 1981 to 8 in 1991, and among females from 42 to 21. Trends away from marriage at these ages have been standard across the MOCs, and undoubtedly forces producing them elsewhere also operated in New Zealand and among Pakeha and Maori alike. But the period 1981-91 was also one of particular economic turmoil in New Zealand as, following the 1984 election, 'the most comprehensive free market reform programme ever undertaken by an OECD country' (Shirley, 1993: 1) was launched. The result was widespread job shedding and rapidly rising unemployment. Unemployment rates and percentages of total population unemployed calculated by Jackson (1994) for Pakeha, Maori and Pacific islanders aged 15-19 through 30-34 by sex at the censuses of 1981, 1986 and 1991 are shown in Table 1.7 Trends evident almost certainly are conservative, the definition of 'unemployed' becoming more rigorous over time and indices probably failing to capture a larger component of discouraged workers in 1991 than in 1981. It is nonetheless clear that the economic capacity of young New Zealanders to form independent households, and to commit to formal marriage was significantly impaired over this decade, and that Maori, concentrated at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, were greater victims of this situation than Pakeha. It is conceivable that the declines in the proportions of Maori living in de facto unions at ages 15-19 and 20-24, and the somewhat irregular or restrained increments at ages 25-29 and 30-34, were largely products of this unfavourable economic climate.

Discussion in the previous two paragraphs has ignored those of Pacific Island ethnicity. Patterns of change revealed for this group by Figures 3 and 4 are in some respects not dissimilar to, but in others notably different from, those for the Maori population, with which it shares the distinction of having been more severely adversely affected by economic restructuring than the Pakeha population (Table 1). Interpretation of these trends requires the changing internal ethnic composition of the Pacific island population to be taken into account. Those of Pacific Island ethnicity in New Zealand fall into air major subgroups: Samoans, Cook Island Maori, Tongans, Niueans, Tokelauans and Fijians. At the 1991 Census, propensity of members of these groups aged 15 and older to be living in de facto unions were quite variable, probably reflecting differences in religiosity. At the high end of the range were Cook Island Maori, among whom 12.1 per cent of males and 10.9 per cent of females aged 15 and older were consensually partnered, and Niueans, with figures of 10.8 and 8.8 per cent respectively. At the low end, just 4.3 and 2.5 per cent of Tongan males and females aged 15 or older were

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7 Unemployment rates shown for 1981 are in fact a revised set made available to the author by Mo Jackson which use more satisfactory denominators than those presented in her thesis.
Figure 4
Percentages of Major Ethnic Groups Living in Unions Living in De Facto Unions by Age and Sex 1981-1991

Non-Maori/Pacific Island Males

Maori Males

Pacific Island Males

Non-Maori/Pacific Island Females

Maori Females

Pacific Island Females
### Table 1


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Unemployment rates

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Source: Jackson (1994; Tables 7.3 and 7.4); 1981 unemployment rates are revisions of those in Table 7.3 kindly made available by Ms Jackson.

range. These comparisons are not standardized for age, but data shortly to be presented show that standardization does not alter the basic conclusion that Cook Islanders and Niueans are distinctly more inclined to cohabit than Tongans and Samoans. Over all ages 21.1 and 23.9 per cent of the former two groups, but only 8.7 and 10.7 per cent of the latter two, claimed to have no religion, objected to answering the religion question, or failed to answer it at the 1991 Census. These are not ideal measures of religiosity (or lack of it), since obtaining a religious affiliation and practicing a religion are two different things, but they are suggestive of the existence of significant differentials in religiosity parallel to those in consensual partnering.

Figure 5 plots the internal ethnic compositions of the 15-19 through 35-39 age groups for New Zealand residents of Pacific Island ethnic origin at the 1981, 1986 and 1991 Censuses. The two youngest age groups are marked by substantial increases in the importance of Samoans and Tongans between 1981 and 1991, and compensating declines in the importance of Cook Island Maori in particular, but also Niueans. These changes in ethnic composition will have restrained any underlying trend to increased consensual partnering among Pacific Islanders.

A particularly sharp increase in the proportion of 20-24 year-olds who were Tongan between 1986 and 1991 (Figure 5) could have been a major factor in 1986-91 declines in consensual partnering among Pacific Islanders surpassing declines for the Maori population in that age group (Figure 3). It could also be the major reason why, for the same age group, Pacific Islanders stood apart from both Maori and Non-Maori/Pacific Islanders in recording a decrease, rather than a substantial increase, during 1986-91 in the propensity to be living in a de facto union if in a union at all (Figure 4).

At ages 25-29 Pacific Islanders first increased, then decreased their level of consensual partnering during 1981-86 and 1986-91 (Figure 3), with the prevalence of consensual unions among all unions rising then falling slightly (Figure 4). The first of these intercensal periods saw Cook Island and Niuean representation in the age group rise, and Tongan and Samoan representation fall (Figure 5), whereas the second brought a sizeable boost to the Tongan share of the age group, offset by Cook Island and Niuean shares returning to 1981 levels.
Again trends in internal ethnic composition are consistent with having helped produce those in consensual partnering, the Tongan factor once more possibly crucial in preventing proportions of men and women in unions who were in de facto unions from rising during 1986-91. Age group 30-34 is notable for Cook Island Maori and Niuean representation having increased during the 1980s (Figure 5). Tongan representation also rose, Samoans compensating for all three subgroups. A degree of cancelling between the changing representation of groups with higher and lower propensities to cohabit is evident (increased proportions of Cook Islanders and Tongans, for example, might have offset each other), and underlying trends to higher levels of consensual partnering and higher proportions of de facto unions among all unions tend to show through, although more clearly for females than for males (Figures 3 and 4).

By 35-39 years of age trends in consensual partnering are being complicated by changing patterns of marital breakdown. Contamination of 1981 Census marital status data by the high non-response among those acknowledging de facto unions precludes a meaningful comparison of percentages separated or divorced at that date and in 1986, but between 1986 and 1991 the prevalence of those marital statuses among Pacific Island males and females aged 35-39 rose from 8.4 to 10.3 per cent and from 10.9 to 14.2 per cent, respectively. This trend represents a bias toward higher levels of consensual partnering and higher proportions of consensual unions among all unions in this age group, but trends in internal ethnic composition mainly were a countervailing force (a 1981-86 decline in the proportion who were Cook Island Maori and a consistent increase in the proportion who were Tongan - see Figure 5). Trends for the age group shown in Figures 3 and 4, which indicate consistent increase on both measures of the prevalence of de facto unions for males but not for females, are the net result of the interplay of these forces, a climate increasingly accepting of cohabitation and the economic realities of the period.

Trends by Urban-rural Residence

The other variable by which data on consensual partnering are available across the 1981, 1986 and 1991 Censuses is urban-rural residence. Age-standardized percentages of females
Table 2
Unstandardized and Age-standardized Percentages of Persons Aged 15 and Older Living in

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common in Minor Urban Areas. This change could reflect previously noted difficult economic
circumstances. Small urban localities may have been especially hard hit, heightening the
associated disincentive to marriage and risk of marital breakdown and informal repartnering.
Significantly also, two quinquennia in which population growth, at 3.2 and 5.6 per cent, had
decisively outstripped that in ‘Main’ and ‘Secondary’ urban areas were followed during
1986-91 by a 1.3 per cent decline, including a 12 per cent fall in the number of 20-29-year-
olds. Out-migration in search of employment in this peak cohabitation age group may have
been selective of single persons (and hence non-cohabitants), while lower living costs may also
have attracted some chronically unemployed, and perhaps in particular cohabitation-prone
Maori. Among females (Table 2), living in a de facto union was in 1981, as among males,
most common among residents of Main Urban Areas followed by those of Minor Urban Areas.
By 1991, however, residents of Rural Areas followed by those of Minor Urban Areas led the
way, consolidating that status by 1991. This finding runs counter to the supposed
conservatism of rural populations, but to be consensually partnered is a minority status, and
the marginal extent of rural-urban differentials does not justify the investment in detailed data
that would be needed to pursue it.

ASPECTS OF CONSENSUAL PARTNERING IN 1991

Differentials by Marital Status

Those who live in consensual unions are not currently married and living with their husbands
or wives; they are never married, separated from legal spouses, divorced or widowed. At the
1991 Census 64 per cent of New Zealanders living in de facto unions had never married, 12
per cent were separated, 18 per cent were divorced and 2 per cent were widowed. Another 3
per cent claimed to be in first marriages and fewer than 1 per cent to be in second or higher
order marriages. These might have been respondents who were never married or separated/divorced/widowed, but perceived their de facto unions to be 'marriages', or they could have
been people who acknowledged their legal marital status when in fact separated, the latter not
being a legal marital status.
Figure 6 plots, by age and sex, levels of consensual partnering in the four marital status groups (assuming the 'married' and 'remarried' groups are intended to capture those living with legal spouses) to which the consensually partnered logically might belong. Discounting age group 15-19 at which divorce is virtually non-existent (since most marriages occur at its upper end and the legal process of divorce occupies in excess of two years under New Zealand law), the most prominent feature of Figure 6 is that the divorced were at all ages the most likely to be cohabiting. The extent to which their prevalence of consensual partnering exceeded that among the separated perhaps is initially a little surprising, but there are several plausible explanations for it. First, separation occurs earlier in the marital dissolution process, so that the divorced had had longer post-separation in which to form de facto relationships. Second, the desire to re-partner, or the reality of having done so, could generate some urgency over formalizing the end of a previous marriage, not least so that matters of property distribution, maintenance obligations and entitlements, and custody and access can be settled. Third, there is little doubt that these days many whose first marriages founder are extremely wary of formal remarriage, preferring to re-partner consensually on an ongoing basis. The consensual unions of longer duration to which those holding such views tend to be party are apt to be associated with being divorced rather than with being separated, simply because, with the passage of time following marital breakdown, divorce becomes more likely and thereafter is an ongoing legal status. Separation, by contrast, tends to be a transient status. Finally, and more speculatively, it is possible that consensual re-partnering sometimes heightens the resolve of an estranged legal spouse to initiate divorce proceedings.

Gender differentials in the age pattern of the prevalence of consensual partnering among the divorced and in prevalence levels at particular ages are of some interest. The incidence of consensual partnering among divorced females peaks at ages 25-29 (Figure 6), whereas for men, who except at these ages (marginally) and at ages 20-24 were the more likely to live in de facto unions if divorced at all ages, the rather less pronounced peak occurs at ages 35-39. Female divorcees aged in their twenties are more likely than older ones to be childless and therefore unencumbered in a re-partnering market that still includes, in addition to men whose first marriages also have broken down, a good selection of never married males of appropriate age and perhaps superior prospects (having when younger concentrated on their educations and/or careers). At older ages the reality that women typically have the custody of children of
dissolved marriages impairs both their ability to mix in circumstances that might lead to the formation of new unions and their attractiveness as partners. It also complicates the repartnering process by introducing to it a desire to see that one's children's as well as one's own interests are served. Moreover, being left with children may embitter and/or mean dependence on welfare income for which repartnering terminates eligibility, both circumstances promoting circumspection in forming new relationships.

The much lower incidence of cohabitation among divorced men than among divorced women aged 20-24 (Figure 6) may be partly an artefact of the former tending to be more recently divorced. Older male than female ages at marriage perhaps give rise to divorces at the upper end of the age range followed by rapid movement into the next older age group, so that on average male divorcees aged 20-24 (only about a quarter as numerous as females) have had less time in which to establish new relationships. Were economic incapacity a significant factor leading to youthful divorce that, too, might have impaired men's repartnering. And the norm that men and women usually seek partners respectively younger and older than themselves could also mean, for the 20-24 age group, that the former faced a more restricted repartnering market; by the early 1990s women aged in their early twenties generally were not anxious to assume a 'likely' role. By ages 35-39, in contrast, male divorcees were almost a third more likely to have repartnered consensually than female divorcees. They were far less often embittered with children, probably less disillusioned with conjugal life, and no doubt keen, in many instances, to regain domestic services lost upon marital breakdown. Moreover, again because of the normative conjugal age difference, they had access to a larger pool of potential partners who had never married and thus (i) had not been discouraged by previous experience from partnering and (ii) did not complicate matters by having children from previous relationships.

Particularly for females, there was rather less variability by age in proportions of separated than of divorced persons who were cohabiting in 1991. Percentages of separated females living in de facto unions ranged from 15.0 to only 17.2 for age groups 20-24 through 40-49 (Figure 6). With separation generally a temporary phase prior to divorce whose duration may usually not greatly exceed the legally prescribed minimum (two years), and acknowledging that consensual repartnering while separated need not coincide with the event of separation, this might hint that a fairly constant proportion of marital breakdowns at these ages involved the formation of a new relationship by the wife. At older ages (50-59 and 60+), levels of consensual partnering among the separated and divorced were more nearly equal than at younger ages. A decreased urgency to resort to the formality of divorce following separation may be indicated, with the result that mean periods elapsed since separation, and hence opportunities to repartner, for the two marital status groups are more similar. A second possibility is that at these ages the propensity to repartner informally is rather low where formation of a new relationship was not the immediate cause of separation. Personal values may tend to preclude it; age may be seen as a barrier to actively seeking a new partner; and there may be a tendency to replace the companionship of the former spouse with that of adult children and their families. With reference to the possible 'decreased urgency to resort to the formality of divorce', several potential reasons can be listed. Those who separate when older are less likely to have children of an age that matters of custody, access and maintenance encourage rapid recourse to the courts, and hopes of reconciliation may linger longer where marriages of longer duration are disrupted. Lower expectations of being able to repartner and perhaps a greater ability to negotiate the division of property (given the amount of assets accumulated over lengthy marriages, limited need to provide for the continued upbringing of children and, conceivably, mutual respect derived from extended durations of marriage) may also slow progress toward formal divorce.

Age patterns of consensual partnering among the never married, like those among the divorced, peak at different ages for men and women in Figure 6. For women the highest incidence of de facto unions occurs at ages 25-29, at a level slightly higher (26.7 compared to 24.6 per cent) than the peak for men at ages 30-34. This difference in age patterns reflects men's typically being older than women when first entering conjugal unions, but in 1991 median ages at first marriage in both cases fell in the age group below that in which the
propensity of the never married to be consensually partnered was highest (27.0 years for males and 24.8 years for females). This makes sense in that consensual partnering would be expected to delay marriage. Hence never married males aged 30-34 and never married females aged 25-29 should include disproportionate numbers of later marriers, many of whom were deferring marriage by cohabiting. Interestingly, though, the never married at older ages do not become increasingly a residue who have opted for living in de facto unions on an ongoing basis. As age increases that residue consists ever more of non-cohabiters; almost certainly mainly people who shunned or were shunned by matrimony, although some will be former cohabiters for whom union dissolution did not mean divorce, or death of a partner did not mean widowhood.

The final group in Figure 6 to be considered are the widowed. Above age 25 widowers were more likely than widows of similar age to live in de facto unions, differences being greatest at ages 35-39, 40-49 and 50-59. It is easy to imagine some widowers being keen to replace the domestic skills of a deceased spouse, and this may be easier when children are past the preschool ages. The substantially higher incidence of cohabitation among 20-24 year-old widows than widowers is based on small numbers of cases, but could well parallel the different levels of cohabitation among divorced women and men at the same ages in reflecting differential exposure to the risk of repartnering. The likelihood is that widowers in this age group had been older than widows when marrying, and hence when they were widowed. Consequently they had on average spent less time in the widowed state and had had less time to mourn for a reasonable period before seeking to repartner.

Ethnic Differentials

Trends and differentials in levels of consensual partnering among the Maori, Pacific Island and Non-Maori/Pacific Island populations over the period 1981-91 already have been discussed, but for 1991 a more refined classification of the population living in de facto unions by ethnic origin is available. Figure 7 shows age-standardized percentages of male and female ethnic populations aged 15 and older who were living in such unions, standardization having been
carried out indirectly using as standard schedules of age-specific percentages living in de facto relationships those for New Zealand Europeans of the relevant sex.

One thing Figure 7 does is to reaffirm the disparate levels of consensual partnering within the broader 'Pacific Island' ethnic group. Among males Cook Islanders and Niueans rate in the top four of 47 ethnic categories, while Tongans and Samoans both rate well below the New Zealand European reference population. Among females what stands out is how near the bottom of the rank ordering Tongans in particular, and to a lesser extent Samoans, rate, while Cook Islanders and Niueans rank well above the reference population without quite being in the top echelon of cohabitators.

Swedes, a small group in New Zealand, stand apart as the most likely ethnic group to have been consensually partnered, regardless of sex. Sweden's leading status, together with Denmark, in the displacement of marriage by informal cohabitation is widely recognized, and there appears to have been some transfer of those values to New Zealand. The obvious question is, 'Why do not persons of Danish ethnic origin stand out in Figure 7 as those of Swedish origin do?' The answer, almost certainly, is that the former's links with Denmark were more distant and lacking in personal experience of contemporary social trends there than were the latter's with Sweden. While 59 per cent of persons of Swedish origin aged 15 and older were aged under 40 in 1991, only 38 per cent of persons of Danish origin were. This undoubtedly means that immigrants of Danish origin had been resident in New Zealand for longer, and more importantly that those in the age groups where de facto unions are most common had more often arrived as children and grown up in New Zealand. In addition, persons of Danish origin were the more likely to have grown up in New Zealand by virtue of being born in New Zealand.

Besides those already mentioned and Maori, other ethnic groups standing out for their high propensities to live in de facto unions are Australians and several European groups - Swiss, Germans, Australians, French and Spanish and French females. One or two differences by sex in the rankings of particular groups in Figure 7 are striking. While females of Spanish and French origin rank just below, albeit well behind, those of Swedish origin, their male counterparts rank respectively barely above the New Zealand European reference population and only a little higher than that. Neither difference, however, matches that between Italian males, who ranked seventh, and Italian females, who ranked twenty-seventh. Inspection of the raw data suggests that it is accounted for principally by a willingness of Italian males aged 40 or older to cohabit, presumably following marital dissolution, whereas almost no Italian women in this age group were consensually partnered. Another group to rank very differently for men and women were Thais, who were well up the female ranking at thirteenth, but well down the male one at thirty-fifth. There were nearly two-and-a-half times as many Thai females as males aged 15 and older resident in New Zealand in 1991, the former being heavily concentrated at the ages at which consensual partnering is most common (11.1 per cent were actually cohabiting, as against 3.8 per cent of Thai males, but this fell to 6.9 per cent after standardization for age). Quite what the explanation for the phenomenon is is uncertain. Perhaps New Zealand men travelling to Thailand have brought back de facto spouses, much as others have acquired brides from the Philippines in recent years. Until November 1991 a foreign national could gain New Zealand residence upon convincing immigration authorities that she or he was the de facto spouse of a New Zealander (subsequently de facto relationships had to be of at least two years duration to qualify). Moreover, since 1987 Thai nationals have enjoyed visa-free entry to New Zealand for up to three months. Again, Thai women may have been encouraged to come to New Zealand by New Zealand men, their unfamiliarity with the country and possible status at the Census as overstayers only adding to the inducement to cohabit.

British ethnic groups generally rank a little above the New Zealand European reference population in Figure 7 in the case of males, and are average to slightly above average in the
case of females. The really low ranking groups are mostly Asian, with only Russian males and Tongan, Greek and Chilean females interspersed among them.

Differentials by Religion

Figure 8 shows age-standardized percentages of male and female adherents of different religious faiths and denominations aged 15 and older who were consensually partnered in 1991. Indirect standardization was employed, the standard schedules of age-specific percentages living in de facto unions used being those for all males aged 15 and older and all females aged 15 and older, respectively. Most religious groups recorded levels of consensual partnering below the national average (the ‘Total’ bars in Figure 8). The very lowest levels were for small fundamentalist Christian sects (Jehovah's Witnesses, Brethren, Apostolics and Pentecostal groups including the Assemblies of God) and for persons of Hindu and Islamic faith. They were followed in rank order by Buddhists and Christian groups such as Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists and adherents of the Salvation Army. Larger Christian groups such as Methodists, Presbyterians, Catholics and Anglicans recorded cohabitation levels near the national average, with Anglican females notably a little above the average. Almost certainly adherents of these groups were more likely than those of smaller sects to be nominal as opposed to practising, but unfortunately census data do not provide any measure of religiosity with which to unequivocally substantiate this proposition.

Four religious groups ranked distinctly above the national average for both males and females. Predictably, one comprised the almost 18 per cent of the population aged 15 and older who claimed to have ‘No religion’, while another consisted of the further 8 per cent who exercised their statutory right to object to answering the religion question; they probably mostly had no, or no strong, religious convictions either. The remaining two groups were the Ringatu and Rabana sects, both Christian sects patronised overwhelmingly by the Maori population. Their high levels of consensual partnering naturally reflect Maori cultural tolerance of the lifestyle.

The Ringatu Church was founded by Te Kooti Rakiang, who preached his faith, principally in the Bay of Plenty and Urewera districts of New Zealand's North Island, between 1867 and

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1993 (Misir, 1975; Tarei, 1992). Its followers remained concentrated in those areas in 1991, almost 60 per cent living in regions administered by the Bay of Plenty and Gisborne Regional Councils. The Ratana Church, blending Wesleyan Methodism and Anglicanism, began as a faith-healing cult in the early 1920s inspired by Tahiropolii Wiremu Ratana. Ratana was a Methodist and the movement's geographic focus became the Ratana Pa near Wanganui, but its influence transcended tribal affiliation and hence geography, and it inevitably was affected by Anglicanism's status as 'the mother church in Maoridom' (Raureti, 1992:150).

The relatively high ranking, especially for males, of Latter Day Saints, or Mormons, among religious groups arrayed by age-standardized propensity to cohabit also reflects Maori culture. The Mormons have had great success in recruiting Maori and Pacific Islanders to their cause. At the 1991 Census just 1.4 per cent of the total resident population and 2.0 per cent of those members of it who nominated a religion were Latter Day Saints, whereas figures for Maori were 6.2 and 8.7 per cent, and for Pacific Islanders 8.0 and 8.3 per cent. Of all adherents of Mormonism, 56 per cent were Maori, well over four times their representation in the total resident population. Moreover, among Maori adherents aged 15 or older, 9.2 per cent lived with de facto partners (compared to 4.7 per cent of non-Maori adherents), and 20.3 per cent of those living in unions lived in consensual unions (compared to 9.3 per cent of non-Maori adherents living in unions).

**Differentiation by Labour Force Status**

Percentages of males and females aged 15 and older living in de facto unions by labour force status are shown in Figure 9. Both unstandardized and age-standardized percentages are presented, the latter calculated using indirect standardization in the same manner as those for religious groups were. Labour force status is highly variable by age, and so for some labour force status groups percentages cohabiting change appreciably when standardized. Among males, the unemployed who were seeking full-time work recorded the highest unstandardized

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*The Rangata Church was not formally constituted until 1936 (Henderson, 1953). Its evolution 'From Prophet Cult to Established Church' is outlined by Misir (1975).*
prevalence of consensual partnering, followed by those who were employed full-time. Both
groups were young, so that standardization brought their cohabitation levels much closer to
the male average, but they remained the groups most likely to have been consensually
partnered. The theme that lack of financial resources and poor economic prospects dispose
towards informal cohabitation has been a recurring one in the research literature on MDC
populations (Carmichael, 1995); being unemployed neither enhances a man’s attractiveness
as a marriage partner nor provides a sound basis for marriage. It may also tend to select
individuals whose capacity for commitment in relationships is dubious, and in the New Zealand
context the susceptibility of Maori to unemployment is a factor of moment. But several studies
have suggested that at the other extreme dual-income status, too, is conducive to living in de
facto relationships (for example, Khoo, 1988; Kliging, 1988; Blom, 1994). The present data do
not confirm this directly for New Zealand, but the facts that in Figure 9 men employed full-time
rank second, and women employed full-time a clear first, on standardized propensities to have
been cohabiting are consistent with such a proposition. So is the likelihood that consensual
partnering often is a premarital phase aimed at establishing the economic foundations for
marriage and parenthood - a transferring outside marriage, at least in part, of the dual-income,
childless phase early in marriage that became established following the introduction of oral
contraception in 1961 (Carmichael, 1982).

It is interesting that, for females compared to males, rank orders of the two most cohabitation-
inclined labour force status groups are reversed in Figure 9. The explanation for the distinctly
higher standardized propensity for women to have been living in de facto unions if employed
full-time may not only be the association of full-time employment with the premarital phase of
the life cycle during which consensual partnering has become common. It may also have to
do with career-oriented, independent women seeing informal relationships as more conducive
to their maintaining their autonomy. On the other hand, female unemployment is not the
disincentive to marriage that unemployment for a man is. The relatively high standardized
propensity of women to have been consensually partnered if unemployed and seeking full-
time work may largely reflect unemployment and consensual partnering selecting in common

Maori and, perhaps, persons with limited capacities for commitment.

Consensual partnering among males employed part-time reached the male average level
following standardization, but among female part-timers it was well below average. Male part-
time employment fulfills a number of roles. It is relatively common above age 60 as links are
retained with the labour force into retirement, and controlling for this element in its age
structure largely accounts for its level of consensual partnering rising upon standardization.
But it also serves as a compromise between unemployment and a desire for full employment,
and attracts younger men whose primary focus is in their educations. For unmarried men in the
former category, economic barriers to formal marriage similar to those that foster consensual
partnering among the unemployed could operate. Concerning those in the latter, Figure 9
indicates that cohabitation was particularly infrequent among male tertiary students with no
employment income, while other data show that the standardized percentage cohabiting
among men who were both studying and working (either full-time or part-time) was higher (5.8
compared to 3.2), but still below the male average (6.4). If men studying and working only
part-time were an intermediate group, their propensity to live in de facto unions was below
average, and an offset to a likely above average propensity among men for whom part-time
employment was an alternative to unemployment.

Female part-time employment, over three times more common than its male counterpart, has
a different character. It is largely the preserve of mothers, whose parental role variously
creates a desire for only a restricted commitment to employment and imposes barriers to a
full-time commitment. Motherhood tends still to be associated with marriage, and the high
proportion of female part-timers who are married mitigates against a high incidence of
consensual partnering among them.

The low frequencies of cohabitation recorded for members of both sexes who were tertiary

Note that Figure 9 excludes persons of labour force age who were not employed and were
still at secondary school, among whom consensual partnering was virtually non-existent.
students and not in the labour force mirrors overseas studies which have found student status to greatly reduce the probability of living in a de facto relationship (see Carmichael, 1995 for a summary). Several of these studies have also found, however, that such is the disincentive to marriage among tertiary students that their propensity to live in consensual unions if living in a union at all is particularly high (see, for example, Hoem, 1986; Liefbroer, 1991; Thornton et al., 1994). Table 3, showing percentages consensually partnered among persons in unions by age, sex, labour force status and whether engaged in tertiary study, provides some basis for focusing on this issue in the New Zealand context, although the definition of a tertiary student as one who 'attended a full-time or part-time study or training course' (my italics) in the week preceding the census is probably less than ideal. Table 3 reveals some, albeit perhaps weak, support for the earlier finding. The obvious comparison is between those who were studying and were not in the labour force (likely to be full-time students), and those who were not studying (the righthand 'Total' column). Only slightly higher proportions of partnered males in the former category were consensually partnered, while for females the differential was in the opposite direction beyond age 25, disparities in favour of students being sharpest for both sexes at ages 20-24.

These comparisons, of course, ignore persons who were both tertiary students and either employed or unemployed. In the latter case 'tertiary study' is likely to have been 'job training for unemployed persons', which the census question explicitly admitted as 'full-time study or training'. Males in unions who were both studying and working were a little less likely than both non-working students and non-students in unions to be consensually partnered, but females in this category were more likely to be, especially at ages 25-29. Partnered males combining work and study may have been apt to have slightly conservative value orientations, while their female counterparts may have tended to include women in no hurry to formalize unions because their primary concern was to establish and advance in careers. Beyond age 20, however, the highest ratios of consensual to total partnering in Table 3 are associated with being unemployed and, in the case of males, being neither in the labour force nor a student. What comes through is thus less an association of student status with choosing cohabitation

<table>
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<th>Age</th>
<th>Working</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>Labour force Total</th>
<th>Not working</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>Labour force Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>15-19</td>
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<td>84</td>
<td>64</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


over marriage than any linking economic insecurity with such a choice. Males who were neither in the labour force nor studying may well have tended to be men who had given up trying to find jobs, whereas women in this category would have been mainly full-time mothers.

No doubt the Maori propensity to cohabit unmarried also is reflected in subgroups which appear to associate economic insecurity with such a lifestyle.

Reframing on Figure 9, before standardization, non-students who were not in the labour force recorded the lowest percentages living in de facto unions for both males and females. This ranking, however, was an artifact of the older age structure of this labour force status group.

After standardization its levels of consensual partnering rose to much closer to, although still below, the relevant resident population averages.

Differentials by Level of Education

The relationship between level of education, as indexed by highest secondary school qualification, and consensual partnering for the population aged 15 and older is illustrated in

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Figure 10. Percentages living in de facto unions in the various educational categories have been indirectly standardized for age in the same way as those for religious and labour force status groups were. Categories listed from 'No school qualification' to 'University Bursary or Scholarship' are an ascending scale of educational experience/achievement within the New Zealand system. School Certificate is a national examination normally sat after three years of secondary schooling. Sixth Form Certificate or University Entrance indicate a fourth year of secondary education. Higher School Certificate or Higher Leaving Certificate show that a fifth year was completed; and University Bursary or Scholarship evidence success in public examinations sat at the end of that fifth year. Before standardization, no clear pattern of propensity to cohabit is evident through this scale. For males, School Certificate, and for females, Sixth Form Certificate or University Entrance, are associated with the highest incidence of consensual partnering, while for both sexes, but especially females, University Bursary or Scholarship holders were distinctly more often cohabiting than those who completed a fifth year at secondary school without attaining one of those awards. However, following standardization a near negative relationship emerges between level of educational experience/achievement and propensity to have been living in a de facto relationship.

Standardization increases levels of consensual partnering relative to the national average among those with no school qualification, reflecting control for older age structures which flow from past patterns of earlier school leaving, especially among females. By contrast it reduces

*Before 1970 candidates were required to obtain a 50 per cent average over four subjects to pass this examination. Subsequently passes have been credited in individual proportions, increasing the proportion of candidates who 'pass'.
University Entrance, attained from 1944 either by 'accreditation' (internal assessment) or by public examination and prior to that by examination only, required students to obtain a 50 per cent average over four subjects. It was replaced in 1956 by the Sixth Form Certificate, awarded on an individual subject basis, in an initiative which shifted assessment of suitability for university study to the fifth year of secondary schooling. By this time most students intending to study at university were remaining at school for an additional year after attaining University Entrance anyway.
University Scholarships awarded on the basis of secondary school academic performance have their origins in legislation passed in 1903. The number awarded annually increased over time, but was always small and only the most gifted students had a chance of securing one. The University Bursaries Examination, offering two less lucrative categories of supplementary financial assistance for university study, was instituted in 1966 to provide a more attainable goal for increasing numbers of students who were proceeding to a fifth year of secondary education, but were not competitive for the more prestigious scholarships.
levels among those in the other four 'scale' categories, by amounts which are sufficiently different for the overall negative relationship to appear. These reductions imply populations more concentrated than the national one at the younger ages where consensual partnering is most common, a finding in keeping with both the prolonging of secondary schooling in more recent youth cohorts and initiatives (footnotes 12-14) that have created new qualifications or rendered older ones easier to attain. It is interesting to muse on the robustness of the overall negative relationship should attention be confined to the non-Maori population. Maori are heavily concentrated at the lower end of New Zealand's educational spectrum, in 1991 comprising 15.4 and 15.5 per cent of the male and female populations aged 15 and older with no school qualification as against 10.4 and 10.5 per cent, respectively, of the total populations in that age range (and just 4.0 and 4.3 per cent of the populations with a University Bursary or Scholarship). Bearing in mind also the comparative youth of the Maori population (48.7 per cent of those aged 15 and older in 1991 were aged 15-29, compared to 28.3 per cent of non-Maori) which, given recent longer schooling, will have moderated Maori/non-Maori educational disparities as measured above, chances are that the status of 'No school qualification' as the most cohabitation-prone educational category in Figure 10 is entirely attributable to the large Maori element within it.

The 'Overseas qualification' category in Figure 10 naturally embraces mainly persons who immigrated as adults. That standardization increases its levels of de facto partnering slightly indicates it to be a marginally older than average group. Evidently the most spectacular changes in cohabitation levels following standardization are, however, associated with the 'Other school qualification' category. This is a very elderly group, 69.5 per cent of males and 72.2 per cent of females having passed their sixtieth birthdays. Their qualifications clearly often were ones which long since have ceased to exist or to carry any value in New Zealand, probably frequently being primary school qualifications.

CONCLUSION

Until recently condemned by most Pakeha as highly immoral, living in de facto relationships has become increasingly common in New Zealand as part of a trend that since the mid-1960s has swept Northern and Western Europe, North America and Australasia. Official data collection instruments and systems often are ill-prepared to monitor such unanticipated social trends, and New Zealand was no exception in this instance. But its national census did recognize the desirability of tracking the spread of consensual partnering earlier than those of some other affected countries, and in the absence of surveys these census data currently provide the only means of assessing the lifestyle's prevalence and socio-demographic differentials in the extent of its adoption. This paper has sought to analyse the census data in question, subject to the constraints that only cross-tabulated, and not unit record, output was available, and that de facto status was established using different questions in the 1981, 1986 and 1991 Censuses.

This is not the place for a blow by blow summary of findings. Instead, three more general concluding observations will be made. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data analysed should be appreciated. As of census night 1991, peak age-specific percentages living in de facto unions were about fifteen for both men (at ages 25-29) and women (at ages 20-24). But with such living arrangements offering a temporary life cycle phase, yet to be entered by some and already transformed into marriages or renewed singlehood by others, cumulative levels of experience of them well above 15 per cent clearly would be, and already had been, recorded by some cohorts. Standardized levels of consensual partnering presented for population subgroups similarly pertain to points in time, other subgroup members undoubtedly having previously experienced the lifestyle or being destined to experience it in the future.

Second, the Maori factor in de facto partnering in New Zealand is a notable one. For Maori the contemporary popularity and tolerance of informal cohabitation legitimates a traditional cultural indifference to formality in the establishment and ending of spousal relationships, and represents an element of cultural convergence in which, for once, Pakeha are doing the converging. The continuing significantly higher prevalence of de facto relationships among Maori than among the remainder of the population, though, clearly impacts on differentials
across other socio-demographic dimensions through disproportionate concentrations of Maori in certain population subgroups. Thus, where it has not been possible in this paper to explicitly take account of the 'ethnic' factor as a potential modifier of differentials discussed, appropriate caution should be exercised in assessing the authenticity of those differentials.

Finally, there is a limit to the understanding of a social phenomenon such as consensual partnering that can be achieved using census data. New Zealand now needs survey-based research that will tackle this fascinating topic on two fronts. It needs to gather retrospective life history data that will permit the changing cohort experience of the lifestyle to be documented. And it needs to mount research that will interview in-depth persons with experience of consensual unions, their dissolution, their conversion to marriages, and childbearing within them. Only through such an approach, ideally conducted in conjunction with a life history survey, can the true complexity, diversity and dynamism of a lifestyle that is patently misrepresented and over-simplified when referred to as, for example, 'de facto marriage' be captured.

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