



*"Living together before marriage seems like a harmless or even a progressive family trend until you look at the evidence."*

ly quite surprising, and they should be carefully considered by all young Americans."

Popenoe once counted himself among the researchers who minimized similar findings; after all, his daughters both have successful marriages after first living with their partners. He also figured that people who live together include a large percentage of unconventional, free-spirited types more likely to get divorced anyway. But he changed his mind after looking closely at dozens of studies indicating that couples who lived together before marriage are more likely to see their marriages dissolve. He points out that no evidence exists that supports the notion that living together will help couples better sustain a relationship once they're married.

Last year, 4 million couples in the United States cohabitated, up from less than half a million in 1960. The report acknowledges that couples will continue to live together before marriage, but it makes the following suggestions: Consider the move carefully, do not take serial partners, limit cohabitation to the shortest possible period, and never cohabitate when children are involved.

Says Popenoe: "The longer you cohabitate, the more tolerant you are of divorce. When you're used to living in a low-commitment relationship, it's hard to shift that kind of mental pattern."

## Meat Eaters

DIET OFFERS CLUES TO MAN'S EVOLUTION

If we really *are* what we eat, says Rutgers anthropologist Matt Sponheimer, then some of the best clues to man's evolution can be found by studying his diet. Scientists have theorized that our earliest known ancestor, *Australopithecus africanus*, ate mostly fruits and leaves and lived in the protection of heav-

ily wooded areas. But a recent study—based on a new method of analyzing tooth enamel—suggests that prehuman hominids also ate small animals and insects and ventured into open spaces to find nourishment.

The findings were published in the journal *Science* by Sponheimer, a Bevier Fellow in anthropology at Rutgers-New Brunswick, and Julia A. Lee-Thorp of the University of Cape Town in South Africa. The pair examined two forms of carbon preserved in tooth enamel from four 3-million-year-old *A. africanus* individuals unearthed in 1995. For comparison, they also analyzed tooth enamel from other animal fossils found at the

same site near Johannesburg. "Curators of these fossils were understandably reluctant to allow any type of destructive analysis," says Sponheimer. "Now we can analyze fossils using such small amounts that there is virtually no visible damage to them."

*A. africanus*, they found, consumed large amounts of foods rich in carbon-13, which includes grass-eating insects, small animals like hyraxes, and the young of grazing animals like antelopes. Since this high-energy, high-nutrient diet is similar to that of the later, and bigger-brained, *Homo* species, the long-held theory that such a diet was necessary for *Homo*'s "metabolically expensive" brain may be false. Indeed, the primary dietary difference between the two may not have been the quality of their food but their manner of procuring it.

Sponheimer speculates that *A. africanus*, which was about the size of a chimpanzee but had a slightly larger brain, killed small game with rocks or used twigs to gather insects, a technique observed today among chimps. "Using stone tools, early *Homo* may have been able to butcher and consume larger animals than *A. africanus* could," says Sponheimer. "Moreover, by cracking the long bones of large animals with stone tools, *Homo* had access to their energy-rich marrow, a delicacy that may have eluded its *africanus* forebears." —  
Bill Glavin □

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