

Despite legal hassles and some landlord pressure, cohabitation is popular

By Anne Carothers

If anyone ever thought living together is easier than getting married, they were and still are mistaken. Cohabitation has its hassles and is more expensive than being married.

One of the biggest hassles is that it is illegal in Nebraska. Adultery laws are valid until July 1, 1978, when Nebraska's new criminal code will go into effect.

According to Robert Lange, UNL Student Legal Services Center attorney, it makes no mention of adultery as a crime. He added that even though it is illegal now, he doubted whether people are being arrested for it.

Unmarried couples may have other hassles besides adultery laws, such as renting a house or apartment or filing income tax.

Craig Johnson and Katie Hilgenkamp say they think of splitting up once a year—when they are filing out income tax.

Johnson said he and his accountant have tried every way possible to claim Hilgenkamp as a dependent but has never succeeded.

Separate returns

According to the Internal Revenue Service, two persons living together without being married cannot file a

joint return or claim each other as a spouse or a dependent, if they are living together in violation of local law.

Both Hilgenkamp and Johnson are 23 and have been living together for four years. Hilgenkamp works for the Lancaster Office of Mental Retardation and plans to return to graduate school in January. Johnson is a self-employed carpenter.

Both say they have no marriage plans.

Hilgenkamp said she has nothing against the marriage institution but thinks "it is not necessary to make it their relationship legal to make it any more meaningful."

Getting married would be "giving in" to social pressures, according to Hilgenkamp. She added that she couldn't understand how they were different from most married couples.

Johnson, who is buying the home they live in now, said he pays the rent since he makes more money than Hilgenkamp. She in return does the housework for having her share of the rent paid.

However, their relationship was not always that way, he said.

Mine is hers

Now, Johnson says "what's mine is hers," however, there was a time "when she was paying half the rent and I was asking it of her."

The relationship has grown from "convenience to something deeper," Hilgenkamp said, recalling divided utility and grocery bills.

Hilgenkamp moved in with Johnson when she was 19 and an undergraduate at Nebraska Wesleyan University. She said she wanted to live off campus and to do that you either had to be married or living with relatives. So she moved in with Johnson and said she was married.

Their relationship now is "more permanent, more committed," Hilgenkamp said. She added that now they are planning for things 10 years in advance.

Both agreed that they could see themselves as 50-year-olds living happily together.

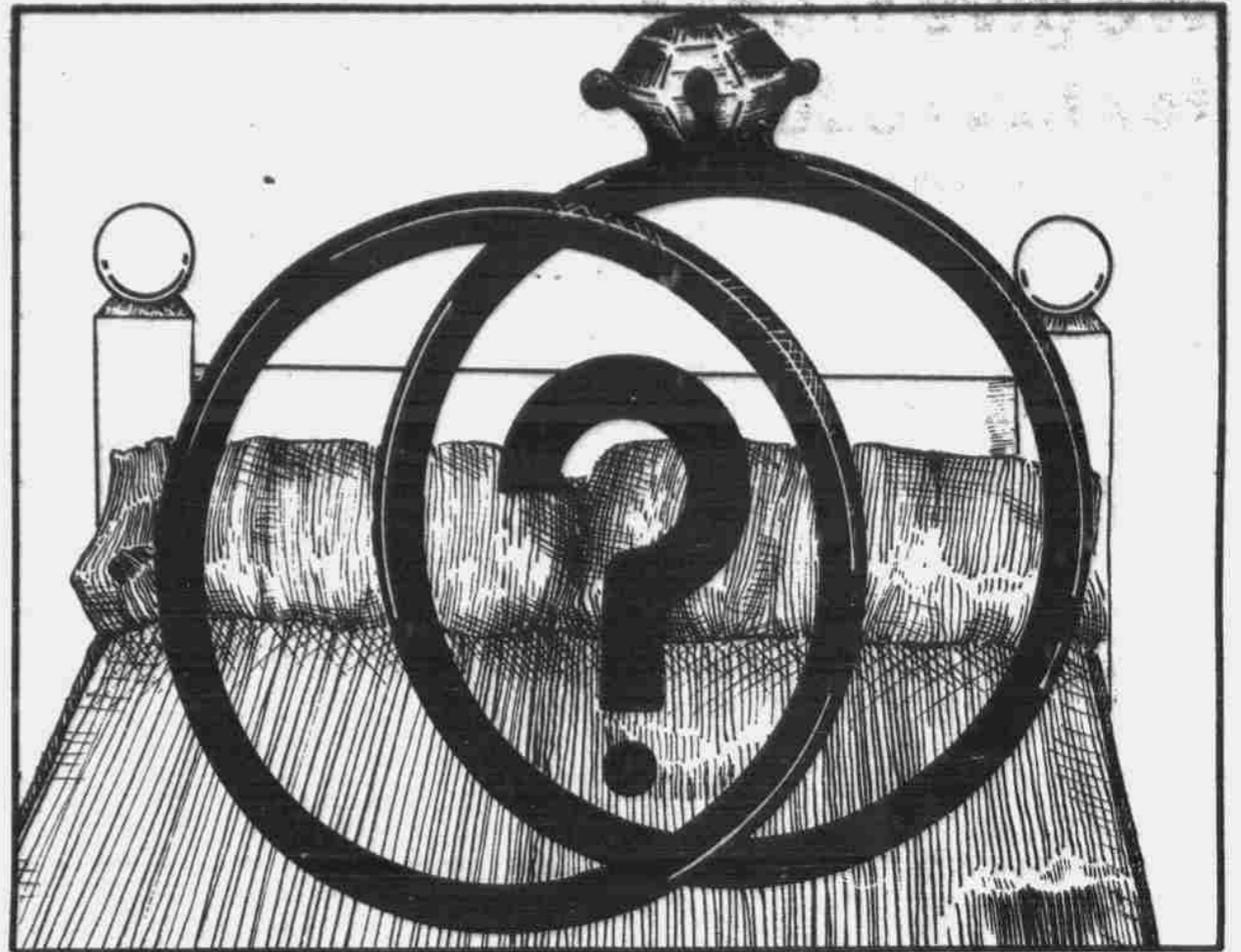
Nevertheless if they should split up, Hilgenkamp said she would know what was hers and take it with her.

Legal freedom

Johnson said he thinks a certain amount of freedom of living together such as freedom from legal ties helped the two stay together.

The couple isn't agreed on how having a child would change their relationship. Although Johnson said he knew unmarried couples who had had children together, he would want to get married simply to "give the child a last name."

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