

Parent's Union Transitions and Ambivalence Toward Children Later in Life

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Background

- Strength of ties between parents and children persist over the life course, but are constantly in flux (Birditt, 2009; Kaufmann & Uhlenberg, 1998)
- Increasing prevalence of union transitions later life (Brown & Lin, 2012; Lin & Brown, 2012; Brown et al., 2012)

Theoretical Background

- Ambivalence (Luescher & Pillemer, 1998)
 - Simultaneous feelings of conflict and closeness
 - Linked to poorer health (Lendon et al., 2014)

Union Transitions in Later Life

- Union dissolution for people 50 and older
 - Divorce rates doubled between 1990 and 2010 (Brown & Lin, 2012)
 - 1.2 million became widows in 2010 (Brown et al., under review)
- Rise in union formation later in life (Brown, Bulanda, & Lee, 2012)

Union Transitions and Ambivalence

- Widowhood brings parents and children closer together (Ha and Ingersoll-Dayton, 2008)
- Divorce and union formation may increase ambivalence
 - Children support parents during divorce or union formation, but transitions may create conflict by disrupting family functioning (Nakonezny et al., 2003).

Hypotheses

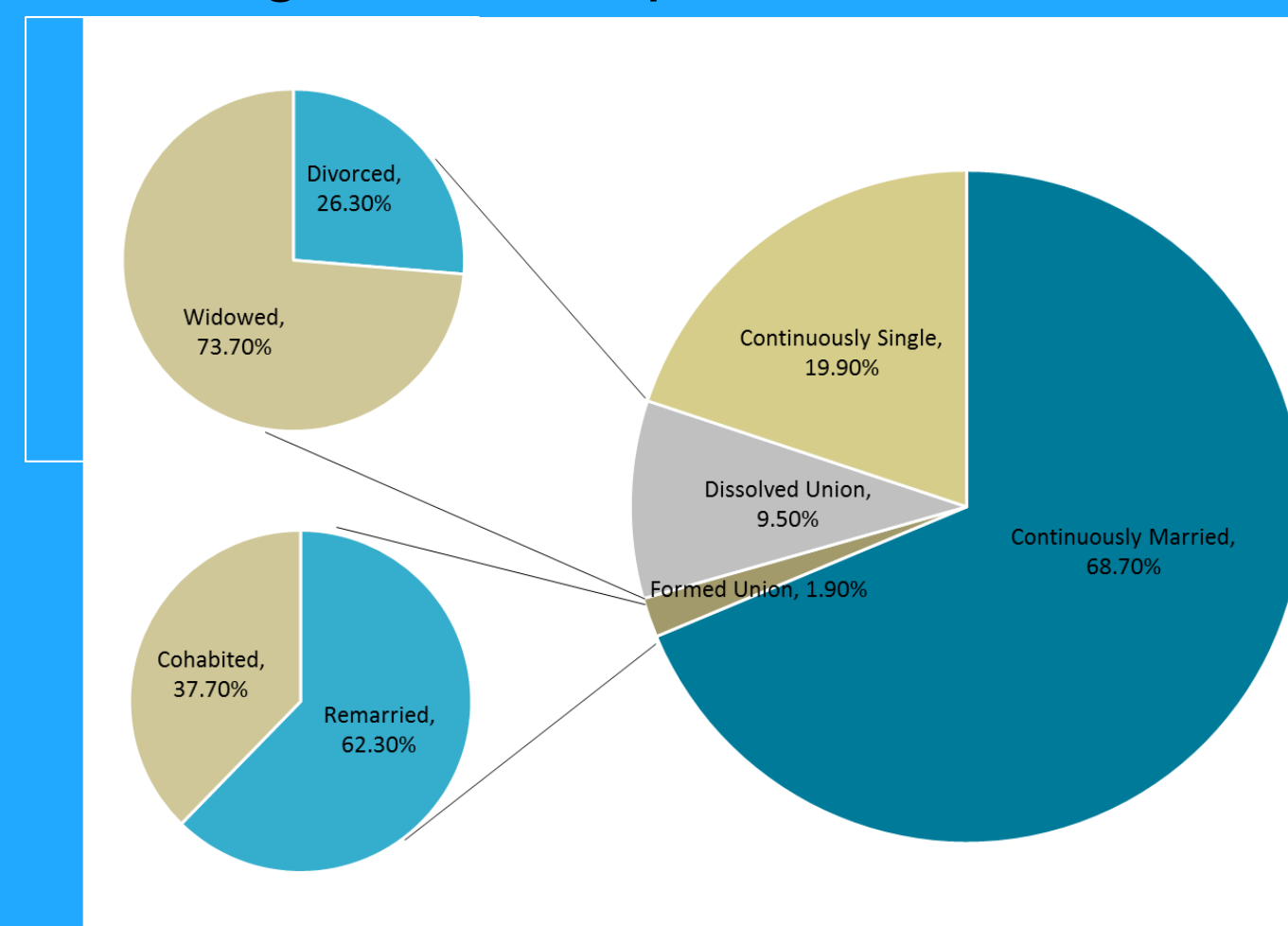
- Widowed will feel less ambivalence toward children, while divorced will feel more ambivalence
- Forming a union will result in more ambivalence toward children

Data

- Health and Retirement Study (HRS), 2006 to 2012
- Sample includes non-institutionalized respondents who filled out the Psychosocial Survey, were 50+, had children, and were ever married as of 2006
 - Final analytic sample includes 7,384 respondents

Sample Distribution

Figure 1. Sample Distribution



Measures and Analysis

- Dependent Variable: Ambivalence in T2 (Ha and Ingersoll-Dayton, 2008)
 - Ambivalence = (positive + negative) / 2 - |positive - negative|
- Independent Variables: Union Transitions
- Covariates
- Lagged Dependent Variable Regression

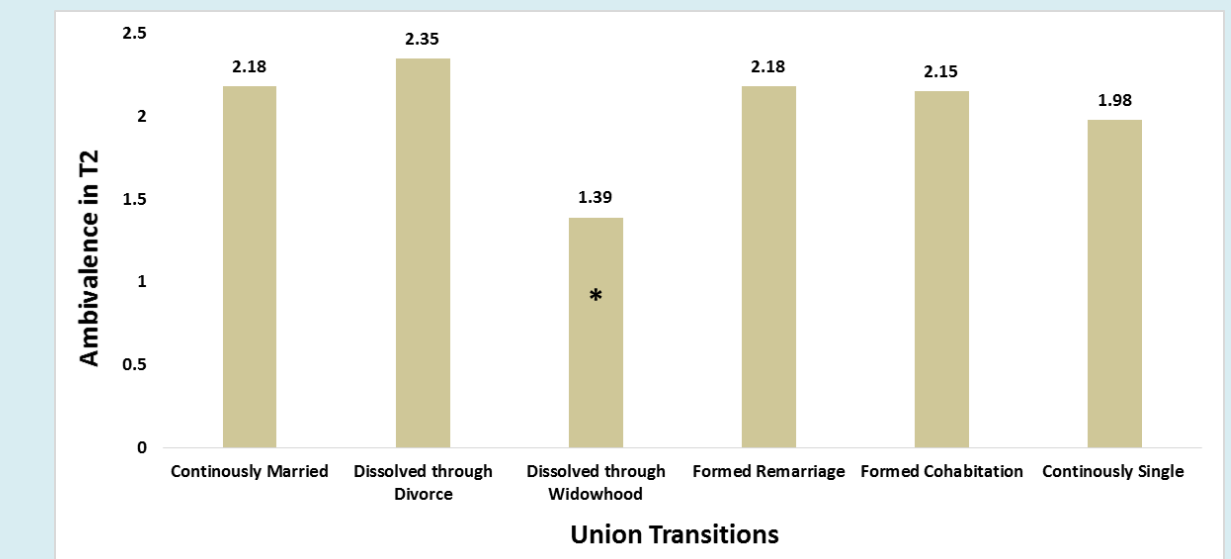
Descriptive Results

Table 1. Weighted Descriptives Statistics for Six Union Transition Groups (N=7,384)

	Continuously Married (Ref)	Divorced or Separated	Widowed	Formed Remarriage	Formed Cohabitation	Continuously Single
Ambivalence in T1	2.61(.05)	2.95(.27)	1.96(.11)	3.07(.33)	2.42(.41)	2.20(.08)
Ambivalence in T2	2.35(.04)	2.42(.28)	1.60(.12)	2.31(.29)	1.87(.40)	2.03(.08)
Male	48.82	40.73	28.14	58.30	54.04	20.92
Age						
White	90.03	80.45	89.49	84.78	79.04	77.53
Black	3.44	9.18	4.69	8.90	15.22	13.87
Hispanic	4.18	7.07	4.31	6.31	5.34	6.16
Other	2.27	3.29	1.40	0.00	0.40	2.32
Less than high school	8.89	12.71	14.38	8.82	13.11	18.48
High school	54.05	55.37	63.99	52.11	54.69	59.41
College	36.53	31.33	21.62	34.81	32.20	22.02
Assets(ln)	14.68(.01)	14.56(.04)	14.62(.02)	14.86(.06)	14.58(.06)	14.47(.01)
Own home	84.98	51.10	71.16	83.54	53.88	59.40
Employed	37.08	40.87	16.25	36.33	36.39	25.95
Health	3.43(.02)	3.27(.10)	3.26(.05)	3.40(.12)	3.12(.14)	3.04(.03)
Depressive symptoms	3.23(.02)	3.56(.12)	3.66(.05)	3.39(.14)	3.20(.11)	3.60(.04)
Children within 10 miles	52.53	52.54	63.42	46.56	35.27	59.27
Number of children	3.18(.03)	3.46(.17)	3.67(.11)	4.37(.29)	2.86(.26)	3.06(.06)
Unweighted N	4777	184	649	105	62	1557

Predicted Probabilities

Figure 2. Predicted Probabilities of Ambivalence in T2 from the Regression of Ambivalence in T2 on Ambivalence in T1, Union Transitions, and Other Covariates



Conclusion

- Becoming a widow results in lower ambivalence
 - Widowed may feel less ambivalence toward children, since support often increases following bereavement (Ha and Ingersoll-Dayton, 2008)
- Other union transitions do not result in more or less ambivalence toward children

Future Directions

- Future Directions
 - Incorporate future waves of data
 - Examine analyses by gender
 - Study differences in positive and negative feelings