

PARTNERING IN LATER LIFE: NEW FRONTIERS IN FAMILY RESEARCH

Susan L. Brown

Acknowledgments

Some of the results presented today come from research co-authored with:

Colleagues

Gary Lee, Professor and Chair of Sociology

I-Fen Lin, Associate Professor of Sociology

Former Graduate Students

Jennifer Roebuck Bulanda (PhD 2006), Assistant Professor, Miami Univ (OH)

Sayaka Kawamura (PhD 2011), Postdoctoral Fellow, Japanese General Social Survey

The Headlines



More Unwed Parents Live Together,
Report Finds

August 16, 2011



Fewer Couples Embrace Marriage;
More Live Together

June 2, 2011



And iPhone Makes Three: Marriage in
the Digital Age

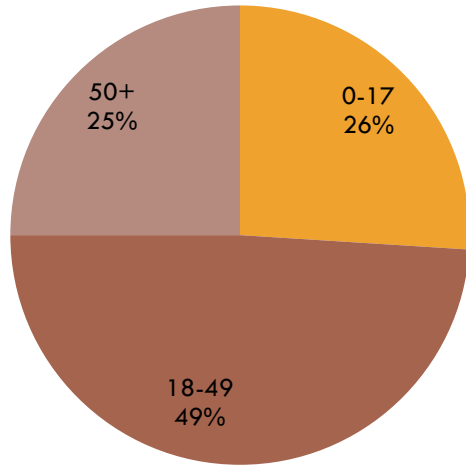
November 2, 2010

Outline

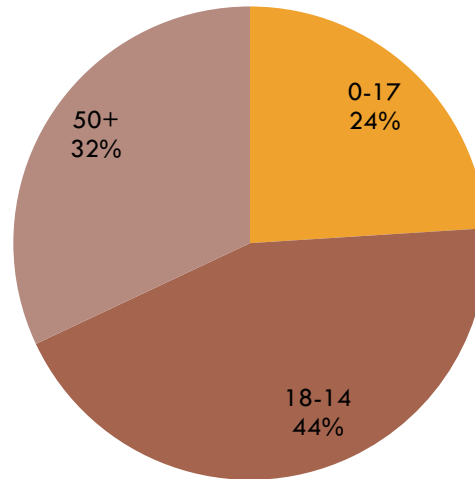
- The family formation and dissolution patterns of older adults (ages 50+) are changing
- Today's talk will show that:
 - A growing share of older adults is unmarried
 - Older adults increasingly form unmarried partnerships
 - Dating
 - Cohabitation

U.S. Age Distribution

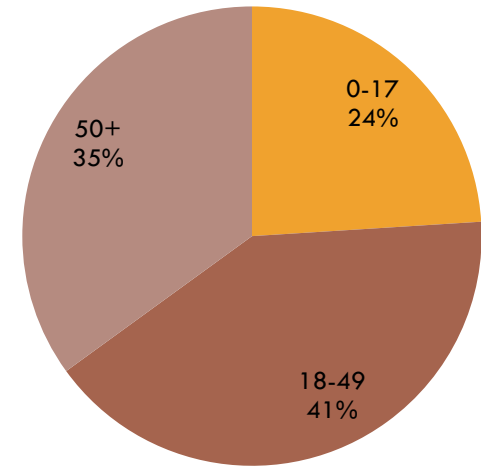
1990



2010



2030



Later Life Family Research

Marriage

Health

- Marrieds enjoy better mental and physical health than unmarrieds

Well-being

- Marrieds have more economic resources and social support

Mortality

- Marriage is positively associated with longevity

Widowhood

Health

- Widowhood is linked to declines in mental and physical health

Well-being

- Widowhood leads to reduced economic well-being (women) and social support (men)

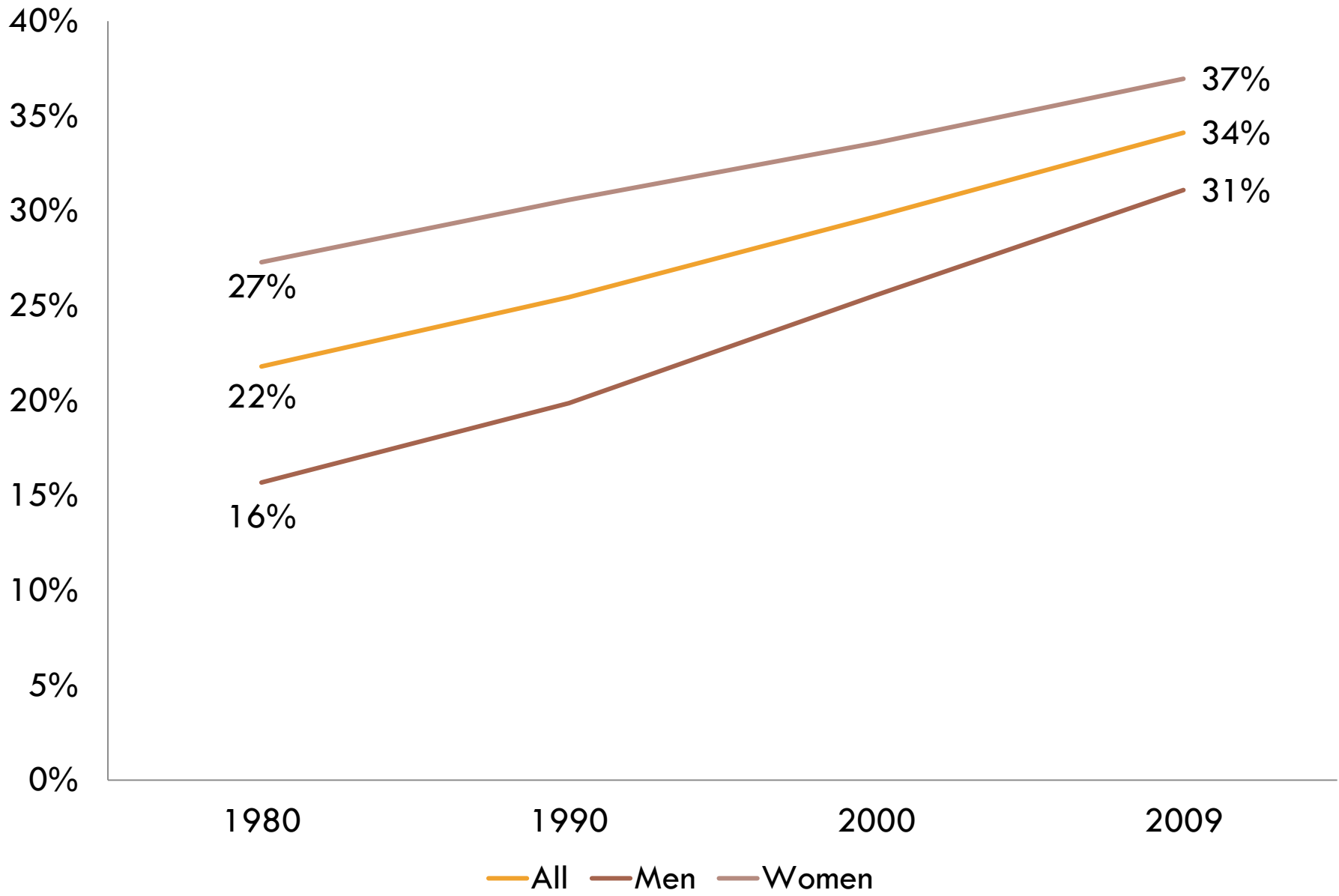
Mortality

- Spousal loss heightens the risk of death

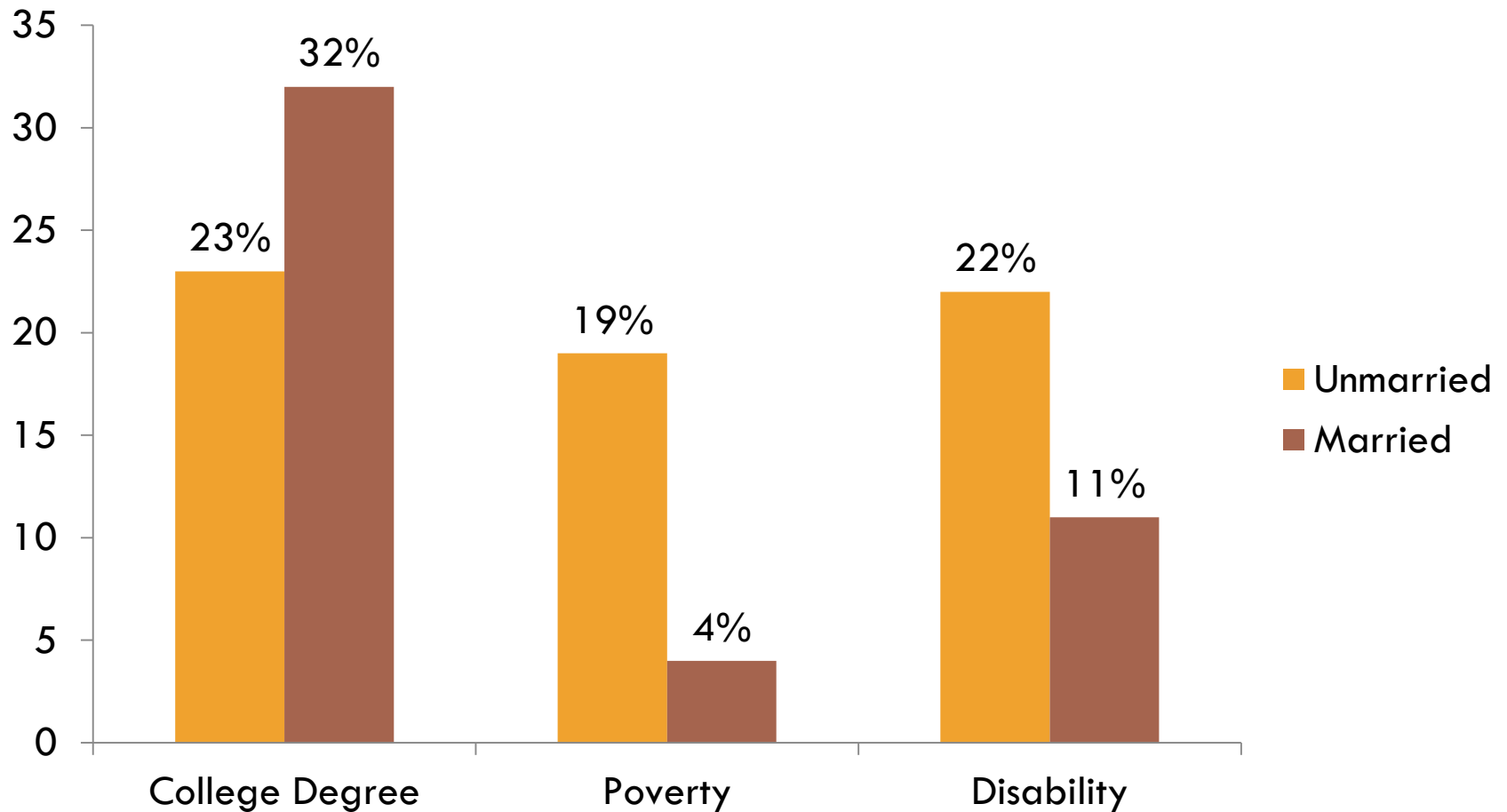
The Family Life Course

- Fewer older adults are married or widowed
- Early family experiences have consequences for middle and later life
 - Cohabitation
 - Delayed or foregone marriage
 - Divorce
- More older adults are unmarried

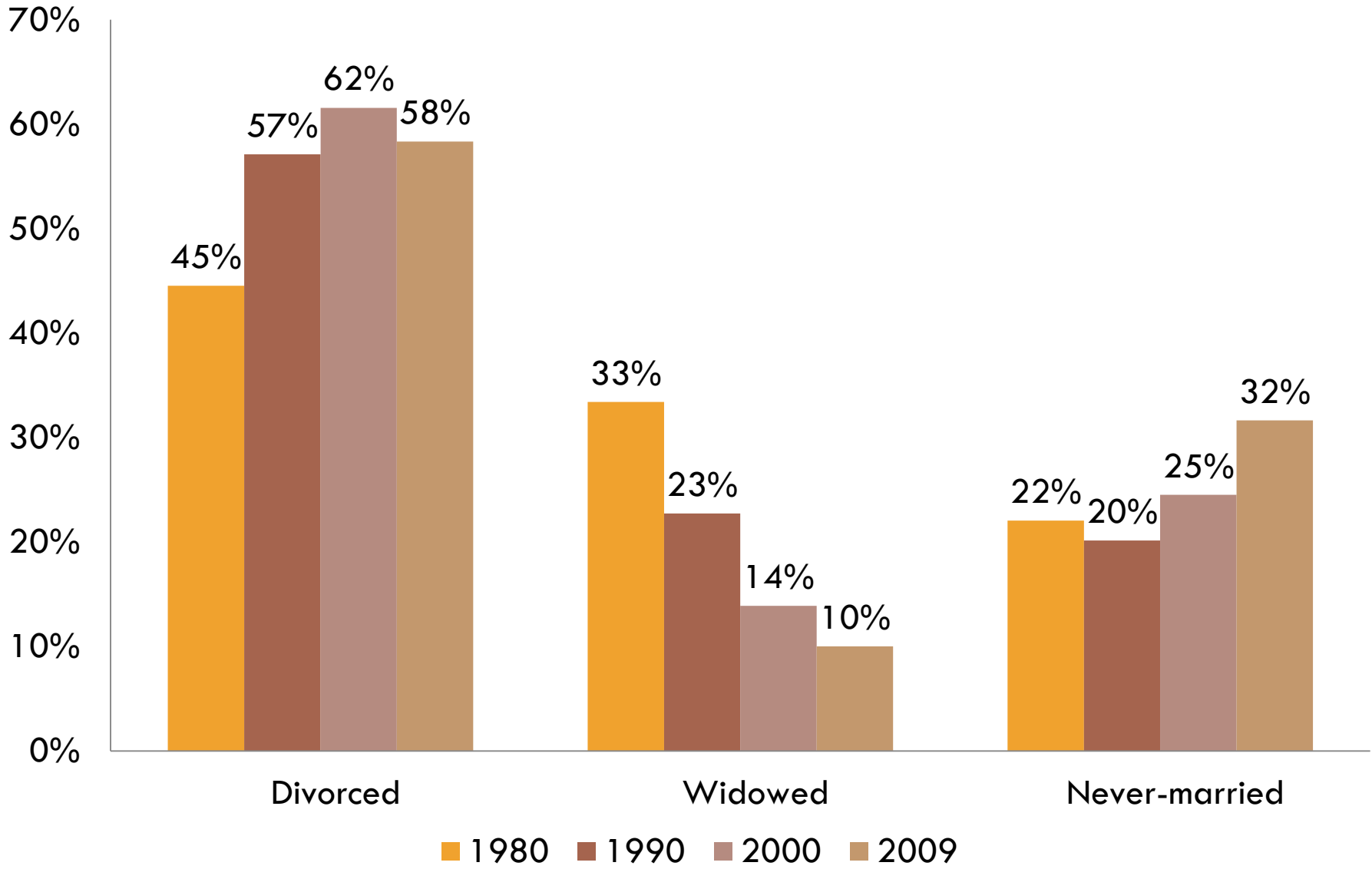
Percentage of Unmarried Persons, Ages 45-63



Baby Boomers, 2009

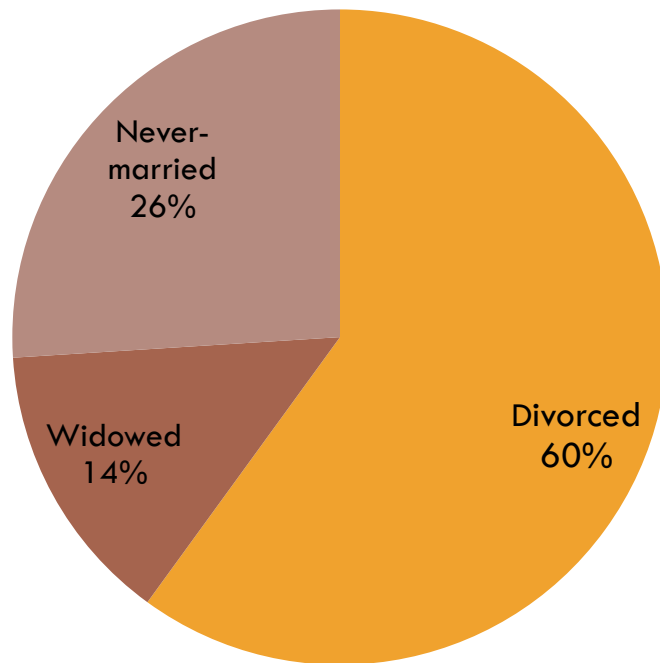


Marital Status Composition of Unmarried Persons, Ages 45-63

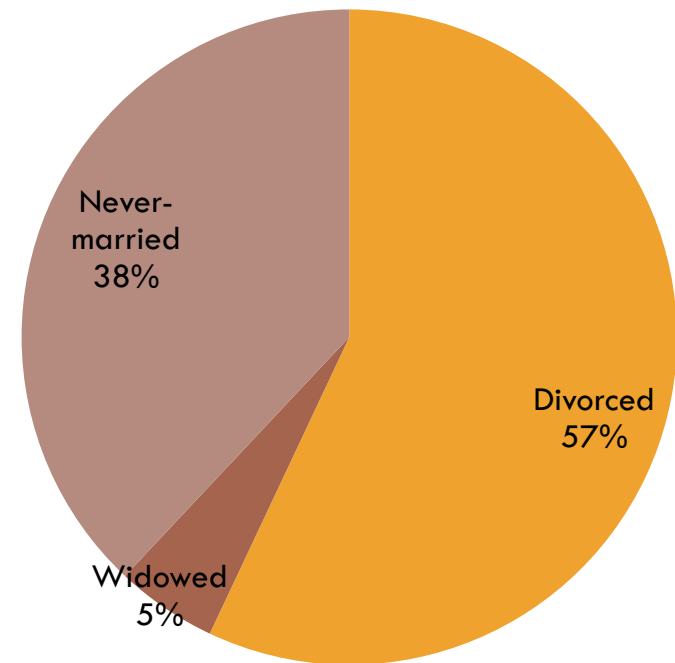


Unmarried Baby Boomers, 2009

Women



Men



Gender Differences

Women

Never-married

- Highly educated
- High income

Divorced

- Moderate education
- Moderate income

Widowed

- Less educated
- Highest disability

Men

Divorced

- Highest income
- Moderate education

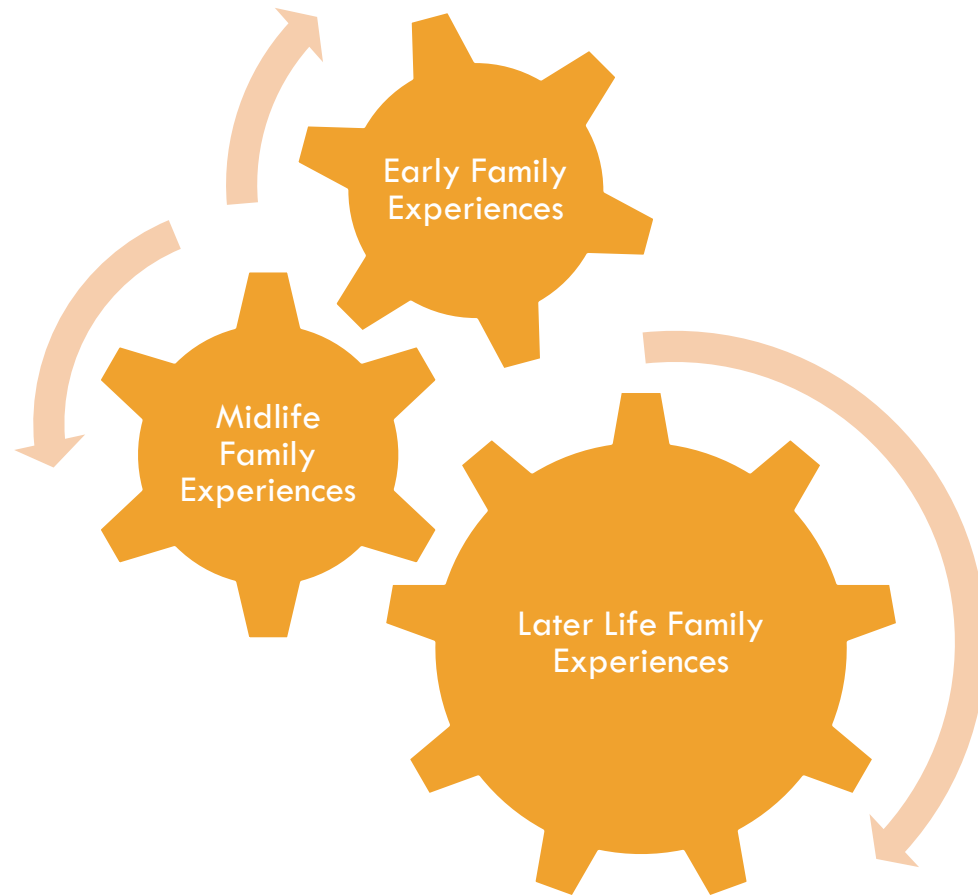
Widowed

- Moderate income
- Most disability

Never-married

- Highly educated
- Lowest income

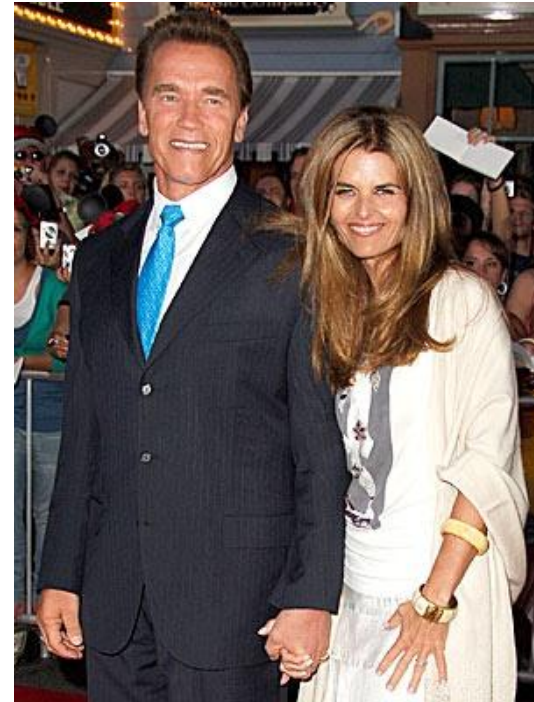
The Family Life Course



Later Life Divorce

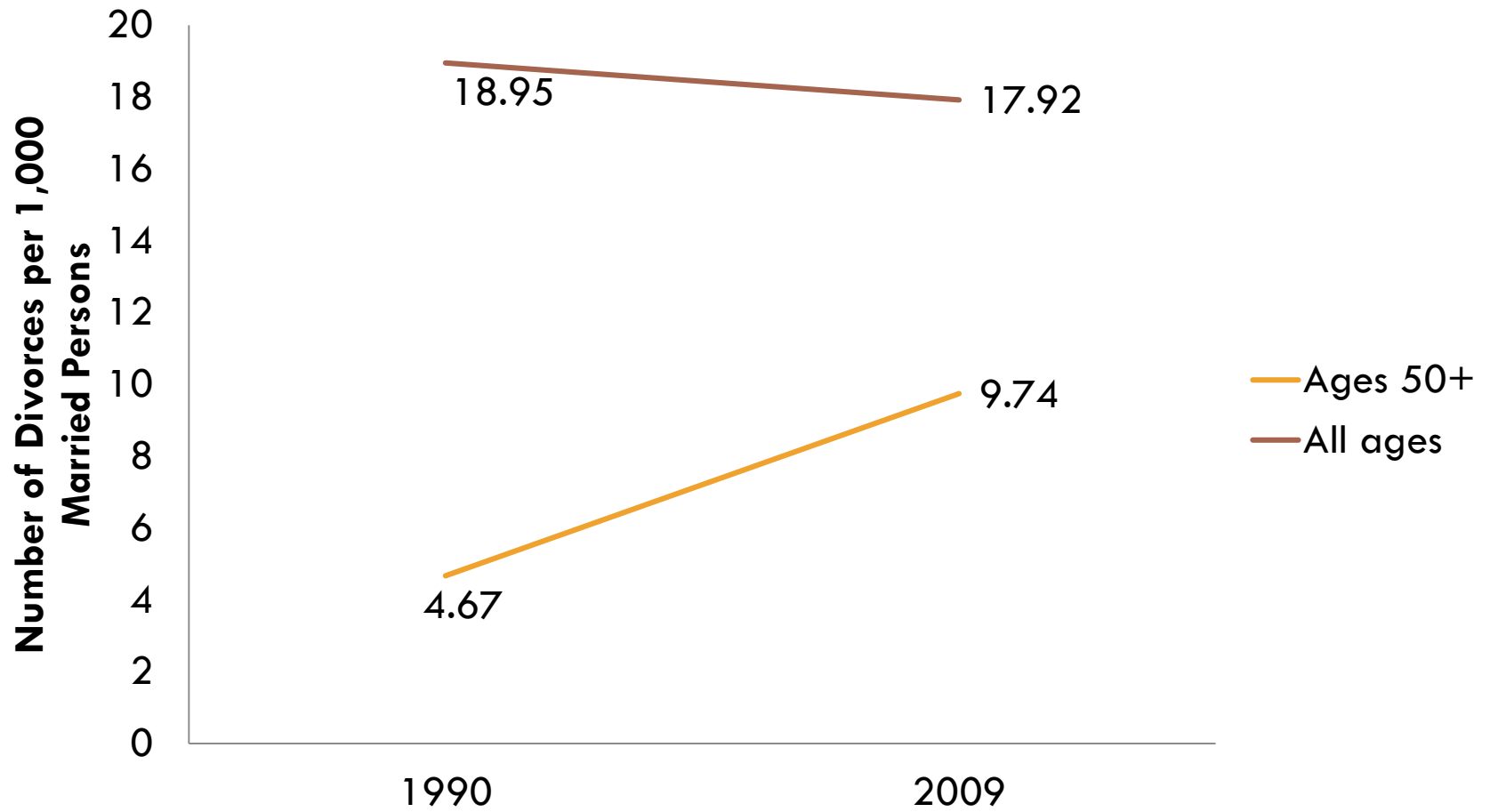


Al, 62, and Tipper, 61, Gore married 40 years

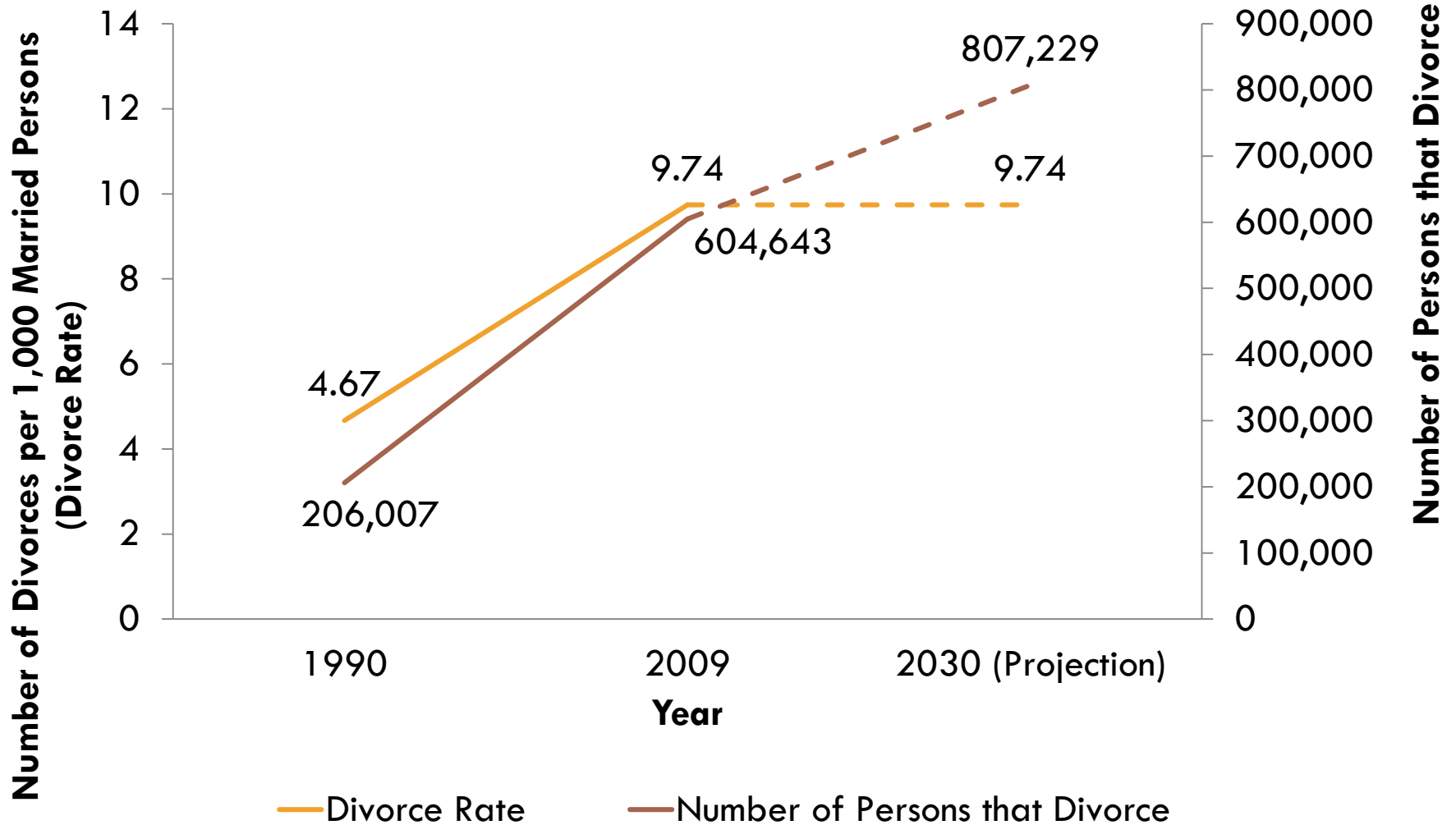


Arnold Schwarzenegger, 63, and Maria Shriver, 55, married 25 years

U.S. Divorce Rates, by Age



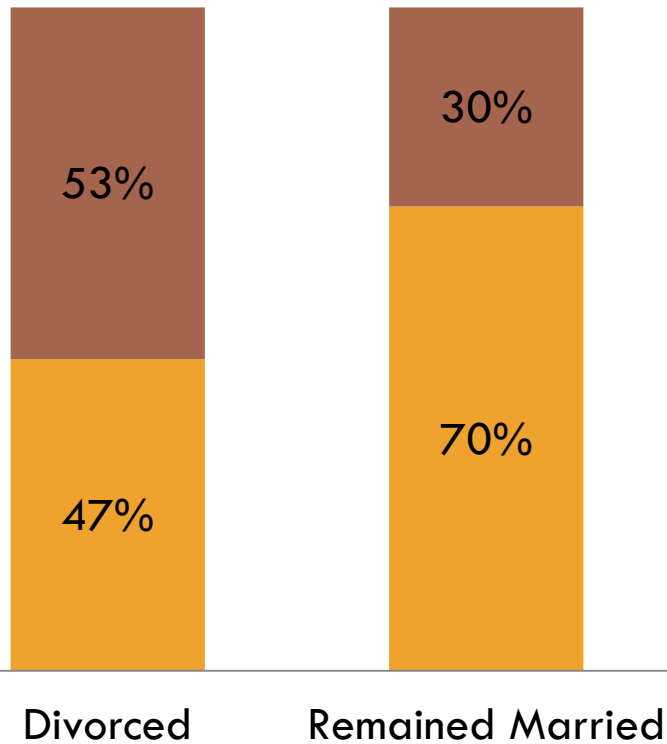
Divorce Rate and Number of Persons that Experience Divorce, Ages 50+



Explaining the Rise in Divorce

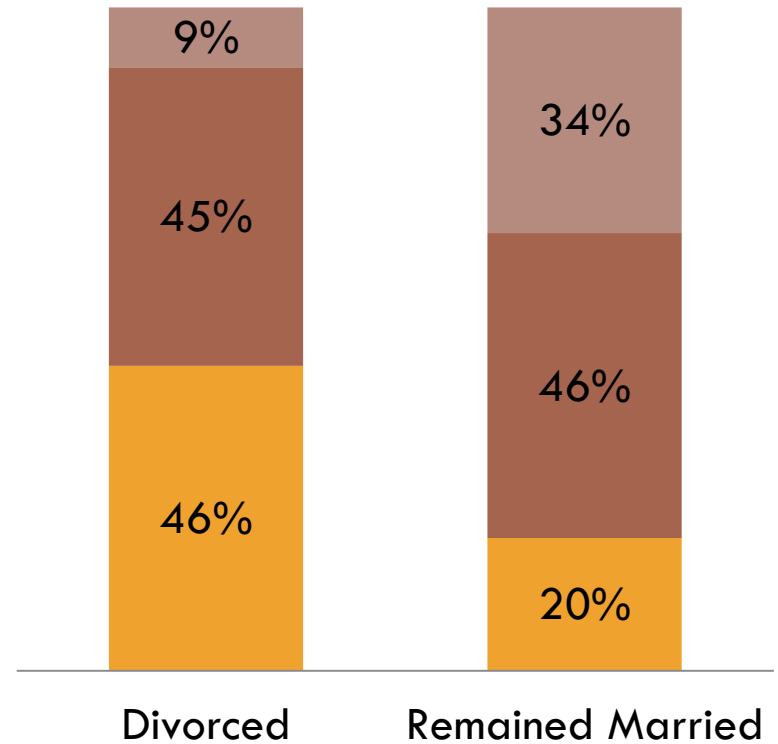
Marriage Order

■ First Marriage ■ Remarriage



Marital Duration

■ 0-19 ■ 20-39 ■ 40+



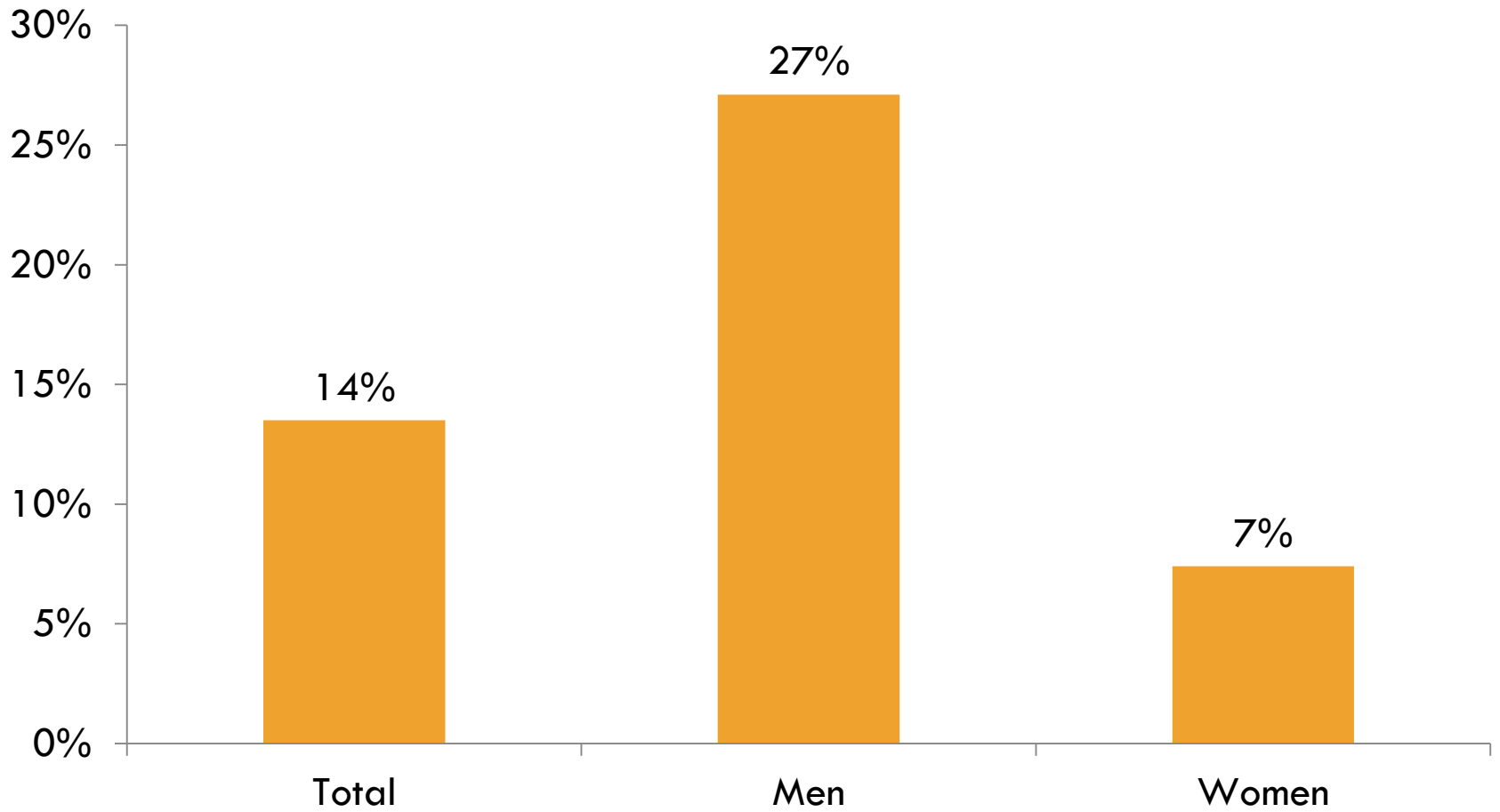
Unmarried in Later Life

- Roughly 1/3 of Baby Boomers will confront old age unmarried
- Married Boomers will continue to experience marital dissolution
 - The divorce rate has doubled among older adults
 - Widowhood increases with age
- A growing share of middle-aged and older adults is eligible to form partnerships

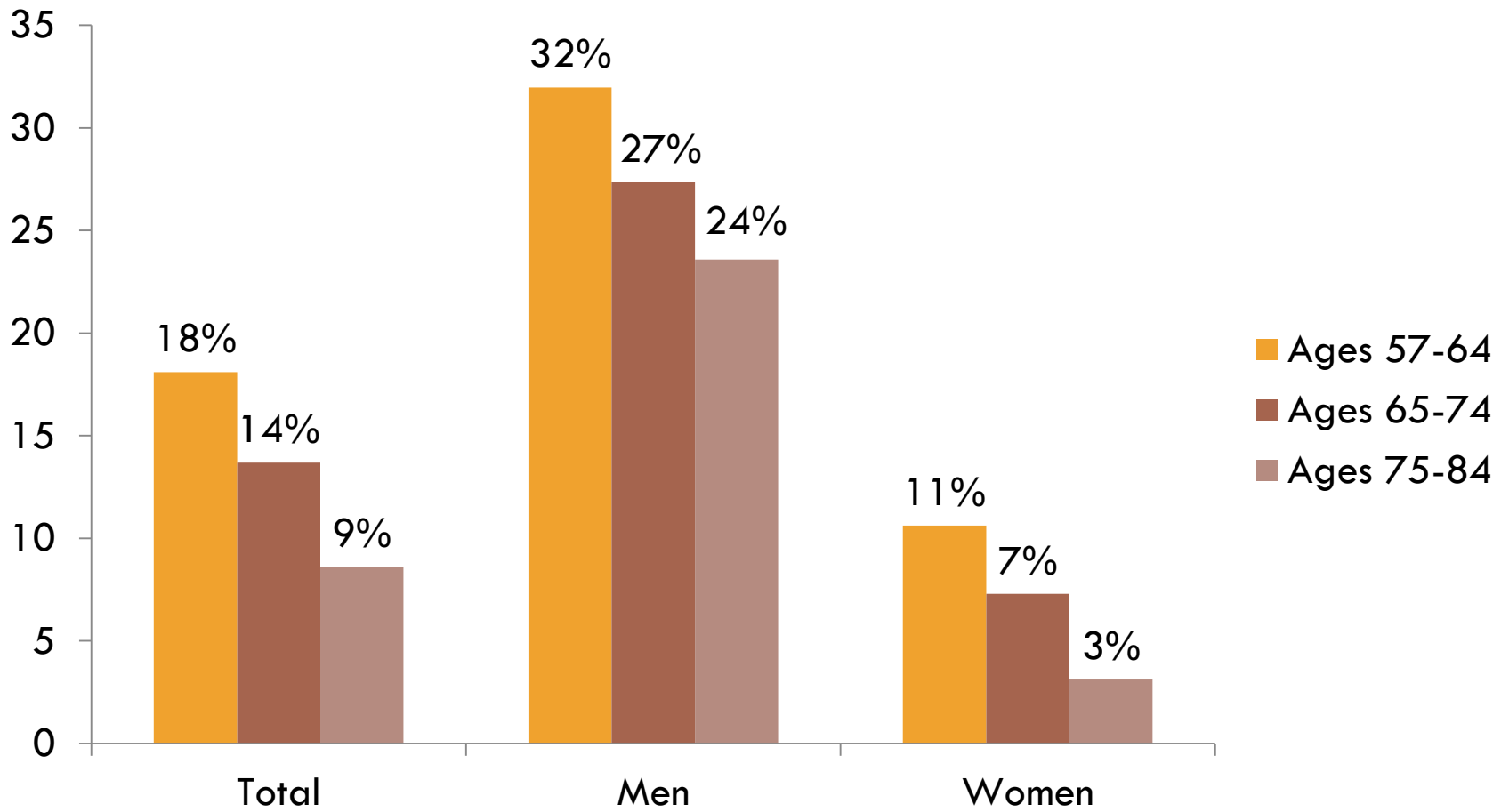
Unmarried Partnerships

- Partnering can provide social support
- Older adults are less desirous of remarriage but they do want companionship
- Types of unmarried partnerships
 - Dating
 - Cohabitation

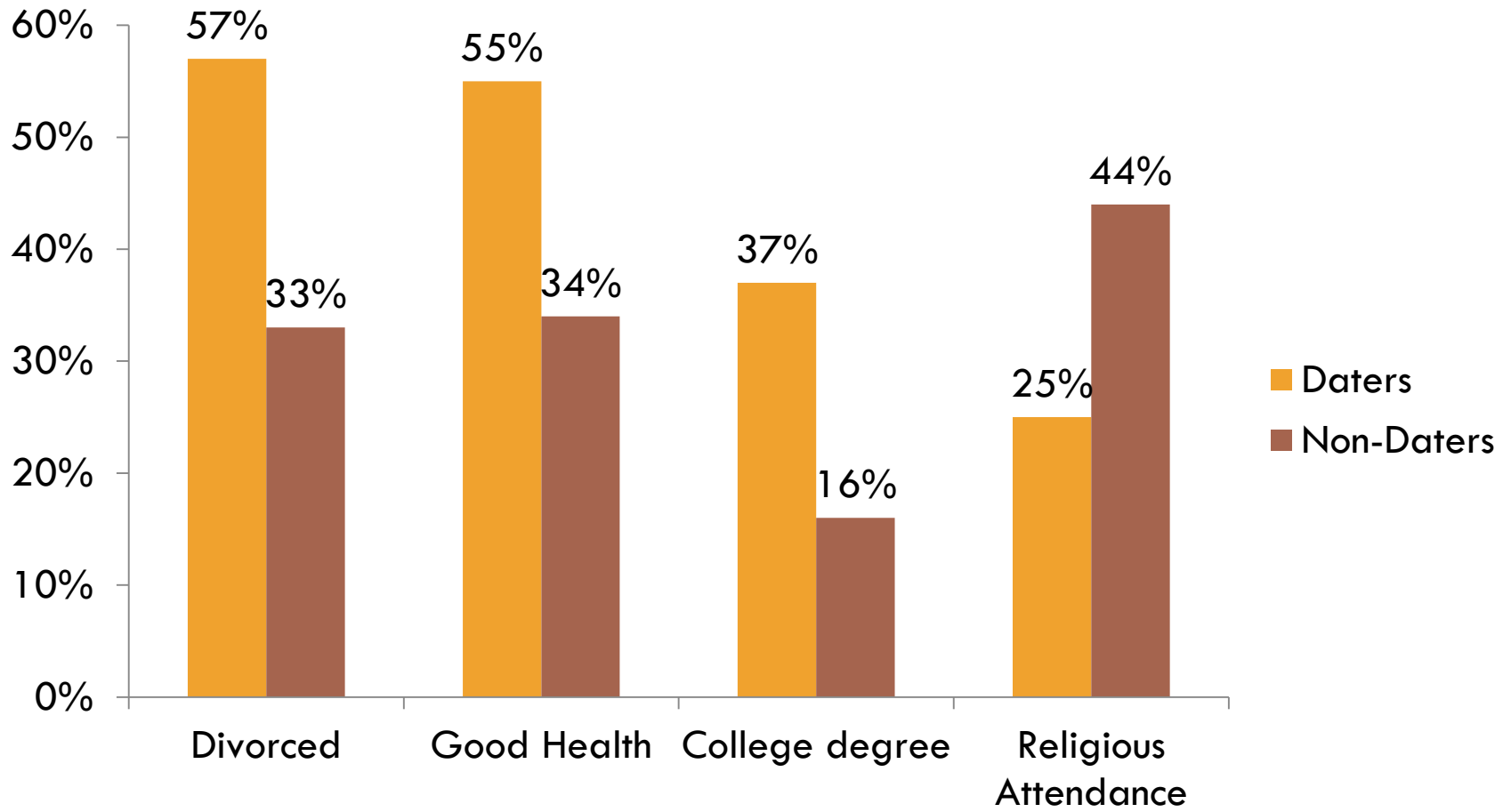
Daters among Unmarrieds, 57-84



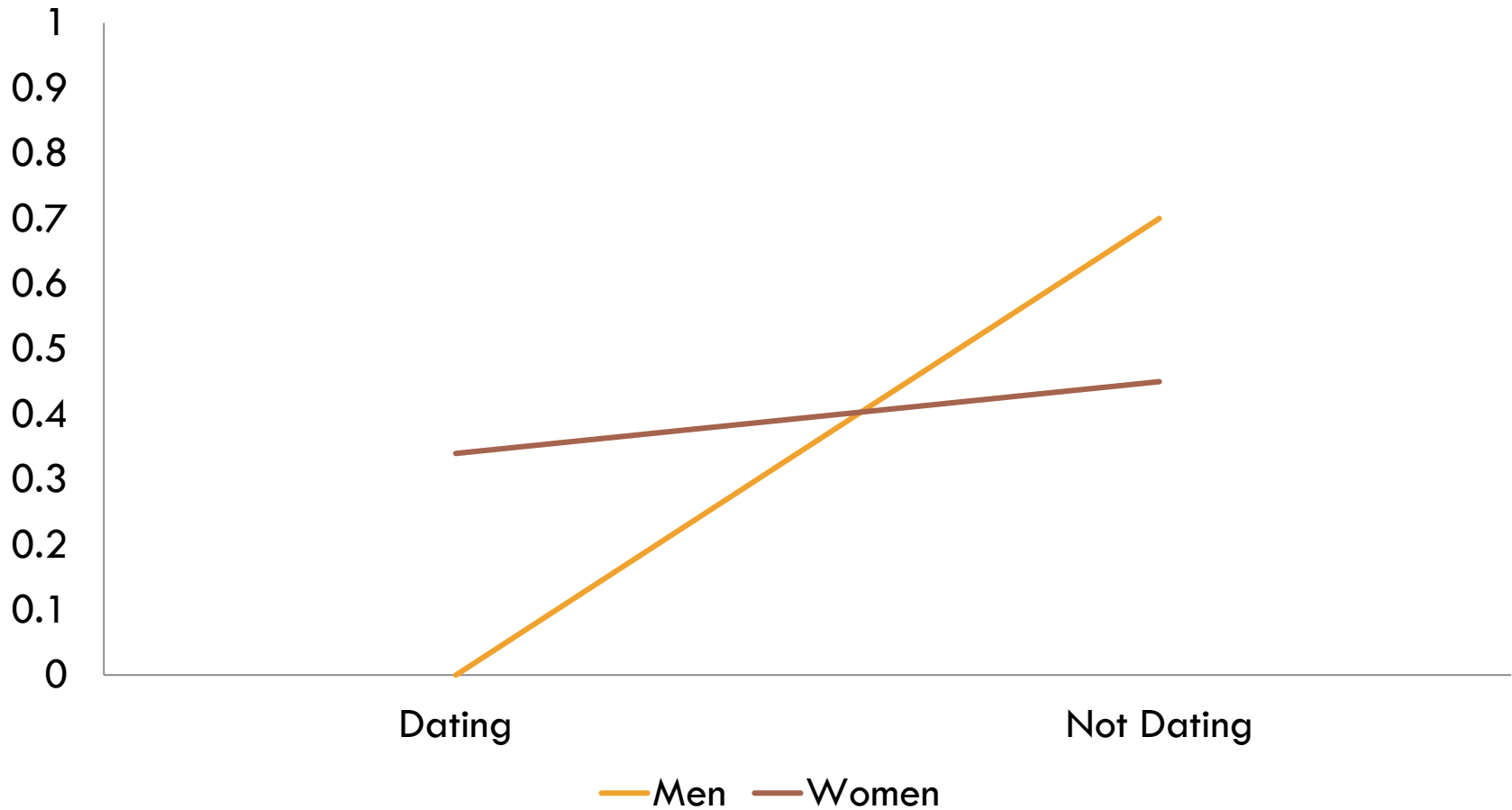
Dating by Age Group, 57-84



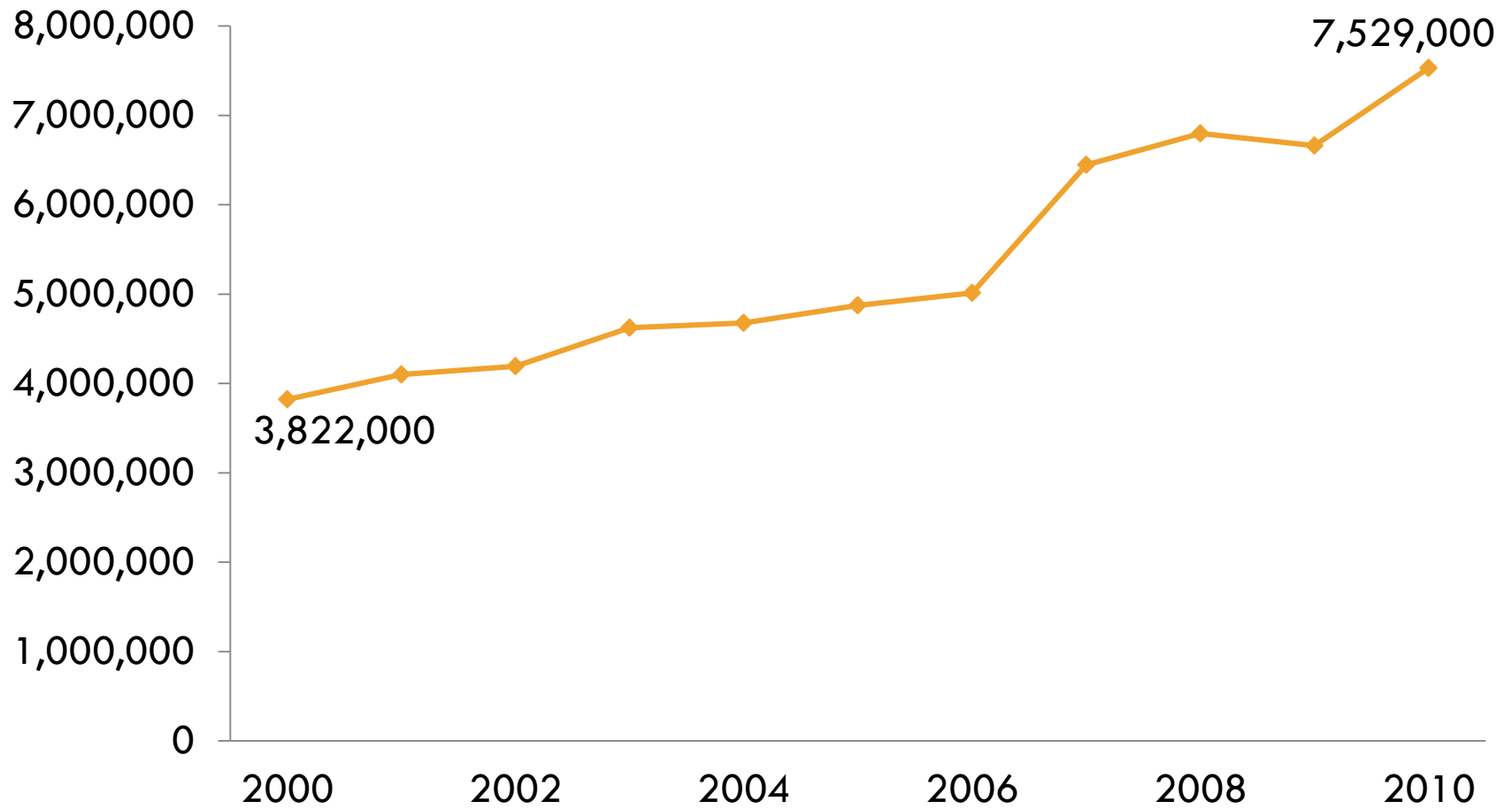
Daters vs. Non-Daters, 57-84



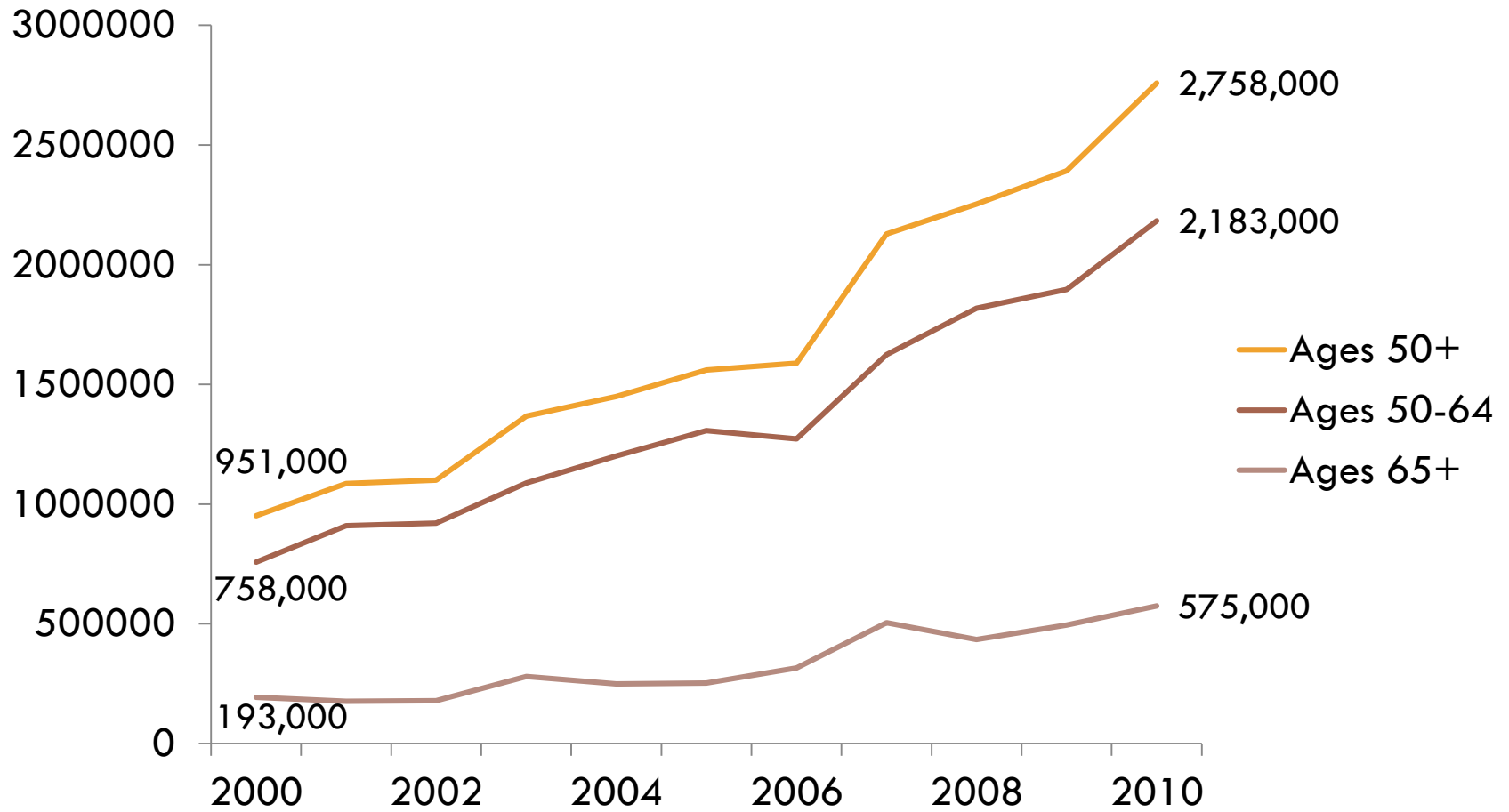
Dating and Loneliness, 57-84



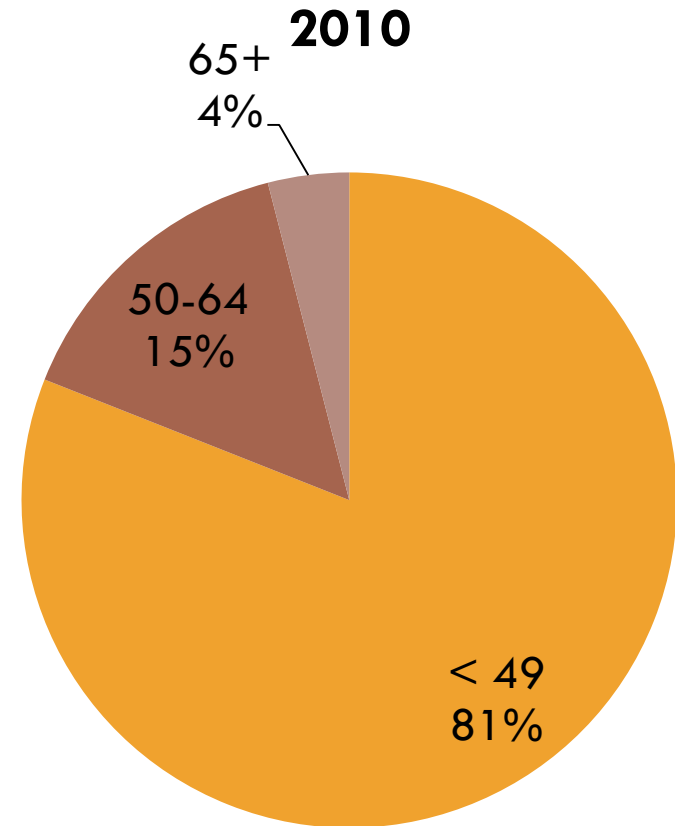
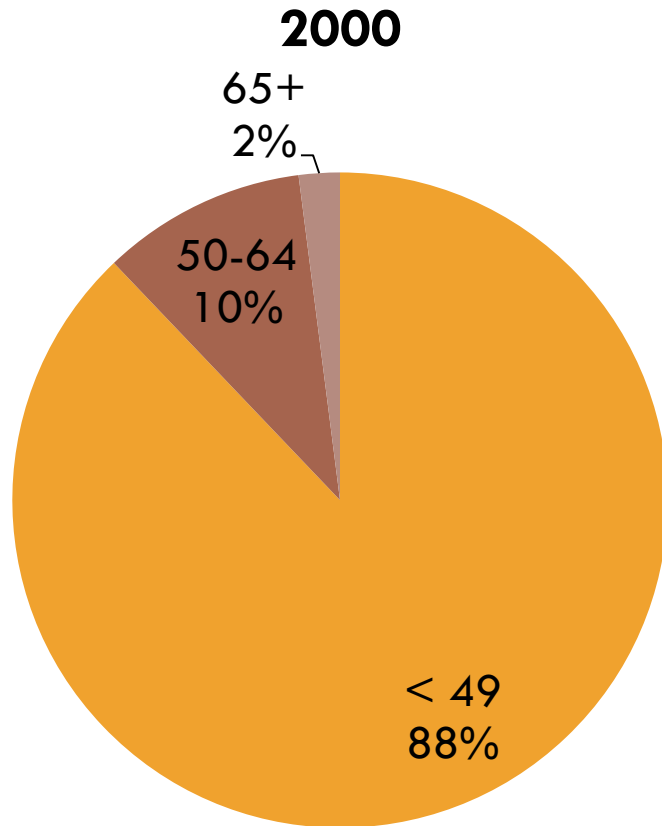
Cohabiting Couples in the U.S.



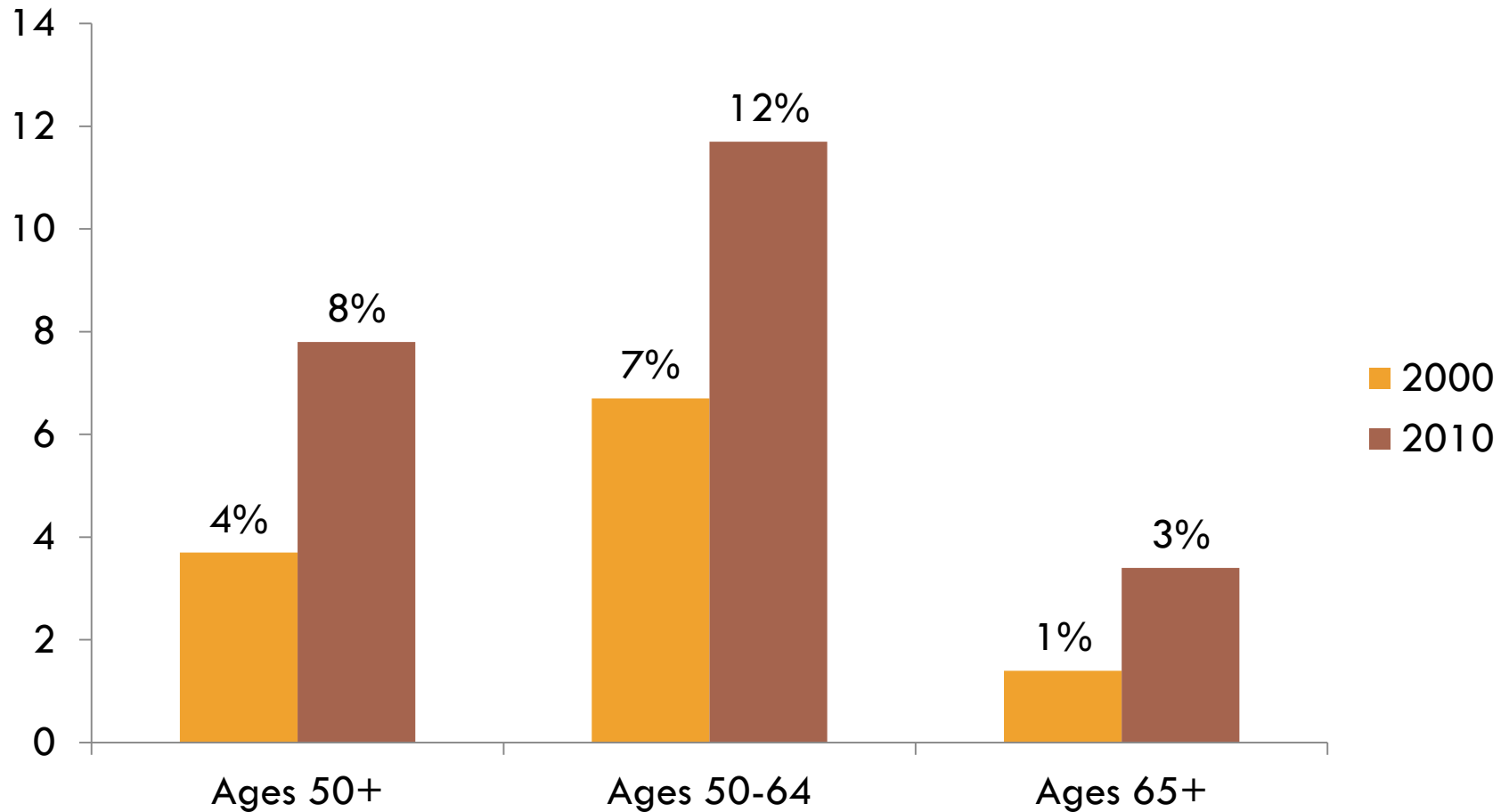
Middle-Age & Older Cohabitors



Age Distribution of Cohabitors



% Cohabiting among Unmarrieds



Why Cohabit in Later Life?

- Less interest in remarriage
 - ▣ Women especially want to maintain independence

- Economic incentives
 - ▣ Protect social security benefits, pension from former spouse
 - ▣ Avoid liability for partner's medical expenses, debt
 - ▣ Resource pooling is voluntary; protect assets, inheritance for adult children

Meet the Jordans

Charlotte: “I wasn't looking for anyone. Not at all. I was content.”

Jim was devastated by the loss of his wife and his sons suggested he consider finding a new mate.

He started asking women to have dinner with him. “And finally, Charlotte was the only one.”

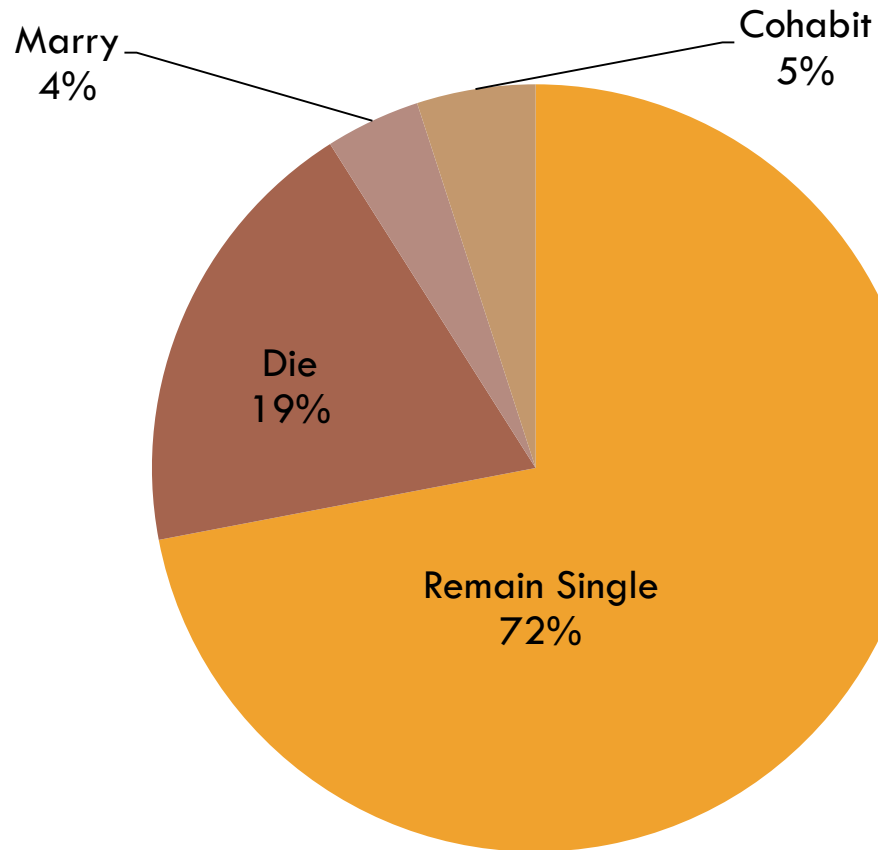
They considered marrying and consulted an attorney about a prenuptial agreement – only to discover that keeping their finances and family trusts separate would be expensive, if not impossible.

-adapted from *The Sacramento Bee*, September 1, 2011



Charlotte, 82, and Jim, 85, met in seniors-only housing and now divide their time between her apartment and his larger cottage.

Union Formation, ages 51-75



Older Cohabitors versus...

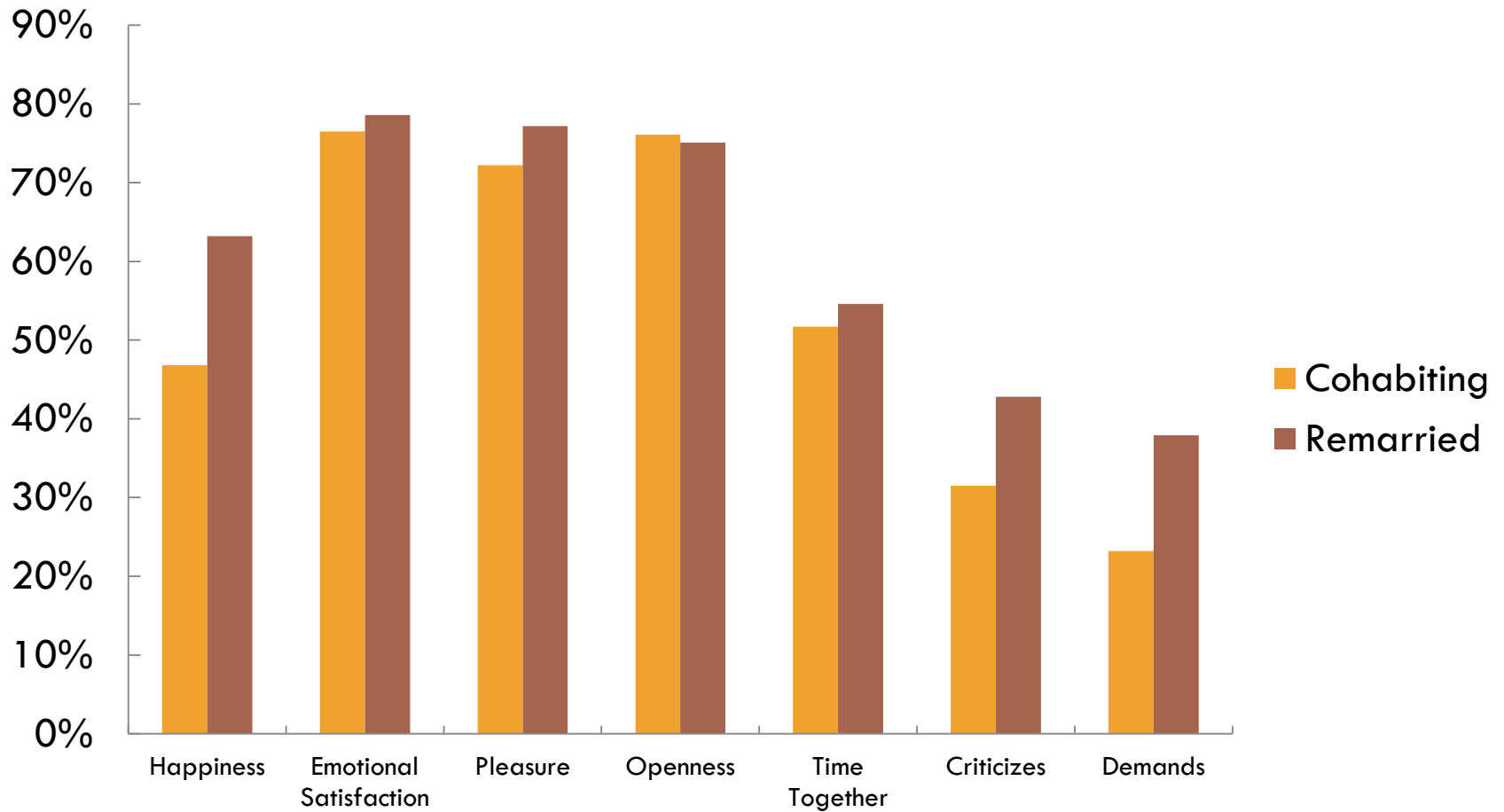
Remarrieds

- ❑ Cohabitors (esp. women) have fewer economic resources
- ❑ Similar levels of health limitations
- ❑ Cohabitors report weaker social ties

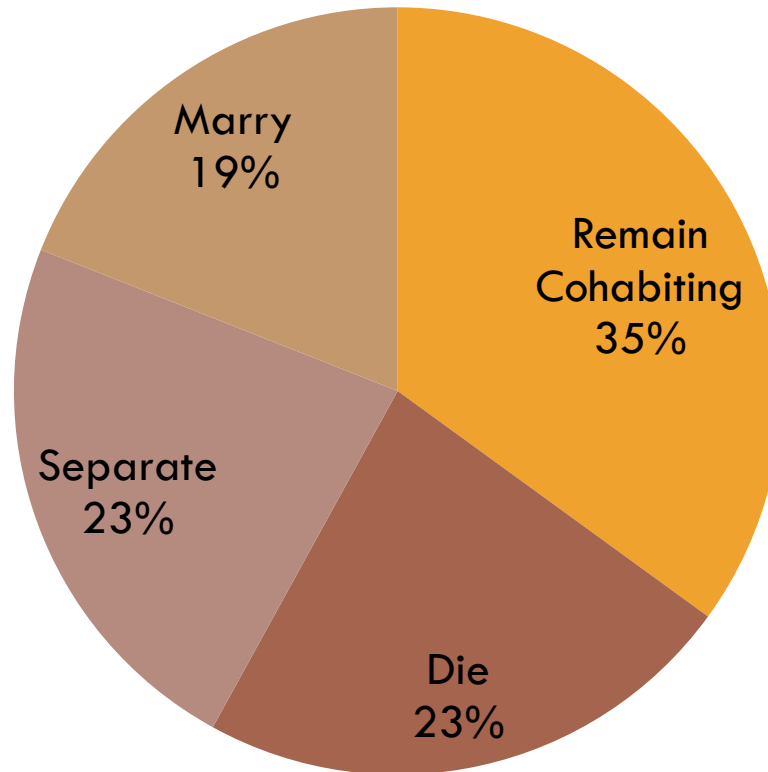
Unpartnereds

- ❑ Cohabitors enjoy greater economic resources
- ❑ Cohabitors have fewer health limitations
- ❑ Cohabitors report weaker social ties

Relationship Quality



Cohabitors' Union Outcomes



Cohabitation in Later Life

- Among older adults, cohabitation operates as a long-term alternative to marriage
- Nearly all cohabitators expect to remain with their partners for the rest of their lives
- Is cohabitation functionally equivalent to marriage in terms of outcomes?
 - Health and well-being
 - Mortality

Discussion

- More older adults will be unmarried
 - ▣ Reflects earlier life course experiences
 - ▣ Recent rise in middle-age and older adult divorce
- Older adults increasingly seek companionship outside of marriage
 - ▣ Dating is common
 - ▣ Cohabitation may be replacing marriage
- Next steps include uncovering how family transitions in later life are linked to well-being

thank you

browns1@bgsu.edu

This research was supported by a grant (R03-AG024512) to the author from the National Institute on Aging.

Additional support was provided by the Center for Family and Demographic Research, which receives core funding from NICHD (R24-HD050959) and the National Center for Family & Marriage Research, which is funded through a cooperative agreement with ASPE/HHS (U01-AE000001).