Divorced Adults Before Versus After Age 50: A National Portrait

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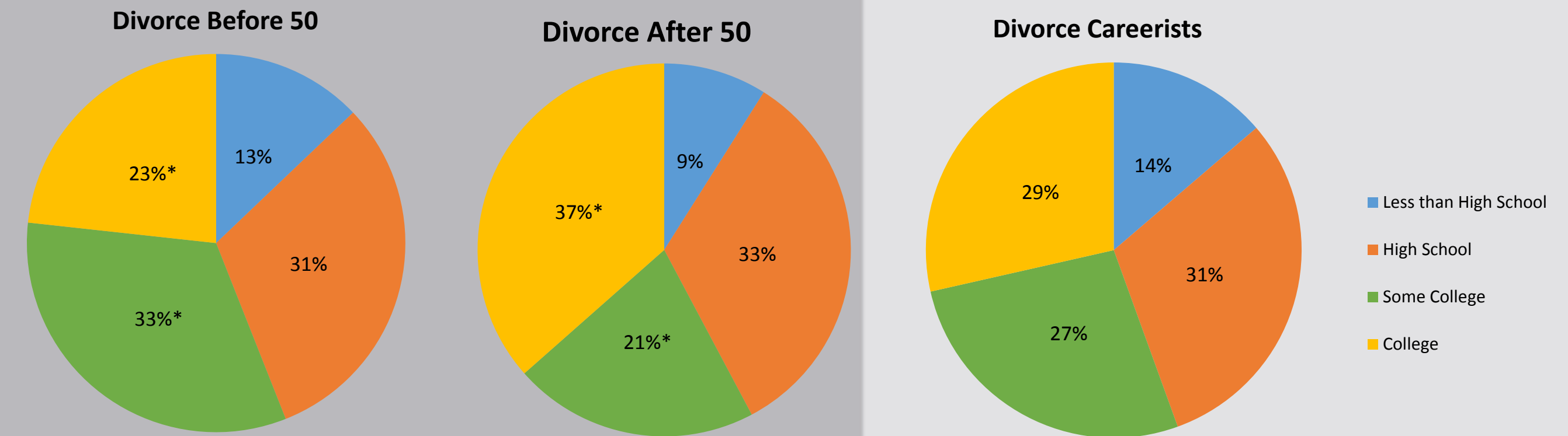**BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY**

Background

- Nearly one-half of marriages will end in divorce (Kennedy and Ruggles, 2014).

- The divorce rate among people 50 and older has doubled since 1990 (Brown and Lin, 2012).

- In 1990, fewer than 1 in 10 people divorced over 50 compared to more than 1 in 4 today (Brown and Lin, 2012).

- Current research focuses on divorce before 50, thus, studying divorce after 50 can inform future research on older adults' wellbeing and potentially influence current policies and attitudes.

Prior Research

- For adults 50 and younger (Amato, 2010)
  — Highest risk of divorce
    • Women, blacks, unemployed, less than high school, short marital duration, being in a higher order marriage, and low socioeconomic status

- For adults 50 and older (Montenegro, 2004)
  — Highest risk of divorce
    • Women, blacks, unemployed, employed full-time, less than high school, short marital duration, being in a high order marriage, and middle-aged (ages 50-64) individuals

Current Study

- Compare people who divorce before 50 and after 50.

- Examine how individuals who experienced divorce both before and after 50 ("divorce careerists") differ from individuals who divorced either before or after 50.

- National portrait includes:
  — Gender, racial or ethnic background, education, wealth, depression, self-rated health, number of marriages, and number of children

Data and Methods

- 2010 Health and Retirement Study
  — Examines experiences, relationships, health, and finances of middle-aged and older adults (50 and older)
  — Longitudinal data collected biennially from 1992 to present
  — 6 cohorts of older adults: Original HRS sample, AHEAD, CODA, WB, EBB, MBB
  — Overall sample approximately 20,000 respondents

- Analytic sample
  — Respondents aged 50 and older who reported at least one divorce (N=3,555)
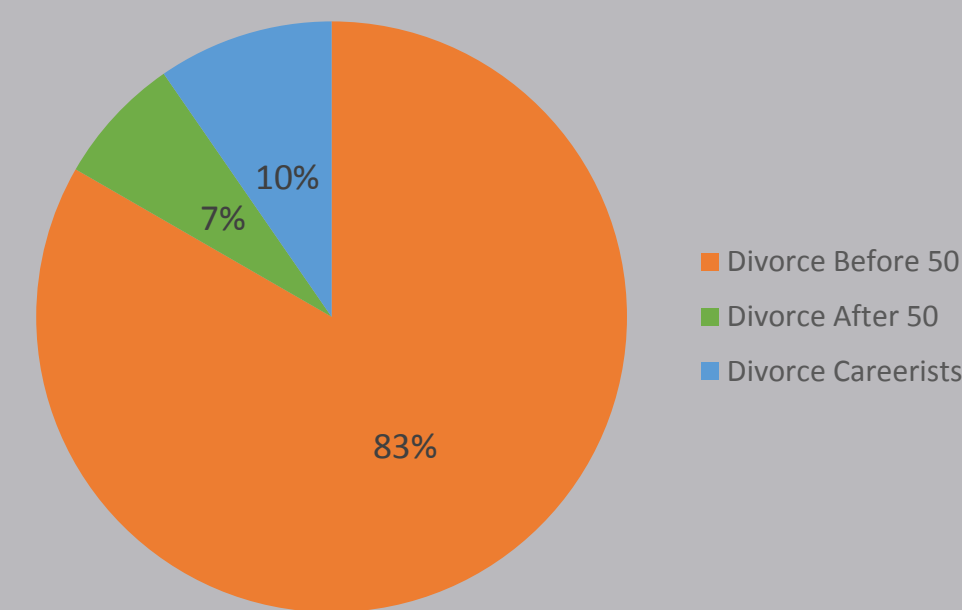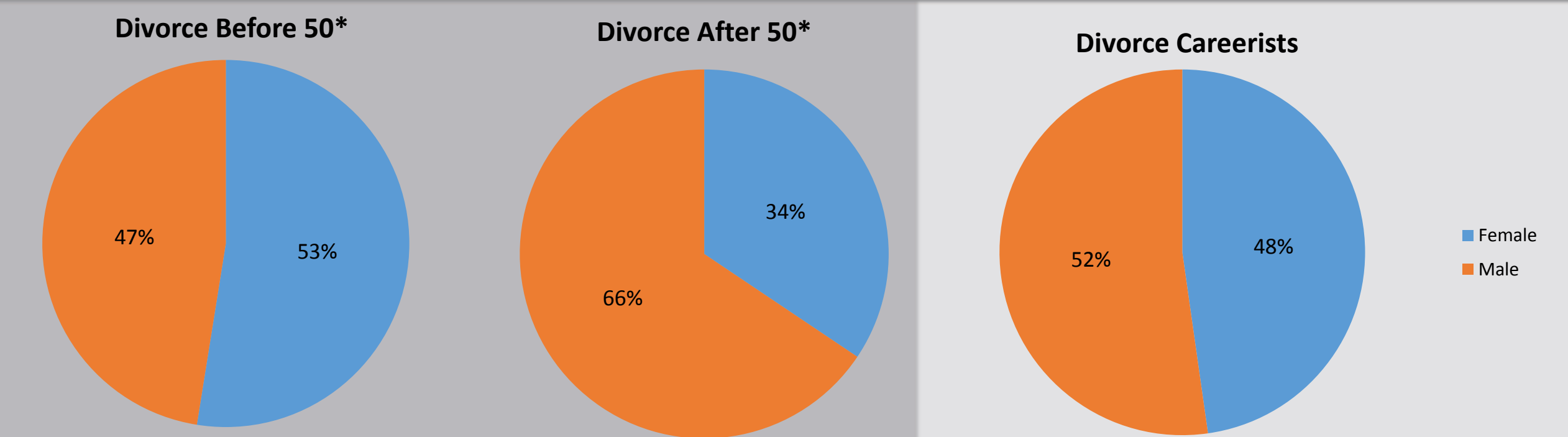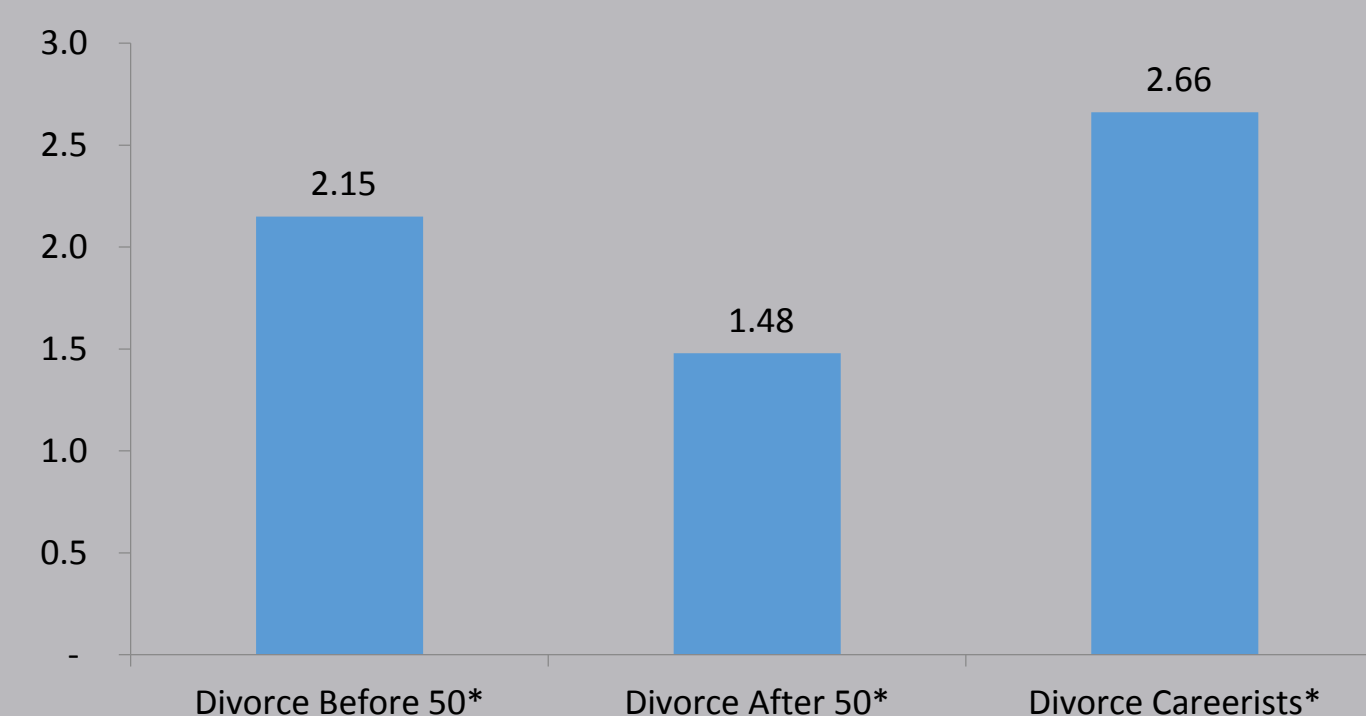 — Weighted estimates

Divorce Groups

Divorce Before 50 — 83%
Divorce After 50 — 7%
Divorce Careerists — 10%

Mean Number of Marriages

Divorce Before 50* — 2.15
Divorce After 50* — 1.48
Divorce Careerists* — 2.66

Educational Attainment

Divorce Before 50
13%, 31%, 33%*, 23%*

Divorce After 50
9%, 33%, 21%*, 37%*

Divorce Careerists
14%, 31%, 27%, 29%

Less than High School / High School / Some College / College

Gender

Divorce Before 50*
53%, 47%

Divorce After 50*
34%, 66%

Divorce Careerists
48%, 52%

Female / Male

Conclusion

- There is no difference across the divorce groups for most of the sociodemographic factors
- Divorce careerists have the highest mean number of marriages followed by those who divorced before 50.
- Adults divorced after 50 are more likely to have a college degree than adults divorced before 50. Divorce careerists do not differ from those who divorce before or after 50.
- Adults who divorce before 50 tend to be women whereas adults who divorce after 50 are more likely to be men. Divorce careerists do not differ from adults who divorce before or after 50.

Citations

- Amato, P. R. (2010). Research on Divorce: Continuing Trends and New Developments. *Journal of Marriage and Family.* 72: 650-666.
- Brown, S. L. & Lin, I.-F. (2012). The Gray Divorce Revolution: Rising Divorce among Middle-aged and Older Adults, 1990-2010. *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological and Social Sciences* 67(6):731-741.
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- Montenegro, X. P. (2004). *The Divorce Experience: A Study of Divorce at Midlife and Beyond*. Washington, DC: AARP Public Policy Institute.