U.S. ATTITUDES TOWARDS NONMARITAL CHILDBEARING 1988-2012

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Nonmarital Childbearing in the U. S.

- Nonmarital Childbearing has been increasing in the U.S. since the 1980’s
  - 21% in the early 1980s to 43% in the early 2010s
- Nonmarital childbearing is associated with poorer economic, health, and mental health outcomes for both the mothers and their children
- Researchers and policy makers are interested in reducing nonmarital childbearing
Why the Increase in Nonmarital Childbearing?

- Women’s increasing economic independence
- Increased government benefits for single mothers
- The decline in marriageable men
- Demographic changes in the U.S.
- Cultural shifts in views of marriage among American adults, particularly among minorities
  - Decline in social stigma attached to cohabitation and childrearing without marriage
The Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis I.** Attitudes towards nonmarital childbearing will have become more permissive among American adults from 1988 to 2012

- **Hypothesis II.** Women, Blacks, adults with lesser education, younger adults, and nonmarried adults will hold more permissive attitudes towards nonmarital childbearing than men, Whites, adults with high educations, older adults, and married adults

- **Hypothesis III.** After accounting for changes in demographic composition of the United States, the change in attitudes becoming more permissive over time will remain
U. S. Attitudes Towards the Family

- U.S. adults’ views or attitudes towards marriage, family, and women’s roles dramatically shifted in the latter half of the 20th century
  - Why? Partially due to the feminist and sexual revolutions as well as the increases in women’s labor force participation in the 1970s

- Social stigma associated non-traditional families, such as cohabitation and single-mother families, have been declining

- However, changes in attitudes towards nonmarital childbearing have been under-investigated
U.S. Attitudes Towards Marriage & Family: Trends

■ In the mid-1990s, Ooms (1995) found that “The vast majority of Americans still consider unmarried childbearing to be an unwelcome event under many circumstances” (p. 204)

■ While this view remains normative, permissive attitudes towards nonmarital childbearing have become more common over time

■ Co-habitors have been found to not marry due to lowered perceived stigma; similar trends may apply for nonmarital childbearing
U.S. Attitudes Towards Marriage & Family: Demographic Attitudes

- **Gender**: Women tend to be more permissive than men
- **Race**: Blacks tend to be more permissive than Whites
- **Education**: Adults with less education tend to be more permissive than adults with higher education
- **Age**: Younger adults tend to be more permissive than older adults
- **Marital Status**: Nonmarried adults tend to be more permissive than married adults
U.S. Attitudes Towards Marriage & Family: Demographic Composition

- **Race**: The U.S. have become more racially diverse than ever
- **Education**: The U.S. has become more educated than ever
- **Age**: American society is aging
- **Marital Status**: Less people are getting married or staying married
The Hypotheses (Reprise)

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Data

  - Conducted by National Opinion Research Center (NORC)
  - American adults ages 18 and up not abroad, institutionalized, or enrolled in the military

- Total N=5,190 (Original N=9,212)
  - 1988: N=1,376; 1994: N=1,400; 2002: N=1,144; 2012: N=1,270

- All samples were weighted using the weight variable provided by the NORC
Methods: The Dependent Variable

- Attitudes towards nonmarital childbearing: “Those who want children ought to get married”
  - 1 = strongly disagree [More Permissive]
  - 2 = disagree
  - 3 = neither agree nor disagree
  - 4 = agree
  - 5 = strongly agree [Less Permissive]

- If values decrease, permissiveness has increased.
Methods: The Independent Variables

■ **Gender**: Female & Male
■ **Race**: White, Black, & Other
  - *(Hispanic was not added to the GSS until 2000)*
■ **Education**: Less than high school, High school, Some college, College+
■ **Age**: 19-29, 30-49, & 50+
■ **Marital Status**: Married, Divorced/Separated, Widowed, & Never Married
Methods: The Math

- T-Tests
- Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regression
- Ordered Logistical (O. Log) Regression
RESULTS
HYPOTHESIS I: Attitudes Towards Nonmarital Childbearing Will Have Become More Permissive Among American Adults From 1988 To 2012
Results: Bivariate Analysis

Attitudes towards nonmarital fertility became significantly more permissive

(Higher numbers = less permissive)
HYPOTHESIS II. Women, Blacks, Adults With Lesser Education, Younger Adults, And Nonmarried Adults Will Hold More Permissive Attitudes Towards Nonmarital Childbearing Than Men, Whites, Adults With High Educations, Older Adults, And Married Adults
Results: Demographic Attitudes

■ Gender:
  - Women more permissive than men \((p<.001)\)

■ Race:
  - Blacks more permissive than Whites \((p<.001)\)
  - Other more permissive than Whites \((p<.001)\)

■ Education:
  - <High School less permissive than College+ \((p<.05)\)
  - Some College less permissive than College+ \((p<.05)\)
  - High school not significantly different than College+
Results: Demographic Attitudes

- **Age:**
  - 18-29 more permissive than 30-49 ($p<.001$)
  - 50+ less permissive than 30-49 ($p<.001$)

- **Marital Status:**
  - Widowed less permissive than married ($p<.05$)
  - Divorced/Separated more permissive than married ($p<.001$)
  - Never Married more permissive than married ($p<.001$)
HYPOTHESIS III. After Accounting For Changes In Demographic Composition Of The United States, The Change In Attitudes Becoming More Permissive Over Time Will Remain
Results: Demographic Composition (1988-2012)

- **Gender**: No significant change
- **Race**: Increased diversity
  - Less Whites (84% -> 75%)
  - More Nonwhites (Blacks 12% -> 15%; Other 4% -> 11%)
- **Education**: Increased educational attainment
  - Increase in Some College (23% -> 28%) and College+ (19% -> 29%)
  - Decrease in Less than High School (26% -> 15%) and High School (32% -> 27%)
Results: Demographic Composition (1988-2012)

- **Age**: Aging society
  - *Increase in 50+ (33% -> 39%) and decrease in 18-29 (27% -> 22%)*

- **Marital Status**: Less married & more diverse
  - *Married decreased (60% -> 52%)*
  - *Increase in Divorced/Separated (11% -> 14%) & Never Married (21% -> 29%)*
Results: Time + Accounting for Demographics

In both the OLS (shown) & O. Log Regression, year remained significant after accounting for demographic variables compared to 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yr 1994</td>
<td>-.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 2002</td>
<td>-.126**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 2012</td>
<td>-.313***</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Hypotheses (Reprise Reprise)

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■ Hypothesis III. After accounting for changes in demographic composition of the United States, the change in attitudes becoming more permissive over time will remain

■ All hypotheses were supported
Results: Some Caveats

- **Education**: Adults with a high school diploma show no difference from those with a college degree in their attitudes
  - *This is consistent with rapid increases in nonmarital childbearing rates for those with some college education than for those with high school diploma*

- **Marital Status**: Widowed individuals were found to be slightly less permissive than married adults
  - *Take that with a grain of salt: there were few cases (total N=476, which led to some cell counts as low as 4)*
Interpretation: Support for a Theory of a Cultural Shift in Attitudes

- Demographic shifts seem to account for some of the changes in attitudes
- Cultural shifts in views of marriage among racial/ethnic minorities and the poor have influenced the shift
  - *NOTE: Behavior may precede attitudes*
- Accounting for demographics: there is still an overall shift in attitudes over time
  - *Prior hypotheses do not fully account for this trend*
Moving Forward: Future Research

- Further research is needed to explore theoretical explanations for the overall cultural attitude shift over time
  - *Perhaps qualitative work focusing on what leads to attitude formation and attitude transitions?*
- U.S. still holds an overall slightly negative view towards nonmarital childbearing, but has moved significantly towards increased permissiveness
WANT TO SEE EVEN MORE NUMBERS? E-MAIL ME AT SNOUSA_@GMAIL.COM!

Thank you for your attention!