

# 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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-habitators 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

- General Social Survey (GSS) from 1988, 1994, 2002, and 2012
  - *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

- *Time*: Measured by Year: 1988, 1994, 2002, & 2012
- *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

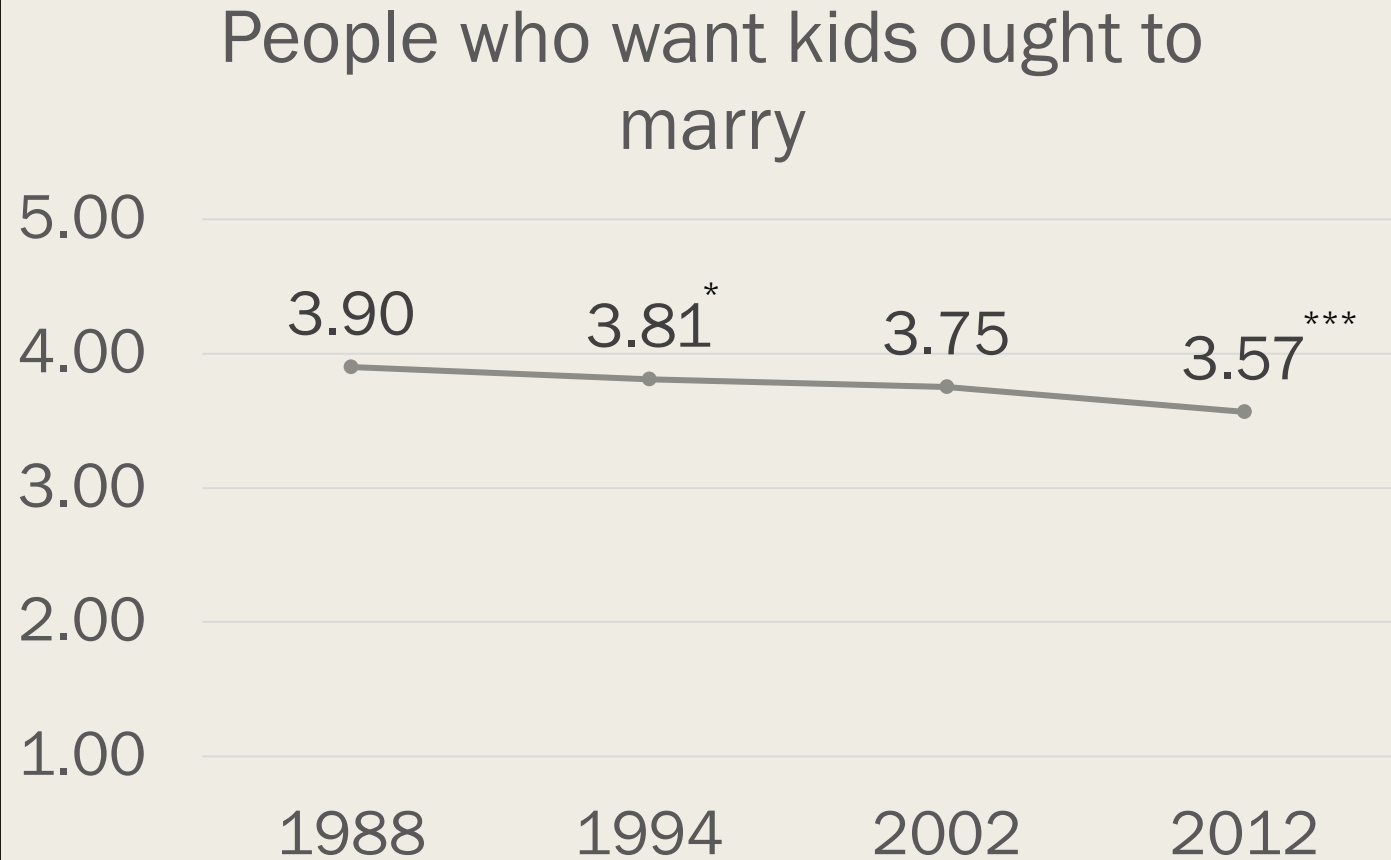


*HYPOTHESIS I:* Attitudes Towards Nonmarital  
Childbearing Will Have Become More Permissive  
Among American Adults From 1988 To 2012

## 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%)

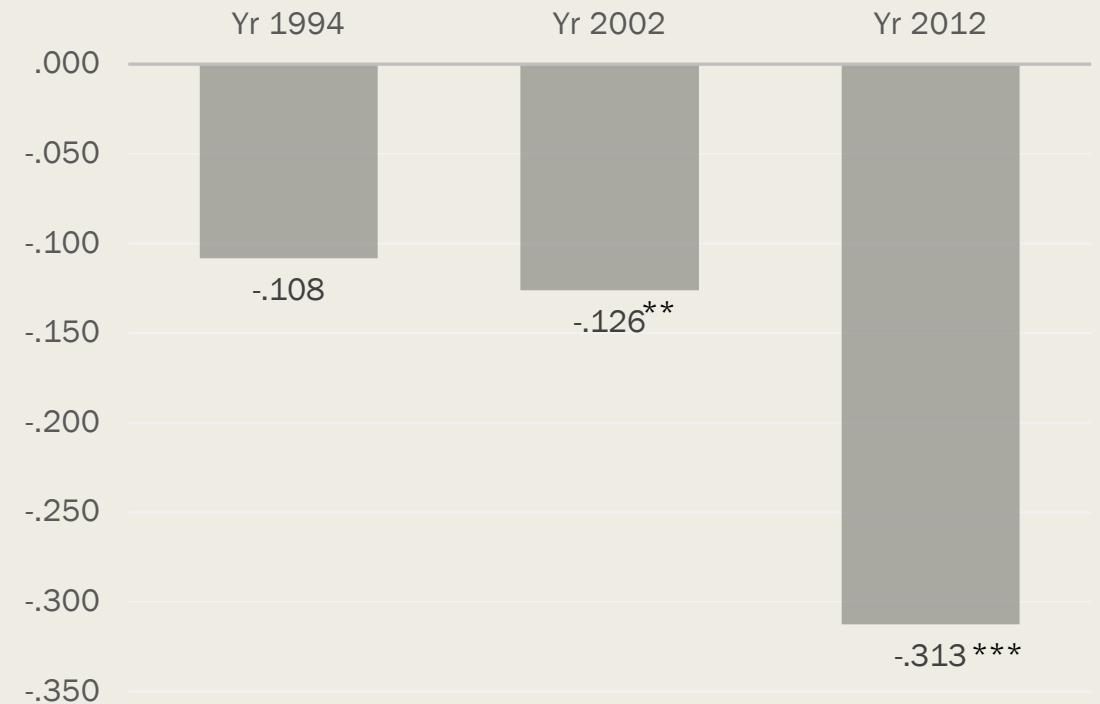
# Results: Demographic Composition (1988-2012)

- 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

OLS Regression Coefficients



# 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

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Thank you for your attention!

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