



For the Least of These: Marriage is a Matter of Fundamental Social Justice

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The Renaissance of Social Justice

President Obama



The “defining challenge of our time,” said President Barack Obama, is that there is “a dangerous and growing inequality and lack of upward mobility that has jeopardized... America’s basic bargain -- that if you work hard, you have a chance to get ahead.”

Inequality



- “We can no longer trust in the unseen forces and the invisible hand of the market. Growth in justice requires more than economic growth, while presupposing such growth: it requires decisions, programs, mechanisms and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality.” ~ Pope Francis

Poverty



- “Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid.” ~ Pope Francis

The Vulnerable



- “It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about.” ~ Pope Francis

What about Marriage?

- But the new attention devoted to inequality, poverty, and the most vulnerable among us—to social justice, more broadly—has not factored in the ways that:
 - The retreat from marriage in the United States is a cause of the growing economic and social divide in America that has left poor & working-class doubly disadvantaged.

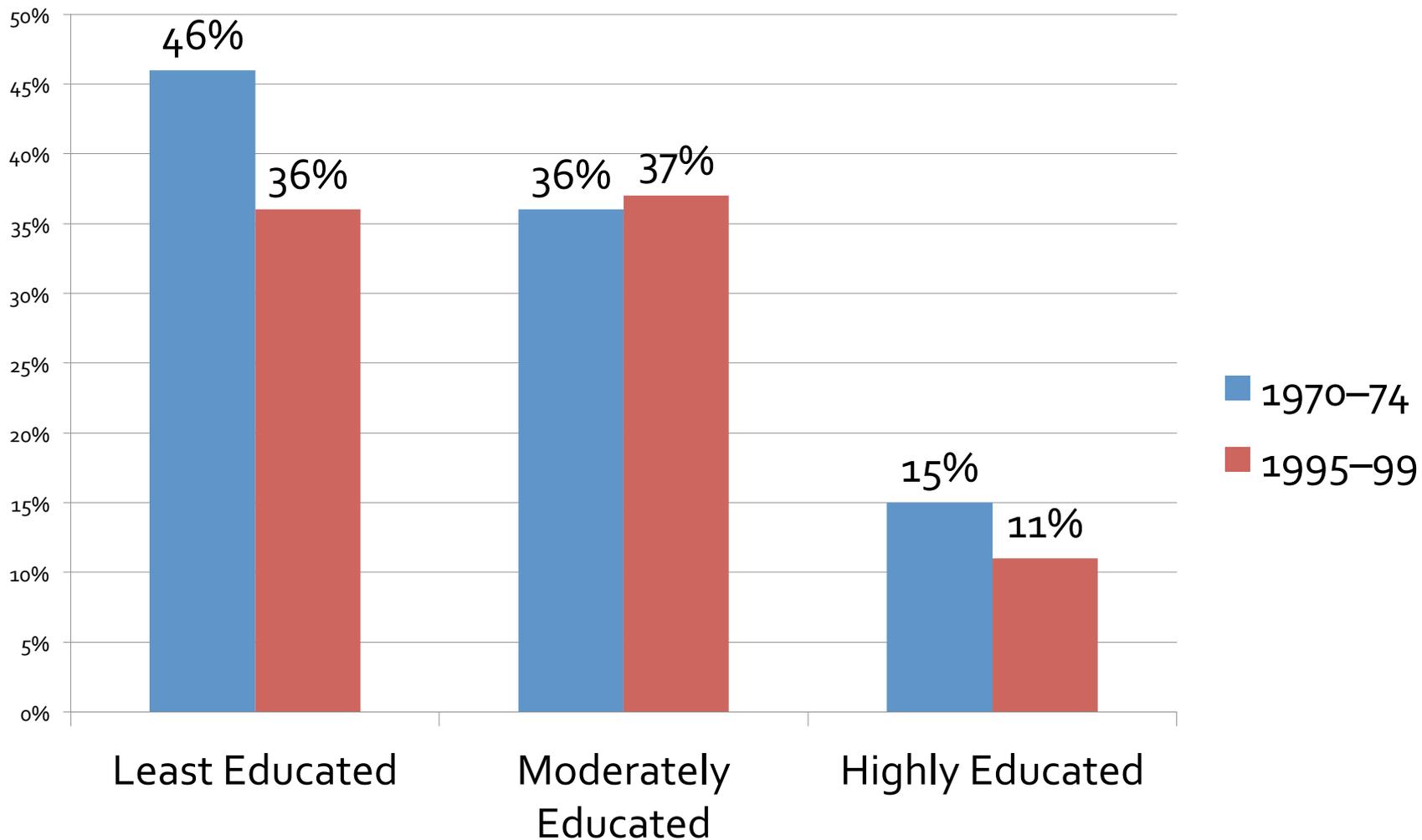
What Marriage Inequality in the U.S. Looks Like

The Marriage Divide

- The United States is increasingly “separate and unequal” when it comes to marriage.
- Growing class divide in marriage:
 - College-educated are enjoying relatively high-quality, stable marriages;
 - But less-educated are less and less likely to form and sustain high-quality marriages;
 - Children in working-class and poor communities are less likely to enjoy the benefits of growing up in an intact, married family.

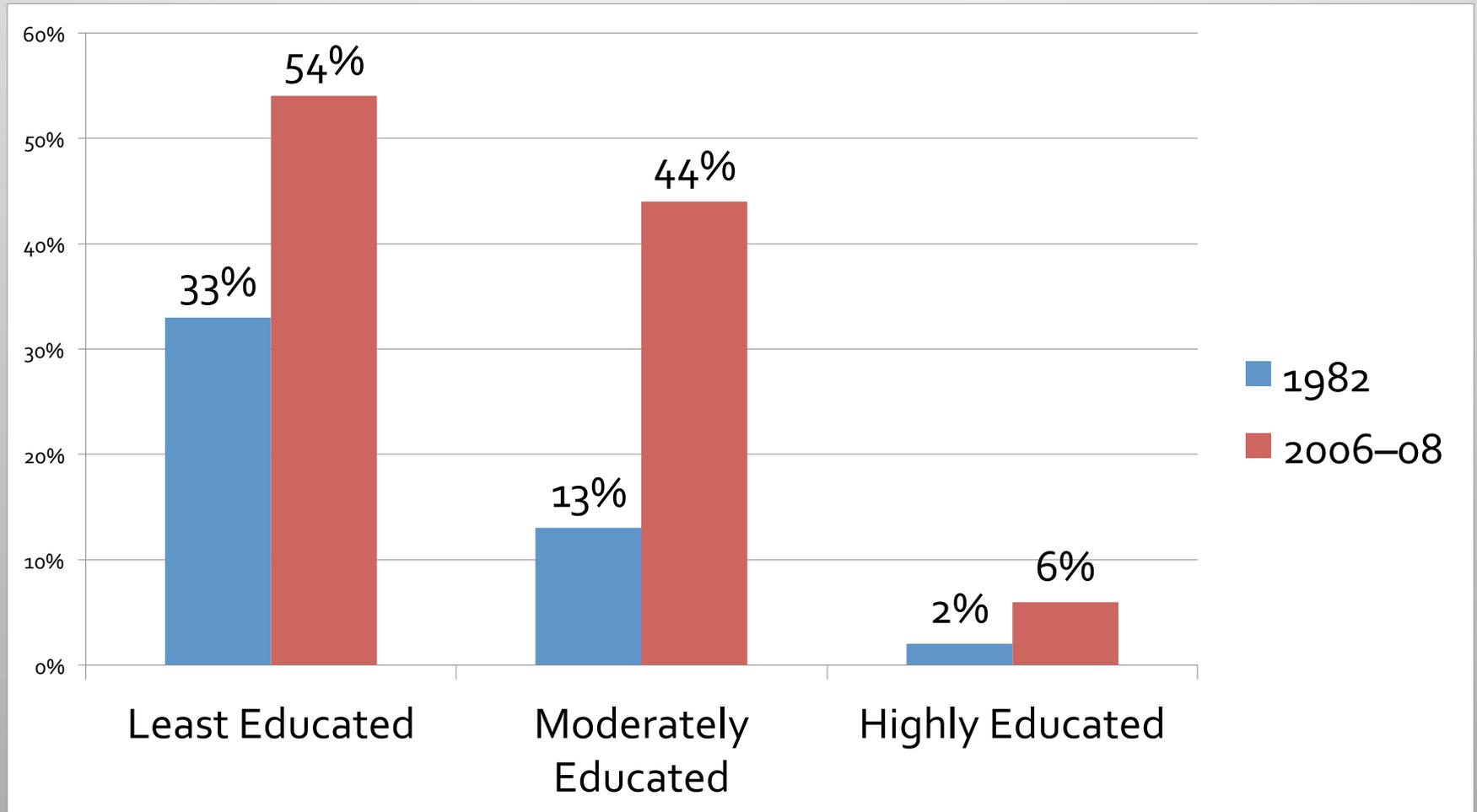
Divorce in First 10 Years

Source: NMP/IAV 2010



Nonmarital Childbearing

Source: NMP/IAV 2010

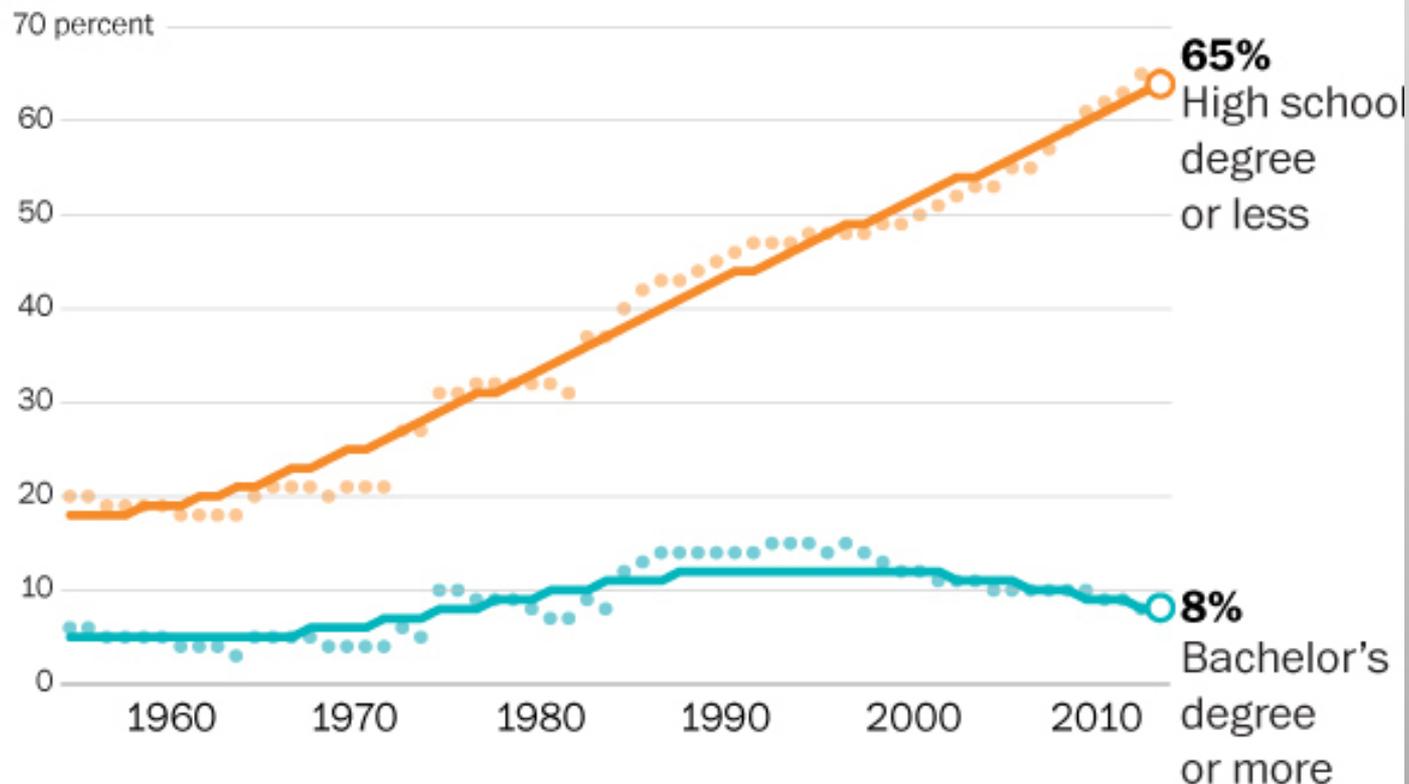


The United States

Source: Putnam 2015

Children living in a single-parent home

In 2012, 65 percent of children whose mothers never made it past high school spent at least part of their early childhood in a single-parent household, up from 20 percent in 1953.



The Growing Marriage Divide

The Bottom Line:

- The U.S. is in danger of “devolving into a separate-and-unequal family regime, where the highly educated and the affluent enjoy strong and stable households and everyone else is consigned to increasingly unstable, unhappy, and unworkable ones.” (Wilcox 2010)

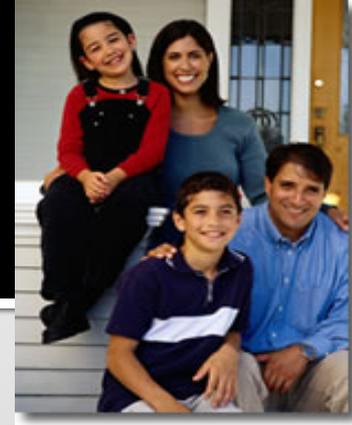
How & Why Marriage Matters for Children

Why Should We Care?

- Why should we care that more children are spending time in single-parent homes?
 - Aren't families just changing with the times?



Two Married Parents are Better than One: Outcomes



Children reared in single-parent homes are two to three times more likely to experience serious negative outcomes.

- About 10% of children in biological married-parent homes experience such outcomes.
- About 25-30% of children in biological single-parent homes experience such outcomes.

▪ (Sources: Amato 2005; Hetherington 2002; McLanahan & Sandefur 1994)

Findings from the U.S.

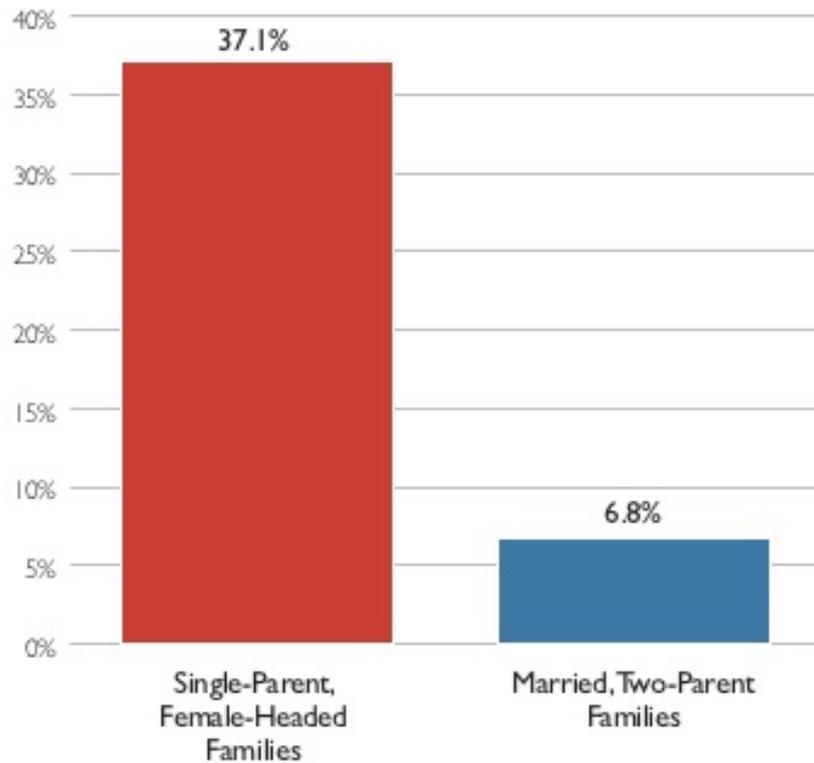
- The consequences of single parenthood for children:
 - Psychological:
 - Suicide, drug abuse & depression
 - Social:
 - Delinquency, teen pregnancy & school failure
 - Economic:
 - Poverty, & material hardship

Poverty



Marriage Drops the Probability of Child Poverty

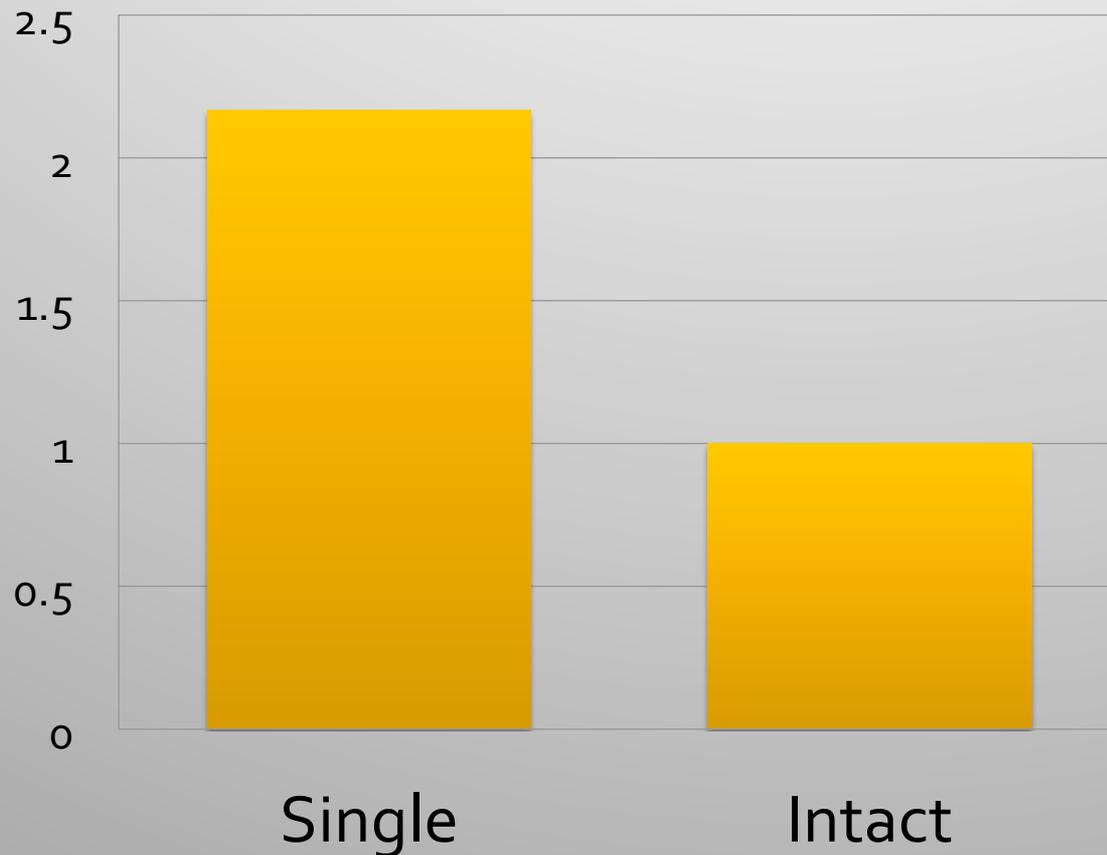
PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN THAT ARE POOR



Young Men in Prison



Odds of Incarceration by 30

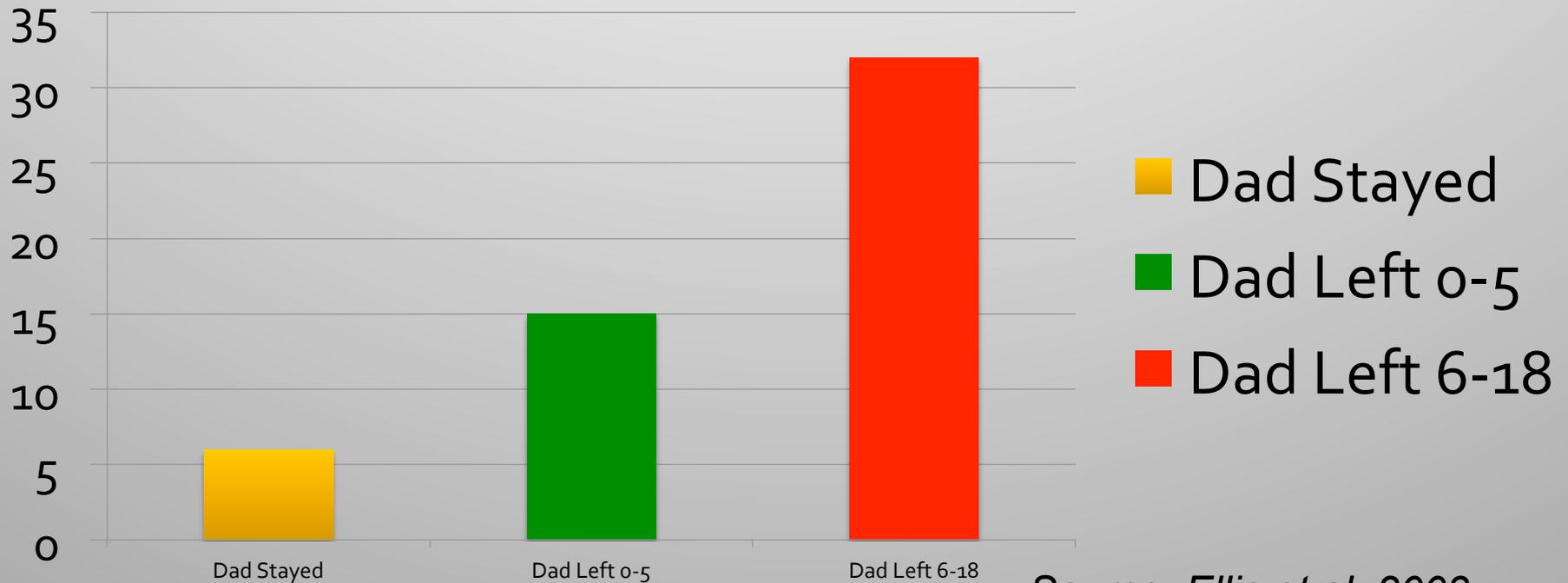


Source: Harper and McLanahan 2004

Teenage Girls Pregnant



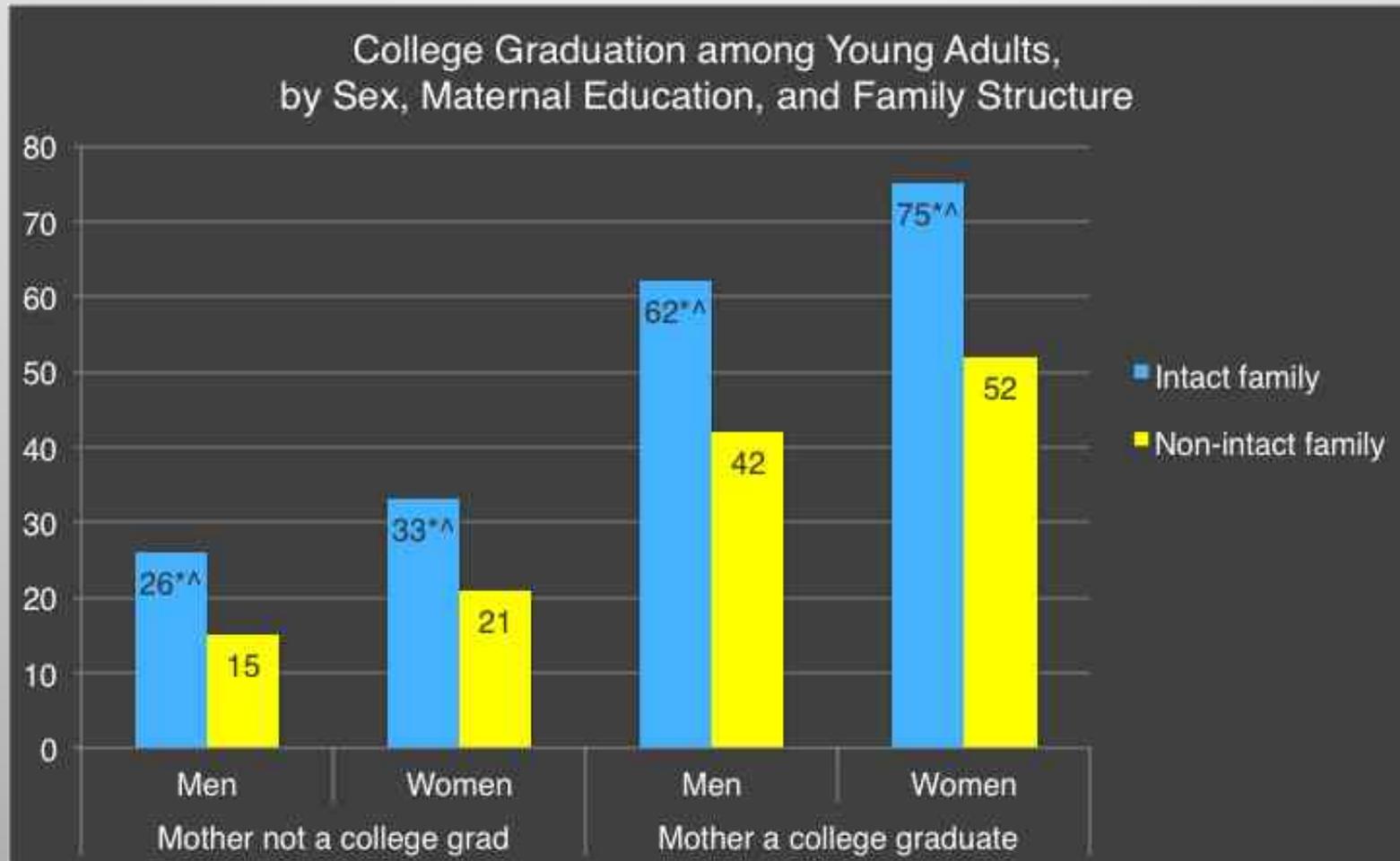
% Teenage Girls Pregnant



Source: *Ellis et al., 2003*

A College Degree

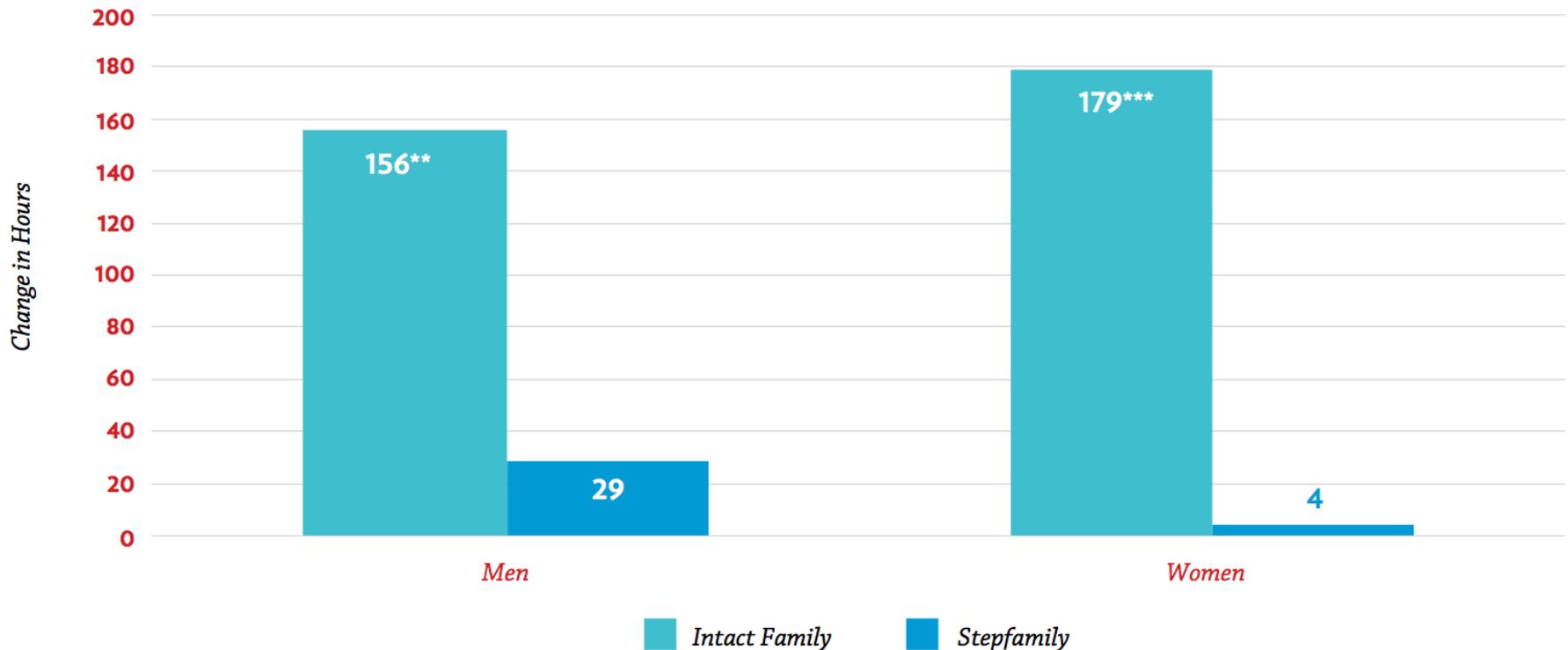
(Wilcox 2013)



Gainfully Employed as Young Adults

FIGURE 10

Change in Hours Worked Per Year: 28- to 30-Year-Olds from Intact and Stepfamilies, Compared to Single-Parent Families



Source: NLSY97.

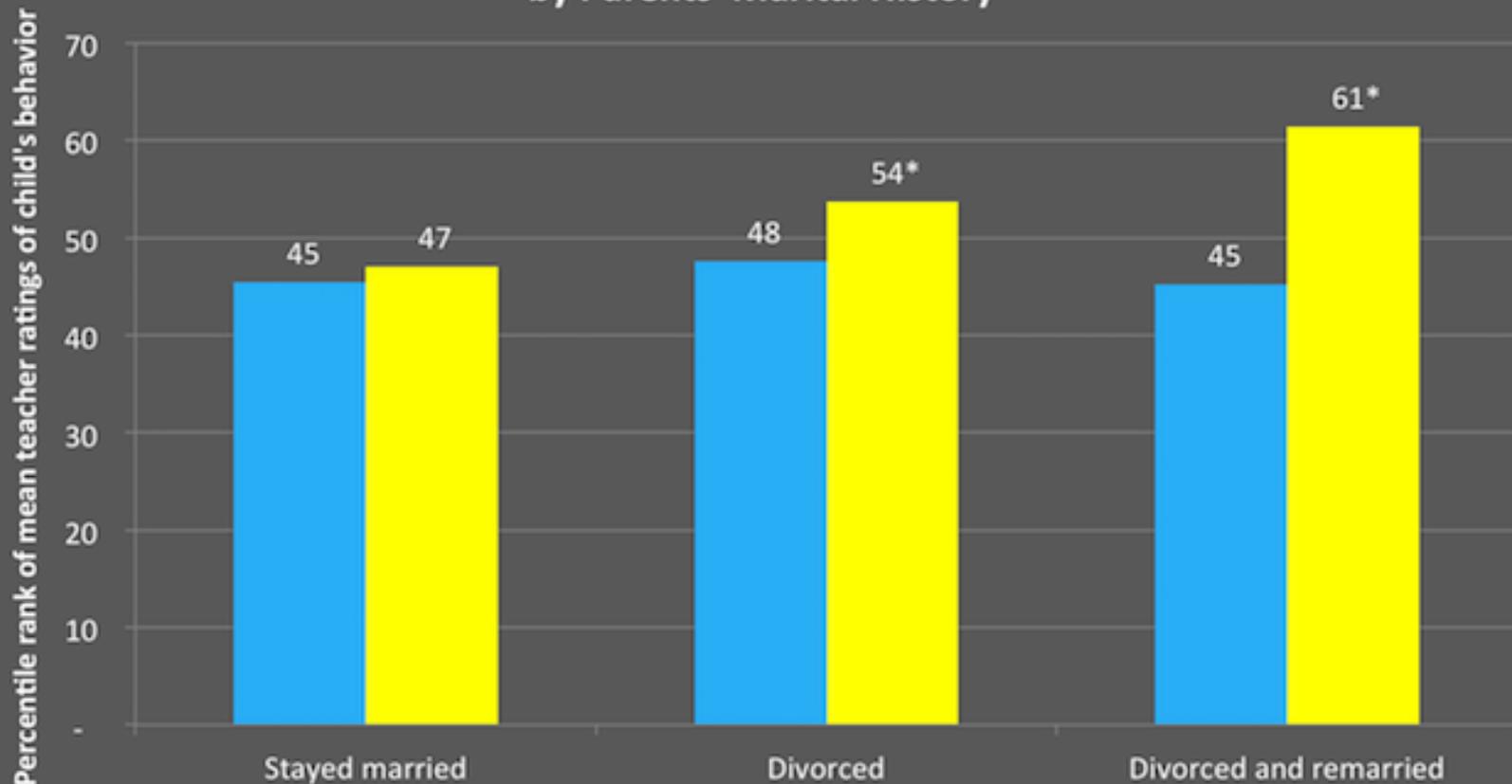
Note: Three asterisks indicate a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between the group and young adults from single-parent families, controlling for unemployment rate, respondent's age, respondent's race or ethnicity, mother's education, mother's age at respondent's birth, and AFQT score. Two asterisks indicate the same ($p < 0.05$).

What About Divorce, Conflict, & the Kids?

- The effects of divorce seem to be least serious for high-conflict divorces.
- Children find divorces in low-conflict marriages disorienting & disillusioning.
- But about 2/3rds of divorces involving children are low conflict.
- (Source: Amato and Booth 1997)

Stably Single Vs. Remarried I?

Figure 2: Students' Sad, Worried, Withdrawn Behavior, by Parents' Marital History



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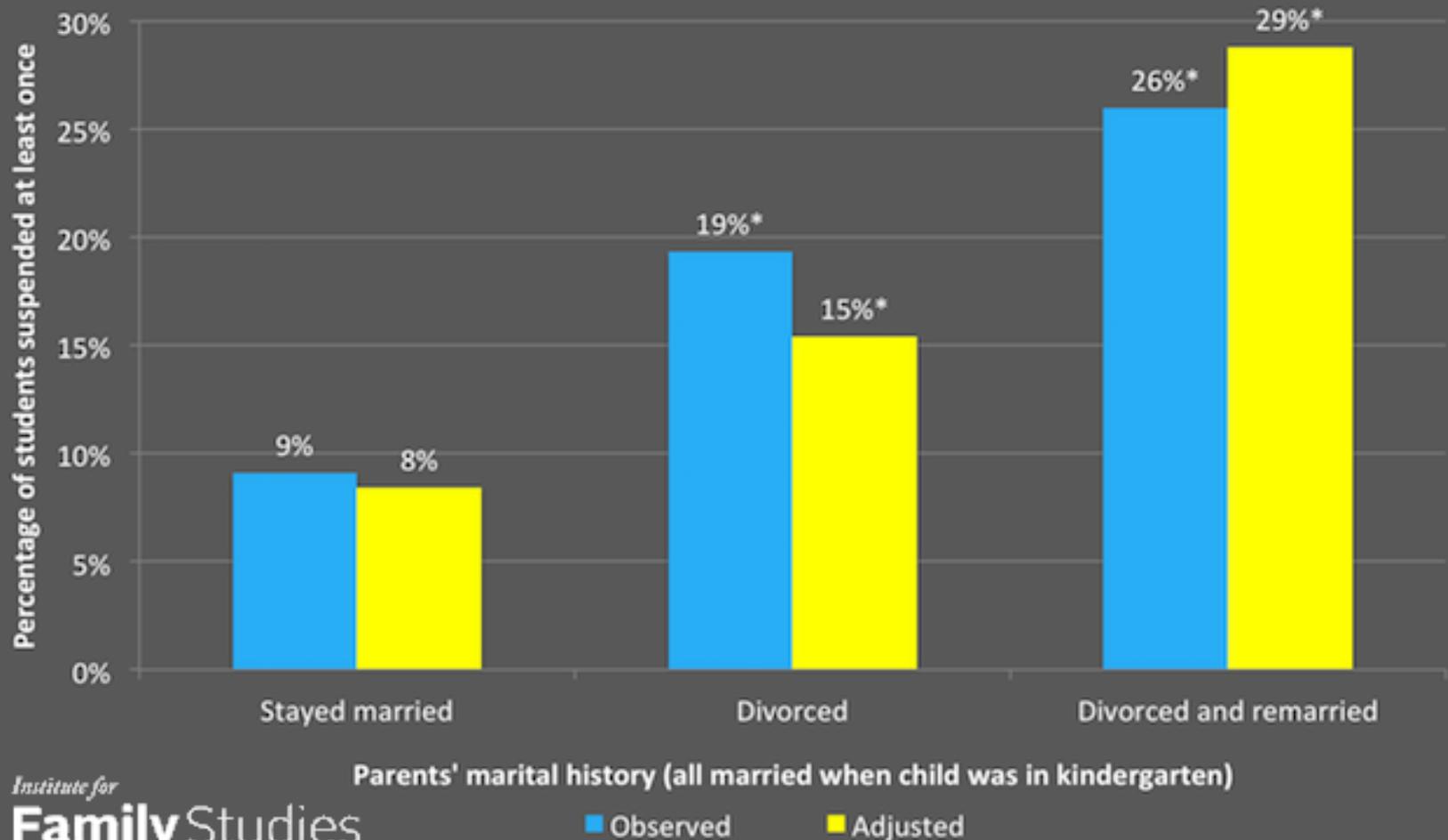
Parents' marital history

■ Kindergarten (all parents married)

■ 5th grade

Stably Single Vs. Remarried II?

Figure 3: Proportion of Students Receiving Out-of-School Suspensions, by Parents' Marital History



What About Cohabitation?

- Cohabitation is becoming an increasingly common vehicle for bearing/rearing children.
 - More than 40% of children will spend some time in a cohabiting household.
 - 21% of children are born into cohabiting unions.
 - (Sources: Wilcox et al 2011; Wilcox 2010)
- Children do not fare as well in cohabiting households as they do in married families.
- Cohabitation now bigger risk to children in the U.S. than divorce.

Drugs, Drop Outs, & Depression

- Substance abuse
 - Teens in cohabiting households are 116% more likely to currently smoke pot compared to teens in intact, married families (Cavanagh 2008).
- Schooling
 - Teens are 60% less likely to graduate from high school if they came from a cohabiting household compared to teens in intact, married families (Raley et al. 2005).
- Psychological well-being
 - 15.7 % of school-age children in cohabiting households experienced serious emotional problems compared to 3.5% of peers in intact, married families (Acs and Nelson 2002).

Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect

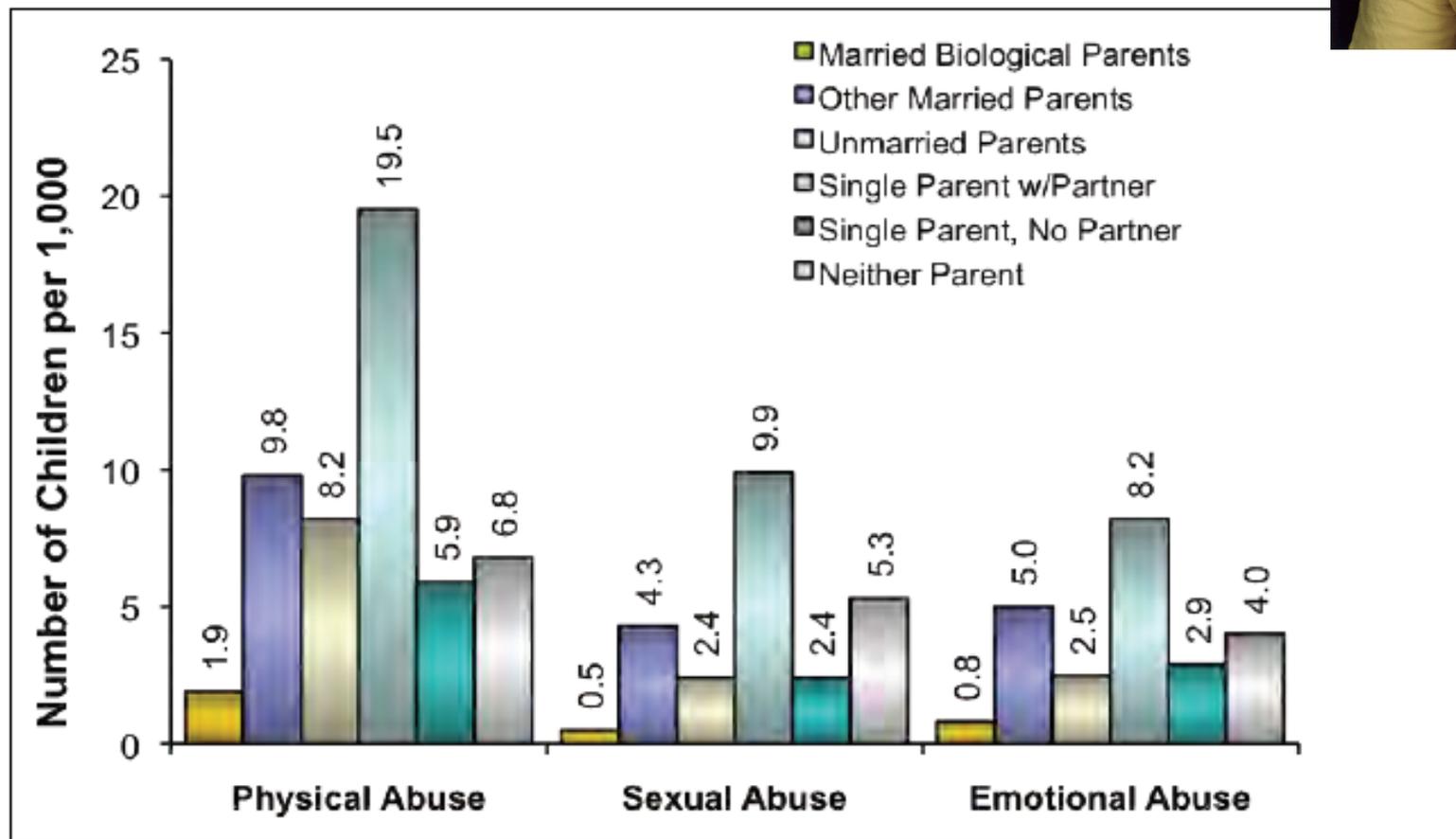
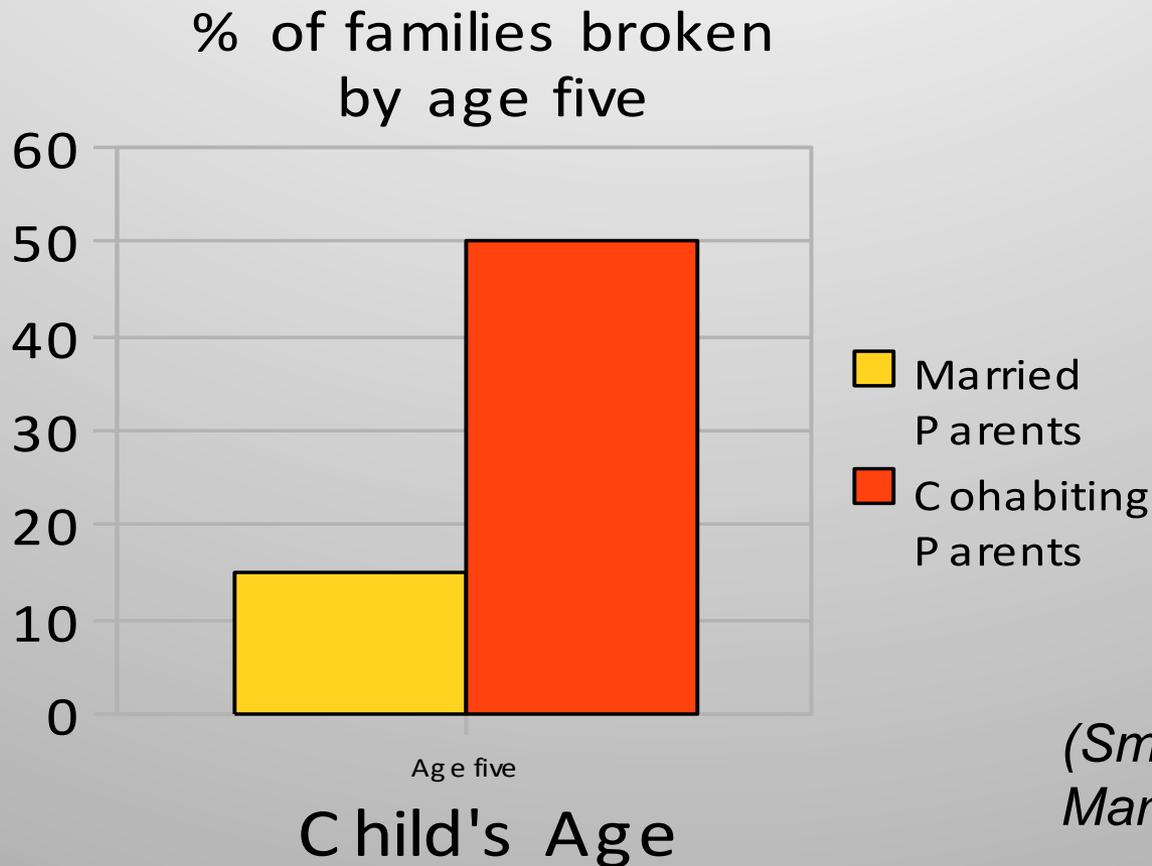


Figure 5-2. Incidence of Harm Standard Abuse by Family Structure and Living Arrangement.

Why are Cohabiting Unions Risky for Kids?

- Family Process
 - Cohabiting unions tend to have less commitment, trust, sexual fidelity, more violence, & less parental supportiveness than married unions (Brown 1996; Cavanagh 2008; Waite & Joyner 2002).
- Family Stability
 - They are also much less stable, even when biological kids are involved.
 - Instability is linked to numerous problems for children—from delinquency to school failure—and helps to explain why cohabiting unions are on some outcomes more risky for children than a stable, single parent home (e.g., Cavanagh 2008).

Stability for Children: Married vs. Cohabiting



(Smock and Manning 2004)

Four Key Mechanisms

- Intact marriage increases:
 - 1) Economic resources available to children
 - 2) Stable routines, stable caregivers, stable neighborhoods
 - 3) More consistent attention, affection, & discipline from parents
 - 4) Biological relatedness of parents to children in the household

The Bottom Line



- “If we were asked to design a system for making sure that children’s basic needs were met, we would probably come up with something quite similar to the two-parent ideal. Such a design, in theory, would not only ensure that children had access to the time and money of two adults, it also would provide a system of checks and balances that promoted quality parenting. The fact that both parents have a biological connection to the child would increase the likelihood that the parents would identify with the child and be willing to sacrifice for that child, and it would reduce the likelihood that either parent would abuse the child.”
- - Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur (1994)

How Marriage Matters for the Environment

Poverty



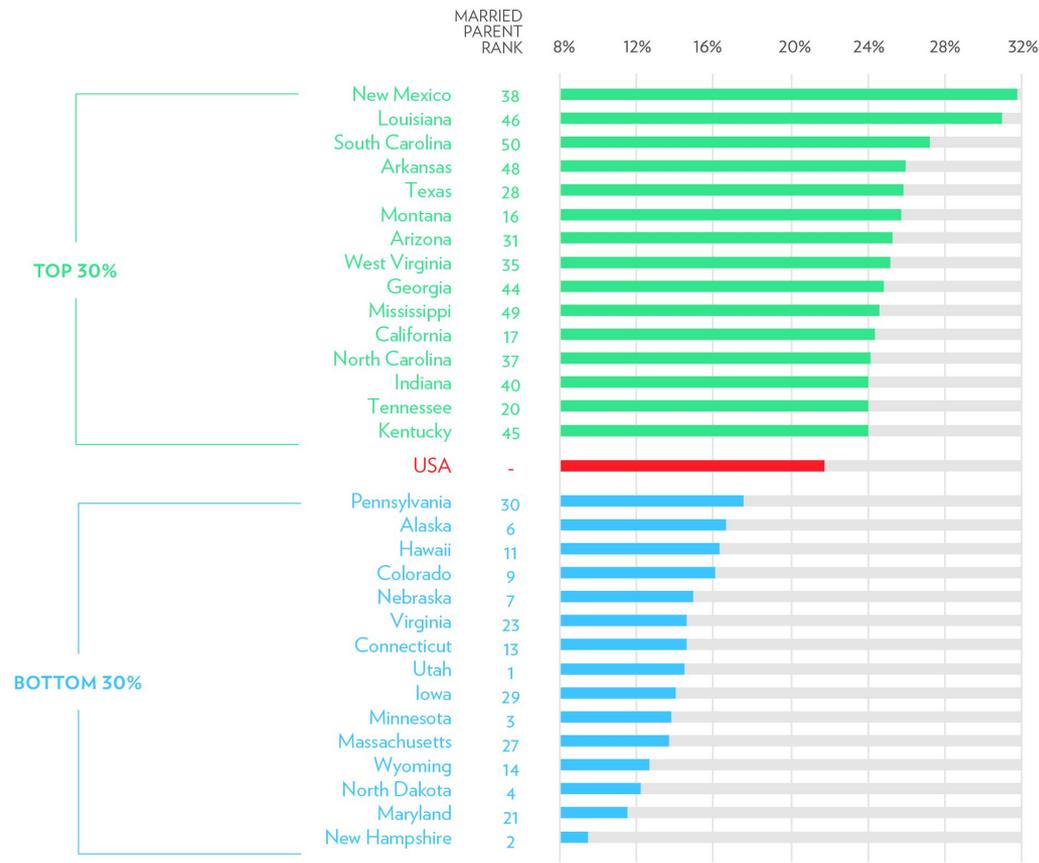
- Child Poverty

- Brookings: “With some exceptions, these studies generally find that most, and in some cases all, of the increase in child poverty over the past thirty to forty years can be explained by changes in family structure.” (Thomas & Sawhill 2005)

Child Poverty in the States

FIGURE 8

States with highest and lowest child poverty rates



American Enterprise Institute (AEI)

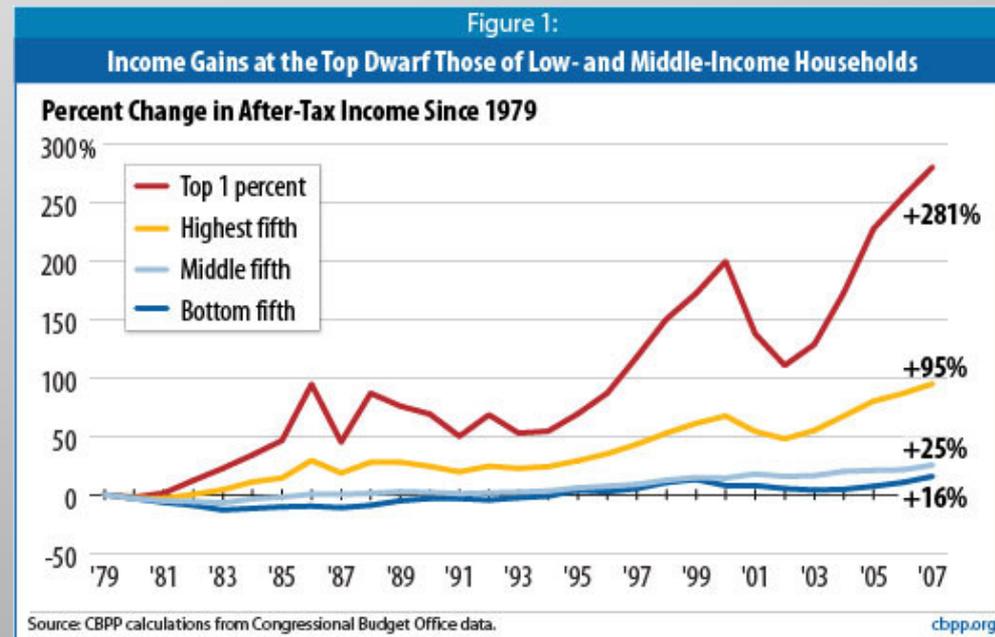
Institute for Family Studies (IFS)

Source: Tabulations by authors from the Current Population Survey, 2012–2013.

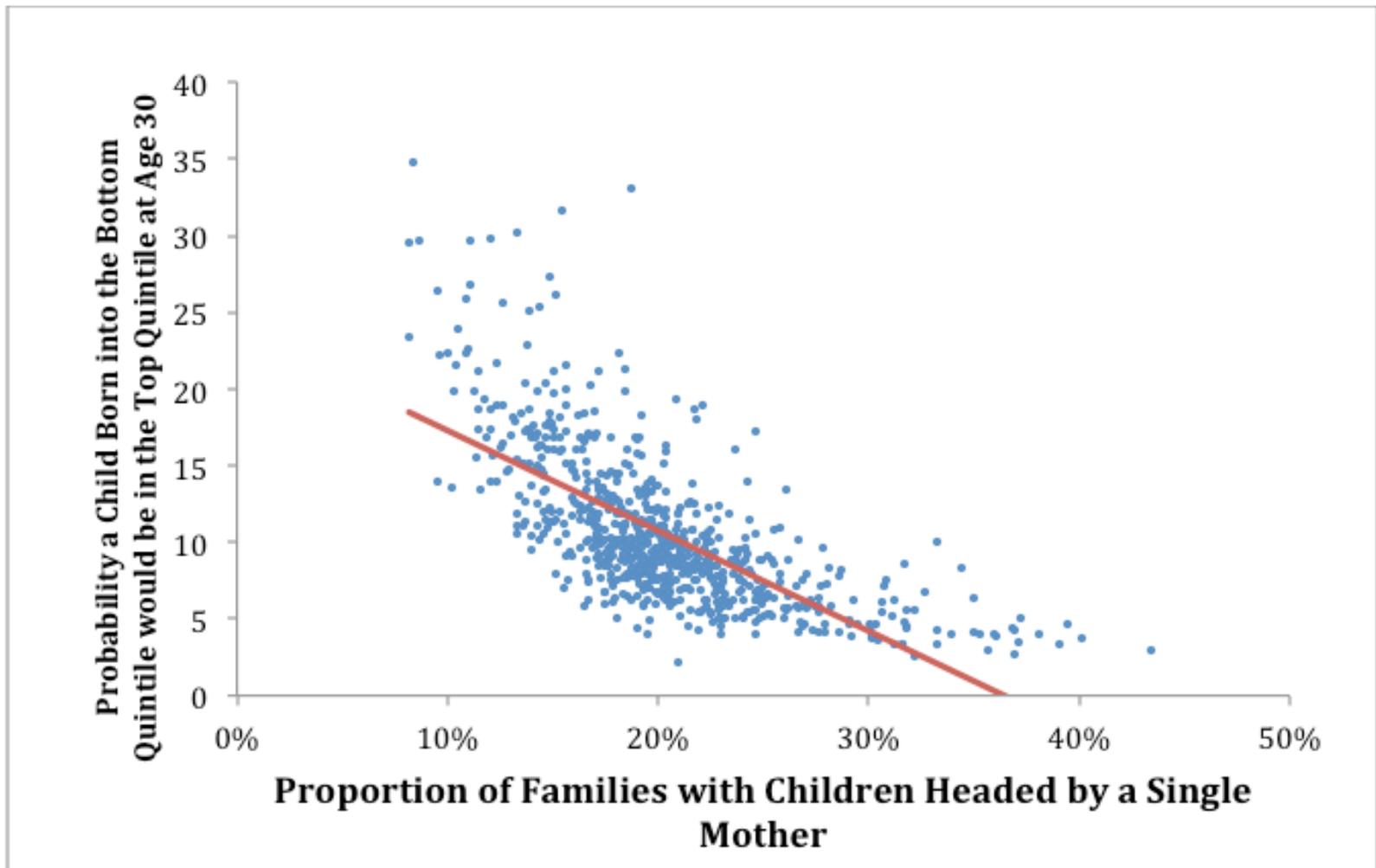
Note: Married parent rank is based on the share of parents with children under 18 that are married, according to the 2013 Current Population Survey. Ages restricted to 25–59. All states included.

Family Income Inequality

- Shifts in family structure linked to about 1/3rd of the growth in family income inequality since the 1970s (Lerman and Wilcox 2014)

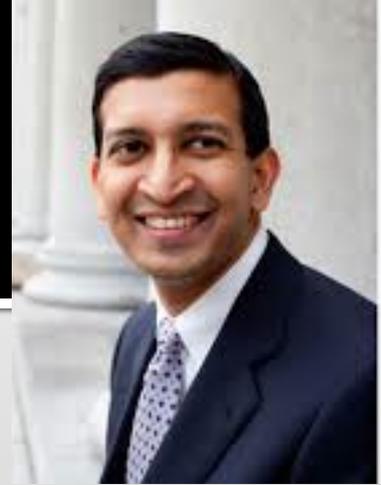


Community Family Structure & American Dream



Source: Data from The Equality of Opportunity Project.

Harvard Study



- Harvard economist Raj Chetty (2014): Community family structure is the “single strongest correlate of upward mobility” for the poor.

Marriage and the Environment

The Bottom line:

- If you care about poverty, income inequality, & the health of the American Dream, you should care about marriage.

Why the Marriage Divide?

What is Driving the Marriage Divide?

- 3 causes:
 - Liberals: The rise of the post-industrial economy;
 - Conservatives: A changing culture; and,
 - Me: The retreat from civil society.

A Change of Heart



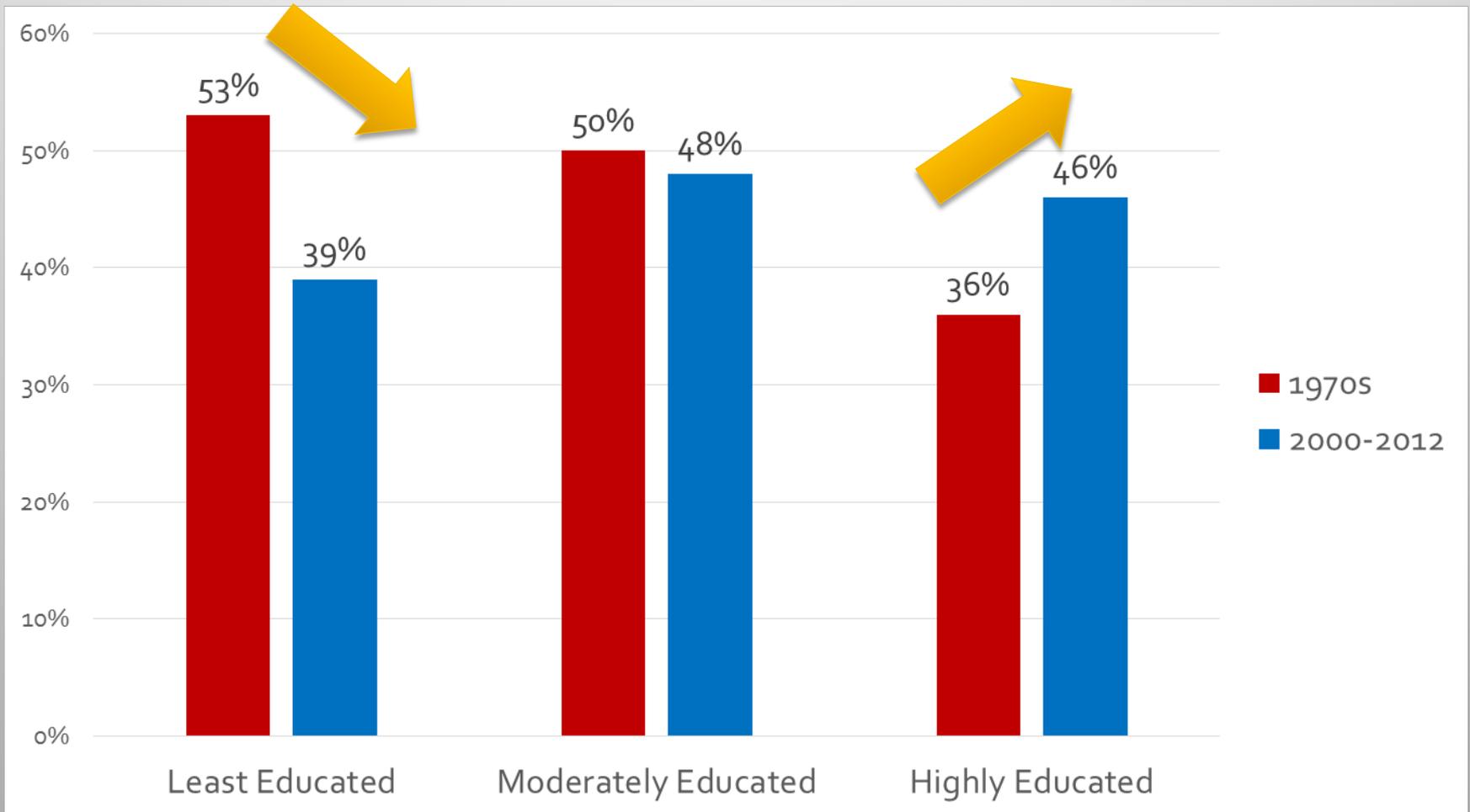
- Almost all Americans honor the ideal of marriage in theory but increasingly tolerant of departures from the ideal in practice.
 - Partly in the name of a “capstone model” of marriage that expects marriage to express and reinforce a high level of financial and emotional success. (Cherlin 2009)
- Cultural dynamic **most** consequential for less-educated Americans, who are now less likely to have a “marriage mindset” and the resources to realize the “capstone model”.

The Return of the Marriage Mindset among Upscale Americans



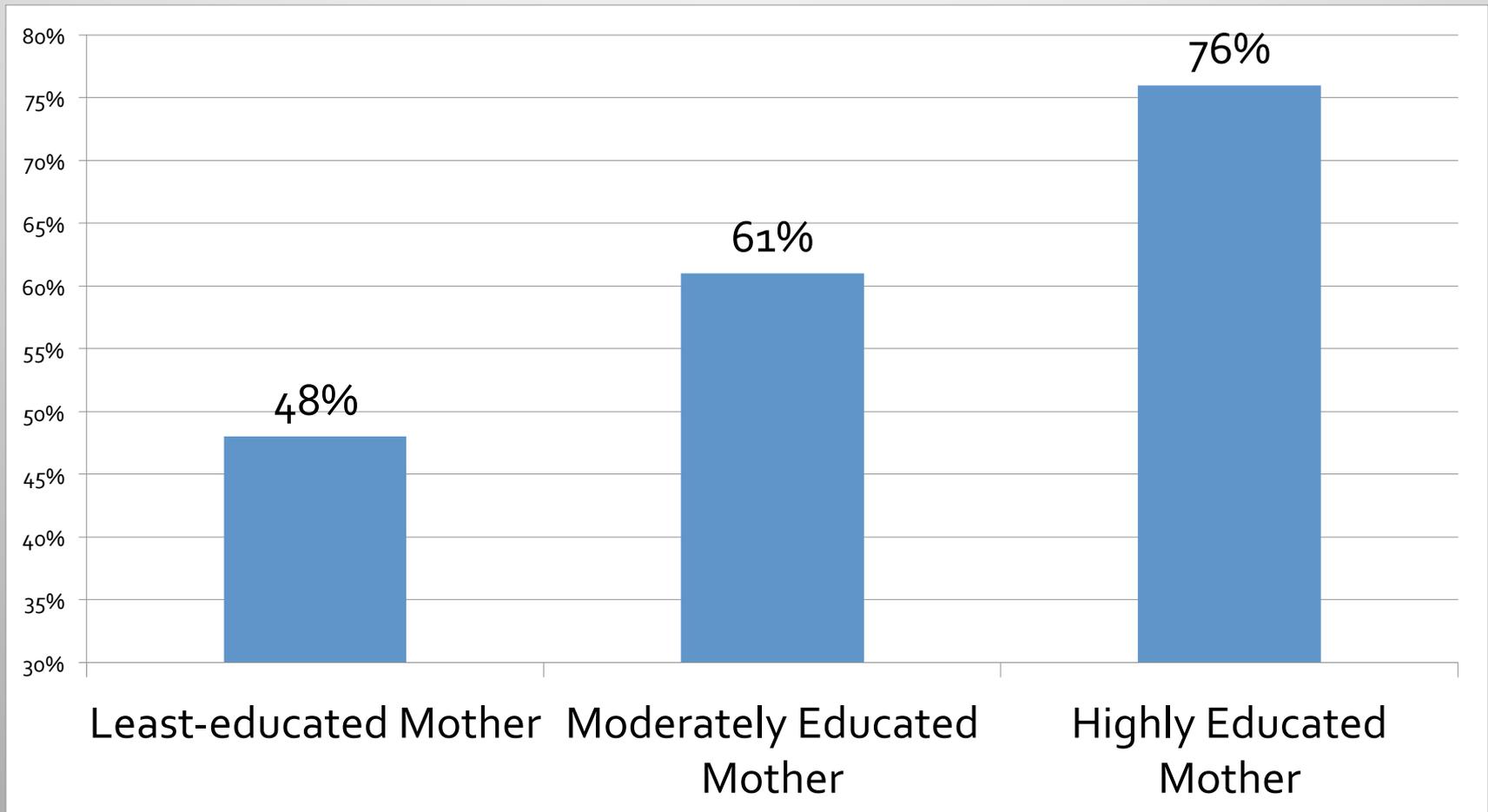
Restrictive Attitudes Toward Divorce

(Source: GSS)



Teens Embarrassed by Pregnancy

Source: NMP/IAV 2010



The Retreat from Institutions

- Less-educated Americans—especially men—are increasingly disengaged from the institutions of work and civil society—including religion.
- These institutions have traditionally supplied money, moral direction, & social support to marriage in America.

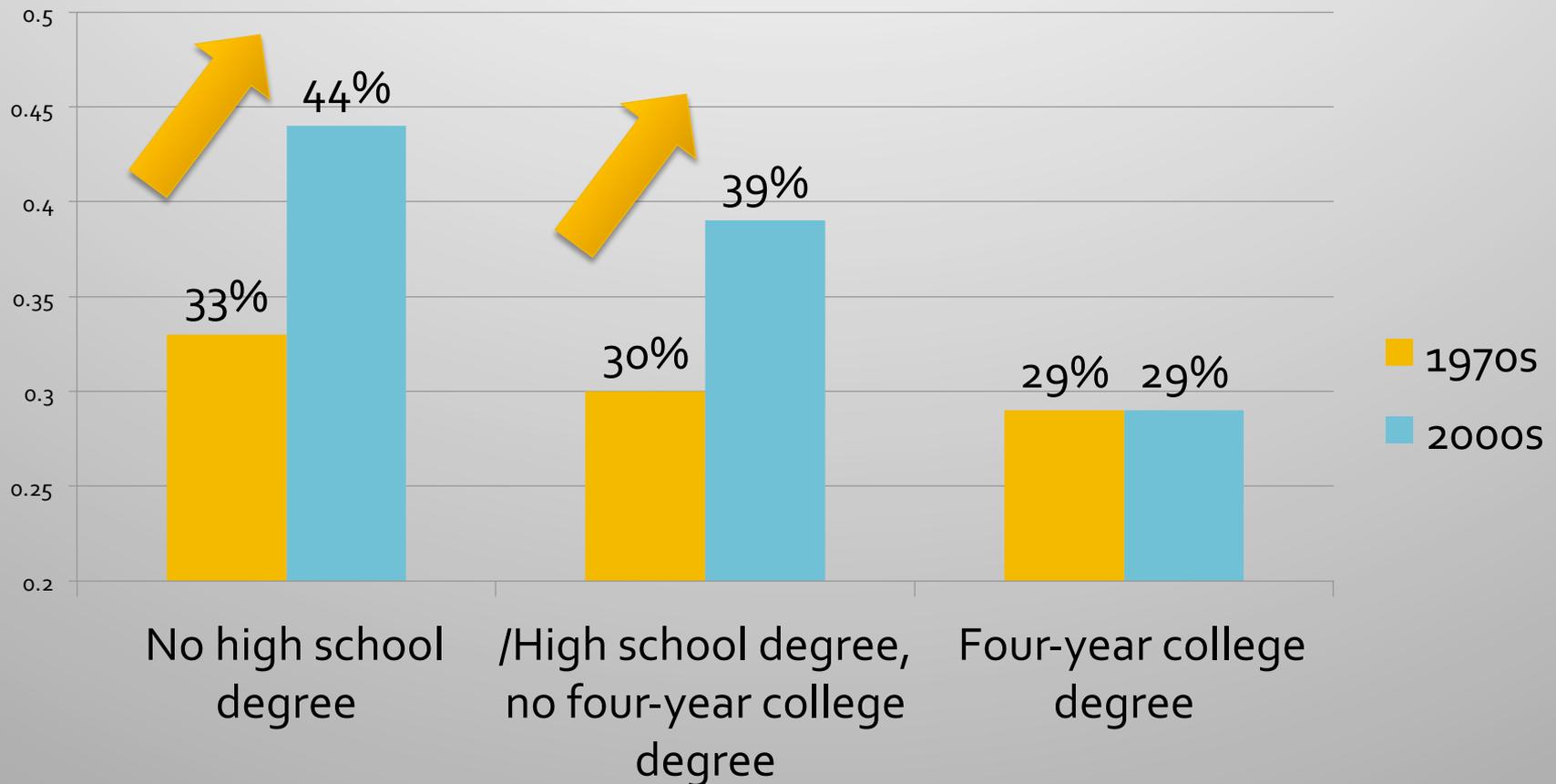


The Post-Industrial Economy

- Less-educated men have seen their economic fortunes fall over the last 40 years:
 - Falling real wages for high-school educated men;
 - Increasing spells of unemployment.
- Not true for highly educated men.
- Less-educated men are now less “marriageable”.

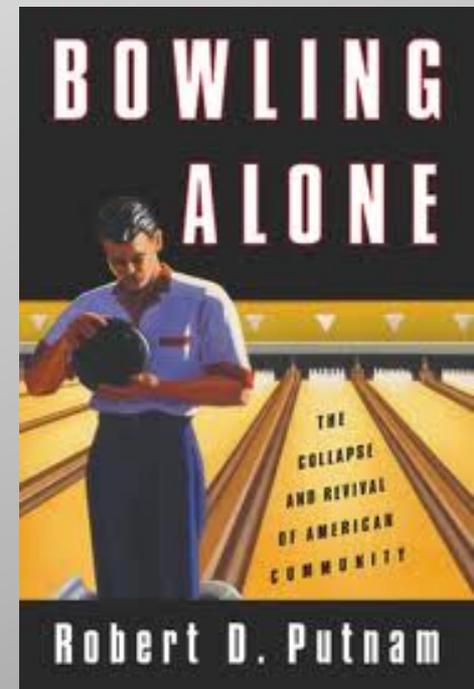
Spells of Male Unemployment in Last 10 Years

Source: NMP/IAV 2010



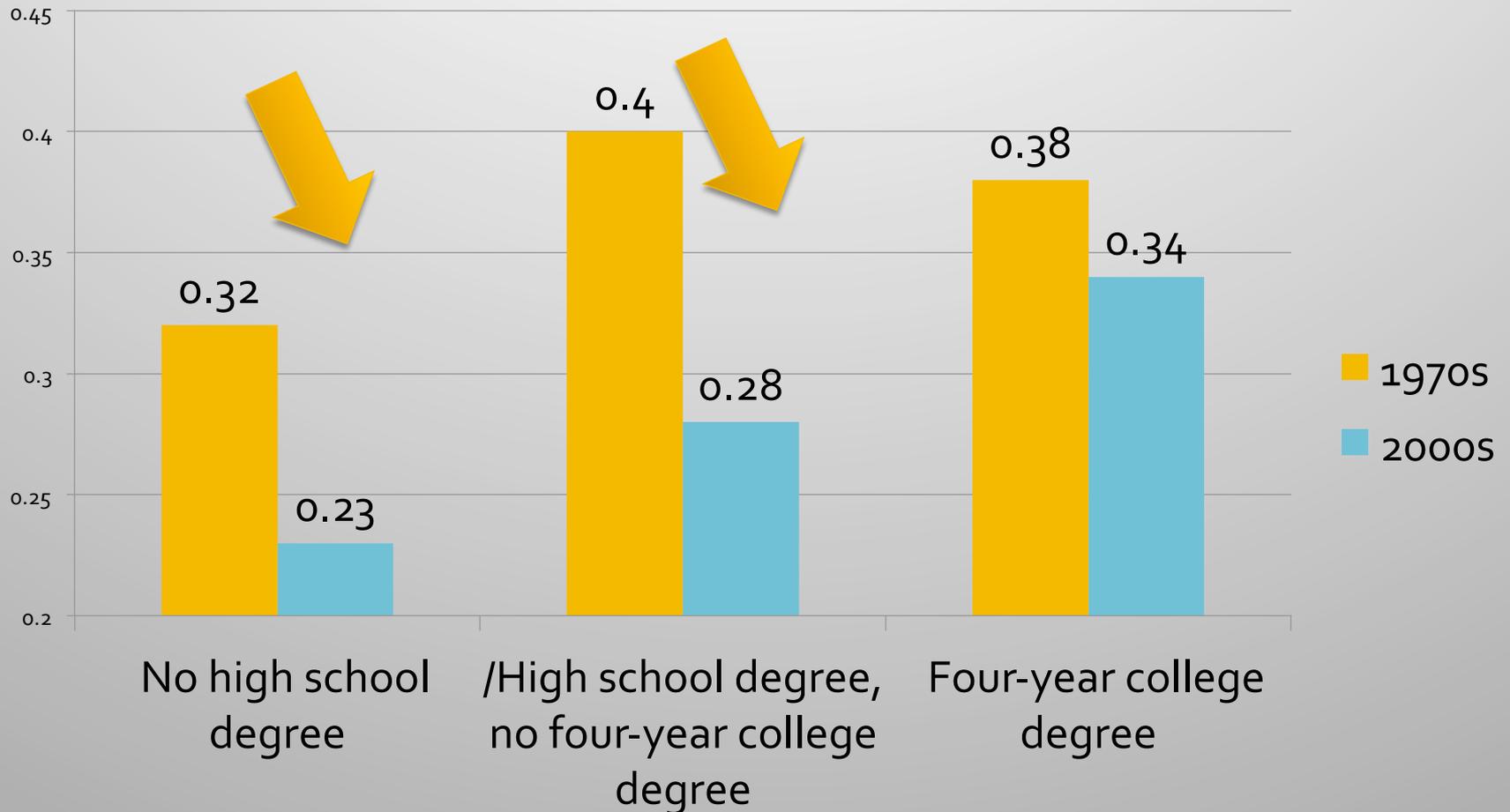
Bowling Alone in Middle America

- The last half-century has witnessed a marked decline in the civic & religious vitality of American society.
 - This decline is concentrated in Middle America.



Praying Alone: Weekly Attendees

Source: NMP/IAV 2010



The Marriage Divide

The Bottom line:

- Marriage divide is rooted in cultural, economic, & civic changes that have undercut the normative, financial, and communal bases of strong and stable marriages and families in poor and working-class communities.

What is to Be Done?

The Family Crisis



- “Evidence is mounting that the decline of the marriage culture is associated with increased poverty and a host of other social ills, disproportionately affecting women, children and the elderly. It is always they who suffer the most in this crisis.” ~ Pope Francis

1. Do No Harm

- Public policy should seek to “do no harm” to marriage and two-parent families
- Stop penalizing marriage among low-income families:
 - “[Most] households with children who earn low or moderate incomes (say, under \$40,000) are significantly penalized for getting married.”
~ Adam Carasso and C. Eugene Steuerle (2005)

2. Strengthen Economic Foundations

- To strengthen economic foundations of working families:
 - Expand child-tax credit to \$2500 and extend it to payroll taxes (Stein 2014)

3. Improve Educational Opportunity

- Most Americans will not get a college degree.
- We need to strengthen vocational education & apprenticeship programs:
 - Improve self-worth, earnings, & marriageability of young adults from working-class and poor communities (Lerman and Wilcox 2014)

4. Civic & Cultural Campaign

- Need a national campaign to expand civic and cultural supports for marriage:
 - “Success Sequence” (finish high school, work, marry & become a parent, in that order);
 - Think especially hard about reaching less-educated men.
 - National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy is a model.

5. Churches

- Churches need to do a better job of:
 - Reaching out to working-class and poor young adults, especially men;
 - Talking about joys & challenges of married life;
 - Intelligently articulating the power, drama, and beauty of lifelong marriage.

Conclusion



- Given the integral connection between strong marriages and social justice, we need to renew the
 - Economic
 - Policy
 - Civic &
 - Cultural

foundations of marriage & family life for 21st century.

More Information

www.family-studies.org

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Sweden

Suicide and Drug Addiction in Sweden

