Marital Instability, Cohabitation, and the Transformation of Youth

Topics

- The rise of divorce and separation
  - Causes of long-run change and race differentials
  - Measurement of recent divorce trends
- The transformation of young adulthood
  - Education
  - Work
  - Marriage
  - Cohabitation
- Lessons of Population History
Percent of eligible whites aged 20-39 who were divorced or separated: 1880-1990

Percent of eligible blacks aged 20-39 who were divorced or separated: 1880-1990
Theories of the Rise of Marital Instability

- Durkheim, Becker, Parsons: Specialization of Roles increases the returns to marriage; therefore benefits maximized when women do not work
- Cherlin, McLanahan, Ruggles: Economic opportunity for women allows them to escape from bad marriages; rising economic power of women undermined patriarchal authority by giving women an alternative
- Oppenheimer, Wilson: Declining economic opportunity for men increased marital instability
- May, Riley, Thornton: Cultural change
Testing the Theories

THE RISE OF DIVORCE AND SEPARATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1880-1990

Strategy

- In every period, there was enormous variation across the country in economic opportunity for both young men and for young women
- I calculated several measures of opportunity for each sex in each economic area (about 400 in each year)
- I used these measures to predict the effects of economic opportunities on divorce and separation from 1880 to 1990
- In every year, effects were the same as expected by theory
Strategy

- Once I knew the effects, I could estimate what the levels of divorce and separation would have been if economic opportunities for men and women had not changed.
- Essentially the same idea as standardizing to control for the change in opportunities.
Conclusions on the Rise of Divorce and Separation

- 83% of change from 1880-1990 can be explained by rise of female labor-force participation.
- The rest can be explained by rise of non-agricultural employment (divorce was rare for farmers)
- 84% of the difference in divorce and separation between blacks and whites can be ascribed to lower black male labor force participation and job quality

Explaining Recent Divorce Trends
What compositional factors could explain the rapid rise of divorce from 1965-1979 and the stagnation thereafter?

Age-Specific Divorce Rates: U.S. Women, 1910-2005
Age-Specific Divorce Rates: U.S. Men, 1910-2005
What compositional factors could explain the rapid rise of divorce from 1965-1979 and the stagnation thereafter?

Age Distribution

Divorce is concentrated among those aged 25-34, and the percentage of the population in that age group peaked in the early 1980s and has been declining ever since with the aging of the baby boomers.
Divorce Rate by Age at First Marriage

Source: Monthly Vital Statistics Reports
What compositional factors could explain the rapid rise of divorce from 1965-1979 and the stagnation thereafter?

Divorce is highest among people who marry young, and the percent marrying young declined greatly after the 1970s.
What compositional factors could explain the rapid rise of divorce from 1965-1979 and the stagnation thereafter?

The risk of divorce is highest for those married less than ten years.

Because of the declining rate of marriage after the 1970s and the aging of the baby boom, the proportion of marriages less than 10 years old has declined dramatically since the 1970s.
Recent Divorce Trends

- Once we control for changes in age distribution and timing of marriage, divorce is still going up, but the pace of increase has slowed.
- The slowed pace of increase may have resulted from selection: as the proportion of people who get married goes down, some of the riskiest marriages may not take place.
- At current rates, about half of marriages are expected to end in divorce.
Moral Acceptability of Divorce

Next, I'm going to read you a list of issues. Regardless of whether or not you think it should be legal, for each one, please tell me whether you personally believe that in general it is morally acceptable or morally wrong. How about... Divorce?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>U.S. (%)</th>
<th>Canada (%)</th>
<th>Great Britain (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morally acceptable</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morally wrong</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The transformation of young adulthood

- Education
- Work
- Marriage
- Cohabitation
1. There is an emerging gender gap in education of young adults.

College Enrolled, 1980-2003, by Gender

BA or Higher, by Gender and Age Cohort

U.S. Workers in Their 20s with at Least a BA, by Gender (Percent)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey.

2. After a dramatic post-war increase, workforce participation of young women has leveled off, and the participation of young men is slowly declining.
3. Earnings for young men continue to decline, except for those with education, and earnings for young women may be leveling off or declining too.
Mean wage and salary income at ages 20-29, 1962-2006

Source: IPUMS

Inflation-Adjusted Earnings for All Full-Time U.S. Workers in Their 20s (2005 Dollars)

4. Young people are delaying or abandoning marriage throughout the developed world.

Never Married at Age 25 (%)

Married at Age 25 (%)

Source: Calculations based on tables in On the Frontier of Adulthood, pp. 60-71 (2005)

Married at Age 30 (%)

Source: Calculations based on tables in On the Frontier of Adulthood, pp. 60-71 (2005)
Median Age at First Marriage, 1950-2006

Source: Current Population Survey, Table MS-2

Median Age at First Marriage, 2000, by Country

### Increase in Median Age at First Marriage, 1980-2000 (years)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


5. Cohabitation prior to marriage has become the norm, and in many countries cohabitation is beginning to replace marriage.
Cohabit at Least Once Prior to Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1953-62</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963-72</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973-82</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-94</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Births to Cohabiting Couples as % of Births to Unmarried Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980-1984</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-2001</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin; Boston Globe (2007)
6. The transition to adulthood—leaving school, leaving parental home, getting work, getting married, having children—is getting stretched out and occurring later: society is becoming less “age graded.”
College is taking longer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median years to completion</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6+ yrs to completion (%)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students 21 and older (%)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pell grant recipients 24 and older (%)</td>
<td>30%*</td>
<td>58%**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1975   **2003


Young Adults are Living Longer with Parents

Source: Jordan Matsudaira, "Jobs, Wages, and Leaving the Nest" (2006)
Men with First Child, by Age and Cohort, UK (%)

- 1946:
  - Age 25: 46%
  - Age 30: 82%

- 1958:
  - Age 25: 23%
  - Age 30: 49%

- 1970:
  - Age 25: 15%
  - Age 30: 33%

Source: John Bynner, "Rethinking the Youth Phase of the Life-Course," p. 374 (2005)

Women with First Child, by Age and Cohort, UK (%)

- 1946:
  - Age 25: 70%
  - Age 30: 90%

- 1958:
  - Age 25: 40%
  - Age 30: 60%

- 1970:
  - Age 25: 30%
  - Age 30: 53%

Source: John Bynner, "Rethinking the Youth Phase of the Life-Course," p. 374 (2005)
Six big changes

1. There is a emerging gender gap in education of young adults.
2. After a dramatic post-war increase, workforce participation of young women has leveled off, and the participation of young men is slowly declining.
3. Earnings for young men continue to decline rapidly, except for those with education, and earnings for young women may be leveling off or declining too.

4. Young people are delaying or abandoning marriage throughout the developed world.
5. Cohabitation prior to marriage has become the norm, and in many countries cohabitation is beginning to replace marriage.
6. The transition to adulthood—leaving school, leaving parental home, getting work, getting married, having children—is getting stretched out and occurring later.
Predictions

• Average earnings for full-time women in their twenties will exceed those of men by 2015.
• Entry level wages will soon begin their first sustained increase for four decades, and it will last from 2012 to 2025.
• Marriage rates will continue to decline for at least another decade.
• Cohabitations among young adults will exceed marriages by 2020.
Lessons of Population History

• Theory
Growth of population

Growth of food supply

Demographic Transition Theory

- Stage 1: Natural increase
- Stage 2: Birth rate
- Stage 3: Natural increase
- Stage 4: Death rate

Birth/Death rates vs. Time
Ester Böserup (1910-1999)

Lessons of Population History

• Theory
• Controversy
Rat Flea (Xenopsylla cheopis)
Lessons of Population History

- Theory
- Controversy
- Life in the past
John Gray and family, Minnesota ca. 1860
Lessons of Population History

- Theory
- Controversy
- Life in the past
- Data

Historical Population Data

- We don’t know much about population before 1650
- Knowledge of 1650-1850 fragmentary and often inaccurate
- For parts of the world, solid data are still lacking
Be skeptical of data

- Even estimates presented as authoritative by highly respected authorities (e.g. Cambridge Group) may be wrong
- All numbers before 1850 must be analyzed critically, but even current numbers produced by government agencies may also be wrong
- Figure out where numbers come from, and judge their plausibility carefully

Lessons of Population History

- Theory
- Controversy
- Life in the past
- Data
- Methods
Methodological lessons

- Demographic measures should be age-independent, like Total Fertility Rate, Life Table, or age-standardized rates
- Period and cohort measures are different
- Period measures ordinarily assume a synthetic cohort
- Synthetic cohorts are more volatile than true cohorts
- Fertility generally has a greater impact on age distributions than does mortality

Number one methodological lesson:

Watch your denominators

Always neglected, but they determine just as much as numerators