

# Cohabitation and other aspects of Household Structure and Instability

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## Overview

1. What is cohabitation?
2. Why demographers started tracking it
3. Who cohabits?
4. Limits to cohabitation as a measure of family structure

## 1. What is cohabitation?

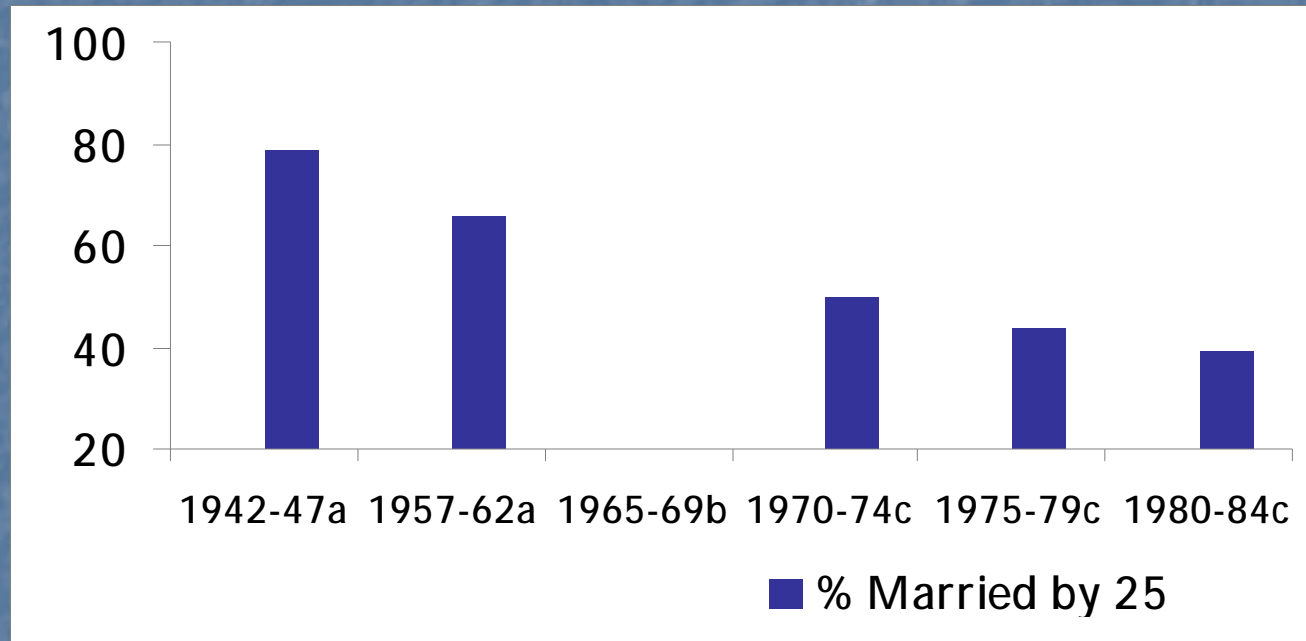
*Household based definition -- Sharing a household with a sexual or romantic partner*

Types of cohabitation

What does cohabitation mean?

## 2. Why demographers started tracking cohabitation

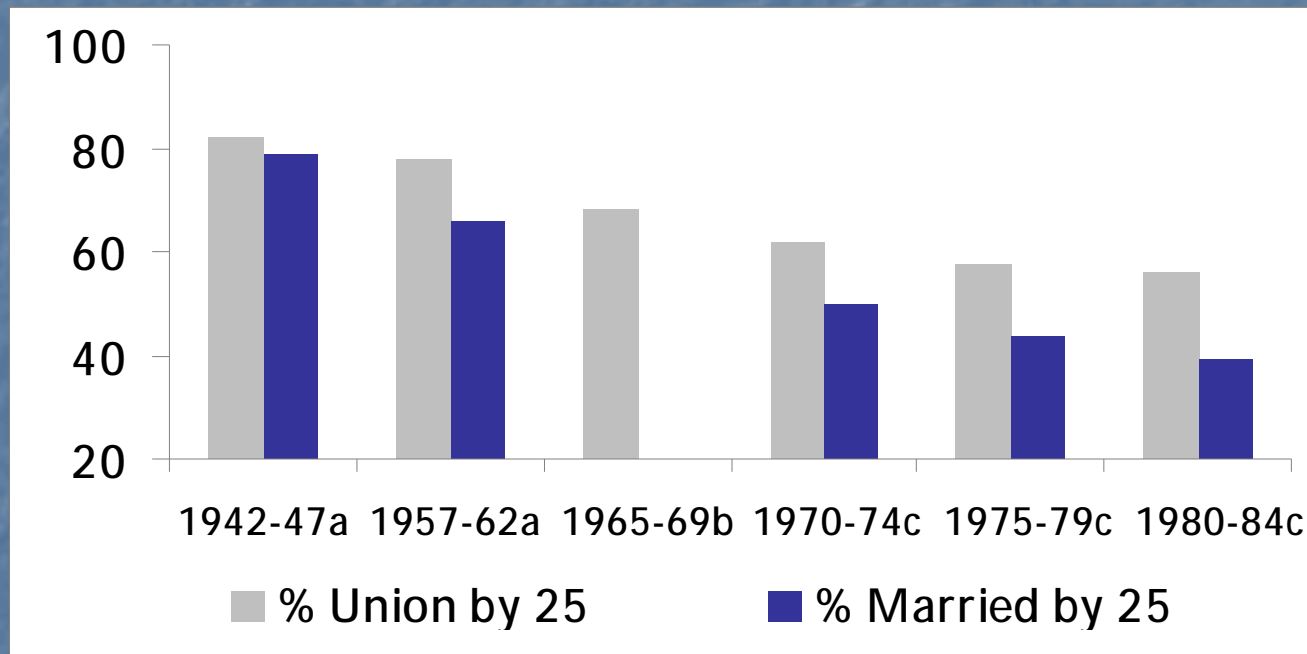
Trends in Percentage of Women  
Ever Married by age 25



Source: <sup>a</sup>Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin 1991; <sup>b</sup>Raley 2001;  
<sup>c</sup>NSFG Cycle 6 (2006-2008)

## 2. Why demographers started tracking cohabitation

Trends in Percentage of Women Ever in Union by age 25



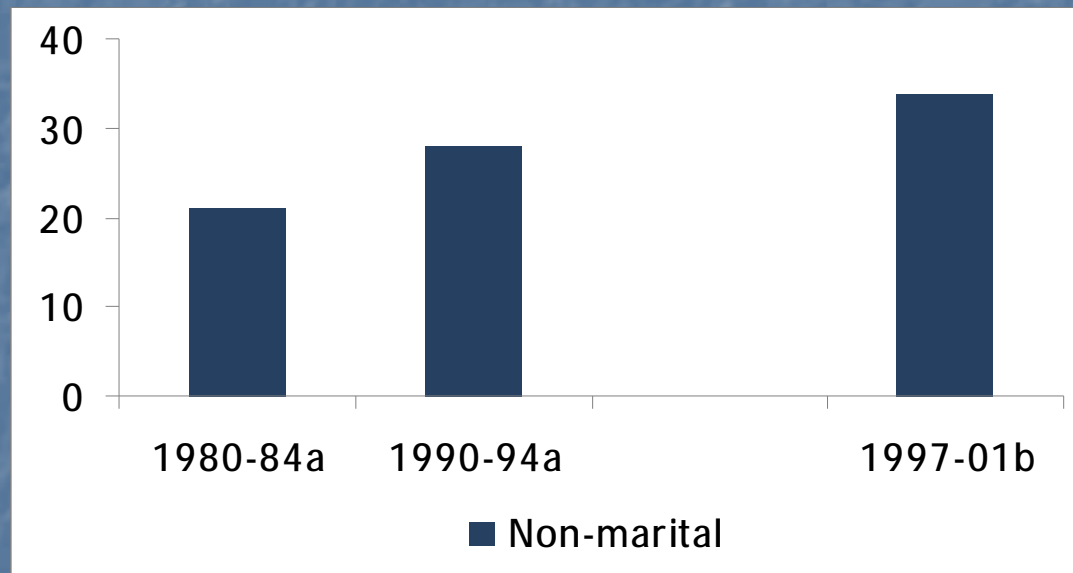
Source: <sup>a</sup>Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin 1991; <sup>b</sup>Raley 2001;  
<sup>c</sup>NSFG Cycle 6 (2006-2008)

Cohabitation increased during the transition to adulthood

Also became more common after divorce.

## 2. Why demographers started tracking cohabitation

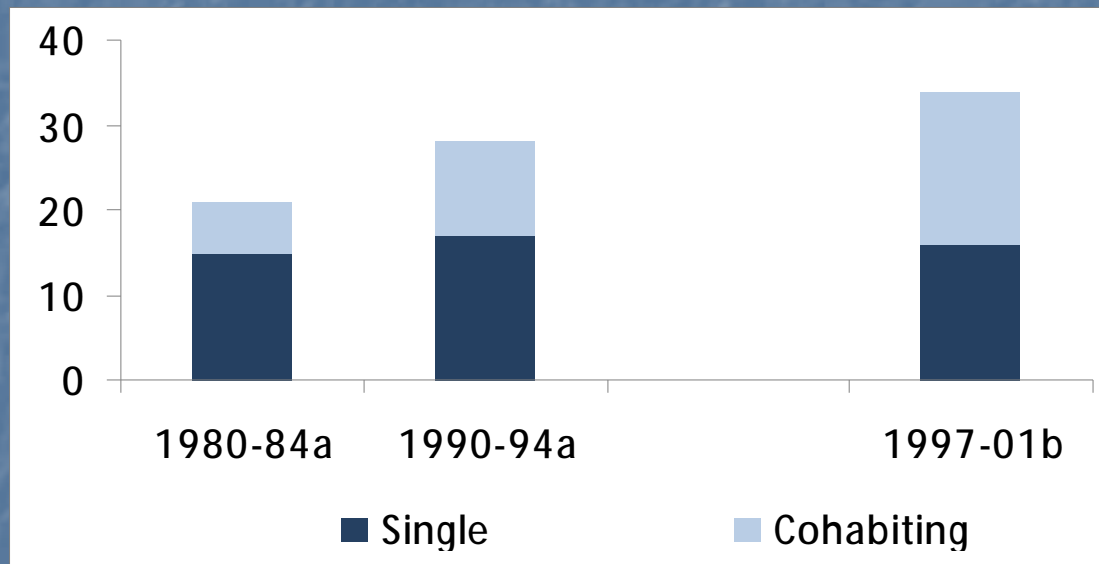
Trends in Percentage of Births that are Non-Marital



Source: <sup>a</sup> Bumpass and Lu 2000; <sup>b</sup> Kennedy and Bumpass 2008

## 2. Why demographers started tracking cohabitation

Trends in Percentage of Births that are Non-Marital



Source: <sup>a</sup> Bumpass and Lu 2000; <sup>b</sup> Kennedy and Bumpass 2008

An increasing proportion of births are to cohabiting women  
2 out of 5 children experience cohabitation while growing up

## 2. Why demographers started tracking cohabitation

### Cohabitation increased

- during transition to adulthood
- following marital dissolution
- during childhood

By measuring cohabitation we have a much more accurate picture of the life course.

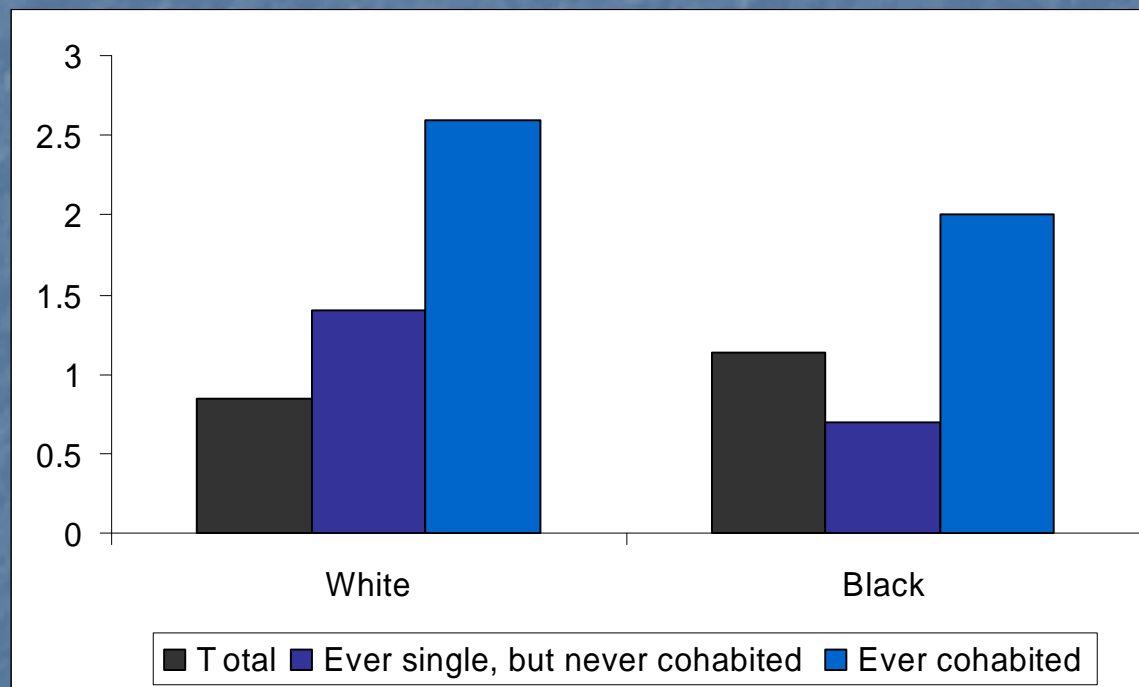
## 2. Why demographers started tracking cohabitation

### Cohabitation also changed Household Stability

Today fewer cohabiting unions result in marriage

Children whose mothers cohabit experience greater instability

Number of household transitions before age 12 by Race

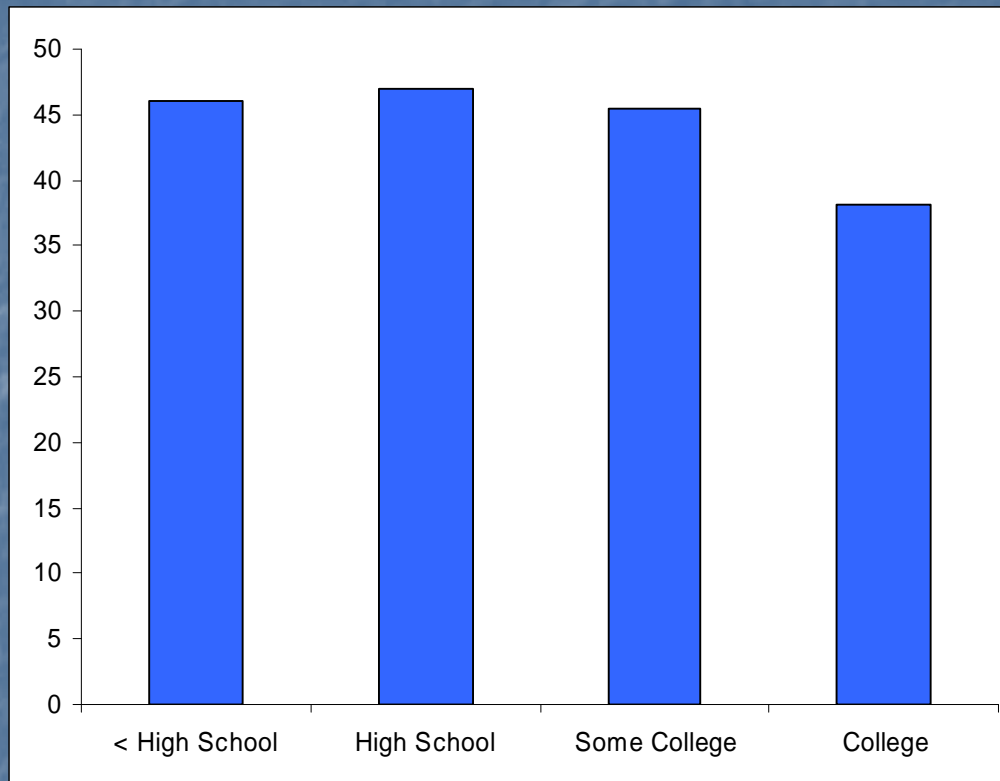


Source: Raley & Wildsmith 2004

By measuring cohabitation we have more accurate measures of family structure instability.

### 3. Who cohabits?

Percent of women cohabiting within 3 years of leaving school

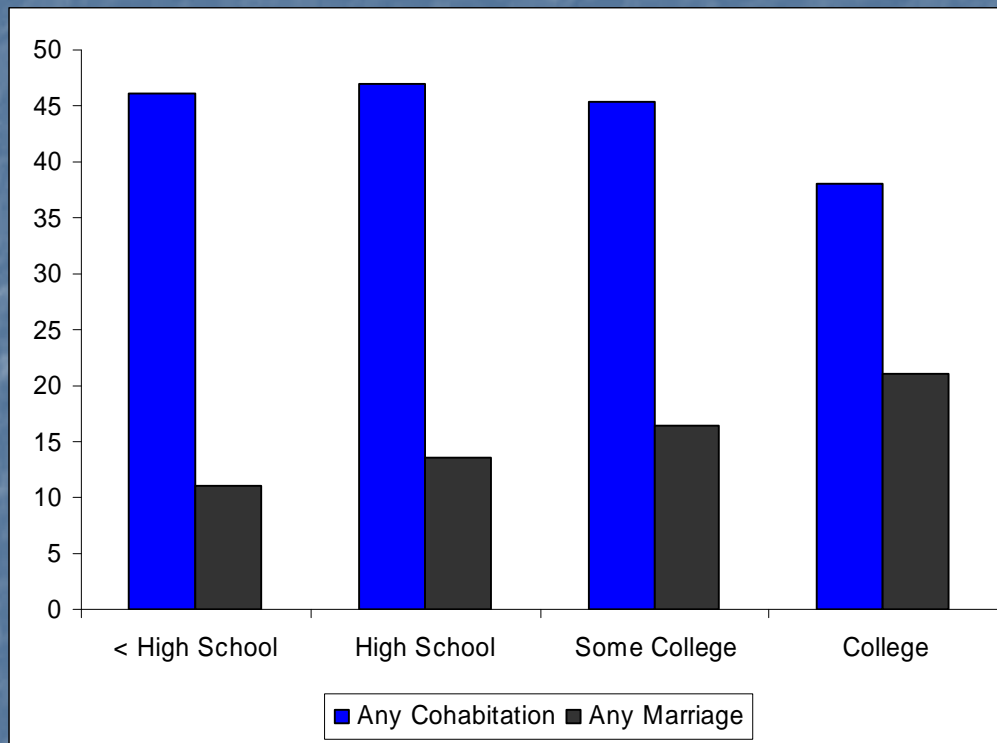


Source: Daniels & Raley 2010

Cohabitation is common across socioeconomic groups

### 3. Who cohabits?

Percent of women cohabiting/marrying within 3 years of leaving school

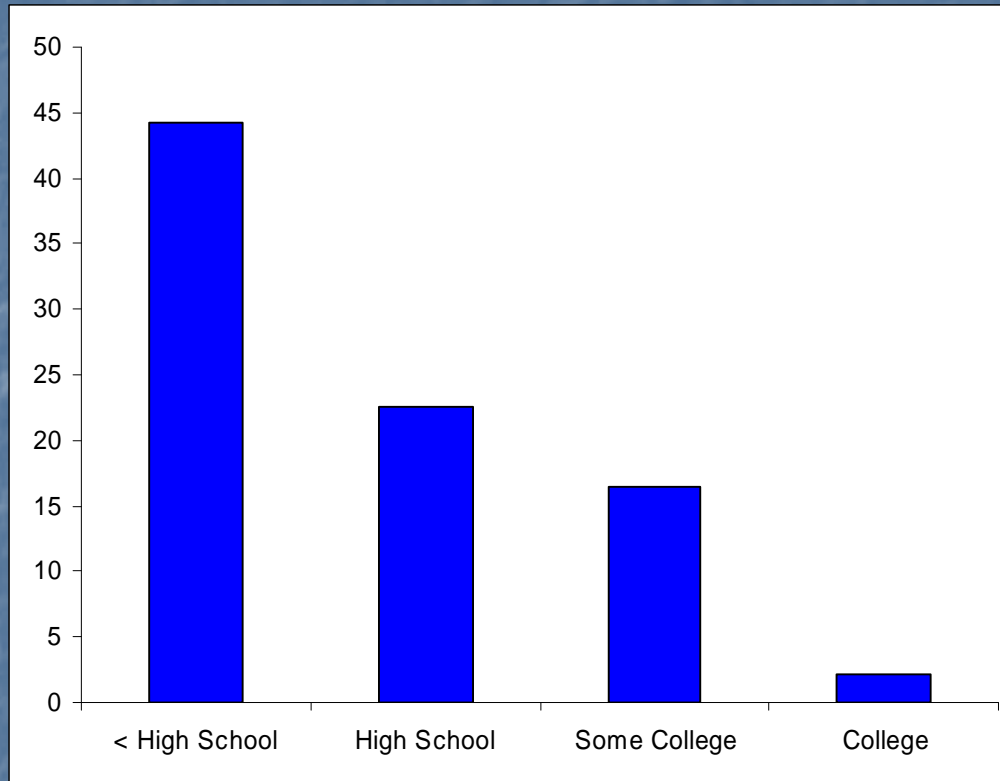


Source: Daniels & Raley 2010

More highly educated women are more likely to marry

### 3. Who cohabits?

Percent of women having a premarital birth within 3 years of leaving school



Source: Daniels & Raley 2010

And more highly educated women are much less likely to have a birth while cohabiting or single.

## 4. Limits to cohabitation as a measure of family structure

Ambiguous

Diverse

Other important aspects of household structure

Household based measure

## Summary

### Measuring cohabitation is important

1. Common aspect of the life course for children and adults
2. Captures instability

### Measuring cohabitation is not enough

1. Substantial diversity among cohabiters
2. Other household relationships are important, especially in step and blended families.
3. Non-Household family relationships are also important.