

---

# Marital Realities, Current Mindsets, and Possible Futures

Mark Regnerus

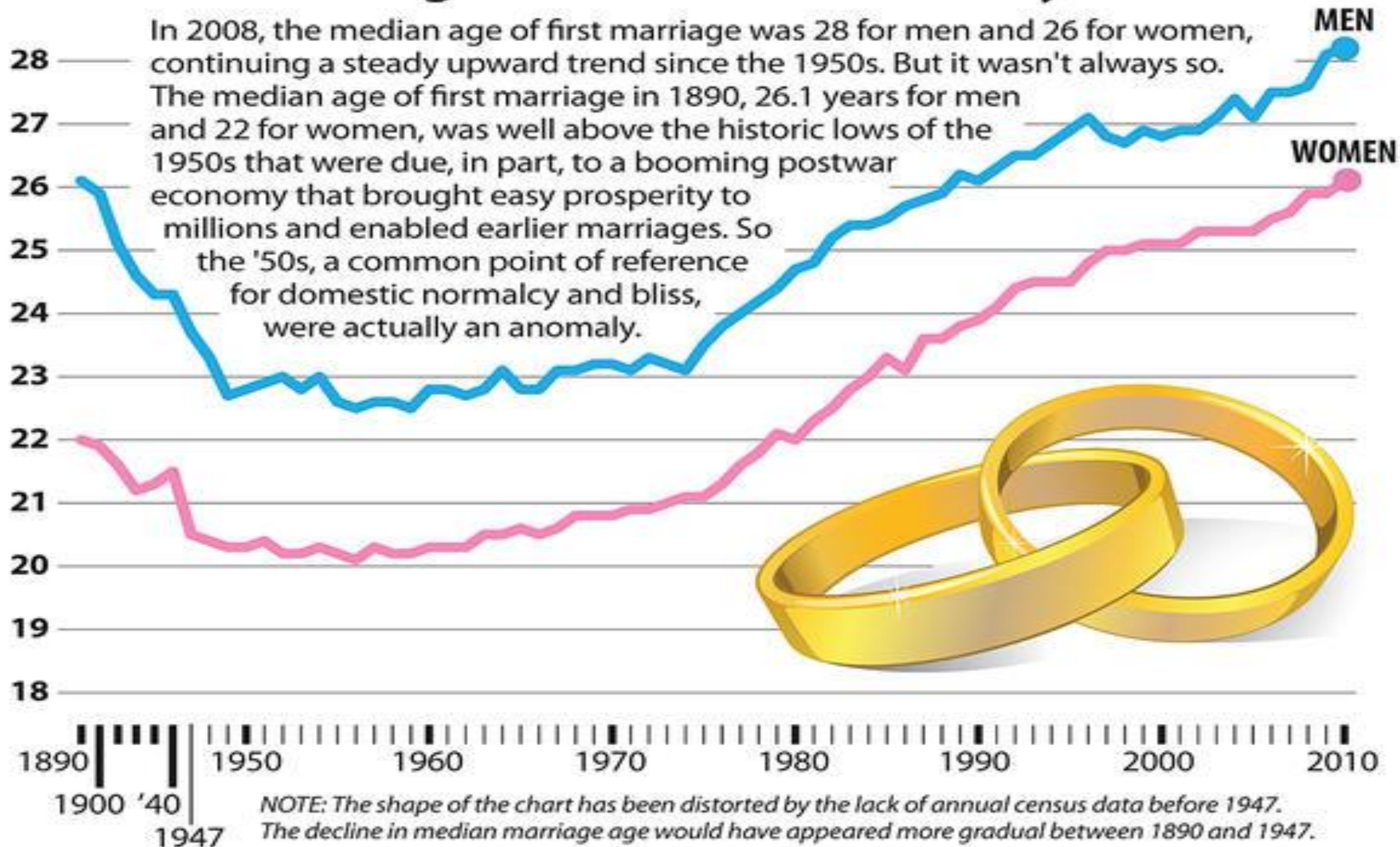
Associate Professor of Sociology  
Faculty Research Associate  
Population Research Center



# At what age do Americans marry?

In 2008, the median age of first marriage was 28 for men and 26 for women, continuing a steady upward trend since the 1950s. But it wasn't always so. The median age of first marriage in 1890, 26.1 years for men and 22 for women, was well above the historic lows of the 1950s that were due, in part, to a booming postwar economy that brought easy prosperity to millions and enabled earlier marriages. So the '50s, a common point of reference for domestic normalcy and bliss, were actually an anomaly.

MEDIAN MARRIAGE AGE



# Age at Marriage in Canada (2004)

	Men		Women	
	Mean age	Median age	Mean age	Median age
Total for Canada	30.3	29.0	28.3	27.0
Yukon	31.4	31.4	31.2	29.0
Northwest Territories	32.1	31.0	30.4	29.0
Nunavut	30.6	29.0	29.3	28.0
Newfoundland and Labrador	30.2	29.0	28.4	27.0
Prince Edward Island	29.5	28.0	27.9	27.0
Nova Scotia	30.2	29.0	28.6	27.0
New Brunswick	29.8	28.0	27.9	27.0
Quebec	31.8	30.0	30.0	28.0
Ontario (2002; 2004 N/A)	29.7	29.0	27.8	27.0
Manitoba	29.1	28.0	27.1	26.0
Saskatchewan	28.7	27.0	26.5	25.0
Alberta	29.1	28.0	26.9	26.0
British Columbia	30.5	29.0	28.4	27.0



## Percent Never Married, 1970-2010

Age	1970	1999	2000	2002	2004	2008	2010
<b>Male:</b>							
20 to 24 years	35.8%	83.2%	83.7%	85.4%	86.7%	86.9%	88.7%
25 to 29 years	10.5	52.1	51.7	53.7	56.6	57.6	62.2
30 to 34 years	6.2	30.7	30.0	34.0	33.4	32.4	36.5
35 to 39 years	5.4	21.1	20.3	21.1	23.4	23.0	23.5
40 to 44 years	4.9	15.8	15.7	16.7	18.5	16.9	20.4
<b>Female:</b>							
20 to 24 years	54.7%	72.3%	72.8%	74.0%	75.4%	76.4%	79.3%
25 to 29 years	19.1	38.9	38.9	40.4	40.8	43.4	47.8
30 to 34 years	9.4	22.1	21.9	23.0	23.7	24.0	27.2
35 to 39 years	7.2	15.2	14.3	14.7	14.6	15.2	17.7
40 to 44 years	6.3	10.9	11.8	11.5	12.2	12.9	13.8

# Age-specific marriage rates per 1,000 unmarried Canadian men and women

Age	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
15-19	1	.9	.8	.8	.8
20-24	21.7	19.4	18.4	16.7	15.7
25-29	<b>58.7</b>	54.1	53.5	43.9	<b>41.9</b>
30-34	<b>52.5</b>	48.3	51.5	43.6	<b>41.8</b>
35-39	35.2	31.8	33.6	28.2	28.4
40-44	26.8	24.0	23.9	20.3	19.8

Age	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
15-19	4.1	3.6	3.4	3.1	2.9
20-24	39.5	35.4	33.3	29.5	27.8
25-29	<b>75.1</b>	68.7	69.9	56.8	<b>53.9</b>
30-34	<b>55.4</b>	51.5	54.5	46.1	<b>44.7</b>
35-39	34.9	31.4	32.7	27.1	27.8
40-44	25.4	22.4	22.0	19.4	19.4



# Why the Age at Marriage Rises

---

## Part economic and structural

- Children: consumers, not producers
- Rapid expansion in educational and occupational opportunities for women
- Low cost/price of sex
- High cost of living in metro areas?
  - Do affordable housing efforts improve or diminish marriage rates?

## Part cultural

- The more religious want to marry *and* they want to finish college and start a career.
- Motivations often couched in a variety of cultural stories.



# It's *NOT* that People Dislike the Idea of Marriage

---

Emerging adults hold the institution of marriage in very high regard, and put considerable pressure on what their own eventual marriage ought to look like.

- Is it possible to esteem marriage too much?
- Or is it a lack of confidence in the institution?

They receive little help in:

- Merging visions of marriage with other life goals
- Understanding “early” romantic relationships



# The cultural stories about marriage in emerging adulthood

---

1. There's no rush
2. Be your own person
  - Emerging adults expect to *change* what they think and feel and want.
  - 20s vs. 30s: experimentation vs. a stable set of preferences.





# The cultural stories about marriage in emerging adulthood

---

1. There's no rush
2. Be your own person
3. Too soon to have children
  - Marriage and parenting are all part of a *package deal* in the mind
  - Obvious resistance to peak fertility
  - Fertility isn't taught
  - Religious emphasis is on sex, not fertility



# The cultural stories about marriage in emerging adulthood

---

1. There's no rush
2. Be your own person
3. Too soon to have children
4. Travel
  - An indicator of the freedom narrative
  - Somewhere, anywhere
  - Little cognizance of the competition with career



# The cultural stories about marriage in emerging adulthood

---

1. There's no rush
  2. Be your own person
  3. Too soon to have children
  4. Travel
  5. Parental resistance
- Those that marry without ever having cohabited are the *least* likely to receive financial assistance from their parents
  - Finish education, launch career, become financially independent.



# The cultural stories about marriage in emerging adulthood

---

1. There's no rush
2. Be your own person
3. Too soon to have children
4. Travel
5. Parental resistance
6. Finding sexual chemistry
  - The extension of match and fit to the bedroom
  - Considered more *innate* to a relationship than *learned*
  - Abstinence is considered by many to be a risk factor for divorce



# The cultural stories about marriage in emerging adulthood

---

1. There's no rush
2. Be your own person
3. Too soon to have children
4. Travel
5. Parental resistance
6. Finding sexual chemistry
7. Deflated confidence in the institution
  - Nonmarital birth rate is an indicator of this
  - Those who “need” its benefits most least likely to pursue it.



# Is Marriage Deinstitutionalizing?

---

- Deinstitutionalizing ≠ Disappearing
- An institution looking for its way
- Most people want those things that destabilize marriage
  - A story of unintended consequences



# The Disappearing Marriage “Naturalist”

---

Among emerging adults, the *story of marriage* is a story that begins and belongs to the late 20s and 30s.

- Marriage *naturalists* and marriage *planners*
  - “For marriage naturalists, the marriage mentality is the imprimatur of adulthood; you become an adult when you get married, whereas, for the planners, one has to be an adult before the marriage mentality is possible.”



# Percent of Young Adults Reporting Having Married before Age 24

	Men	Women
<i>Importance of Religion</i>		
Not important	17.2	30.9
Somewhat important	20.4	22.7
Very important	25.1	35.6
Most important thing	44.7	35.3

(Source: National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health)





# Peering into the Future

---

- Age-at-marriage increases taper off: appears self-limiting
- Proportion of people married continues its decline
  - As a result, both the marriage and divorce rates tumble
  - “Price” of sex appears stably low
- The popularity of stay-at-home fathers quickly hits a ceiling
- Fertility declines, and intergenerational relations suffers in part due to the growing age gap between grandparents and grandchildren
- In the US, at least, a *moral hazard*: growing call for federal or state assistance or tax breaks, since independence of marriage seems increasingly more than a personal choice; rather, a right.

