

**NO SECOND ACTS IN AMERICAN LIVES?
THE STATE OF REMARRIAGE IN THE CONTEMPORARY U.S SOCIETY**

MUH-CHUNG LIN

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO**

Abstract

Remarriage is one of the most important yet neglected research topics in family sociology. Using the 2006-2008 NSFG data, this paper presents a socio-demographic profile of remarriage in the U.S. in late 2000s, providing much-needed information on the prevalence of remarriage and its socio-demographic variations, its relationship with cohabitation, related dyadic characteristics, the presence of children, and its outcomes. Results show that, despite its apparent fragility, marriage remains a vigorous institution, as remarriages continue where first ones leave off.

0. Introduction

Remarriage is one of the most important yet neglected topics of research in family sociology. Remarriage is quantitatively important because the majority of individuals after marital disruption continue to marry for a second time or more. Compared to other research topics, remarriage is relatively neglected, as most marriage studies do not go much further than the dissolution of first marriages.

Quantitative importance alone, however, does not justify a sociological study. Remarriage is sociologically relevant and significant because it picks up where first marriages leave. Although scholars and social commentators often lament the fragility of marriage, citing that about half of all recent marriages are expected to dissolve in 30 years (Raley and Bumpass (2003)), divorces from first marriages are neither the end of the story nor the end of the world. A first marriage lasting for a lifetime is more an ideal than a reality, frequently disrupted by divorce in the present and by death or desertion in the past. The continuing relevance of marriage as a social institution in the contemporary U.S. society therefore hinges on remarriage, or a lack thereof. If remarriage is still the modal choice for the format of intimate union, then we may well conclude marriage remains a robust social institution, despite turbulences in individuals' life journeys. On the other hand, if other types of intimate unions or living arrangements largely replace marriage in life after the first marital disruption, then we may say that marriage is indeed a waning institution in today's world, since it only serves as a rite of passage. To validate either standpoint, we need to know the basic socio-demographic facts about remarriage in the U.S.

Unfortunately, not much is known about remarriage, and even the precious few studies are largely based on data from the mid-1990s (e.g. NSFG5). Our knowledge of remarriage is therefore in urgent need of an update, particularly on the socio-demographics,

and demands an expansion of its scope. This paper seeks to provide a timely and comprehensive statistical description of the state of remarriage in the U.S. in the late 2000s. Specifically, it answers the following research questions: What is the prevalence of remarriage currently in the U.S. and how does it vary among socio-demographic groups? In addition, what is the proportion of remarriages to all currently existing marriages? On the other hand, before remarriage comes marital disruption. The question that follows naturally is the role of marital disruption causes in remarriage. Do the propensity to remarry and the duration between marriages differ for divorced and widowed individuals? Given the current popularity of cohabitation, it is important to delineate the role it plays in the processes leading to remarriage—whether and to what extent it replaces remarriage as an alternative form of intimate union, the proportion of remarriages preceded by cohabitation, and whether it bears any relationship with subsequent marital success or failure.

Previous studies are also relatively limited in scope and rarely venture into features of remarried dyads, features that both reflect the market conditions individuals face when contemplating a remarriage and that directly affect the quality and outcome of remarriages. Specifically, homophily in a couple's socio-demographic characteristics are thought to facilitate communication and stabilize a marriage, whereas children are regarded as marital-specific capital and may stabilize or de-stabilize a marriage, depending on whether a child is jointly produced in a union. Further, prior marital history may introduce instabilities into a marriage. This paper will provide much-needed information on the extent children are involved in remarriages, the degree of homophily on selected socio-demographic variables, and the proportion of remarried spouses who have been previously married. Finally, this paper presents outcomes and duration of remarriages.

1. Literature Review

As Sweeney (2010) pointed out in her decadal review, recent studies on the demographics of remarriage itself are sparse, and most of the literature is based on data from the mid-1990s. One reason for the scarcity such studies is the lack of data. Without vital statistics on marriages and divorces in the U.S., scholars have increasingly relied on surveys, which suffer from problems of limited age range—NSFG's 44 prevents capturing remarriages occurring at mid-life and beyond—and limited sample size, making inferences

about minority populations difficult. Another reason is that scholarly attention has shifted increasingly towards stepfamily and the well-being of children in particular.

Kreider (2005) used the 2001 marital history module of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and is arguably the most comprehensive study on the demographics of remarriage in recent years. It covers birth cohorts from 1935 to 1979, and has a sample size of 56,574, permitting investigation of remarriage behaviors of minority parts of the population. On the other hand, it does not focus solely on remarriage, which is just one part of this admirable study. Further, it does not study spouse characteristics, and therefore is limited to information provided by respondents themselves. It is not possible to investigate the extent of homophily of remarriages, nor important features such as the presence of children and premarital cohabitation associated with remarriage.

2. NSFG Sample

The 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) is a nationally representative sample of women and men (results for men will be furnished later) aged 15-44 years old. It has an oversample of racial/ethnic minorities and teenage respondents. The NSFG collects detailed information on fertility and family-building behaviors such as cohabitation, marriage, and marital disruption, as well as factors affecting these processes. It also obtains comprehensive socio-demographic data and attitudinal measures related to family and fertility. Data through the end of 2008 have been released in May 2010, and this study is based on publicly available NSFG data.

To address the NSFG's issue of a youthful sample, I used the National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project (NSHAP) to cover older population. The NSHAP is a nationally representative sample of 3,005 elderly adults aged 57-85 in 2005-06. In addition to fairly extensive demographic and socio-economic data, its union history file contains information on the beginning and ending dates of each marriage and cohabiting union, as well as their dissolution causes. The major benefit of this dataset is that a substantial proportion of its respondents have (nearly) completed their marital history and likely would experience few marital turnovers (except for entry into widowhood in the future). Unfortunately, it does not obtain demographic and marital history information on each spouse/partner, and this study therefore is limited to the respondents themselves.

3. Results

3.1 First Marriage

I begin with the prevalence of first marriages and its socio-demographic variations. This relatively low ratio is due largely to the youthfulness of the sample. Table 1 presents the prevalence measures of first marriage, first marital disruption (conditional on entry into the first marriage), and remarriage (after the first disruption) by various socio-demographic groups. Among NSFG women, 54.73% of them have ever been married, and the ratio rises steeply with age. In addition, teenage marriage has almost completely vanished in the contemporary U.S. society. Although the ratio of being ever married still has not reached 90% even for the oldest women in this sample, it actually is consistent with the forecasts of Goldstein and Kenney (2001).

Overall, the prevalence of first marriage does not differ very much by race/ethnicity, except for African Americans, only 38.50% among them have ever been married. The prevalence of first marriage does increase substantially with educational attainment. As to religious affiliation, women with no religion are the least likely to be ever married, whereas Evangelical Protestants are the most likely, followed closely by Catholics. [All results on religious group differences are tentative, pending revision of recodes by CDC/NCHS.]

The NSHAP provides a dramatically different picture based on adults aged 57-85 in 2005-6. Overall, Table 1b shows that more than 96% of all NSHAP respondents have ever been married, indicating the near universality of marriage for Americans born between 1920 and 1948. Differences in the prevalence of first marriage among socio-demographic groups such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and religions are slight. However, African American females aged 57-64 appear to have the lowest prevalence among all subgroups at “only” 88.31% (results not shown).

3.2 Disruption of First Marriage

The prevalence of the disruption of first marriages is conditional on its entry. Among women aged 15-44 in 2006-08, divorce/separation accounts for the overwhelming majority of the first marital disruptions, and only a small fraction (4.4%) results from spousal deaths. Table 1 shows that, overall, only 30.20% of NSFG women who ever married have their first

marriage ended either in divorce or death, but the ratio increases sharply with age, reaching 39.90% for women aged 40-45, perfectly in line with the estimates of Raley and Bumpass (2003). African American women are more likely to experience a marital disruption than others. The proportions of women having experienced marital disruption decrease with educational attainment. Among the major religious groups, mainline Protestants and Catholics have the lowest prevalence, while women with no religious affiliation and Evangelical Protestants have the highest ratio. One of the reasons why Evangelical Protestants are more prone to divorce is their lower median age at first marriage.

Among ever married NSHAP respondents, 52.87% had already experienced the disruption of their first marriages: 46.81% for men and 58.60% for women. It is also natural that older respondents are more likely to experience marital disruption caused by spousal death. If we just look at causes other than death, 34.76% (35.96% men and 33.63% women) had gone through a divorce or separation (divorce/separation results not shown). Younger cohorts are more likely to have ended their first marriage this way: 41.17% and 34.78% for those aged 57-64 and 65-74, respectively. African Americans are most likely to divorce or separate (40.20%), but white and Latino respondents are not too far behind. There are no significant differences among educational groups, but people of different religious persuasions have significantly different divorce/separation experiences, with those without any religion leading the way (52.18%) and Catholics having the lowest proportion (26.98%).

Age at marriage is highly correlated with divorce. Divorced NSFG women typically married at a much younger age (around 20). Despite the overall increase in age at marriage, divorced women's age at marriage has not changed across birth cohorts. Further, the difference in median age at marriage between divorced and continuously married is full four years for all birth cohorts. On the other hand, another important characteristic of marriage, premarital cohabitation, is unrelated to divorce now, which is consistent with findings based on more recent cohorts, supporting the notion that the disrupting forces of premarital cohabitation result largely from selection (Lillard et al. (1995)). As cohabitation became the modal path to marriage, its impacts on marital stability became washed out. It is highly likely that earlier findings of a significantly positive relationship between premarital cohabitation and subsequent divorce are due to the selection of more divorce-prone couples opting for cohabitation as a trial marriage. As cohabitation became the modal path to first marriage, the aforementioned selection effect was substantially diluted. Further, whether a

couple was engaged when they started cohabitation is also unrelated to subsequent divorce: 30.23% women who were engaged when the couple started to live together later divorced, while 32.29 % of those who were not subsequently divorced. Although the NSFG does not contain measures of marital quality, results here contradict implications of Stanley et al. (2010), where premarital cohabitation without prior engagement is associated with lower marital quality and higher divorce proneness.

3.3 Remarriage

3.3.1 Propensity to Remarry

The prevalence measures of remarriage are conditional on having ever experienced marital disruption. However, an issue arises regarding whether the separated should be counted as being maritally disrupted. On the one hand, in the contemporary U.S., once separated, couples rarely reconcile and re-unite. Being separated could be a prolonged affair for certain segment of the population such as African Americans, and they formalize the rift only when remarriage opportunity emerges. On the other hand, separation is only a temporary state for most women in the U.S. and they quickly move on to divorce. In addition, separated but not divorced individuals cannot remarry unless they terminate the marriage legally. Excluding the separated from the denominator does not change the overall patterns, although gaps among groups are affected. Consequently, I will present both sets of measures but focus only on the latter to illustrate the prevalence of remarriage.

Between 2006 and 2008, 52.80% of divorced/widowed women aged 15-44 have ever remarried. Including the separated in the denominator decreases the proportion to 44.47%, still fairly substantial. Since both divorce and remarriage take time, the prevalence of remarriage increases with age to 53.61% and 59.30% of divorced/widowed women aged 35-39 and 40-45, respectively. Among racial/ethnic groups, non-Hispanic white and Hispanic women have similar propensity to remarry (above 50%), whereas only 41.40% African Americans have remarried. However, separation appears to be a longer-term affair for both African American and Hispanic women. Accounting for the separated reduces their ratios to 28.61% and 41.28%, respectively. Although the propensity to remarry increases with schooling, the dip at the top level likely results from a shorter period at risk for women with a college degree or more. Among religious groups, women with no religion and mainline

Protestants are much less likely to remarry than Evangelical Protestants (67.01%) and, to a lesser extent, Catholics (51.19%). It turns out that Evangelical Protestants are the group with the highest marital turnover before age 45, due likely to their younger age at marriage on average, making marriages more unstable. [All results on religious group differences are tentative, pending revision of recodes by CDC/NCHS.]

Although first marriage is nearly universal for NSHAP respondents, remarriage is not. That said, the majority individuals still remarried after a marital disruption (58.67%). On the other hand, there is substantial gender disparity in the propensity to remarry: 73.33% men remarried while only 47.61% women remarried after spousal death or divorce. The proportion of being ever remarried also declines drastically with age: 72.89% people aged 57-64 ever remarried, while only 40.62% of those aged 75-85 did so. The racial/ethnic pattern of remarriage follows that of first marriage closely, albeit on a much reduced scale. On the other hand, individuals with more education are more likely to have remarried, and so are respondents reporting no religious affiliation (69.53%), far ahead of everyone else.

3.3.2 Proportion of Remarriages among Currently Existing Marriages

Table 3 shows the proportion of remarriages among currently existing marriages and its distribution among various socio-demographic groups. 22.21% of all marriages are remarriages for either spouse, 12.49% of which are remarriages for NSFG women, and 9.72% are remarriages for their first husband. Among currently existing remarriages for women, about half (6.27%) are also remarriages for the husband. Although one-fifth may seem to be too low, the ratio increases with age, reaching 29.38% for women aged 40-44. The differences among racial/ethnic groups are not pronounced, but African Americans do have a higher ratio of remarriages to all marriages (25.84%). The ratio of remarriage is the highest among high school graduates (35.90%) and the lowest among college graduates or more (11.99%). Religious group differences in the ratios of remarriage to all marriages are fairly small, mostly hovering between 15% and 19%. However, consistent with their high marital turnover, Evangelical Protestants have a ratio as high as 34.37%.

3.3.3 Characteristics of Remarriages

3.3.3.1 Causes of First Marital Disruption

Having examined the prevalence of remarriage and its socio-demographic variations, it is natural to ask whether remarriage depends on how the previous marriage ended. The upper limit on age at 44 means there are fewer than 100 third (and beyond) marriages. I therefore only focus on the transition to the second marriage (other results are available upon request). Table 4 shows that causes of marital disruption turn out to be unrelated to the propensity to remarry. Although the divorced are more than 10% more likely to remarry than the widowed (53.47% vs. 40.73%), the small number of the widowed and who went on to remarry (N=44 and 16) makes the standard error very large and renders the difference insignificant. Causes of disruption are also unrelated to the duration to remarriage. On average, divorced women took 41.47 months to remarry, while the widowed took 39.15 months. Although marriages that ended in widowhood on average lasted 14 months longer than those ended in divorces, the median ages at marriage are comparable for the divorced and the widowed (both at 20, except for the 1970-74 birth cohort where there is a five-year gap).

Although the causes of first marital disruption are unrelated to the second marriage for NSFG respondents, they weigh heavily for NSHAP respondents' decisions to remarry. Among divorced elderly individuals, 78.14% had at least a second marriage, while the ratio is 24.04% for the widowed. Even if we look at younger respondents less likely to be affected by spousal death (aged 57-64), 81.63% of the divorced ever remarried, versus 40.01% for the widowed, and men are far more likely to remarry than women in all age groups.

Differences in the propensity to remarry, however, did not translate to waiting time to remarry. If any, divorced elderly individuals waited much longer to enter into another marriage. For example, the mean duration between first and second marriages for divorced people is 79.79 months, but only 64.74 months for widowed ones. The pattern persists for all marriage orders (with a gap of at least 12 months) and therefore is not just an artifact arising from marital disruptions decades ago. In most cases, the waiting time is much shorter for men than women, reflecting the advantages men have in remarriage market. Although cohabitation before a remarriage might play a role in the duration of waiting time

in the sense that couples already lived together took longer to remarry (by 20 months or more for second marriages), the difference in waiting time to remarry by causes of prior marital disruption persists even after accounting for premarital cohabitation.

3.3.3.2 Premarital Cohabitation

Cohabitation is now the modal path to marriage in the U.S. Over half (52.48%) of all first marriages are preceded by cohabitation, and this is particularly true for remarriages. The ratio increases dramatically to 72.14% for the second marriage and 77.38% for the third one (results for the fourth and fifth marriages are not shown due to small number of cases). It is very likely that women found the divorce experience so painful that they wanted to live with their future spouse before marriage to ensure compatibility, and there is some tentative result supporting this notion. Among second marriages, 30.44% of those who lived with their husband before marriage later divorced/separated, while 36.64% of those who did not cohabit premaritally divorced/separated. The difference, however, is not significant.

For NSHAP respondents, the differences are substantial and significant. Given the time period, it is no surprise that only 8.55% of all first marriages were preceded by cohabitation. The ratio rose to 41.74% for second marriages and further to 54.98% for third ones. There are two plausible explanations to it. First, compared to first-timers, previously married individuals have more realistic expectations of marriage and move more quickly in their dating process to try out quality of match by living together first. Second, as premarital cohabitation became more common over time, NSHAP respondents may find it increasingly acceptable to begin an intimate relation by living together without formalizing it.

3.3.3.3 Husband's Remarriage

Among first marriages, 12.67% women married husbands who had previously been married and this proportion increases enormously with the order of marriage. For the second marriages, almost half (49.42%) involved husbands who were formerly married, and the ratio grows to 65.77% for the third marriage. Although premarital cohabitation is unrelated to marital disruption for these cohorts of women, marrying a formerly married husband is, and significantly so: 36.22% women whose first husband had married before experienced marital disruption, compared to 27.76% women whose first husband had not married before.

3.3.3.4 Age Homophily

Marital disruption may also disrupt an individual's social relations. Families, friends, and other stake-holders are likely exposed to or entangled with predicaments related to the dissolution of one's marriage and have become intimate with many details of the marriage, willingly or unwillingly. Consequently, social contacts may want to detach from a divorcee's future marriage, and the best way to remain outside is not to get involved in the first place, and not to introduce potential mates from existing networks. After the embarrassing event of divorce, people also have incentives to look outside their immediate social environment for potential mates. Since individual's social networks tend to be composed of people of similar traits, "exogamy" tends to result in a lower degree of homophily in terms of socio-demographic characteristics. Although the NSFG collected information on a variety of socio-demographic traits of respondents' spouse/partner, it did not ask about the husband's race, educational attainment, or religious affiliation if the marriage has ended in divorce or death. The only demographic information available for all marriages is husband's age, therefore I limit my discussions on age homophily/heterophily of remarriage.

Table 5 presents age homophily by the order of marriage, and the small number of cases beyond the second marriage means that results pertaining to the third marriage are merely suggestive. I used age difference greater than 5 years as a measure of heterophilous marriage, following the practice of Laumann et al (1994). Among first marriages, 22.06% of women married men either 5 years older or younger. The ratio increases to 32.17% and 54.32% for second and third marriages, respectively. However, the reason for a greater age heterophily in remarriages is not just women tend to marry older men in remarriages: they also tend to marry younger men in remarriages. For illustrative purposes, I used one-year younger because women still tend to marry men older than themselves. In first marriages, 16.79% women married younger men. However, the ratio increases to 32.98% and 46.82% for second and third marriages, respectively.

3.3.3.5 Children

Table 7 shows that the proportion of women having biological children with husband declines with the order of marriage, from 66.99% in first marriages to 42.29% and 31.50% in second and third marriages, respectively. On the other hand, as the proportion of

husbands having been previously married increases, so does the proportion of husbands having children from previous relationships, which increases from 14.82% in first marriages to 46.33% and 72.17% in second and third marriages, respectively. However, there is no discernible pattern regarding the ratios of children from the husband's previous relationships living in the household: 32.04% for first marriages and 41.46% and 29.97% for second and third ones.

3.4 Marital Disruption of Remarriage

One of the most intriguing finding about remarriage is that remarriages appear to be more vulnerable than first marriages. Previous literature has proposed several explanations: divorced individuals may possess certain personality traits or attitudes that are not conducive to marital success, or they may have learnt from previous marriages patterns of communication or interaction that are detrimental to the successes of subsequent marriage, or capital specific to a previous marriage such as children becomes liability in the sense that it introduces complexities and destabilizes another marriage. These hypotheses, however plausible, do not sit well with a strictly rational choice explanation of divorce, which stresses the role of information (Becker et al, 1974). If the revelation of information is indeed pivotal in the dissolution of marriage, then why should divorced people remarry if the odds of success are much lower than the first one? Even if we allow for the scenario where people may not have received adequate information on the likelihood of re-marital success/failure, individuals themselves possess the best information as to whether the marriage is a good fit or otherwise. People on the threshold of remarriage supposedly should know themselves much better after painful marital disruptions, and yet remarriages are more prone to failure than first ones. The situation therefore is more akin to people repeatedly try to quit smoking or to reduce weight, despite previous failures.

To reconcile neo-classical economic interpretation of divorce with empirical evidence from remarriage is beyond the scope of this paper. Here I will provide basic descriptive statistics on the disruption of remarriage and some attitudinal measures. As discussed earlier, for women aged 15-44 between 2006 and 2008 in the U.S., 28.87% first marriages ended in divorce, separation, or death. The ratio increases to 32.40% and 36.98% for second and third marriages, respectively (and to 94.16% for fourth marriages, but the number of cases is too small). The median duration of marriages that ended in divorce or separation

also declines with order of marriage. First marriages that ended in divorces lasted 49.30 months, whereas second ones that ended in divorces lasted 34.72 months. First marriages that ended in separation lasted 54.95 months, and second ones ending in separation lasted 48.85. It is likely that the upper limit on age also puts a cap on the duration on marriages that disrupted, but it is also possible that divorced/separated individuals learned from the past about the futility to drag on, and this is reflected in their attitudes towards divorce and the desirability of marriage in general.

Table 8 presents attitudinal measures by marital status/history. The NSFG asked about 18 marriage and family related attitudes, and I used two of them that are directly related to marriage and divorce: whether it is better to get married than to remain single for life, and whether divorce is the best solution when a couple cannot work out marriage problems. I combined “agree” and “strongly agree” into a category, and similarly “disagree” with “strongly disagree”. Since there are too few widows from the second marriage onwards, I combined divorced, separated, and widowed into the same group. More importantly, in the case of first marital disruption, the divorced/separated and the widowed actually had comparable attitudes, justifying the practice of grouping them together. (If any, the widowed actually had a slightly more favorable attitude towards divorce.) Results show that marital disruption, regardless of causes, are negatively associated with finding marriage preferable to singlehood and positively associated with seeing divorce as a viable means to solve marital problems. Moreover, as the order of marriage increases, the desirability of marriage declines, from 60.10% for those still in intact first marriage to 54.00% and 29.09% for women in intact second and third marriages, respectively. The order of marriage is also positively related to approval of divorce as the best solution: from 40.58% of those in intact first marriage to 54.32% and 63.26% for women in second and third marriages, respectively. These results suggest that individuals may increasingly regard divorce as a viable and valid solution to an unhappy and unsatisfying marriage as they themselves accumulate more first-hand experiences from divorce/separation.

3.5 Did Cohabitation Replace Remarriage?

There are good reasons to suspect that cohabitation has to some extent replaced remarriage after marital disruption. After all, the growing popularity among younger people has been credited as an important factor contributing to the delayed entry into the first

marriage. Moreover, although divorce may well bring certain relief to couples suffering from a bad relationship, marital disruption is still likely to be a most traumatic experience, both psychologically and financially. Divorced individuals may still desire intimate, romantic relationships, but certain aspects of marriage could make them wary of being entrapped in this social institution again. They may well opt for a cheaper alternative, cohabitation. It provides intimacy, certain social support, and ready access to sex. On the other hand, in the contemporary U.S. society, cohabitation involves much less commitment than marriage does, and is not as full-fledged a social institution with clearly delineated norms and values as is marriage. Cohabitation is not common law marriage and hence can be dissolved at will, with much lower costs than a divorce. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect cohabitation replaces remarriage after marital disruption.

Table 9 shows results from the NSFG. Since it takes time to divorce and remarry, I stratified the results by age groups. Further, since the upper limit on age is 44, I restricted the discussions to cohabitation after the first marital disruption, and those on cohabitation after the second marital disruption are only suggestive due to the small number of cases with two marital disruptions before age 44. Overall, after the first marital disruption, 56.46% women aged 20-44 have ever cohabited. Slightly over half of them (31.97%) have lived with their second husband before marriage and the remaining unions did not result in a marriage. Another 11.58% women remarried directly without having lived with their future husband or someone else, and almost a third of women (31.97%) did not enter into any union, formal or informal, after the first marital disruption. Taken together, slightly over half of women after the first disruption have ever cohabited, and slightly under half of them (44.47%) have ever remarried.

Table 10 shows that this overall pattern masks substantial age difference in the propensities to cohabit or to remarry. Across all age groups (except for those aged 15-19, of whom there is no marital disruption yet), the ratios of women who have ever cohabited after the first marital disruption are all well above 50%, except for the youngest group. On the other hand, the ratios of divorced/widowed women ever remarried after marital disruption decline steadily with age, especially under age 35. The situation is similar for women after the second marital disruption, with the proportions of having ever cohabited hovering around 50% for age groups 25 and above and those of remarriage behaving erratically, due to small number of cases.

These results cannot provide definitive answers as to whether cohabitation replaces marriage after divorce or spousal death. On the one hand, the decline in the proportion of women who remarried could result from age or cohort effect. Age effect implies that the proportion would recover as younger women mature. A cohort interpretation suggests that the difference in the propensity to remarry may be of a more permanent nature. The limited evidence on hand cannot settle this issue, and we may have to wait to see how things turn out. On the other hand, if information from women aged 35-44 could provide some hints, there is rather moderate replacement of remarriage by cohabitation.

Attitudinal measures also send mixed signals. On the one hand, younger respondents are more likely to believe that divorce is the best solution if a marriage does not work out, and cohabitation ensures compatibility among couples and prevents divorce. On the other hand, there is no apparent decline in the desirability with age (results not shown). It may be that although younger women acknowledge the fragility of contemporary marriages and hence the utility of divorce, their attitudes towards marriage still do not differ dramatically from those of older respondents, and they are more willing to turn to cohabitation to enhance the survival of their marriages, regardless of whether such beliefs are correct or not. In that case, we may see cohabitation precede a substantial proportion of marriages, but it likely does not replace them.

Discussions

Scott Fitzgerald once remarked that “there are no second acts in American lives”. Notwithstanding its different meanings, it is usually interpreted as a complete absence of opportunities for people to reinvent themselves and to reinvigorate their lives in America: once you fail, you are lost forever. This paper shows that, even in the aftermath of a major crisis such as divorce, the majority of Americans are still able to pick themselves up and move on—to remarry—for another chance at happiness. This study also shows that, despite a higher age at marriage and lower proportion of the population having ever been married, marriage is still popular among the most recent cohorts of Americans, even after a traumatic event such as a divorce.

Demographics of Remarriage
February 15, 2011

Table 1a: Prevalence Measures of Marriage, Disruption, and Remarriage – NSFG women

	Total Sample Descriptives	Ever Married	Ever Disrupted	Ever Remarried ¹	Ever Remarried ²
N	7356	3416	1241	771	771
Total Sample %		54.73%	30.20%	44.47%	52.80%
<u>Age Groups (6)</u>					
15-19	16.86%	1.41%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
20-24	16.39%	23.85%	15.93%	11.11%	23.69%
25-29	16.57%	56.25%	21.23%	23.79%	34.37%
30-34	15.50%	74.35%	26.74%	41.87%	50.20%
35-39	16.93%	82.92%	32.63%	46.28%	53.61%
40-45	17.75%	88.44%	39.90%	54.28%	59.30%
<u>Races/Ethnicities (4)</u>					
White	60.87%	58.17%	30.15%	48.76%	53.64%
Black	13.66%	38.50%	38.26%	28.61%	41.40%
Hispanic	16.77%	55.78%	28.11%	41.28%	56.44%
Others	8.69%	54.11%	25.69%	39.95%	53.65%
<u>Education Groups (4)</u>					
Dropout	23.04%	32.70%	38.60%	30.39%	44.46%
HS Grad	24.02%	58.98%	44.47%	46.61%	54.68%
Some College	27.75%	52.05%	33.62%	51.10%	56.61%
BA+	25.19%	73.76%	13.25%	42.54%	48.12%
<u>Religion (5)</u>					
None	16.68%	43.90%	36.56%	30.51%	39.47%
Mainline Protestant	20.60%	52.22%	27.77%	37.29%	42.18%
Evangelical Prot.	27.20%	60.14%	38.52%	56.95%	67.01%
Catholic	24.87%	57.25%	23.77%	41.53%	51.19%
Others	10.65%	56.82%	19.44%	36.11%	38.34%

Ever Remarried¹: Separated counted as disrupted in the denominator.

Ever Remarried²: Separated not counted as disrupted in the denominator.

Demographics of Remarriage
February 15, 2011

Table 1b: Prevalence Measures of Marriage, Disruption, and Remarriage – NSHAP all

	Total Sample Descriptives	Ever Married	Ever Disrupted	Ever Remarried
N	3005	2888	1645	864
Weighted %		96.50%	52.87%	58.67%
<u>Gender (2)</u>				
Female	51.52%	96.30%	58.60%	47.61%
Male	48.48%	96.71%	46.81%	73.33%
<u>Age Groups (6)</u>				
57-64	41.34%	96.39%	49.69%	72.89%
65-74	34.86%	96.52%	51.75%	56.82%
75-85	23.81%	96.65%	60.01%	40.62%
<u>Races/Ethnicities (4)</u>				
White	80.65%	96.87%	51.92%	61.15%
Black	10.03%	93.07%	64.03%	46.35%
Hisp	6.84%	97.30%	48.21%	54.23%
Others	2.48%	95.61%	52.57%	51.60%
<u>Education Groups (4)</u>				
Dropout	18.53%	95.85%	60.42%	46.80%
HS Grad	26.95%	97.47%	54.55%	56.65%
Some College	30.02%	96.97%	52.95%	65.48%
BA+	24.50%	95.34%	45.13%	63.55%
<u>Religion (5)</u>				
None	6.81%	94.68%	64.60%	69.53%
Mainline Protestant Evangelical	27.32%	96.95%	52.43%	57.47%
Protestant	19.55%	96.44%	59.16%	59.82%
Catholic	27.56%	96.91%	44.84%	55.62%
Others	18.76%	96.33%	54.13%	56.79%

Table 2: Median Age at First Marriage by Birth Cohort and Median Age at Marriage by Outcome – NSFG

<u>Birth cohorts:</u>	<u>Median Age at First Marriage</u>			
1961-1964	24.9			
1965-1969	25.4			
1970-1974	25.3			
1975-1979	26.4			
1980-1984	-			

<u>Med Age by Outcomes:</u>	<u>1961-64 cohort</u>	<u>1965-69 cohort</u>	<u>1970-74 cohort</u>	<u>1975-79 cohort</u>
Entire cohort	24.9	25.4	25.3	26.4
Continuously married	25.4	25.2	24.1	23.1
Divorced	20.3	20.9	20.1	19.7
Separated	25.0	22.6	21.8	20.9
Widowed	20.5	23.0	24.2	19.0

Demographics of Remarriage
February 15, 2011

Table 3: Proportion of Remarriages Among Currently Existing Marriages

<u>% Currently existing marriage:</u>	<u>W %</u>
Own Remarried	12.49%
1st Husband Remarried	9.72%
Either Spouse Remarried	22.21%
Both Remarried	6.27%

<u>Age Groups (6)</u>	<u>% Remarriage of All Marr.</u>	<u>Educational Attainment (4)</u>	<u>% Remarriage of All Marr.</u>
15-19	0.00%	Dropout	21.59%
20-24	6.73%	HS Grad	35.90%
25-29	12.47%	Some College	25.66%
30-34	22.89%	BA+	11.99%
35-39	25.99%		
40-45	29.38%		

<u>Races/Ethnicities (4)</u>		<u>Religious Affiliation (5)</u>	
White	22.19%	None	19.15%
Black	25.84%	Mainline Protestant	17.14%
Hispanic	20.15%	Evangelical Protestant	34.37%
Others	23.03%	Catholic	17.08%
		Others	15.10%

Demographics of Remarriage
February 15, 2011

Table 4a: Causes of Marital Disruption and Remarriage – NSFG

	Causes of Marital Disruption	
	<u>Divorce</u>	<u>Widowhood</u>
% Ever Remarried	53.47%	40.73%
Duration betw marriage #1 & #2:		
Mean (months)	41.47	39.15
Median (months)	29.23	31.50
% ever cohabited w/ second husb.:	72.28%	68.67%
% 2 nd marriage ever disrupted:	32.78%	23.42%

Demographics of Remarriage
February 15, 2011

Table 4b: Causes of Marital Disruption and Remarriage – NSHAP

	Causes of Marital Disruption	
	<u>Divorce</u>	<u>Widowhood</u>
<u>% Ever Remarried, all</u>	78.14%	24.04%
% Ever Remarried, age 57-64	81.63%	40.01%
% Ever Remarried, age 65-74	73.60%	24.01%
<u>Duration betw marriage #1 & #2:</u>		
Mean (months), all	79.79	64.74
Mean (months), age 57-64	78.29	65.11
Mean (months), age 57-64, Male	70.52	74.83
Mean (months), age 57-64, Female	88.11	55.39
Mean (months), age 65-74	81.54	68.04
Mean (months), age 65-74, Male	73.86	62.77
Mean (months), age 65-74, Female	91.72	76.37
<u>% ever cohabited w/ second spouse:</u>		
% cohab w/ 2nd sp, age 57-64	51.36%	40.07%
% cohab w/ 2nd sp, age 65-74	42.42%	35.48%
<u>% 2nd marriage ever disrupted:</u>		
% 2nd marriage ever divr., age 57-64	37.68%	21.07%
% 2nd marriage ever divr., age 65-74	38.00%	18.16%

Demographics of Remarriage
February 15, 2011

Table 5a: Characteristics of Marriage and Husband by Marriage Order – NSFG

<u>Order of Marriage:</u>	<u>% Pre-Marital Cohab</u>	<u>% Husband Married Before</u>	<u>% Age Diff > 5 Years</u>	<u>% Husband 1+ Years Younger</u>	<u>% Marriages Ever Divr./Sep.</u>
#1	52.48%	12.67%	22.06%	16.79%	28.87%
#2	72.14%	49.42%	32.17%	32.98%	32.40%
#3	77.38%	65.77%	54.32%	46.82%	36.98%

Table 5b: Characteristics of Marriage by Marriage Order – NSHAP

<u>Order of Marriage:</u>	<u>% Pre-Marital Cohab</u>	<u>% Marriages Ever Divr./Sep.</u>
#1	8.55%	34.26%
#2	41.74%	33.37%
#3	54.98%	35.38%
#4	47.37%	36.84%

Table 6: % of Marriages Disrupted by Pre-Marital Characteristics – NSFG

<u>Cohab w/ husband #1:</u>	<u>% Marriages Disrupted</u>
No	28.28%
Yes	29.37%
<u>Engaged when cohab w/ husband #1:</u>	
No	32.29%
Yes	30.23%
<u>Husband #1 remarried:</u>	
No	27.76%
Yes	36.22%
<u>Cohab w/ husband #2:</u>	
No	36.64%
Yes	30.44%

Table 7: Remarriage and Joint- or Step-Children – NSFG

<u>Order of Marriage:</u>	<u>% Husband had Children Before</u>	<u>% Had Bio Child w/ Husband</u>	<u>% Husb's Prior Child Live w/ R</u>
#1	14.82%	66.99%	32.04%
#2	46.33%	42.29%	41.46%
#3	72.17%	31.50%	29.97%

Demographics of Remarriage
February 15, 2011

Table 8: Marriage/Divorce Attitudes by Marital Status-History – NSFG

<u>Marital Status-History</u>	<u>Better Married Than Single for Life</u>	<u>Divorce Best Solution If Can't Work Out</u>
Never Married	45.87%	41.95%
1st Marr. Cont.	60.10%	40.58%
1st Marr. Disrupted	35.93%	61.44%
2nd Marr. Cont.	54.00%	54.32%
2nd Marr. Disr.	41.94%	64.80%
3rd+ Marr. Cont.	29.09%	63.26%
3rd+ Marr. Disr.	25.16%	35.70%

Table 9: Marital-Union Status After the First Marital Disruption – NSFG

Status after 1st marital disruption

	<u>W %</u>		<u>W %</u>
No Remr, nor Cohab	31.97%	No Remr, nor Cohab	31.97%
No Remr but Cohab	23.56%	Ever Cohabited	56.46%
Remr, No Cohab	11.58%		
Remr & Cohab – Husb #2	31.97%	Ever Remarried	44.48%
Remr but Cohab w/ Other	0.93%		
Total (N=1241)	100.00%		

Demographics of Remarriage
February 15, 2011

Table 10: Cohabitation/Remarriage Experiences after Marital Disruptions by Age – NSFG

After the disruption (incl. sep.) of 1st marriage, N=1241

Age Groups	Weighted %	
	Ever Cohab	Ever Remarr
40-45	53.14%	54.28%
35-39	54.30%	46.28%
30-34	67.68%	41.87%
25-29	58.16%	23.79%
20-24	44.80%	11.11%

After the disruption (incl. sep.) of 2nd marriage, N=203

Age Groups	Weighted %	
	Ever Cohab	Ever Remarr
40-45	50.37%	31.28%
35-39	50.61%	49.41%
30-34	44.16%	13.04%
25-29	57.82%	33.65%
20-24	0.00%	0.00%