

**TOO POOR TO MARRY? A CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON OF THE SES
GRADIENT IN NON-MARRIAGE**

Joshua R. Goldstein

Catherine T. Kenney

PRELIMINARY DRAFT: PLEASE DO NOT CIRCULATE

ABSTRACT

In the United States, several recent studies find a negative educational gradient in non-marriage—those with more education are actually more, rather than less, likely ever to marry. Observations about Northwestern Europe, which contributed to the development of Second Demographic Transition theory, suggest the opposite: In at least some countries, the most-educated are more likely to embrace alternatives to marriage, such as long-term cohabitation. In this paper, we seek answers to the following questions: Which pattern of association is more common? How does the existence of a positive or negative educational gradient in non-marriage, or the steepness of the gradient, vary with the characteristics of the society? Is the main divide in behavior between the most- (or least-) disadvantaged members of the society and everyone else, or are there differences between each gradation of social status? How does non-marriage diffuse over time? The answers to these questions matter because non-marriage has implications for a wide variety of sociologically important issues, from kinship to consumption. Using data from the IPUMS-International for 32 countries, augmented for 9 European countries by data from the Generations and Gender Surveys and the Harmonized Histories data, we examine the association between non-marriage and education for women for whom non-marriage appears most likely to be an alternative, rather than a precursor, to marriage: those who are age 35-44, never-married, and living with a partner and children. We find, first, that the negative educational gradient in non-marriage seen in the United States appears to be common, while a pattern of higher non-marriage among the most-educated is relatively rare. In addition, the negative gradient, where it appears, is remarkably consistent across educational levels. Finally, we see no evidence for the emancipation theories' prediction that the diffusion of non-marriage through societies will occur from the "top down".

Introduction

Although opinion research finds that marriage remains an ideal and an expectation for most young people in the United States, a higher proportion of individuals in cohorts born since the baby boom may ultimately forgo marriage than has been the case for any previous generation of Americans, even the low-marrying cohorts who came of age before and during the Great Depression. The same is true for people in many European countries, where the “retreat from marriage” has been even stronger, although perhaps less bemoaned. Why? Given the common belief that it is better to marry, both for the individuals involved and for children, given supports for marriage ranging from extensive government subsidies to the blessing of nearly every organized religion, why *not* marry?

One set of social science theories—whether taking the form of the independence hypothesis in sociology and economics or Second Demographic Transition [SDT] theory in demography—emphasizes the idea of non-marriage as emancipation (see, e.g., Becker, Landes & Michael 1977; Lesthaeghe & Van de Kaa 1986). In this view, the past three or four decades have represented a period of increasing individualism, in which a new focus on self-realization and self-fulfillment has come at the expense of marriage, family, and, perhaps, social solidarity more generally. Although the theory is sometimes phrased in gender-neutral terms (particularly SDT theory), more often the protagonists of the non-marriage-as-emancipation story are women. The argument is that women’s increasing education and labor force participation have allowed them to pursue their self-interest as never before, and their self-interest is understood to be antithetical to marriage. Women are supposedly using their increased purchasing power to buy themselves out of marriage.

This approach is contradicted by evidence that, in the United States at least, non-marriage, like divorce, is actually more common among those with the lowest socioeconomic status. Consistent with this observation, several scholars have argued for a theory of non-marriage as deprivation. Oppenheimer (1994; *see also* Oppenheimer, Kalmijn & Lim 1997) suggests that the important shift over the past few decades—more important than well-educated women’s increased financial autonomy—has been the decrease in men’s earning power, particularly among men with low to moderate levels of education. Under this theory, marriage is costly, both due to expenses associated with the wedding itself and to the perceived need for marriages to be on sounder financial footing than non-marital relationships. Those with low-paid or unstable employment, no savings, and few prospects for improving their economic standing—women or men—find marriage to be out of reach in practical terms, however desirable it may be as an ideal.

These alternative theories of non-marriage offer clear and conflicting predictions about which groups will experience the most non-marriage. Under non-marriage-as-emancipation theories, women with the highest earning capacity, usually measured by education, will be most likely to choose self-fulfillment over marriage. Thus, we should see a positive educational gradient in non-marriage. If non-marriage should instead be viewed as deprivation, we would expect those with the poorest financial prospects to predominate among the non-marriers, creating a negative educational gradient in non-marriage.

In the United States, as noted above, recent evidence suggests a negative educational gradient in non-marriage (e.g., Goldstein & Kenney 2001; McLanahan 2004). Observations about Northwestern Europe, which contributed to the development of SDT theory, suggest a positive gradient in some countries. In this paper, we seek answers to the following questions:

Which pattern of association is more common? How does the existence of a positive or negative educational gradient in non-marriage, or the steepness of the gradient, vary with the characteristics of the society? Is the main divide in behavior between the most- (or least-) disadvantaged members of the society and everyone else, or are there differences between each gradation of social status? That is, do we see either a pattern of underclass non-marriage or a pattern of upper-class/avant-garde non-marriage, or is the gradient more even? How does non-marriage diffuse over time? Is the pattern top-down (as suggested by SDT literature) or bottom-up?

The answers to these questions matter. Non-marriage has implications for a wide variety of sociologically important issues, from kinship (what are the norms and obligations associated with care across generations of non-in-laws?) to consumption (how does non-marriage influence decisions such as homeownership, given reduced income pooling among unmarried couples?). In addition, in many if not most societies, marriage confers a variety of benefits not only on its participants, but on children, as well. The benefits for adults, many of which also entail positive externalities for children, range from greater relationship stability and better physical and mental health to greater financial stability and wealth accumulation. If emancipation theories of non-marriage are correct, and it is the most privileged in society who are choosing to forgo marriage, then non-marriage may serve as an equalizing force across generations. Children of highly-educated unmarried mothers are likely to fare well, but they will presumably be somewhat less advantaged than their within-social-class peers whose parents have married; meanwhile, to the extent that less-educated women marry more, their children will get a leg up toward competing with the children of the more-educated. (Indeed, although emancipation theories are often accompanied by a scolding tone toward the supposed selfishness of those who would choose

self-realization over marriage, it is not at all clear why non-marriage among the most privileged is a *social problem* at all.) However, if deprivation theories of non-marriage offer a better fit to empirical fact, inequality will be magnified for children. For children of the least educated women, not only are their mothers poorer to start with, but higher rates of non-marriage would mean they also have less secure access to their fathers' income and greater family instability. Without a strong social welfare state and policies that level the playing field between those whose parents are married and those whose parents are not, a negative educational gradient in non-marriage—itsself a reflection of existing inequality, if the deprivation theory is true—is likely to contribute to even greater inequality for children.

In this paper, we ask whether the negative educational gradient of deprivation theory, found in the United States, or the positive gradient hypothesized by emancipation theories, is more common. Previous research has largely focused on within-country analyses of entry into marriage versus cohabitation, considering the influence of each partner's education, employment, and/or income on the decision to form a union and the type of union formed (e.g., Smock and Manning 1997; Kravdal 1999; Oppenheimer 2003). By contrast, we compare the pattern of association between non-marriage and education across a large number of countries, not just in Europe and North America, but also in South America, Africa, and, to the extent possible, Asia. The innovation of our study is its attempt to take a global look at the issue, describing contours of class differentials in non-marriage and identifying apparent patterns and exceptions. We also build upon work by Perelli-Harris, et al., (2010), which examined the educational gradient in non-marital childbearing for several European countries. Both emancipation and deprivation theories predict changes not just in the age at which individuals marry but in whether they ever choose to (or are able to) marry. Using census data from 32

countries, augmented for 9 European countries by data from the Generations and Gender Surveys and the Harmonized Histories data, we examine the association between non-marriage and education for women for whom non-marriage appears most likely to be an alternative, rather than a precursor, to marriage: those who are age 35-44, never-married, and living with a partner and children.

Background

Non-Marriage as Emancipation

Although, as Lewis (2001) argues, there is widespread support in academia for the idea of increased individualism as “*the major explanation* for family change” (emphasis added, at 163), empirical support for emancipation theories remains mixed. Emancipation theories, whether cultural or economic, lead to specific (and testable) predictions regarding how and among whom marriage behavior is expected to change. First, the emancipation theories suggest that non-marriage should become appealing as individuals achieve income levels that allow them to shift their focus from material to non-material needs (the “Maslowian preference drift” of SDT theory) or as women achieve high enough earnings of their own that they no longer need a breadwinner husband (independence hypothesis). Such income levels, as well as support for ideas regarding tolerance for diversity and individual choice, are associated with higher levels of education. Thus non-marriage should be found primarily among those in the most-educated groups. Next, Oppenheimer argues that the independence hypothesis predicts not merely that people will wish to marry later in life, but that they will choose not to marry at all. As a result, cohabitation among the most educated should be observed acting as a substitute for, rather than merely a precursor to, marriage, as evidenced by cohabitations of greater duration and

cohabitations that include childbearing (Heuveline and Timberlake, 2004). Finally, after starting among the most-educated, emancipation theories predict that non-marriage will diffuse “downward” through the rest of society, following the pattern observed with the adoption of fertility control in the first demographic transition.

Given the widespread scholarly—and popular—acceptance of emancipation theories, empirical studies that offer support for their specific predictions with regard to the educational gradient are relatively scarce. Dominguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martin (2008) find a negative association between higher educational attainment and marriage for women in Spain and Portugal, and they note that this association becomes stronger in the youngest cohort they consider. In further support of emancipation theory, they find that highly-educated women are more likely than their less-educated peers to cohabit in Spain, and that this relationship has weakened over time, suggesting a top-down transmission of this behavior. The same pattern was not found in Portugal, however, where cohabitation was more common at lower educational levels. Emancipation theories appear to find support in the Netherlands, as well. Dykstra and Poortman (2010) find that high-resource women were more likely to remain single, consistent with Liefbroer and Corijn’s (1999) finding that educational attainment has a negative effect on marriage for Dutch women.

Non-Marriage as Deprivation

Deprivation theories of non-marriage, popular in 18th and 19th century literature, are gaining significant empirical support in recent years. These theories argue that non-marriage is driven not by ideological rejection of the institution but by economic constraints that prevent those who wish to marry from doing so. From Malthus through Jane Austen and most of the 19th

century novelists, the assumption was, as Godwin (1820) argued, that “no man has a right to marry, without a fair prospect of being able to support a family.” Deprivation theories of non-marriage predict a pattern of disadvantage or constraint in the association between non-marriage and socioeconomic status. Marriage is most likely to be out of reach for those with the least education, most unstable job prospects, and fewest family resources. With formal marriage out of reach, cohabitation is predicted to serve as a form of “poor man’s marriage” and a site for childbearing. Deprivation theorists have generally been less explicit than emancipation theorists in their predictions about the diffusion of non-marriage over time. However, to the extent that non-marriage is initially more common among those with low levels of education, as educational opportunity expands within a society, acceptance of non-marriage might be found to spread upward over time, flattening the negative gradient in non-marriage. Alternatively, increasing income inequality over time, along with increased commercialization of weddings and publicity for the lavish weddings of the rich, might be expected to lead to inflation in the social understanding of what constitutes a “good enough” wedding and therefore a good enough income to afford marriage, making marriage out of reach for larger segments of the poor over time and, potentially, increasingly out of reach for the working class. If this is the case, we would expect to see a negative educational gradient in non-marriage that becomes steeper over time as well as shifting upward to include more of those at moderate and higher levels of education.

Since the mid-1990s, scholars investigating the association between union formation and socioeconomic status have found evidence of a negative educational gradient in non-marriage in several countries. A few regions stand out as particularly representative of this pattern, particularly the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and many countries

in Latin America. As Bradatan and Kulcsar (2008) note, in their investigation, education and employment had strong influences on family formation in Hungary—but the effects were in the opposite direction than that predicted by SDT theory. Instead, they find both that it is women in the least-educated groups who are most likely to stay in cohabitation and those with the highest levels of education who are “more able or willing to marry” (at 505). Similarly, Kantorova (2004) found that women in the Czech Republic who had university degrees had higher transitions to direct marriage (without prior cohabitation) than women with less education, and Gerber and Berman (2010) report that higher education also makes Russian women more, rather than less, likely to marry. Some of this pattern may be related to different marriage behavior on the part of low-status minorities in these countries; Bradatan and Kulcsar (2008) find that the Roma, who are disproportionately found among those at lower educational levels, have higher non-marriage rates, and this is true for the Roma in Bulgaria as well (Hoem & Kostova 2008). Castro-Martin (2002) observes similar patterns in several Latin American countries, concluding that consensual unions there are significantly more prevalent among those who are less educated, have less educated partners, and live in rural areas, “suggesting economic costs may act as a deterrent on marriage” (at 36). These results are all consistent with recent findings from the United States that suggest that those with the poorest economic prospects are less likely to marry (e.g., Clarkberg 1999; Goldstein & Kenney 2001; McLanahan 2004; Smock, Manning & Porter 2005; Sweeney 2002). Perhaps more surprising is that they are also consistent with findings from Scandinavian countries, in which cohabitation is so common as to be classified as “indistinguishable from marriage” by Heuveline and Timberlake (2004). Kravdal (1999) reported that cohabitants in Norway most often cited economic reasons for not marrying, and Finnas (1995) reports that as in Sweden, where the increase in cohabitation began among the

less-educated, in Finland, cohabitation as a substitute for marriage is far more common among those with a low level of education. Although their focus is on non-marital childbearing rather than non-marriage itself, Perrelli-Harris and her colleagues (2010) found a consistent negative educational gradient in childbearing within cohabitation in all eight of the European countries they considered, suggesting a pattern of disadvantage.

Both or Neither: Path Dependence or “Distinct Mechanisms” and Non-Marriage

Part of the answer to “why not marry” may be that non-marriage has always (or long) been an accepted or acceptable alternative in certain cultures or among certain ethnic subgroups. One criticism that has been levied against both SDT theory and the independence hypothesis, and may apply also to deprivation theories if they are assumed to apply equally across cultures, is that they ignore differences in family behaviors that, according to Reher (1998), have deep historical roots. Even if there are forces of modernization that are common across countries (or subcultures within countries), Reher argues that once these forces interact with “different historical, cultural, geographical, or social realities” (at 221), they may lead to considerably different outcomes. Thus, even cultures that appear to be subject to the same influences may not show convergence in family behaviors. Mamolo (2006) argues that such path dependence helps to explain why union formation patterns have followed such different trajectories in Austria, Hungary, and Slovenia when compared with Northern Italy, despite “modernizing” influences that would, according to SDT theory, predict convergence. In Canada, Laplante, Miller and Malherbe (2006) suggest path dependence as an important reason why the choice between marriage and cohabitation is not related to socioeconomic characteristics in the same way in Quebec as it is in the rest of the country. [They argue that Protestants in English-speaking

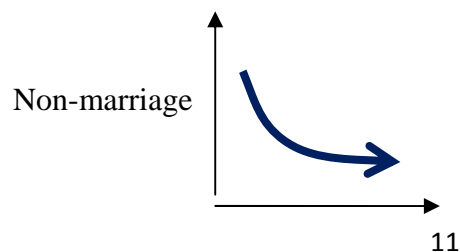
provinces were better able to influence their church to change with them as they became more accepting of alternative family forms, whereas the Catholic church in Quebec, which was more hierarchical and less democratic, resisted such change, leading to outright rebellion against the church among the Quebecois]. From a distance, path dependence may be suspected when otherwise apparently similarly situated countries show distinctly different patterns, or when there appears to be evidence that one regional, ethnic or language subgroup within a country marries more or less than the remaining population. [While we can speculate about such historical roots to contemporary non-marriage, a full analysis of each case is beyond the scope of this paper.]

Finally, Lesthaeghe himself, in a piece on theory development (1998), suggests that the best answer to whether non-marriage is the result of emancipation or deprivation may be, “both.” He reports that his study of cohabitators in Belgium found two groups of cohabitators, one who were predominantly on unemployment benefits, another who were wealthy and homeowners, suggesting that “distinct mechanisms [may] operate in different population segments” (at 11). If both emancipation and deprivation are important influences, we might expect to see a “U-shaped” relationship between education and non-marriage.

Stylized versions of pattern of association based on various predictions:

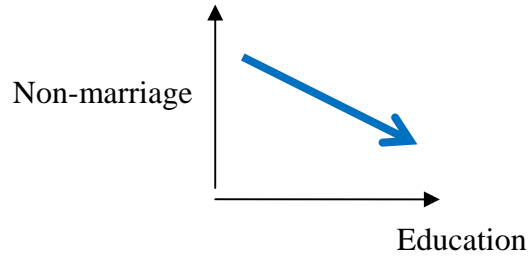
Deprivation Theory

Underclass Pattern of Non-Marriage:



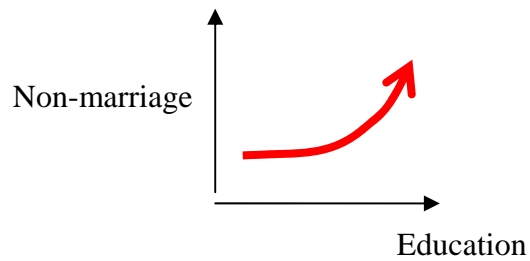
Education

Economic Constraints on Marriage for the Poor/Incentives for Marriage for the Rich:

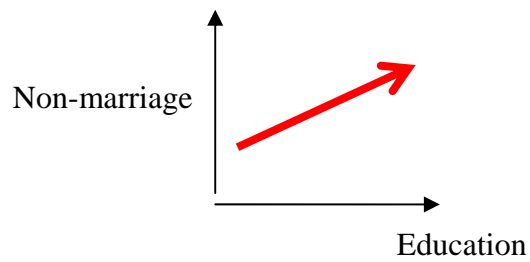


Emancipation Theory

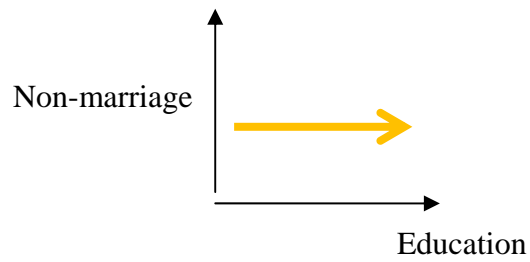
Avant-Garde Rejection of Marriage:



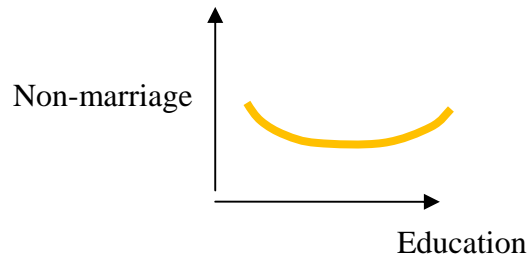
Maslowian Preference Drift:



Complete Indifference 😊:



Distinct Mechanisms, or Both Emancipation and Deprivation:



Method

In this analysis, our goal has been to achieve maximum breadth of coverage across countries in order to explore how much and what kinds of variation exist in the patterns of association between education and non-marriage. In order to maintain as much comparability as possible across such a large number of countries, we have kept our variables, our samples, and our methods simple. Thus, for example, whenever possible, we make use of the harmonized, constructed marital status and education variables provided by IPUMS-International, which are consistent across countries, even when more detailed or nuanced variables are available for a particular country. Of course we acknowledge that both marriage and non-marital cohabitation may have very different meanings across cultures and even across ages within a society. We attempt to minimize such differences by focusing on a limited set of couples—those age 35 to 44 with children—who may be less likely than younger couples to be cohabiting “on their way” to marriage.

Data. Our data come from two main sources: census data from the Integrated Public Use Microsample International (IPUMS-I) program and survey data from the Generations and

Gender Programme (GGP).¹ In addition, data for Poland (collected as part of the Employment, Family and Education Survey [EFES]), as well as data for the United Kingdom (collected for the British Household Panel Survey) were obtained through the Harmonized Histories data project.² Where data from both IPUMS-I and GGP were available (for example, for Hungary), we report results based on the census data, given the much larger numbers of individuals in our subsample of interest. The selection of countries from the IPUMS-I was limited to those in which individuals in consensual unions could be distinguished from those in legal marriages (either through the use of the explicit *consens* variable constructed by the IPUMS staff, or when an unmarried partner could be distinguished using the “relationship to household head” or similar variables) and in which an education variable was available. For some countries and/or years, the IPUMS-I data required that weights be applied in order for results to be nationally representative. For the sake of consistency, we have applied the provided weights for all IPUMS-I countries (although in some cases, the weights are flat and have no effect on the results). We have also used weights for the GGP countries for which they were available.³

Because we are interested in *non*-marriage, we limit our sample to those who most likely would have married by now if they have plans to do so: never-married women aged 35-44 with children who are living with a partner as a percentage of all partnered women.⁴ Although some

¹ Data for the following countries were drawn from the IPUMS-I: Argentina, Austria, Belarus, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, France, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Kyrgyz Republic, Mexico, Mongolia, Panama, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, the United States, and Venezuela. Data from the GGP were used for Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Russia.

² Information on the Harmonized Histories data, a project of the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, can be accessed through the following website: <http://www.nonmarital.org/>

³ No weight variable was available for Bulgaria, Georgia, the Netherlands, Poland, or Romania.

⁴ The age range for Poland was 30–40, as the EFES data included only women aged 25-40.

of the unions represented in this sample may eventually be legalized, these sample restrictions seem likely to result in a group composed largely of those who are cohabiting as an alternative, rather than a precursor, to marriage. Results are reported as the percentage of partnered women with children, age 35-44, who are cohabiting (as opposed to married).

Variables. In addition to the legal status of the woman's current partnership, which provides the dependent variable in these analyses, our key variable of interest is the woman's education. Because education systems and classification of educational credentials vary substantially across such a broad range of countries, we adopt the simpler of the IPUMS-I constructed education variables, *edattan*, which consists of the following four categories: less than primary education; primary completed; secondary completed; tertiary. For ease of comparison, we recoded the more extensive International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) categories provided for most of the GGP countries to this simpler, four-category format. For several European countries, there were no observations in the less-than-primary category. In those cases, we conducted the analysis with a three-category education variable starting with "primary completed". To investigate how any resulting educational gradient in non-marriage varied by characteristics of countries, we gathered basic country-level information such as the Human Development Index (HDI), GDP per capita, and Gini inequality coefficient from the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report for 2007/2008.⁵

Analysis. For each of the 41 countries, we conducted a simple cross-tabulation of the legal status of the woman's current partnership by her level of education, using gamma tests to determine the direction, strength, and significance of association between the two variables. We then graphed the association for ease of comparison across countries and with our stylized

⁵ http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_20072008_EN_Indicator_tables.pdf

depictions of the theoretically predicted associations. Given substantial differences in typical educational attainment across the range of countries we consider, we then standardized our results by using linear interpolation to find predicted levels of non-marriage for the 20th, 50th, and 80th percentiles of the education distribution in each country. We next graphed the educational gradient in non-marriage for each country using these standardized results (the standardized results are presented here). Because SDT theory predicts a top-down pattern of diffusion of non-marriage over time, we then used the standardized results to investigate the actual patterns of diffusion in countries for which data are available from the IPUMS-I for three or more successive censuses.

Results

Pattern of Non-Marriage as Economic Constraint (Figure 1): Of the possible patterns of association between non-marriage and education suggested by theory, by far the most common, seen in 26 of the 41 countries we examined, was the pattern of a relatively evenly-graduated negative gradient, suggesting economic constraints on marriage at the lower educational levels and/or incentives for marriage at the higher educational levels. This pattern was particularly pronounced in Latin America, where it was strongly evident in Panama, Colombia, Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador, Brazil, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Mexico. In Bolivia and Peru, the pattern differed only in that those in the lowest-education group had a slightly lower percent cohabiting than those in the primary-completed education group, but the negative gradient was apparent for those with primary education and above. In all of the Latin American countries, consensual unions are common; in Venezuela, Peru, Cuba, Colombia, and Panama, over 40 percent of unions of women with children in this age group are consensual. Nonetheless, those

with higher levels of education are much more likely to be in legal marriages. In addition, the gradient is strong not only between those at the 20th and 50th percentiles of the education distribution, but between the 50th and 80th as well. Outside of Latin America, the economic constraint pattern of non-marriage appears not only in less-developed countries, such as South Africa, Jamaica, Rwanda, and the Philippines, but also in several of the formerly communist countries such as Estonia, Romania, and Bulgaria and Hungary. Among Western highly-developed countries for which we have data, the United States, Canada, and Ireland also exhibit the negative gradient.

Pattern of Underclass Non-Marriage (Figure 1a). One disadvantage of our use of standardization to compare across countries is that it tends to obscure our ability to observe cases in which a small subset of the population exhibits different behavior. Thus, in Figure 1a, we show non-standardized results for three countries for which the initial cross-tabulation of marital status by educational category showed a more extreme pattern than is apparent in the standardized results. Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania appear to show the underclass pattern of non-marriage, in which those in the lowest education class (less than a primary education) have a far higher percent not married than any other group, while the gradient for the remaining educational groups is fairly shallow. Two important facts stand out about this pattern. First, in each of these countries, a distinct ethnic group, the Roma, are both disproportionately represented among those with the least education and have high non-marriage rates (see, e.g., Hoem & Kostova 2009). Second, these graphs, which take into account the share in each education group, show that only a small number of individuals falls into the high-non-marriage group. While the underclass pattern of non-marriage is most clearly apparent in these countries in which a single, small, and marginalized group has distinctly different education and marriage

behavior than the majority, it may be that related phenomena are responsible for some portion of the negative gradient in other countries, as well.

No Relationship (Figure 2). In 11 of the countries we considered, there was no significant association between non-marriage and education. For seven of these countries, our data came from the GGP or the Harmonized Histories, and it may be that once we had limited our sample to partnered women age 35-44 with children, sample size was simply too small to detect differences between groups. France, Greece, Portugal, and Slovenia, however, for all of which we had large-sample census data from IPUMS, showed no apparent relationship between non-marriage and education.

Pattern of Non-Marriage as Emancipation (Figure 3). Four countries, Austria, Italy, Spain, and Ghana, show a pattern of non-marriage that could be consistent with the emancipation story told by SDT theory and the independence hypothesis. In each case, there is a positive and significant association between education and non-marriage. However, the positive gradient in non-marriage by education in countries following this pattern is substantially weaker than the negative gradient in the “economic constraint” countries. In addition, in each of these countries except for Ghana, there is a hint of a U-shape to the pattern, with those at the 20th percentile of the education distribution exhibiting a slightly higher percent unmarried than those at the 50th percentile, before the modest positive gradient appears for higher levels of education. Although the pattern in Ghana is most clearly similar to the stylized pattern for non-marriage as emancipation, or Maslowian preference drift, living conditions in Ghana, including a GDP per capita of only \$485, make a shift in concerns away from material needs and toward freedom of expression, self-realization and autonomy, as hypothesized under SDT theory, seem unlikely. A better understanding of this pattern of non-marriage in such a poor country calls for a closer

examination of education and marriage practices among the diverse religious and ethnic groups in the country that is beyond the scope of this paper.

Pattern of Avant-Garde Rejection of Marriage. In only one country, the Netherlands, we see a pattern consistent with a rejection of marriage by those in the most-educated group as distinguished from all other groups (see Figure 3a). However, the sample size for the 35-44 age group in the GGP data is small, and this apparent association is not significant.

Evidence on Diffusion of Non-Marriage over Time (Figure 4). Because SDT theory relies heavily on an ideational shift to explain changes in demographic behavior, and because the ideas that are expected to change are those associated with higher levels of education, SDT theory would appear to predict that changes in marriage should occur first among those with the most education and diffuse downward through the population over time. Such a pattern was apparent in the first demographic transition with regard to acceptance of family planning and might also govern changes in union formation in the SDT. In order to explore the apparent direction of diffusion of non-marriage—top-down, bottom-up or, perhaps, neither—in Figure 4, we show how the educational gradient in non-marriage has changed over time in the 13 countries from the IPUMS-International archive for which information on consensual relationships was available from at least 3 points in time. Again, Latin American countries are over-represented—9 of the 13 countries—because consensual relationships have been acknowledged and measured for longer in Latin America than elsewhere. For many of these countries, the first demographic transition was still in progress during the earlier decades portrayed, so these are far from ideal data for a test of change over time under SDT. Nonetheless, SDT theory makes fairly broad claims regarding its applicability outside of Western Europe, and in many of these countries, a fertility transition had taken place by the second half of the time period portrayed. In addition,

changing ideas about individual fulfillment and self-realization, leading to changing marriage behavior, should be most accessible to the most highly-educated groups in these countries.

The most common pattern that emerges, and it appears in a somewhat diverse group of countries, is that an already-negative gradient became steeper (more negative) over time. This is the case in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama (through 1990), the Philippines, and South Africa. In each of these cases, non-marriage among the least-educated, already at a higher level than for those with more education at the earliest point measured, also grew more over the period in question. In all of these countries, the overall level of non-marriage also increased over time across all groups, but there is no evidence of “bottom-up” transmission of the behavior, given that there is no “catch-up” among the highly educated. Indeed, the highly-educated seem relatively more reluctant to adopt the behavior even as it expands and might be expected to become more acceptable.

Two countries, Brazil and Ecuador, show evidence of a “flattening” of their negative educational gradient in non-marriage over the earlier decades considered, followed by a recent return to a steeper gradient, while in Mexico and Venezuela, the gradual flattening of the gradient continues to the most recent censuses. In these latter two countries, non-marriage was increasing for those with the highest education more than for those with less education, suggesting a “bottom-up” transmission. This transmission may have come about largely through a shift in the composition of individuals at each educational level as primary and even secondary education became more widespread over time.

Finally, in Austria and France, the earliest years show a very mild negative gradient. This was replaced in Austria by 2001 and in France by 1999 by higher levels of non-marriage among the most-educated (although this pattern was already reversed in France by 2006, when

the level of non-marriage was almost even across all education categories). Given the overall very low levels of non-marriage in the earlier period, it seems improbable that the recent increase among the most-educated could be attributed to “bottom-up” transmission of the behavior. Instead, it seems more likely that it is, indeed, a function of a subset of the educated elite rejecting marriage. However, in countries for which we have data over time, there is no evidence of top-down transmission of non-marriage anywhere. A full exploration of this possibility would require data over time from countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands that are more central to the SDT proposition.

How does the steepness of the gradient vary with the characteristics of the country?

In the next stage of this research, we will report the results of our exploratory analysis of the association between a variety of country characteristics and the educational gradient in non-marriage.

Discussion

Why not marry? Are newly prosperous, highly educated, secular-minded people (particularly women) rejecting the restrictions of marriage en masse in favor of the freedom to realize their full individual potential? Or is marriage a privilege and benefit that is increasingly out of reach for those without the ready cash for a wedding or the steady employment or prospects for future financial stability to qualify as “marriage material”?

Returning to our research questions, we find first, that the pattern of association between non-marriage and education seen in the United States, in which non-marriage is associated with deprivation, appears to be common, while a pattern of higher non-marriage among the most-educated is relatively rare. In addition, where greater non-marriage among the most-educated

does occur, the positive gradient is not as steep or monotonic as is the more usual negative gradient.

Next, the negative gradient, where it appears, is remarkably consistent across educational levels. In most countries that show the pattern of deprivation, the negative gradient is as steep between the 50th and 80th educational percentiles as it is between the 20th and 50th. Although a few countries appear to show an “underclass” pattern, a more even gradient is the norm.

Finally, we see no evidence for the emancipation theories’ prediction that the diffusion of non-marriage through societies will occur from the “top down”. Instead, where we have evidence for changes in non-marriage over time, we see either an intensification of the pattern of disadvantage (countries in which the negative gradient has become steeper even as overall non-marriage has increased) or, in some cases, a possible pattern of “bottom-up” transmission (countries in which the negative gradient, while still present, has become somewhat flatter over time). One caveat regarding this observation derives from the over-representation of Latin America among the countries for which we have information on consensual unions over several censuses. Although we would like to consider diffusion patterns in more of the countries that show the “emancipation” pattern, we note that even in France, there is no evidence for “top-down” diffusion. Instead, it is only in the most-recent period that the negative gradient has been reversed there.

Emancipation theories of family change, whether in the form of the Independence Hypothesis or Second Demographic Transition Theory, tend to focus on those most advantaged by high levels of development and predict family change to begin there, among those whom prosperity allows to seek self-fulfillment. If this were the case, non-marriage would be of little concern to society, as its main effect would be a modest de-concentration of wealth in both

parent and child generations. Instead, we see that in more instances, non-marriage is more common among those who are already economically disadvantaged. In countries with a strong negative educational gradient, non-marriage is almost certainly an inequality amplifier, making life for the children of the poor more insecure in terms of family relationships as well as finances.

Conclusions

The question of whether changes in marriage, or family patterns more broadly, result more from emancipation or deprivation is not new. The tendency to perceive family change, and particularly the weakening of marriage, as resulting from secularization, individualization, and increases in women's independence dates back at least as far as Roman times. According to historian Richard Saller (2001), Tacitus, writing circa 100 C.E., decried the ways in which the supposedly new independence of women, resulting from their increased control over wealth, was leading to a decline in the family. Yet Saller notes that in early Rome, imagined later by Tacitus to be a "golden age" of the family, Cato the elder was already decrying the detrimental effects on marriage of independently wealthy women. Van Bavel (2009) offers a more recent example of the tendency of those writing in the midst of family change to interpret the change (and, often, to criticize it) as arising from emancipation, whereas those with greater historical distance may be more likely to attribute such change to structural forces, including deprivation. He notes that between 1920 and 1940, contemporaneous explanations attributed the drop in fertility in Western countries to "processes that now tend to be associated with the Second Demographic Transition, including secularization, individualization, rising consumerism, and women's emancipation," whereas most retrospective evaluations attribute low fertility during this period to the wars and severe economic crises including the Great Depression.

Which is the “correct” view? Most likely, the truth lies somewhere in between, whether the subject is fertility limitation between the world wars, or non-marriage now. Those evaluating family change as it happens may tend to over-emphasize a cultural interpretation that attributes change to the newfangled behavior and attitudes of “kids nowadays.” Those looking back with greater historical perspective find it easier to see structural factors and harder to imagine that what passed for secularization or individualization “back then” could have mattered, when it seems as if we’ve become so much *more* secular or individualistic *since* then.

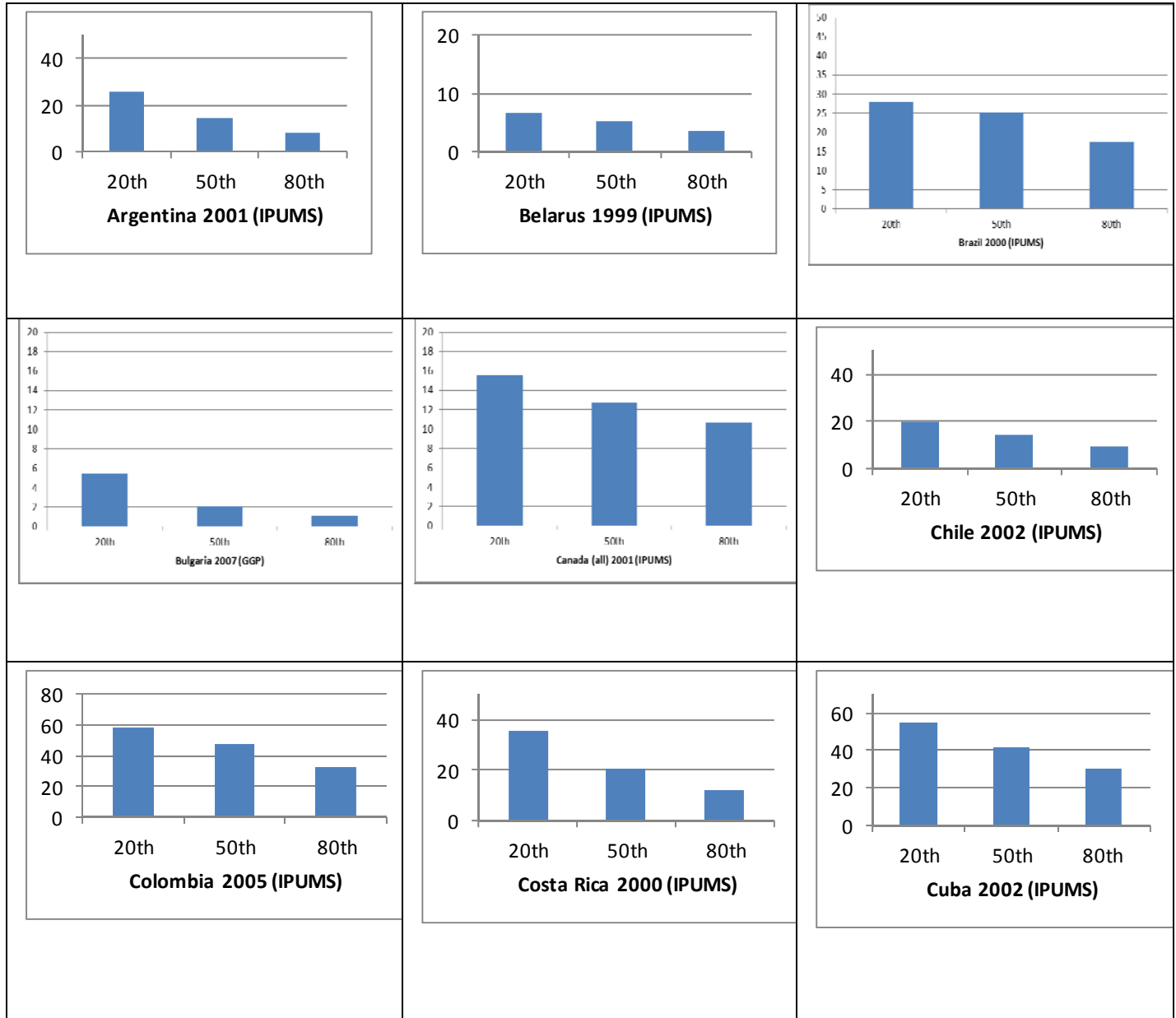
Reference List

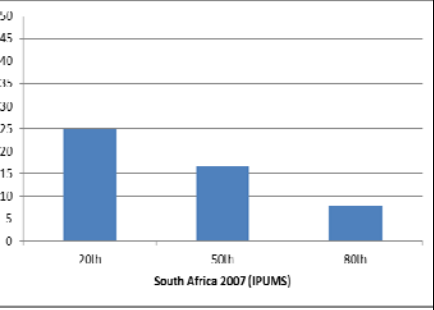
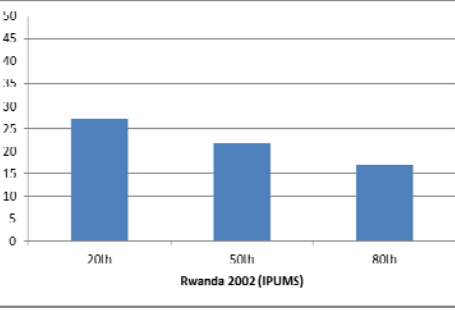
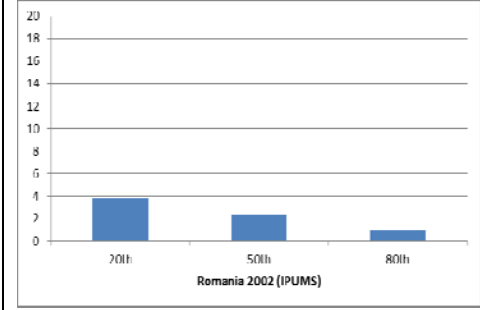
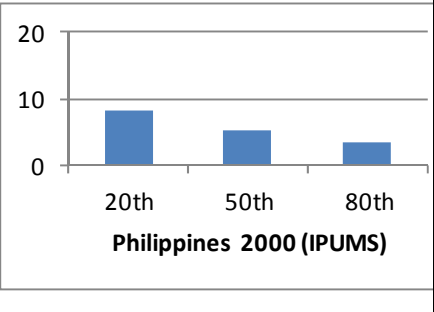
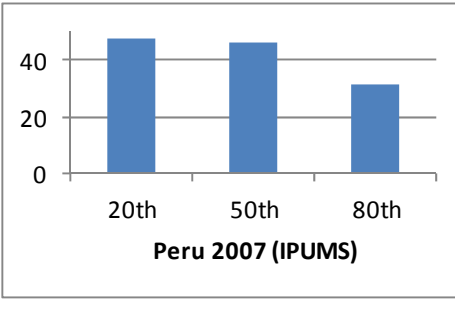
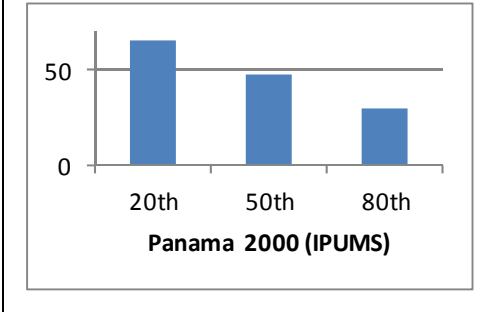
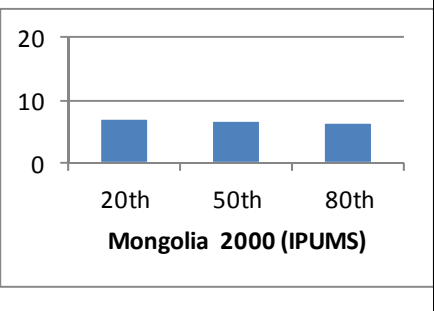
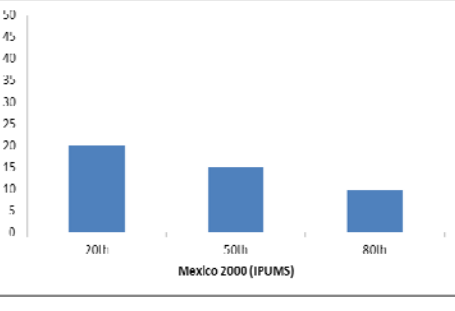
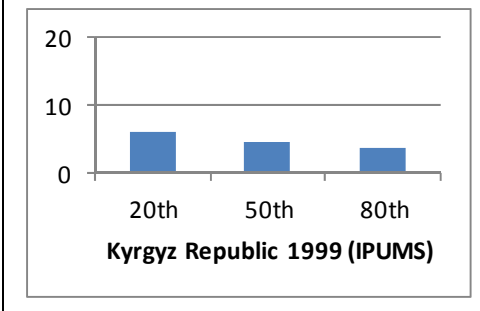
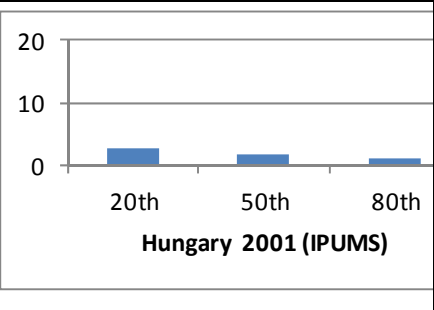
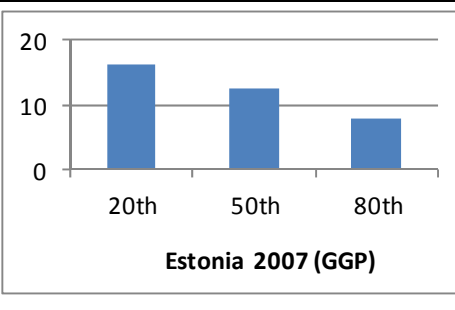
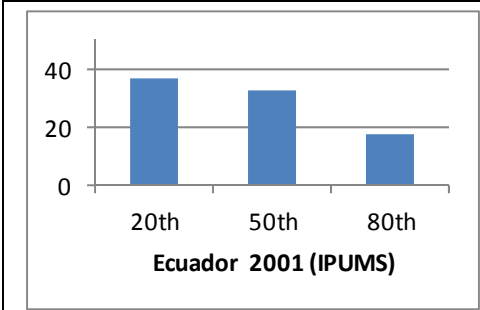
1. Becker, Gary, Elisabeth Landes, and Robert Michael. 1977. An Economic Analysis of Marital Instability. *Journal of Political Economy* 85, no. 6: 1141-87.
2. Blossfeld, H., and J. Huinink. 1991. Human capital investments or norms of role transition? How women's schooling and career affect the process of family formation. *American Journal of Sociology* 97: 143-68.
3. Bracker, M., and G. Santow. 1998. Economic independence and union formation in Sweden. *Population Studies* 52: 275-94.
4. Bradatan, Cristina, and Laszlo Kulcsar. 2008. Choosing between marriage and cohabitation: Women's first union patterns in Hungary. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 39, no. 4: 491-507.
5. Castro Martin, Teresa. 2002. Consensual unions in Latin America: Persistence of a dual nuptiality system. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 33: 35-55.
6. Clarkberg, M. 1999. The price of partnering: The role of economic well-being in young adults' first union experiences. *Social Forces* 77, no. 3: 945-68.
7. Dominguez-Folgueras, Marta, and Teresa Castro-Martin. Women's changing socioeconomic position and union formation in Spain and Portugal. *Demographic Research* 19, no. 41.
8. Dykstra, Pearl A., and Anne-Rigt Poortman. 2010. Economic resources and remaining single: Trends over time. *European Sociological Review* 26, no. 3: 277-90.
9. Finnas, F. 1995. Entry into consensual unions and marriages among Finnish women born between 1938 and 1967. *Population Studies* 49, no. 1: 57-70.
10. Gerber, Theodore, and Danielle Berman. 2010. Entry to marriage and cohabitation in Russia, 1985-2000: Trends, correlates, and implications for the Second Demographic Transition. *European Journal of Population* 26: 3-31.
11. Godwin, William. *Of Population: An Enquiry Concerning the Power of Increase in the Numbers of Mankind, Being an Answer to Mr. Malthus's Essay on That Subject*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown.
12. Goldstein, Joshua R., and Catherine T. Kenney. 2001. Marriage delayed or marriage forgone? New cohort forecasts of first marriage for U.S. women. *American Sociological Review* 66, no. 4: 506-19.
13. Harmonized Histories Data for Poland: <http://www.nonmarital.org/HarmHist.htm>

14. Heuveline, Patrick, and Jeffrey Timberlake. 2004. The role of cohabitation in family formation: The United States in comparative perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66, no. 5: 1214-30.
15. Hoem, Jan, and Dora Kostova. 2008. Early traces of the Second Demographic Transition in Bulgaria: A Joint analysis of marital and non-marital union formation, 1960-2004. *Population Studies* 62, no. 3: 259-71.
16. Kantorova, Vladimira. 2004. "Family life transitions of young women in a changing society: First union formation and birth of first child in the Czech Republic, 1970-1997." Charles University in Prague and Universite de Paris I--Pantheon-Sorbonne.
17. Kravdal, Oystein. 1999. Does marriage require a stronger economic underpinning than informal cohabitation? *Population Studies* 53: 63-80.
18. Laplante, Benoit, Caia Miller, and Paskall Malherbe. 2006. The evolution of beliefs and opinions on matters related to marriage and sexual behaviour among French-speaking Catholic Quebecers and English-speaking Protestant Ontarians. *Canadian Studies in Population* 33, no. 2: 209-39.
19. Lesthaeghe, R., and D. J. van de Kaa. 1986. Two Demographic Transitions? *Population: Growth and Decline*. Editors D. J. van de Kaa, and R. Lesthaeghe, 9-24. Deventer: Van Loghum Slaterus.
20. Lesthaeghe, Ron. 1998. On theory development: Applications to the study of family formation. *Population and Development Review* 24, no. 1: 1-14.
21. ———. 2010. The unfolding story of the Second Demographic Transition. *Population and Development Review* 36, no. 2: 211-51.
22. Lewis, Jane. 2001. Debates and issues regarding marriage and cohabitation in the British and American literature. *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 15: 159-84.
23. Liefbroer, A. C., and M. Corijn. 1999. Who, what, where, and when? Specifying the impact of educational attainment and labour force participation on family formation. *European Journal of Population* 15: 45-75.
24. Liefbroer, Aart, and Jenny De Jong Gierveld. 1993. The impact of rational considerations and perceived opinions on young adults' union formation intentions. *Journal of Family Issues* 14, no. 2: 213035.
25. Mamolo, Marija. 2006. "Union formation, marriage and first birth: Convergence across cohorts in Austria, Hungary, Northern Italy and Slovenia?" WP 2006-08. Vienna Institute of Demography, Vienna.

26. McLanahan, Sara. 2004. Diverging destinies: How children are faring under the second demographic transition. *Demography* 41, no. 4: 607-27.
27. Oppenheimer, Valerie Kincade. 2003. Cohabiting and marriage during young men's career-development process. *Demography* 40, no. 1: 127-49.
28. ———. 1994. Women's Rising Employment and the Future of the Family in Industrial Societies. *Population and Development Review* 20, no. 2: 293-342.
29. Oppenheimer, Valerie Kincade, Matthijs Kalmijn, and Nelson Lim. 1997. Men's career development and marriage timing during a period of rising inequality. *Demography* 34, no. 3: 311-30.
30. Perelli-Harris, Brienna, Wendy Sigle-Rushton, Michaela Kreyenfeld, Trude Lappegard, Caroline Berghammer, and Renske Keizer. 2010. The educational gradient of nonmarital childbearing in Europe: emergence of a pattern of disadvantage? *MPIDR Working Paper WP 2010-004* .
31. Reher, David Sven. 1998. Family ties in Western Europe: Persistent contrasts. *Population and Development Review* 24, no. 2: 203-34.
32. Smock, Pamela, and Wendy Manning. 1997. Cohabiting parnters' economic circumtances and marriage. *Demography* 34, no. 3: 331-41.
33. Smock, Pamela, Wendy Manning, and Meredith Porter. 2005. 'Everything's there except money': How money shapes decisions to marry among cohabitators. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67, no. 3: 680-96.
34. Sweeney, Megan M. 2002. Two decades of family change: The shifting economic foundations of marriage. *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 1: 132-47.
35. Van Bavel, Jan. 2009. Subreplacement fertility in the West before the baby boom: Past and current perspectives. *Population Studies* 64, no. 1: 1-18.

Figure 1. Countries showing the pattern of economic constraint (negative gradient). Graphs shows percent of partnered women with children, age 35-44, who are cohabiting by education percentile.





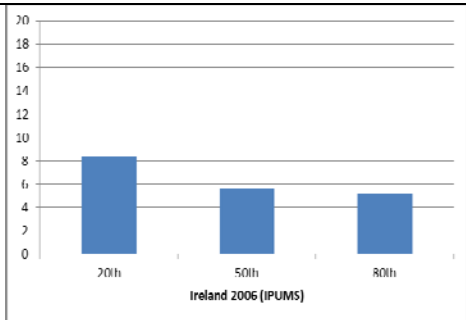
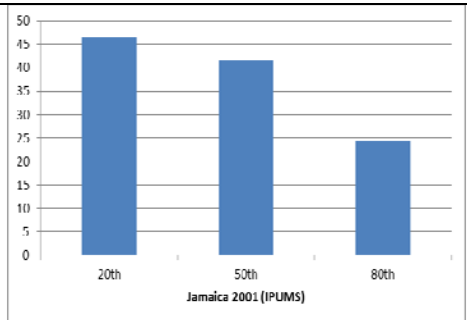
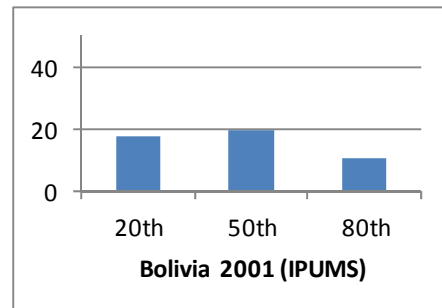
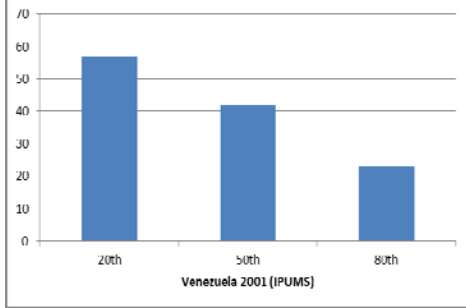
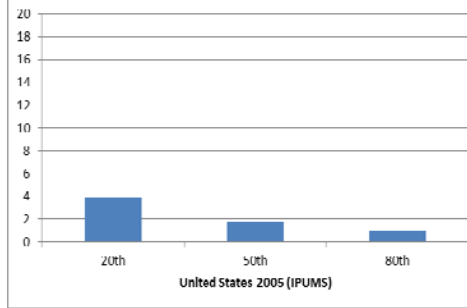


Figure 1a. Underclass non-marriage.

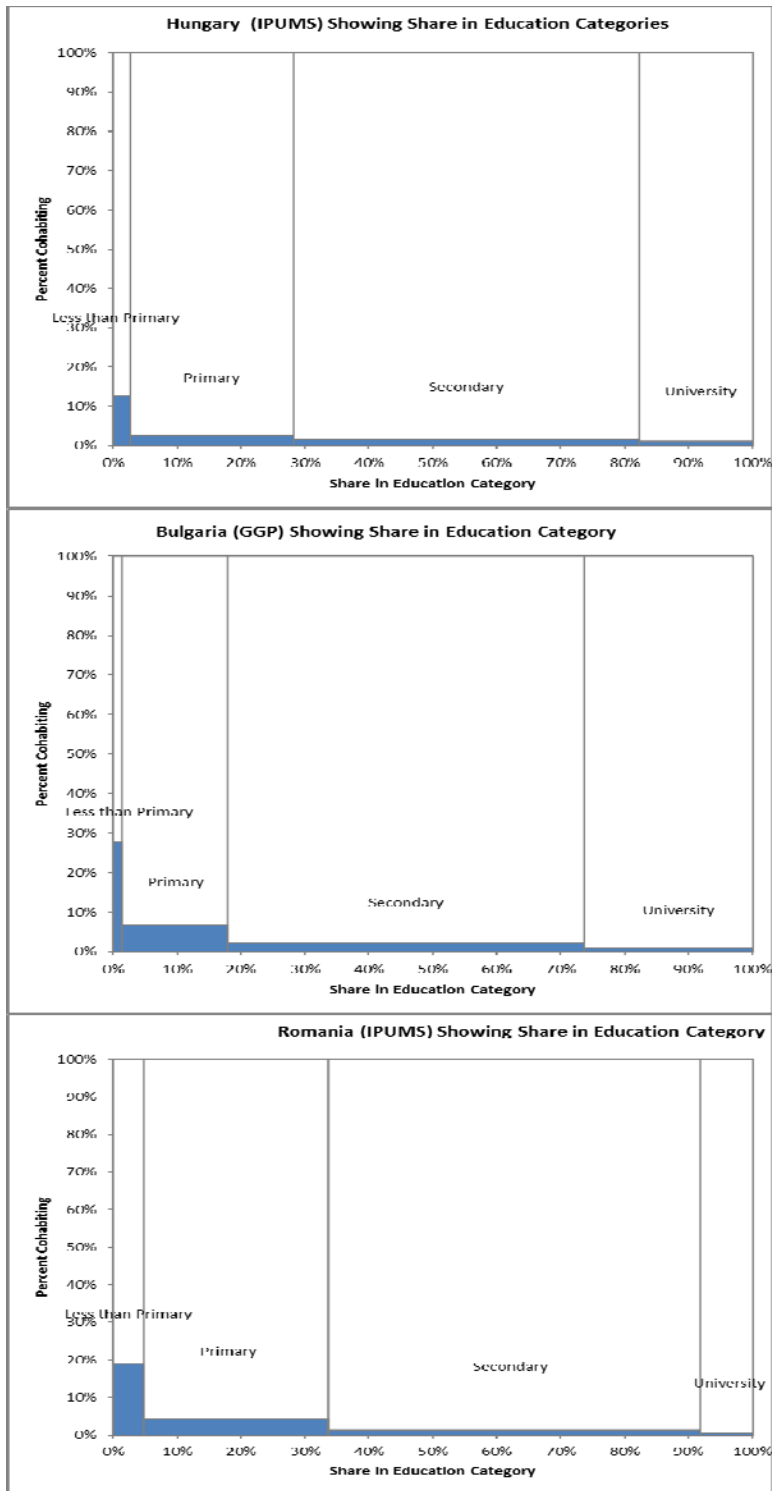


Figure 2. Countries in which there is no significant relationship.

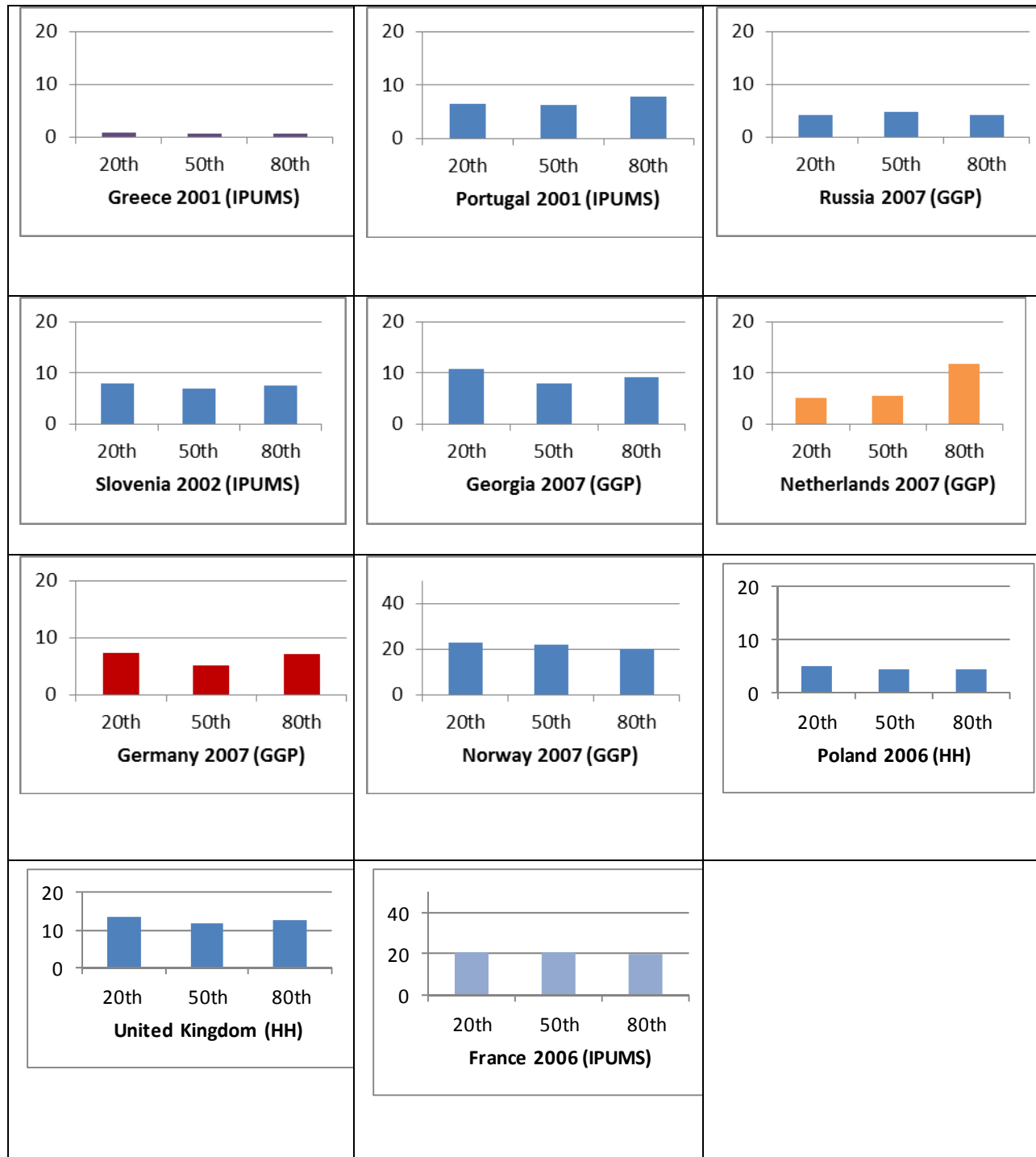


Figure 3. Percent cohabiting among partnered women age 35-44 with children by education percentile. Countries showing pattern of Maslowian preference drift (positive association is significant).

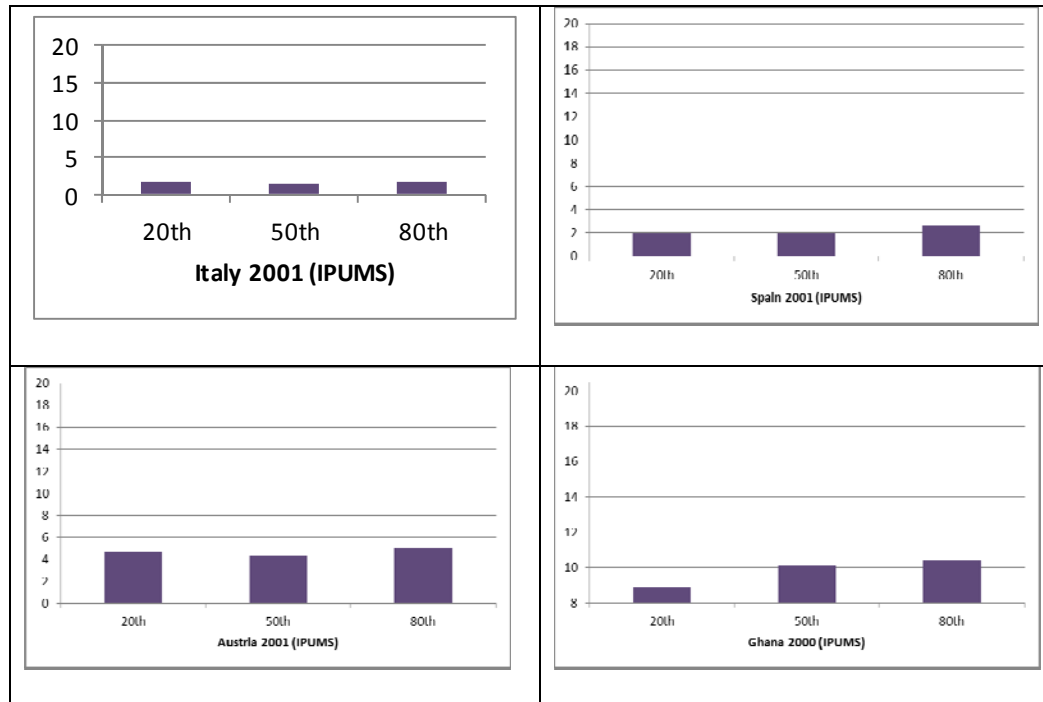


Figure 3a. Possible pattern of avante gard rejection of marriage. Although the graph is consistent with such a pattern, these results are non-significant due to the small sample size in the GGP.

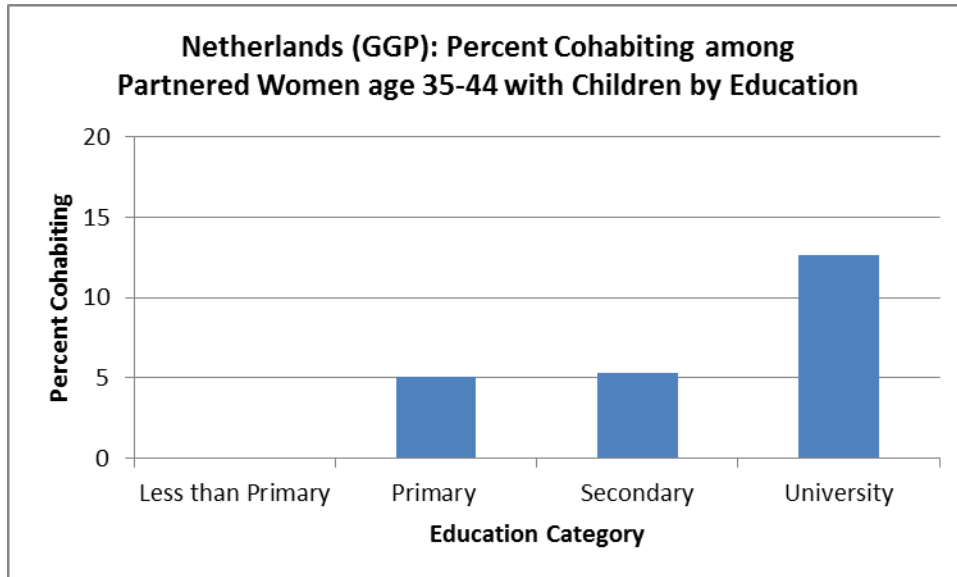


Figure 4. Diffusion of Non-Marriage over Time for Selected Countries. Graphs show percent cohabiting among partnered women age 35-44 with children by education percentile.

