



Married Parents: One Way of Reducing Child Poverty

W. Bradford Wilcox
University of Virginia/ AEI/ IFS



@WilcoxNMP

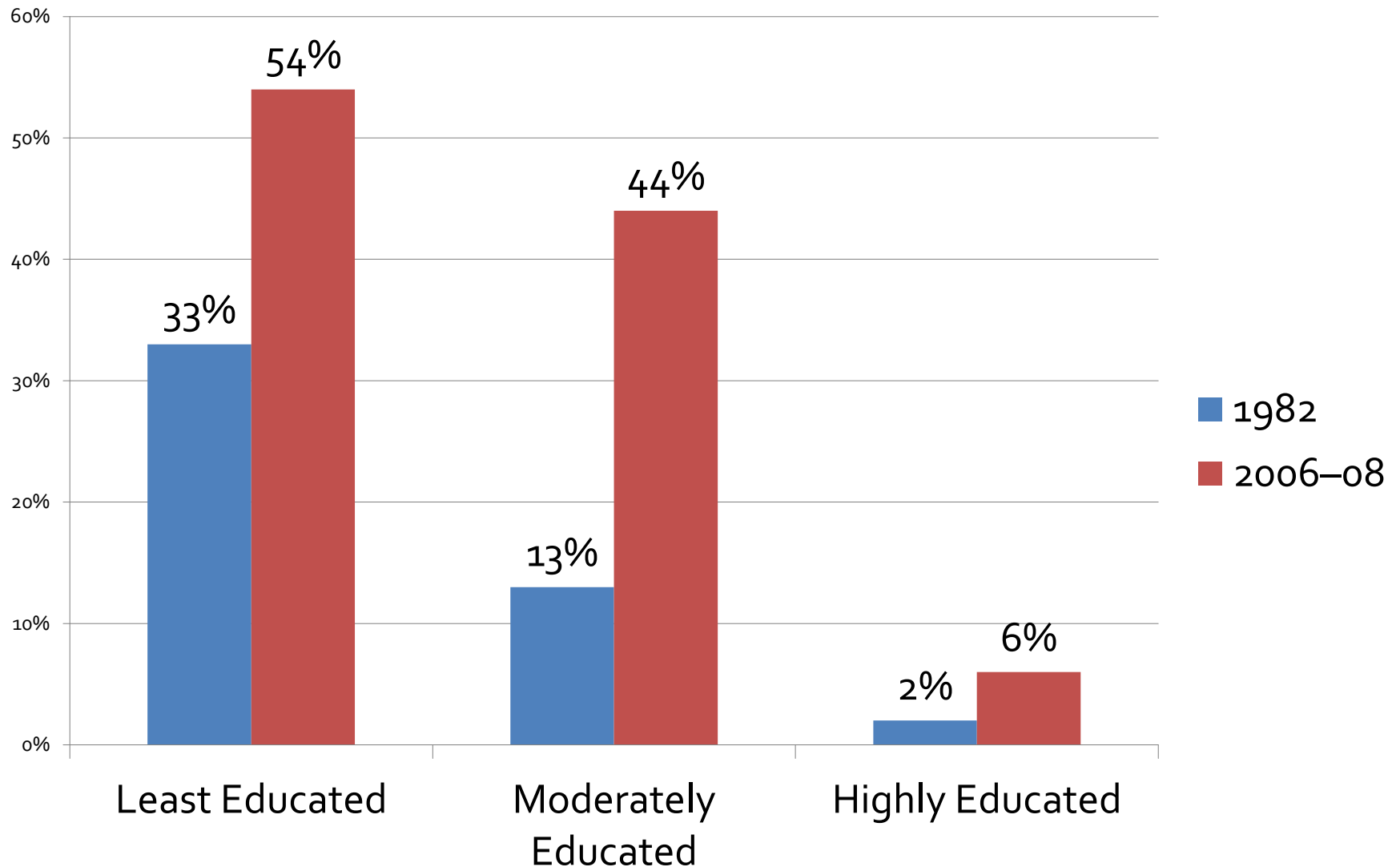
Understanding Child Poverty

- Child poverty is high
 - Low spending on government transfers;
 - Declines in real wages for less-educated men;
 - Growing class divide in marriage:
 - Americans without college degrees less and less likely to have and raise children in stable marriages;
 - Children in unstable/single parent families more likely to experience poverty.

A Growing Marriage Divide

The Class Divide in Nonmarital Childbearing

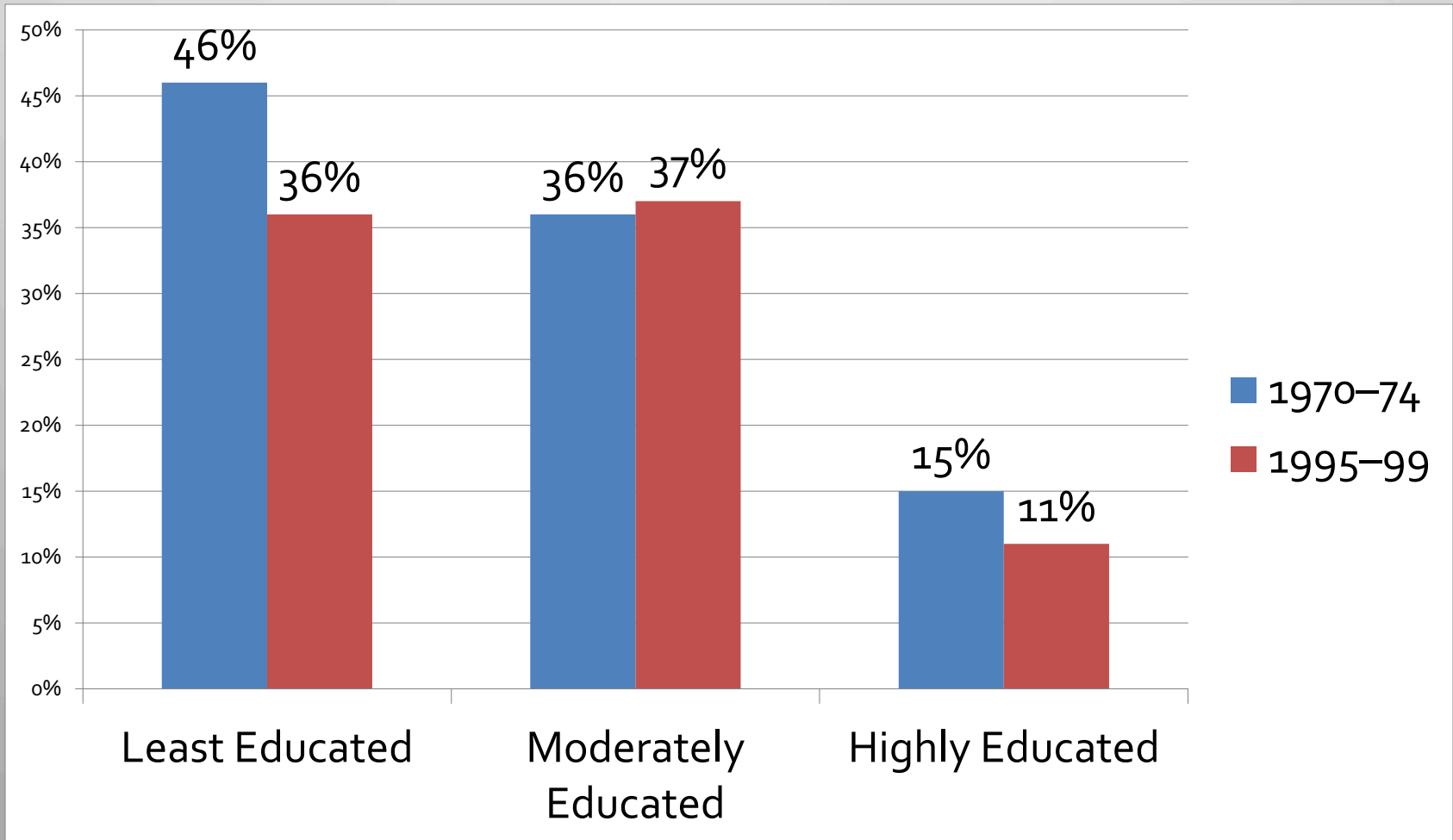
Source: Wilcox 2010





Divorce in First 10 Years

Source: NMP/IAV 2010

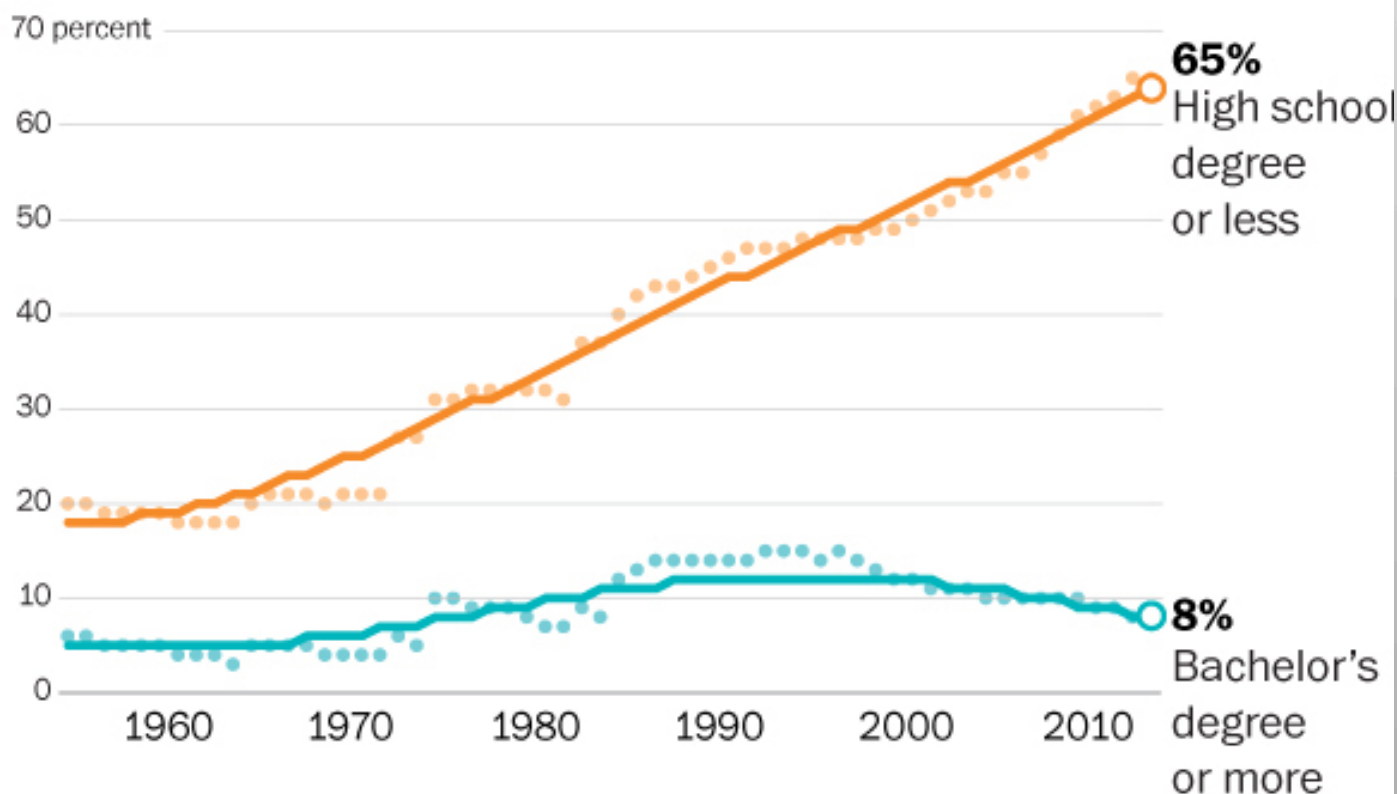


The United States

Source: Putnam 2015

Children living in a single-parent home

In 2012, 65 percent of children whose mothers never made it past high school spent at least part of their early childhood in a single-parent household, up from 20 percent in 1953.



The Marriage Divide: Why It Matters for Poverty

Growth in Poverty



- Child Poverty

- Brookings and Urban Institute studies:

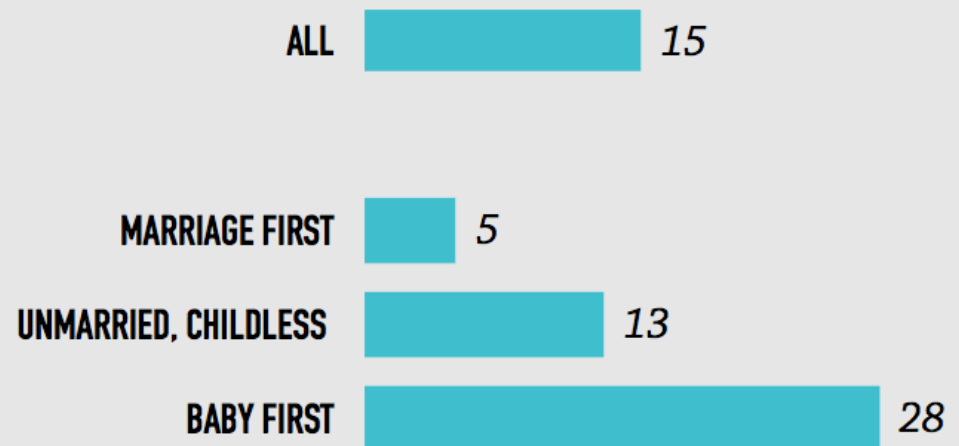
- Large share of growth in child poverty in the United States from 1970s to 1990s linked to increase in single parenthood (Lerman 1996; Thomas & Sawhill 2002).

Family Poverty Today

- Among Millennials, “putting marriage first reduces the odds of young adults being in poverty by 60% (vs. having a baby first).” (Wang & Wilcox 2017)

Nearly 3 in 10 Millennials who had a baby before or outside marriage are in poverty

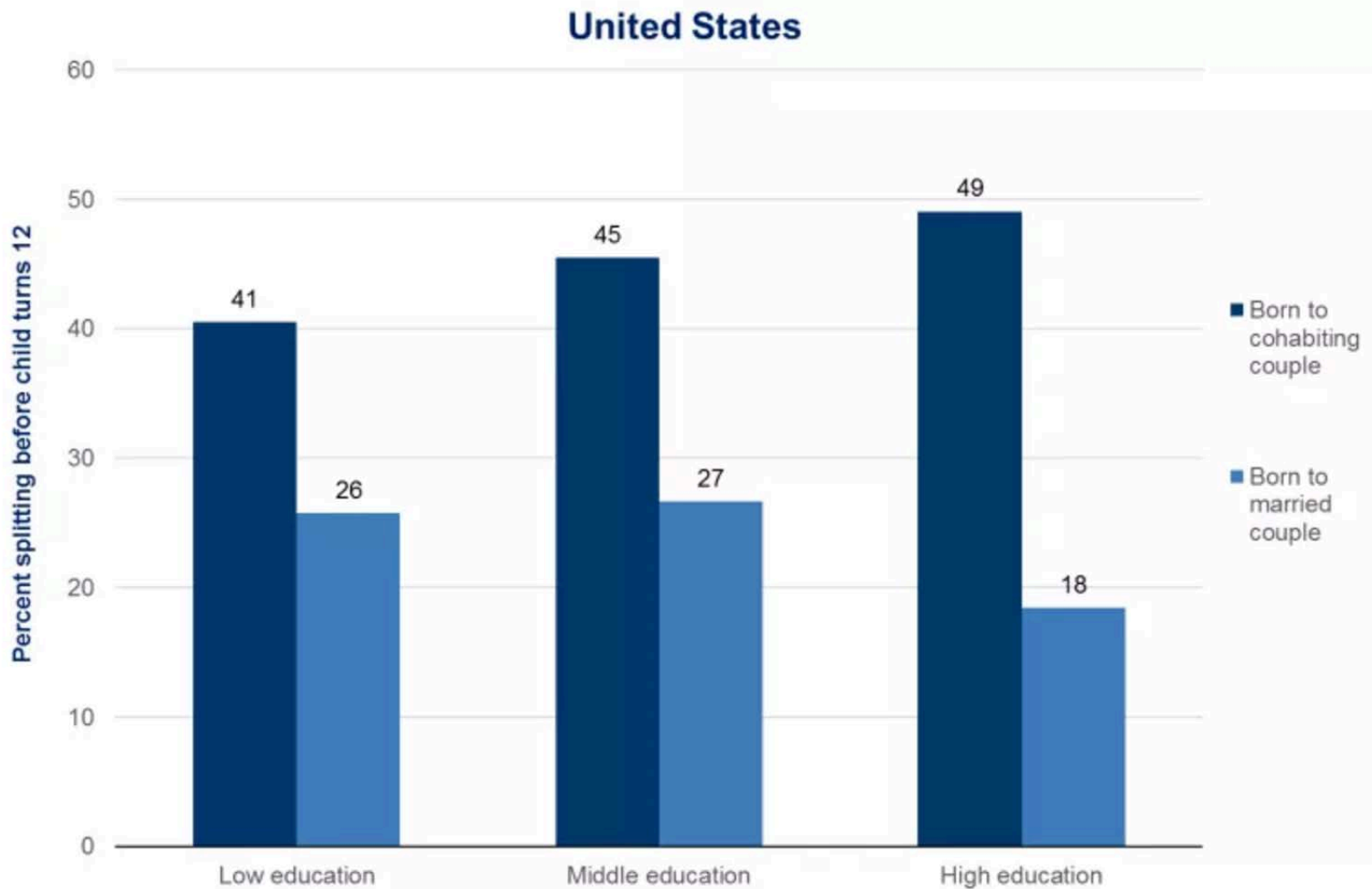
% of adults ages 28-34 in poverty by each sequence



Today, Child Poverty Would Be Lower If Marriage Was Stronger

- If share of children in female-headed families had remained steady at its 1970 level, child poverty would be lower by almost one-quarter (Sawhill 2014).

Cohabitation Doesn't Compare to Marriage



Why Marriage Matters

- 1) Children more likely to enjoy economic support of both parents—esp. father;
- 2) Married parents enjoy economies of scale and (often) pooled income & assets;
- 3) Less family instability, fewer children across multiple households;
- All this translates into @ \$40,000 advantage for children of stably married parents, compared to children of single parents.

Why the Marriage Divide?

About More than Money



■ A “purely economic theory falls short as an explanation of the dramatic transformation of family life in the U.S. in recent decades.”

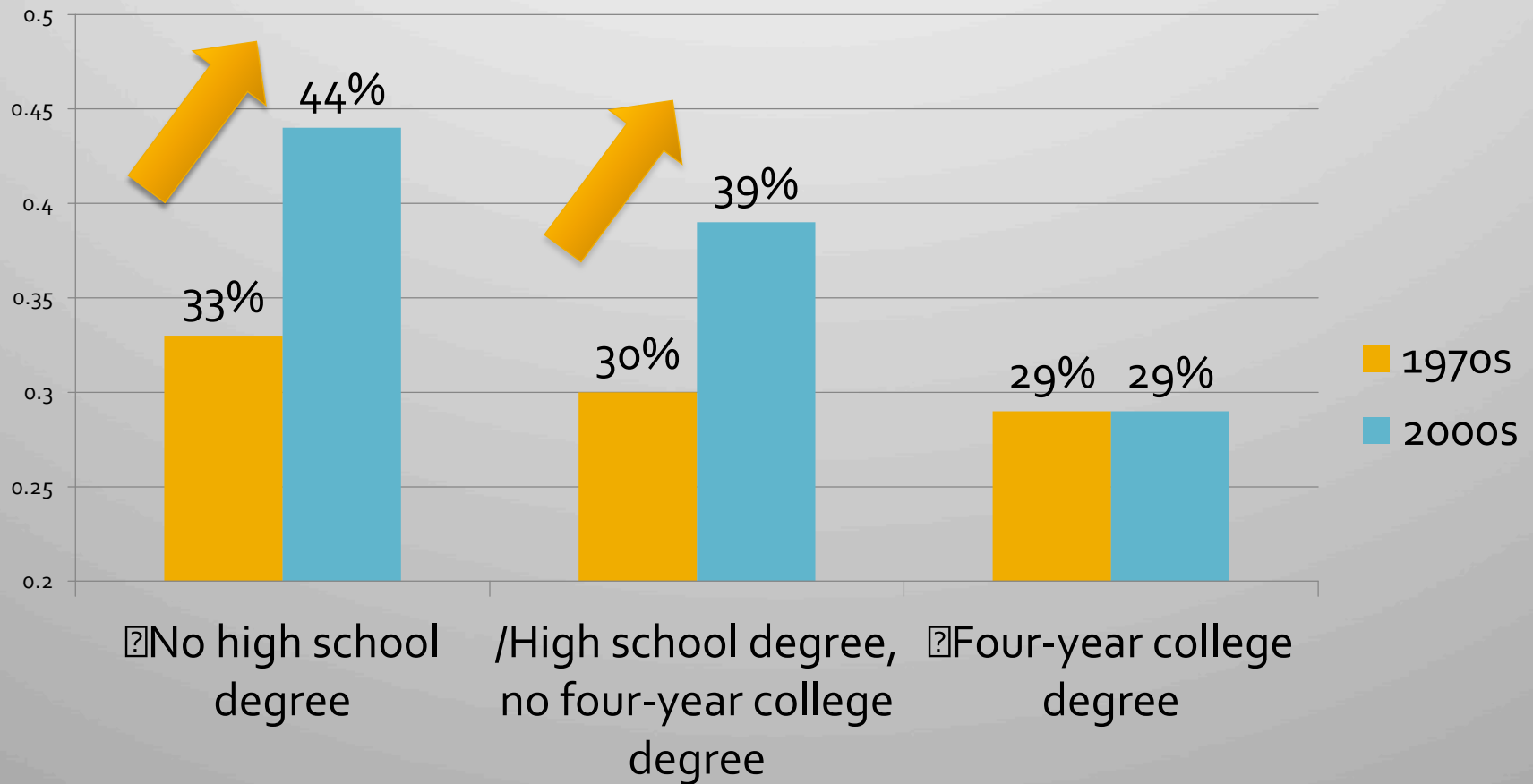
~ Isabel Sawhill (2014)

What is Driving the Marriage Divide?

- 4 causes:
 - The rise of the post-industrial economy;
 - Unintended consequences of welfare policy;
 - A changing culture;
 - Bowling Alone: The retreat from civil society.

Spells of Male Unemployment in Last 10 Years

Source: NMP/IAV 2010

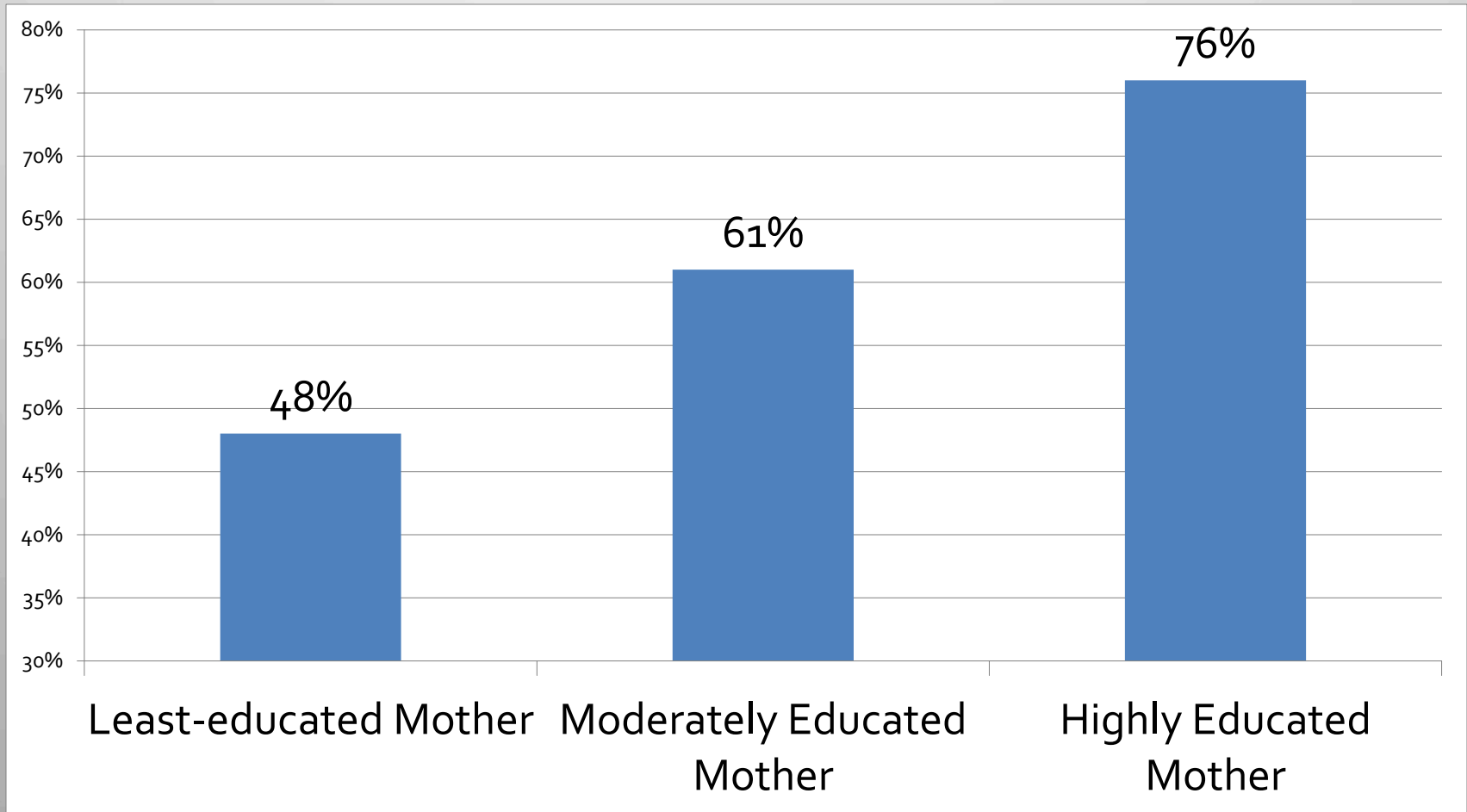


Marriage Penalties

- The contemporary welfare state penalizes marriage among lower-income families.
 - “[Most] households with children who earn low or moderate incomes (say, under \$40,000) are significantly penalized for getting married.”
~ Adam Carasso and C. Eugene Steuerle (2005)

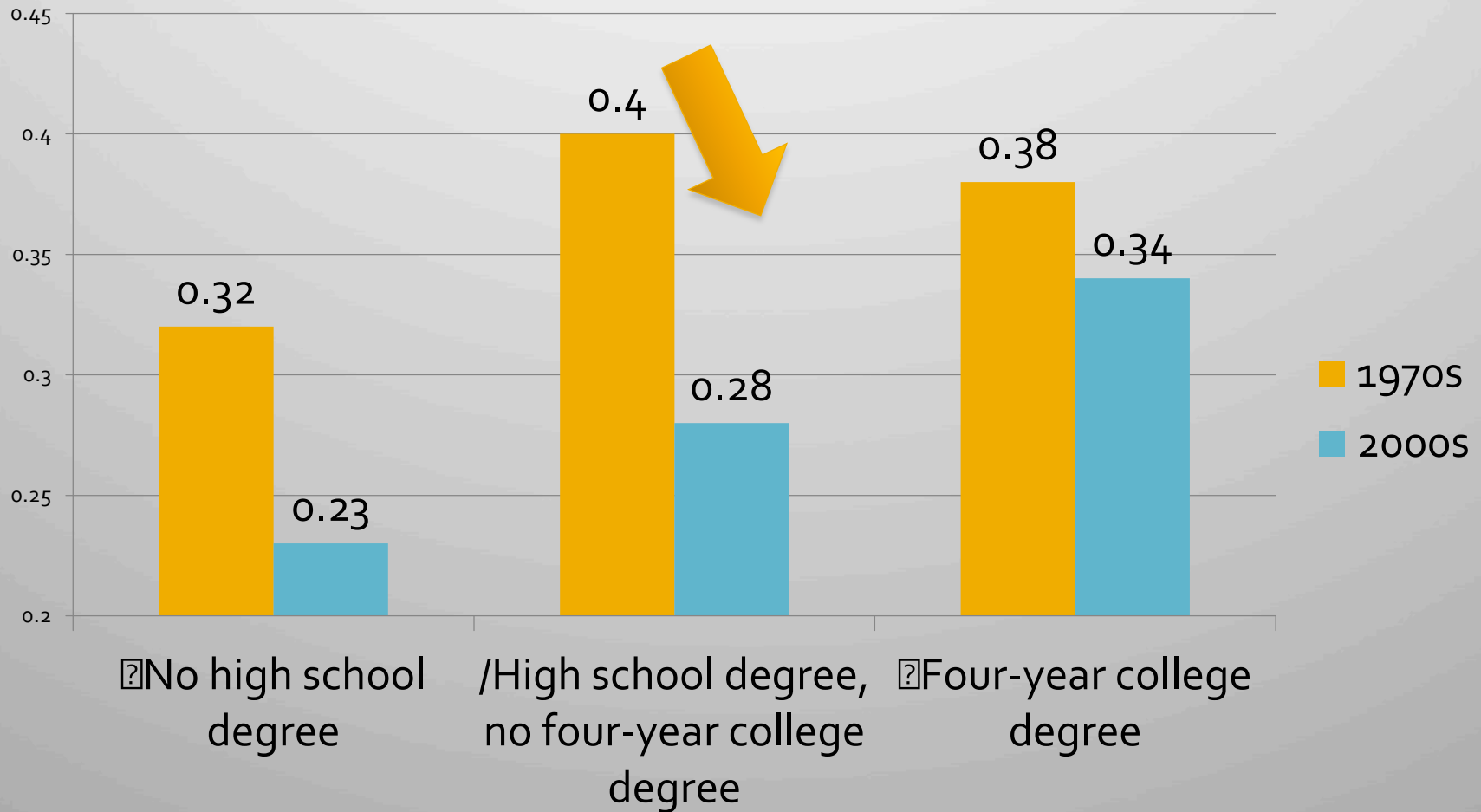
Teens Embarrassed by Pregnancy

Source: NMP/IAV 2010



Bowling Alone: Religious & Secular Change

Source: NMP/IAV 2010



The Marriage Divide

The Bottom line:

- Marriage divide is rooted in cultural, economic, policy, & civic changes that have undercut the normative, financial, and communal bases of strong and stable marriages and families in poor and working-class communities.

What is to Be Done?

1. Improve Educational Opportunity

- Most Americans will not get a college degree.
- We need to improve vocational education & apprenticeship programs:
 - Career Academies boosts work hours, income, and marriage rates of young men from low-income families (MDRC 2008).
 - Apprenticeship programs in South Carolina, Georgia, and Washington are boosting young adults' work and income (Lerman 2014).

2. Do No Harm

- Public policy should seek to “do no harm” to marriage and two-parent families:
 - Stop penalizing marriage among low-income families by granting low and moderate income Americans a honeymoon of 3 years regarding any marriage penalties associated with means-tested policies.

3. Cultural Campaign

- Need local, state & national campaigns to expand cultural supports for marriage:
 - “Success Sequence” (finish high school, work, marry, & become a parent, in that order);
 - Modeled after successful campaigns to prevent teen pregnancy.

4. Civic Engagement

- Encourage secular & religious organizations to expand engagement of working class and poor Americans.

Conclusion



- Given the economic, social, & emotional benefits of marriage for children, we need to renew the

- Economic
- Policy
- Civic &
- Cultural

foundations of marriage & family life for 21st century.

More Information

www.family-studies.org

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