Social Mobility in an Era of Family Instability and Complexity

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Family Definitions in Classic Mobility Studies

8a. Were you living with both your parents most of the time up to age 16?...........

22. Yes (Skip to question 9)
2. No (Answer question 8b)

8b. If "No" above, who was the head of your family?............

23. Mark one
1. Father
2. Mother
3. Other male
4. Other female
The Growth in Unmarried Motherhood

Source: Updated from McLanahan (2004), IPUMS Census/ACS 1960-2010
Only 1 in 5 nonmarital children is born to a “single” mother. The rest are born to “fragile families.”

40% of ALL children will live in a cohabiting household by age 16.

Sources: Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Baseline Survey; McLanahan (2009); Bumpass and Lu 2000
Measuring the Family

**Cohabitation**

- Presence and class position
- Distinguish from married and single-parent
Relationship Stability Following a Birth

% of couples who broke up by child’s...

Nationally, 35% of marital children and 75% of cohabiters’ children experience their parents’ dissolution by age 15.

Sources: Tach’s tabulations of Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Surveys Waves 1-4 (sample restricted to couples who were in a relationship at the child’s birth); Andersson (2002).
Measuring the Family

Cohabitation
• Presence and class position
• Distinguish from married and single-parent

Non-Resident Parents
• Presence and class position
• Duration of non-residence
• Level of involvement with children
Parents Quickly Repartner

New Partner

Focal Child

New Partner
30% of ALL children spend time in a marital or nonmarital stepfamily by age 18.

Source: Tach’s tabulations of Waves 1-4 of the Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Survey; Bumpass et al. 1995. Counts total number of mothers’ and fathers’ new romantic relationships that lasted at least three months.
# Measuring the Family

**Cohabitation**
- Presence and class position
- Distinguish from married and single-parent

**Step-Parents**
- Presence and class position
- Duration of step-family
- Level of involvement with children

**Non-Resident Parents**
- Presence and class position
- Duration of non-residence
- Level of involvement with children
New Partnerships Often Produce New Children...

Half-Sib

Focal Child

Half-Sib
... and Bring With Them Children From Past Relationships
Amount of Multi-Partner Fertility (Half-Sibs) in Fragile Families by Child’s 5th Birthday

- No Half-Sibs in Family: 40%
- Half-Sibs in Family: 60%

# of Half-Siblings
- 1: 18%
- 2: 19%
- 3+: 23%

20% of women have MPF my midlife (28% of mothers with 2+ children). 30% of adults report that they have step- or half-siblings.

Source: Tach’s tabulations of Waves 1-4 of the Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Survey; Dorius 2011; Parker 2011. Counts total number of half-siblings (biological children of either mother or father, but not both).
Measuring the Family

**Cohabitation**
- Presence and class position
- Distinguish from married and single-parent

**Non-Resident Parents**
- Presence and class position
- Duration of non-residence
- Level of involvement with children

**Step-Parents**
- Presence and class position
- Duration of step-family
- Level of involvement with children

**Blended Families**
- Identify based on half-siblings or parents’ other kids
Other Diverse Family Forms

Grandparents

- In 2011, 10% of US children lived with a grandparent (Dunifon 2013).

Gay/Lesbian Parents

- 500,000-2 million children raised by gay and lesbian parents, depending on whether bisexual and single parents are included (Miller and Price 2013).
Measuring the Family

**Cohabitation**
- Presence and class position
- Distinguish from married and single-parent

**Step-Parents**
- Presence and class position
- Duration of step-family
- Level of involvement with children

**Non-Resident Parents**
- Presence and class position
- Duration of non-residence
- Level of involvement with children

**Blended Families**
- Identify based on half-siblings or parents’ other kids

**Other**
- Presence and class position of grandparents
- Sex of partners/parents, and perhaps sexual orientation
Family and the Reproduction of Inequality
Resource for
Family Structure Survey Questions:
http://ncfmr.bgsu.edu/page118422.html