

Counting the Chicks after They've Flown: Shared and Non-Shared Fertility Among Empty Nesters

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WHO ARE EMPTY NESTERS?

"Empty Nesters," are parents of adult children who have moved out (presumably to establish their own homes). They are defined largely by the absence of coresident children. Per the 2014 SIPP Wave 1 data, there are roughly 22.5 million Empty Nest couples in the United States.

WHY CARE ABOUT FERTILITY IN EMPTY NESTS?

Empty Nest couples are generally defined by the absence of their children. However, the absent children matter because adult children provide social, economic, and medical support to aging parents (Jennings, Perry, & Valeriani, 2014). Moreover, as more adults recouple over the lifecycle, shared and non-shared fertility has been shown to matter for the level of support, and the sense of family cohesion (Kalmijn, 2015 and 2013).

SAMPLE & DIMENSIONS OF COUPLE-LEVEL FERTILITY

The Empty Nest sample consists of opposite-sex couples with only adult children with whom they do not live. In order to be in the sample, all of a parent's children must be 18 years old or older. To examine the correlates of shared and non-shared fertility, I divide these couples into three groups:

1. Empty Nest parent couples in which all children are shared
2. Empty Nest parent couples in which some (but not all) children are shared
3. Empty Nest parent couples in which no children are shared

These distinctions are made possible by new data from the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), which includes a complete fertility history for all adult respondents, including new questions to ascertain shared fertility between members of a coresident couple.

ABOUT THE SIPP
The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is a nationally representative panel survey administered by the Census Bureau that collects information on the short-term dynamics of employment, income, household composition, and eligibility and participation in government assistance programs. For more information, please visit the SIPP website at www.census.gov/sipp.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THESE DATA
Survey data are subject to error arising from a variety of sources. For information on sampling and nonsampling error see: <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html>. For additional information about methods and response rates, see: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/nonresponse-reports.html>

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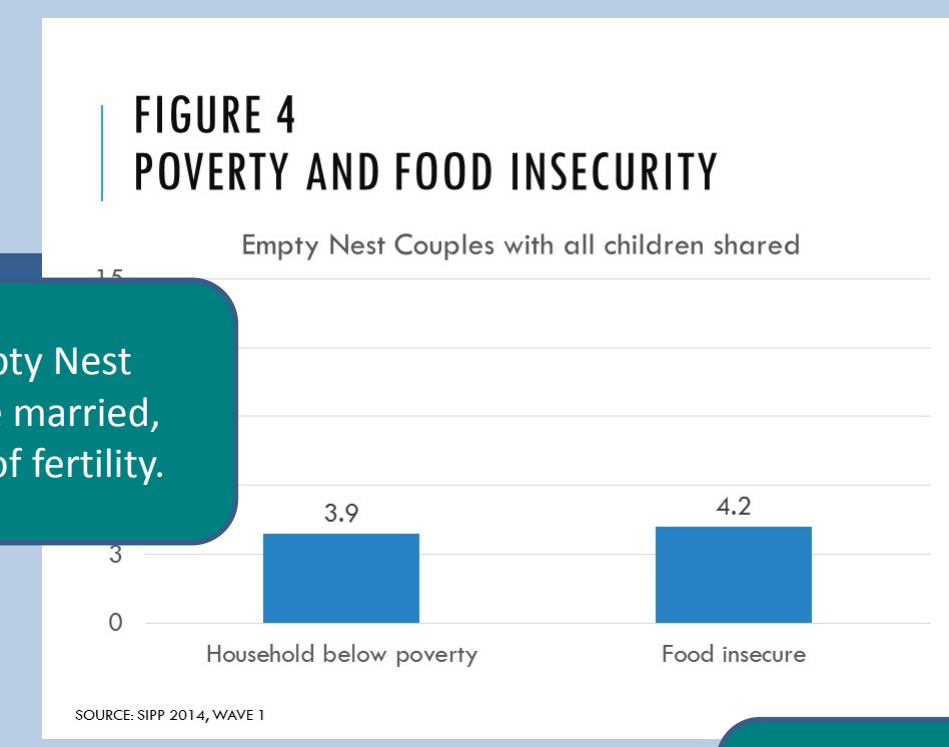
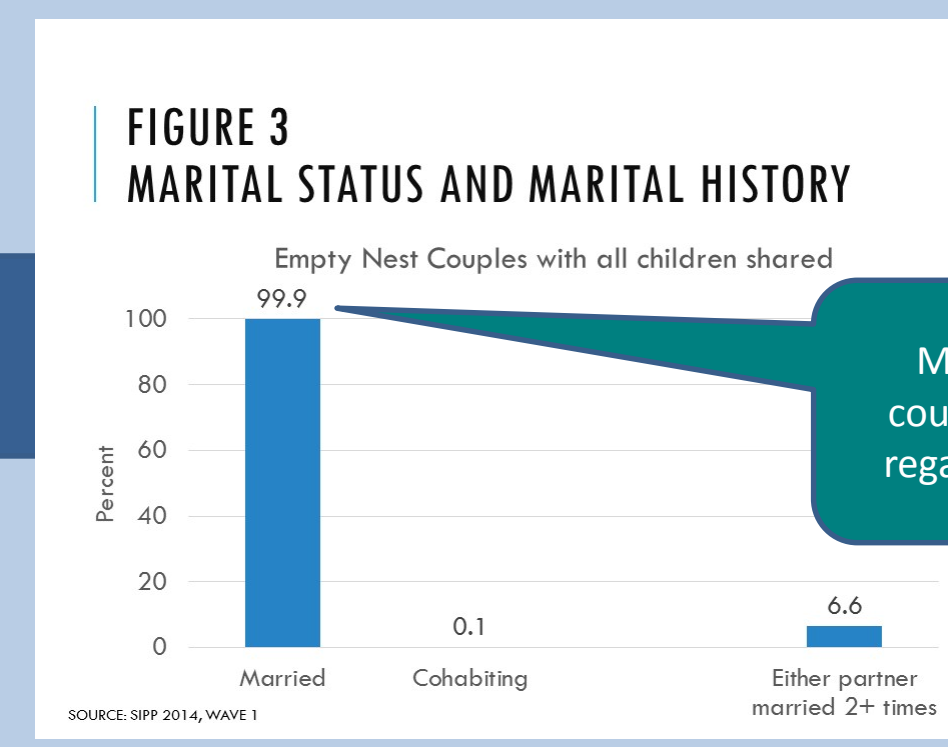
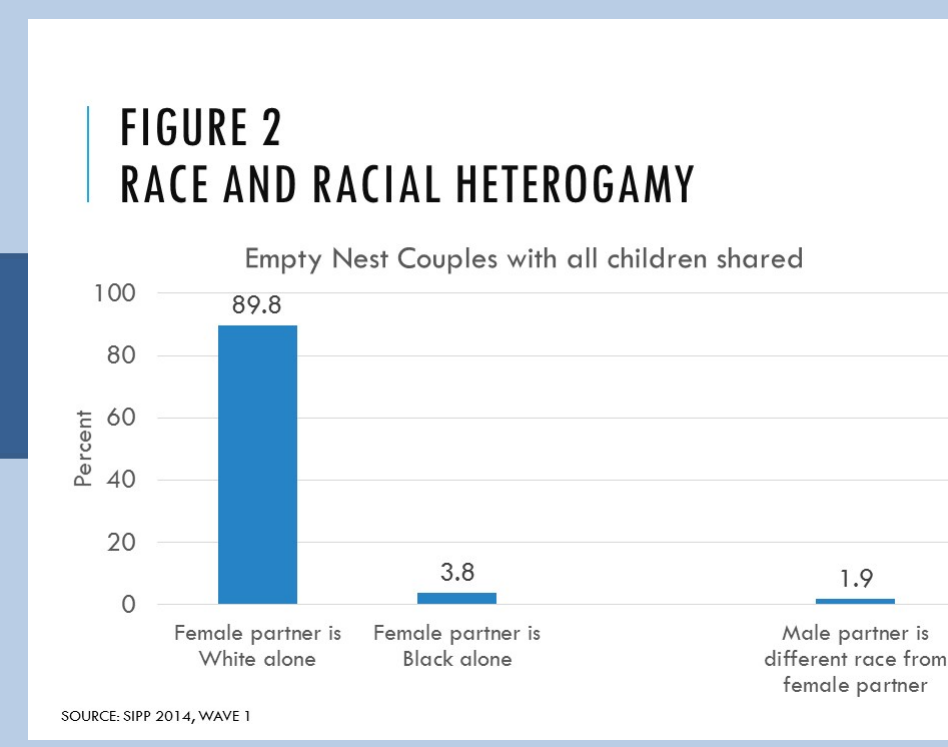
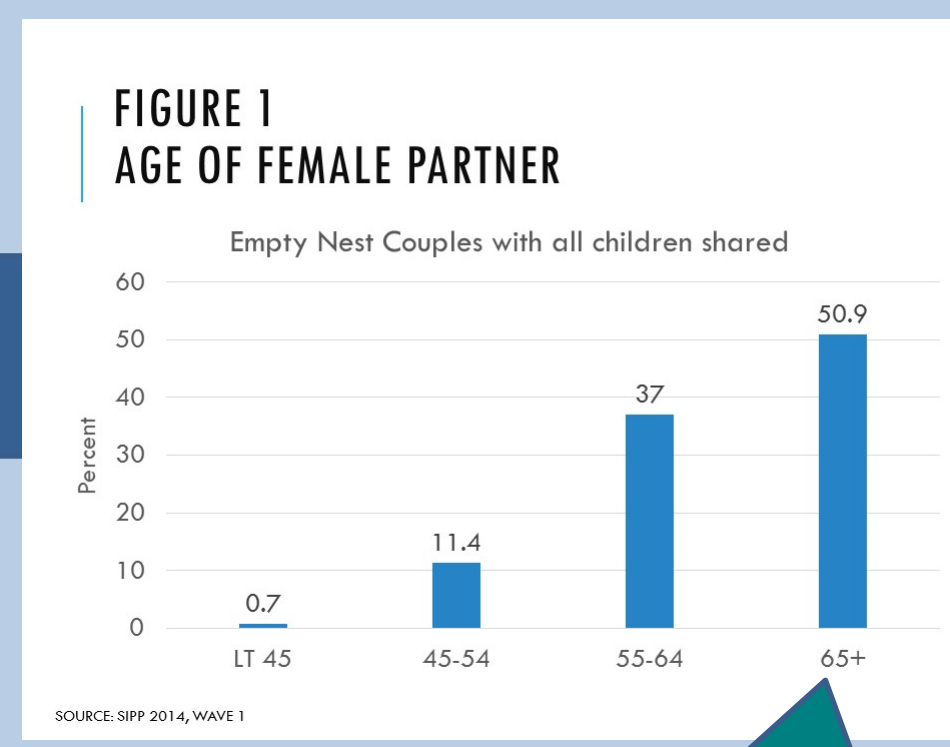
RESEARCH QUESTION:

How are Empty Nesters different based on their shared and non-shared fertility?

EMPTY NEST COUPLES: ALL CHILDREN SHARED

- All of the couple's children are shared
- ~11.6 million couples
- Percent of all Empty Nest Couples: 51.7%

Couples with all children shared are the majority of Empty Nest couples

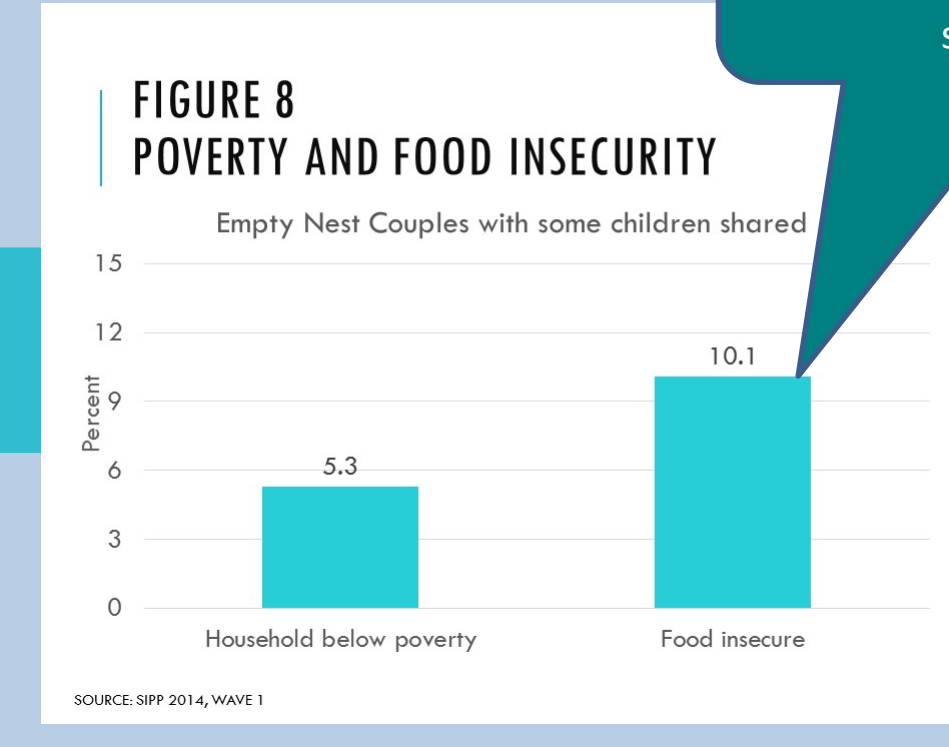
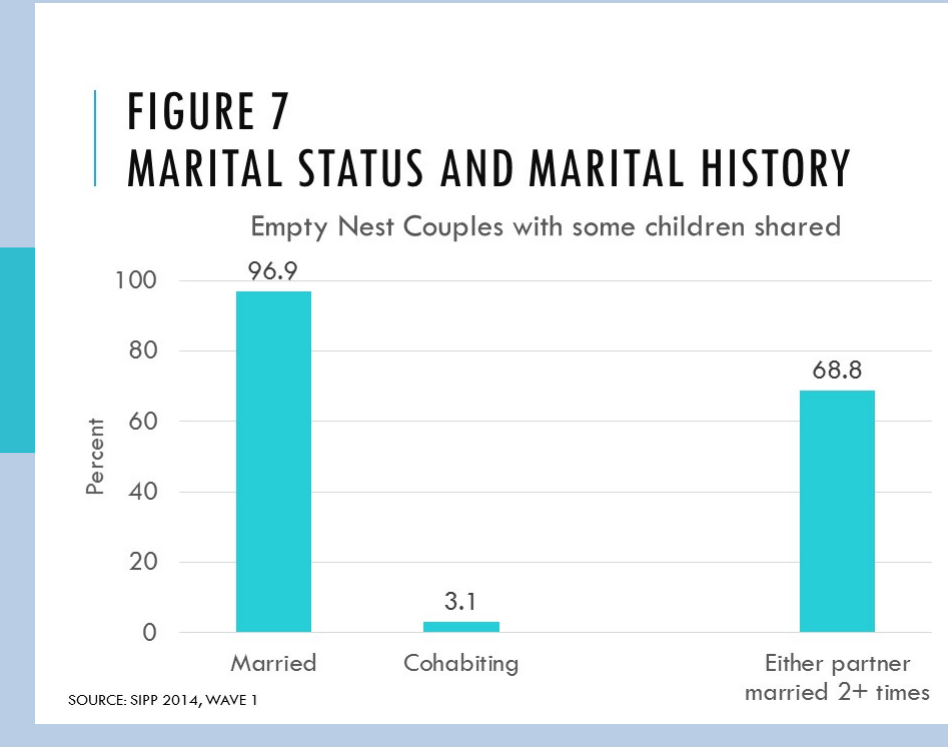
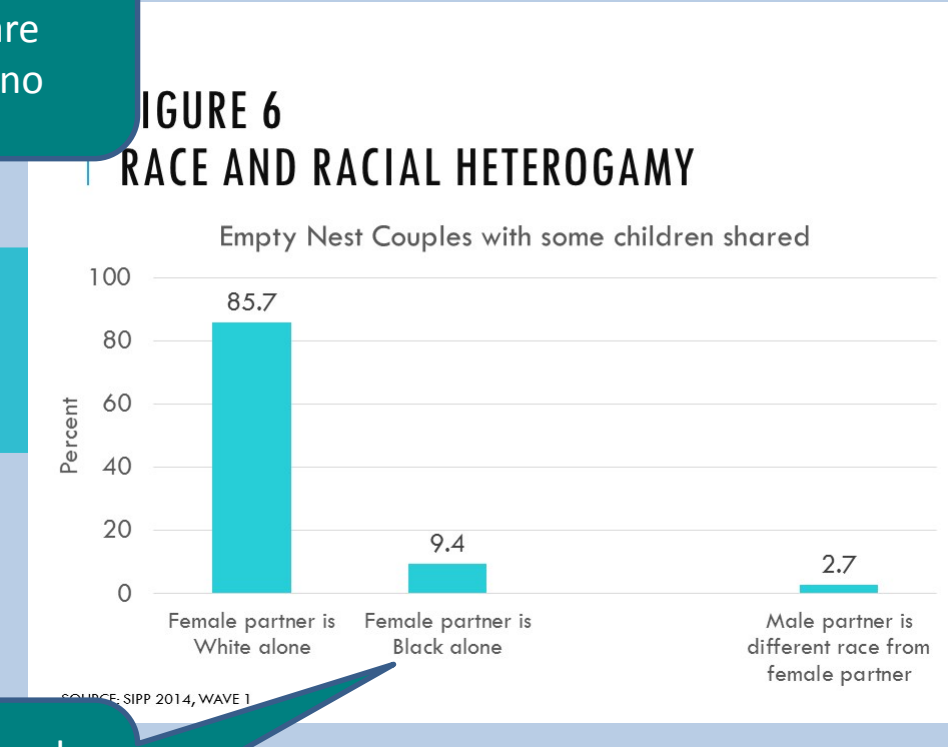
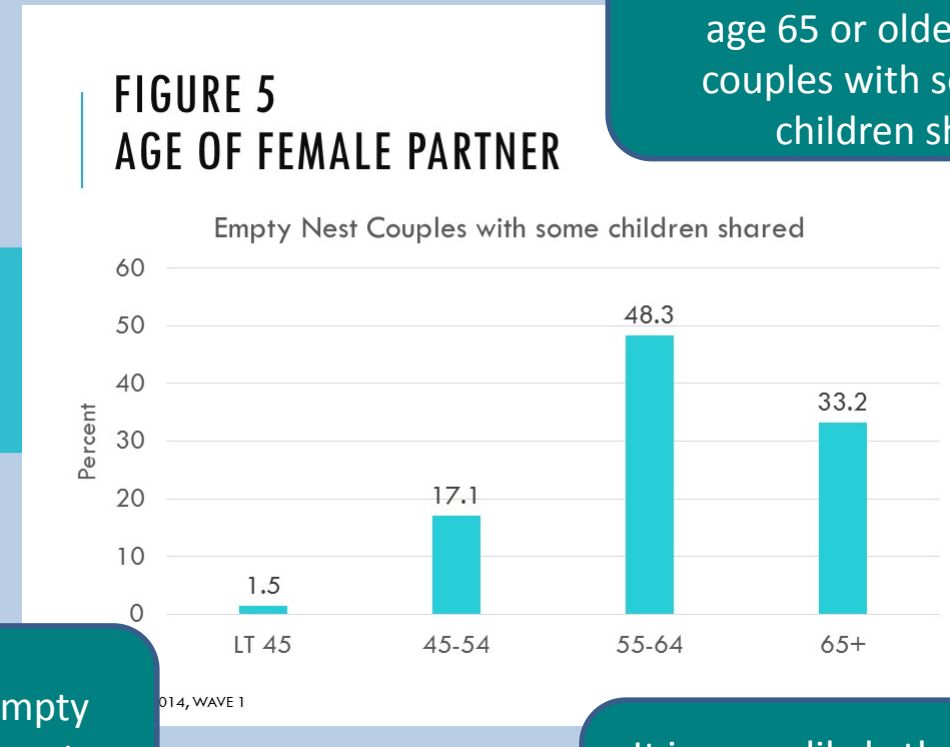


COUPLES WITH ALL CHILDREN SHARED

- These couples represent the majority of childbearing couples.
- Almost all are currently married, and in 7% of such couples, at least one of the parents has been married two or more times.
- They show levels of material hardship that are lower than the national average for adults 35 and older.

EMPTY NEST COUPLES: SOME CHILDREN SHARED

- Some (but not all) of the couple's children are shared
- ~1.9 million couples
- Percent of all Empty Nest Couples: 8.6%

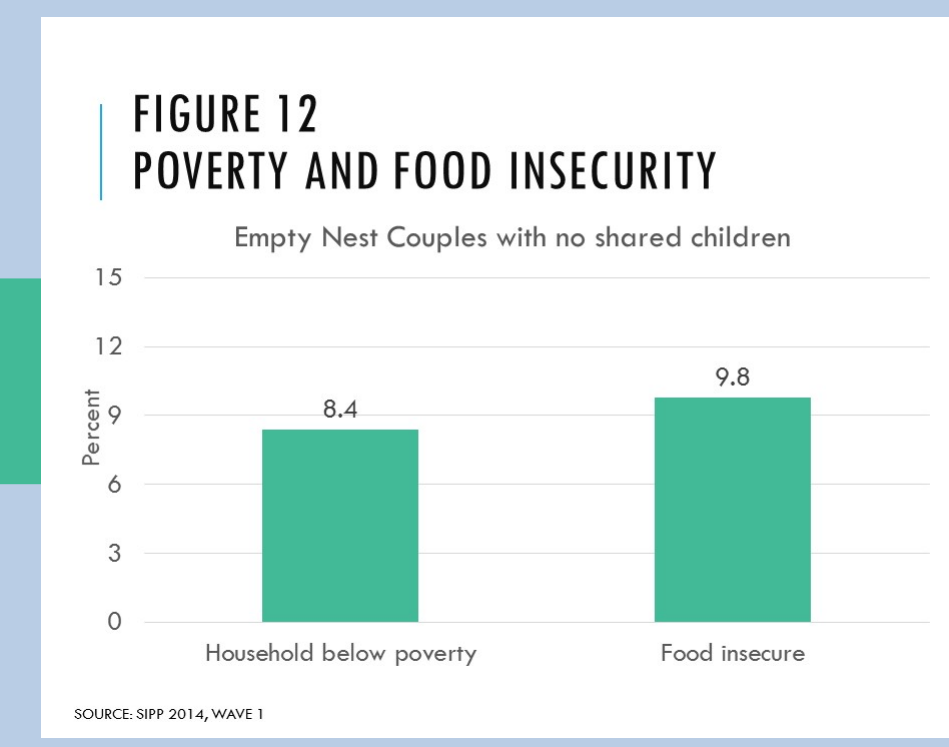
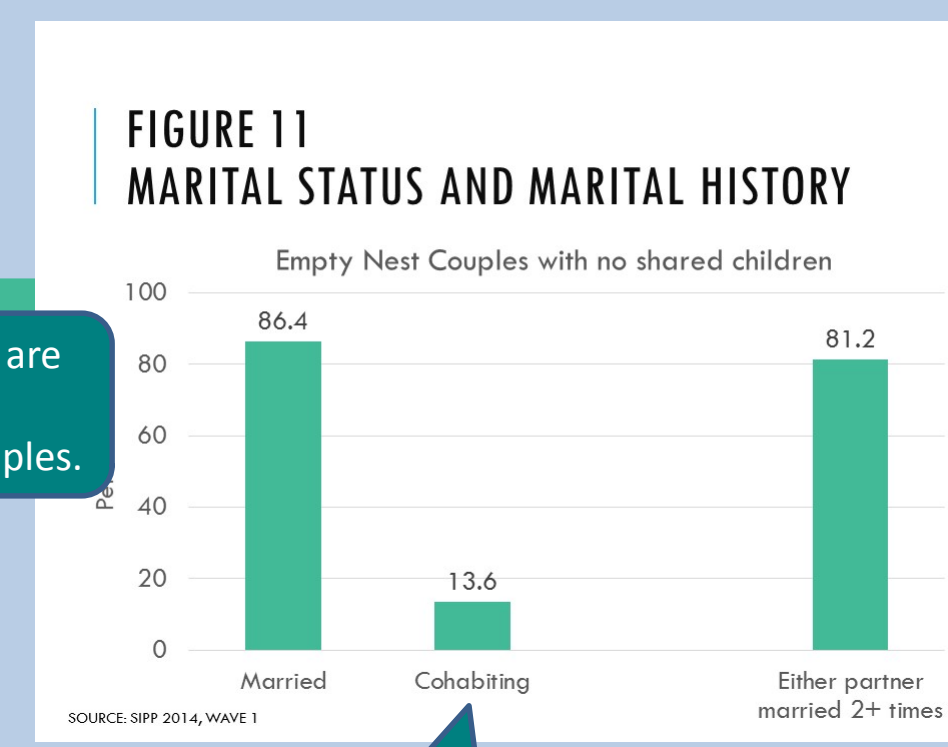
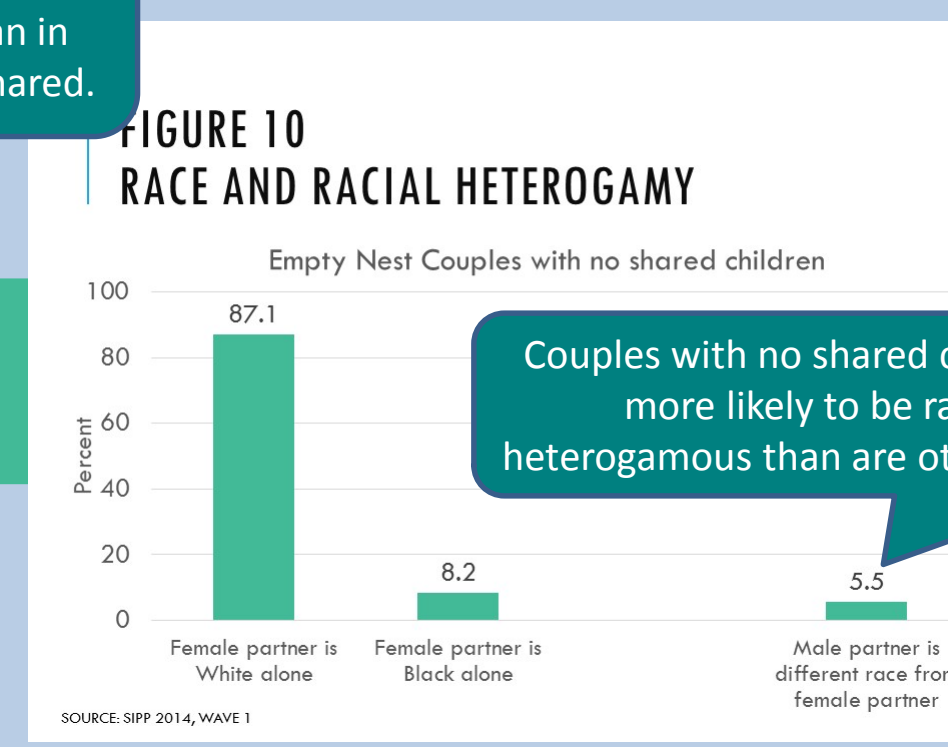
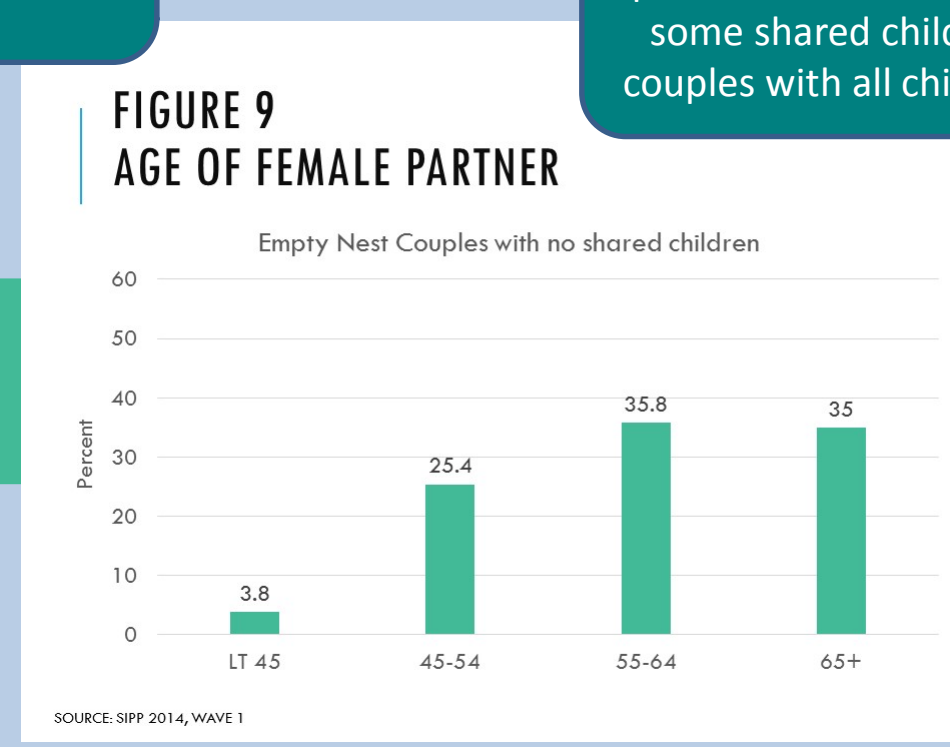


COUPLES WITH SOME SHARED CHILDREN

- These blended families represent less than 10% of all Empty Nest couples.
- The female partner is between 55 and 64 years old in nearly half of these couples.
- In 69% of these couples, one or the other partner has been married two or more times.

EMPTY NEST COUPLES: NO CHILDREN SHARED

- None of the couple's children are shared
- ~8.9 million couples
- Percent of all Empty Nest Couples: 39.7%



COUPLES WITH NO SHARED CHILDREN

- Almost 40% of Empty Nest couples have no shared children between partners.
- 14% of these couples are cohabiting.
- In 9.8% of Empty Nest couples with no shared children, the couple reports being food insecure.

Couples with all children shared are more likely to be age 65 or older than are couples with some or no children shared.

It is more likely that the female partner is Black in couples with some shared children than in couples with all children shared.

Couples with no shared children are more likely to be racially heterogamous than are other couples.

Couples with no shared children are more likely to be cohabiting than are other couples.

Couples who share some but not all of their children are more likely to be food insecure than Empty Nest couples who share all children.

Most Empty Nest couples are married, regardless of fertility.

NOTE: All comparative statements have been tested and are significant at the .1 level.



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