

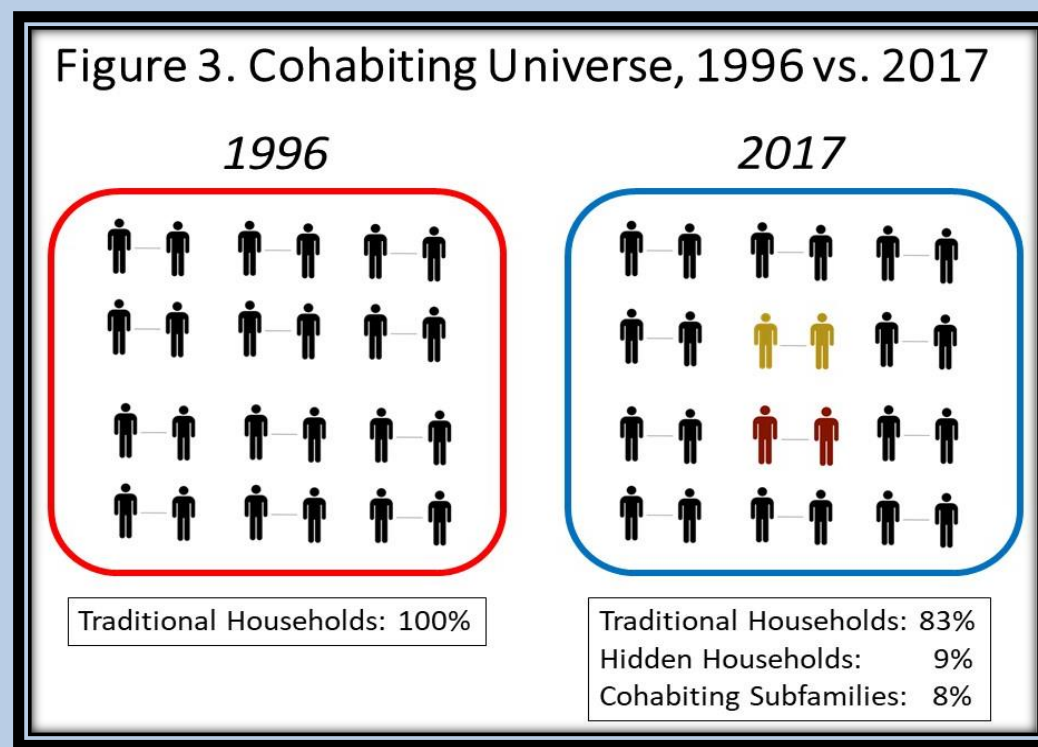
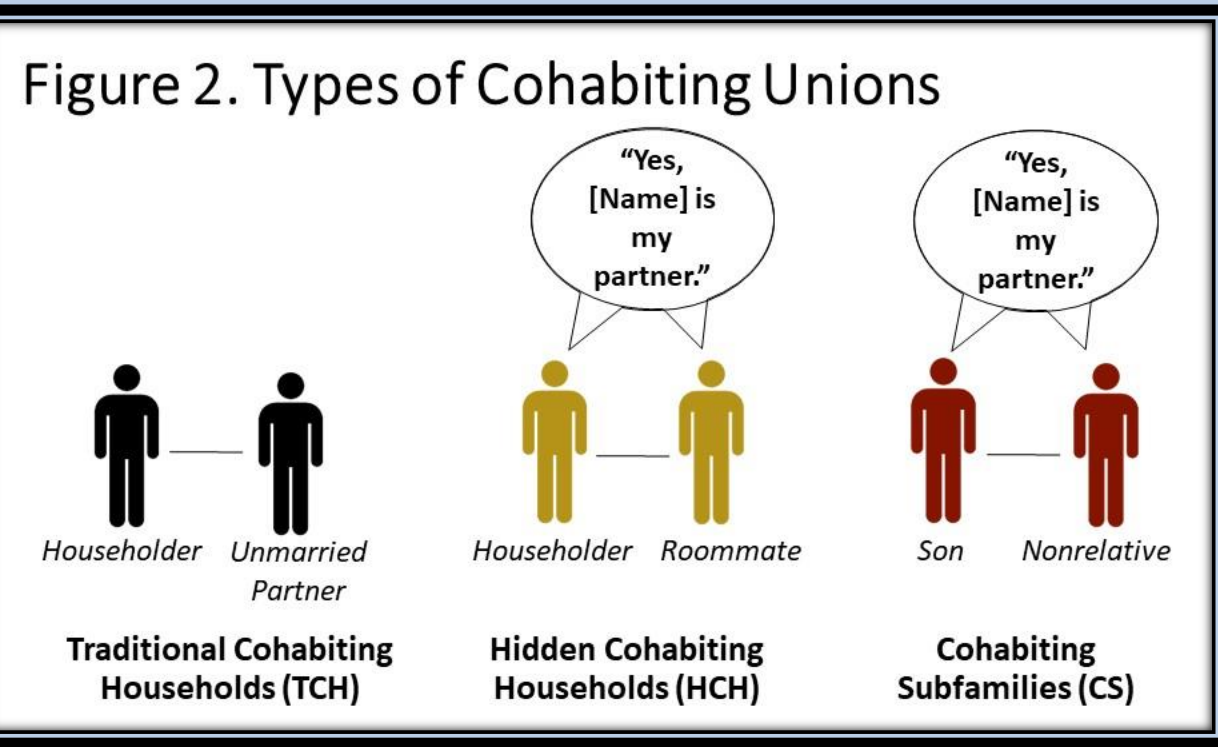
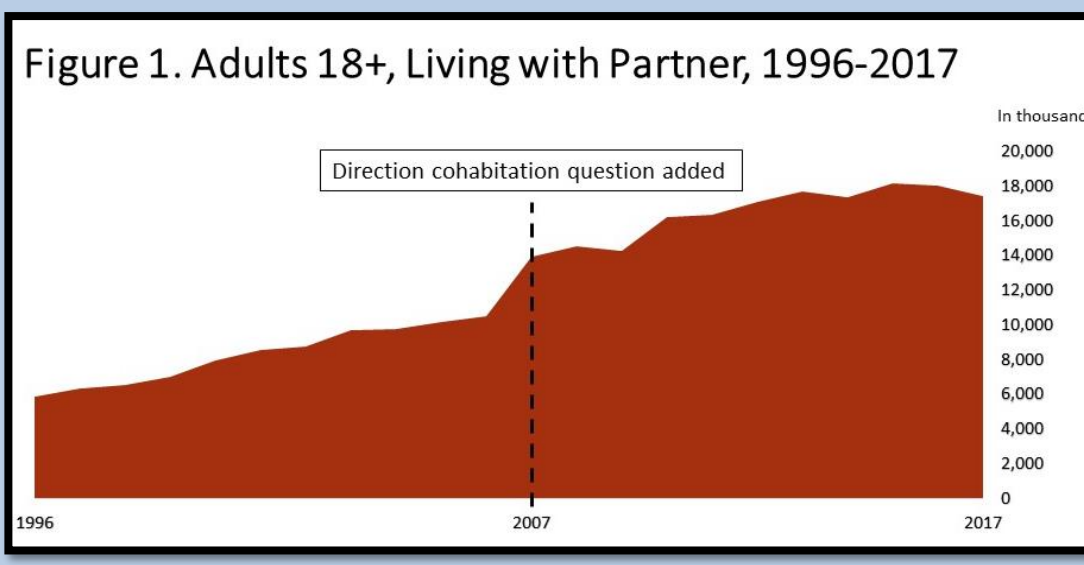
Cohabitation Over the Last 20 Years: Measuring and Understanding the Changing Demographics of Unmarried Partners, 1996-2017

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BACKGROUND

- Cohabitation has more than doubled in the last 20 years, reflecting either increasing normalization and/or increasing social disadvantage.
- Over this same period, the Current Population Survey (CPS) has significantly improved the measurement of cohabiting partners:
- 1996: CPS adds "unmarried partner" category to measure for relationship to householder (i.e., person who owns/rents the home). I refer to these cohabiting couples as *traditional cohabiting households (TCH)*.
- 2007: CPS adds a direct cohabitation question -- "Do you have a boyfriend, girlfriend, or partner in this household?"
- This revealed two additional cohabiting union types: *hidden cohabiting households (HCH)*, and *cohabiting subfamilies (CS)*. HCH involve the householder and often a "roommate" or "other, non-relative" in relationship question, who later is identified as a partner in the direct cohabitation question. CS do not involve the householder and are identified in the direct cohabitation question.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1996, 2006, 2007, and 2017 Annual Social and Economic Supplements

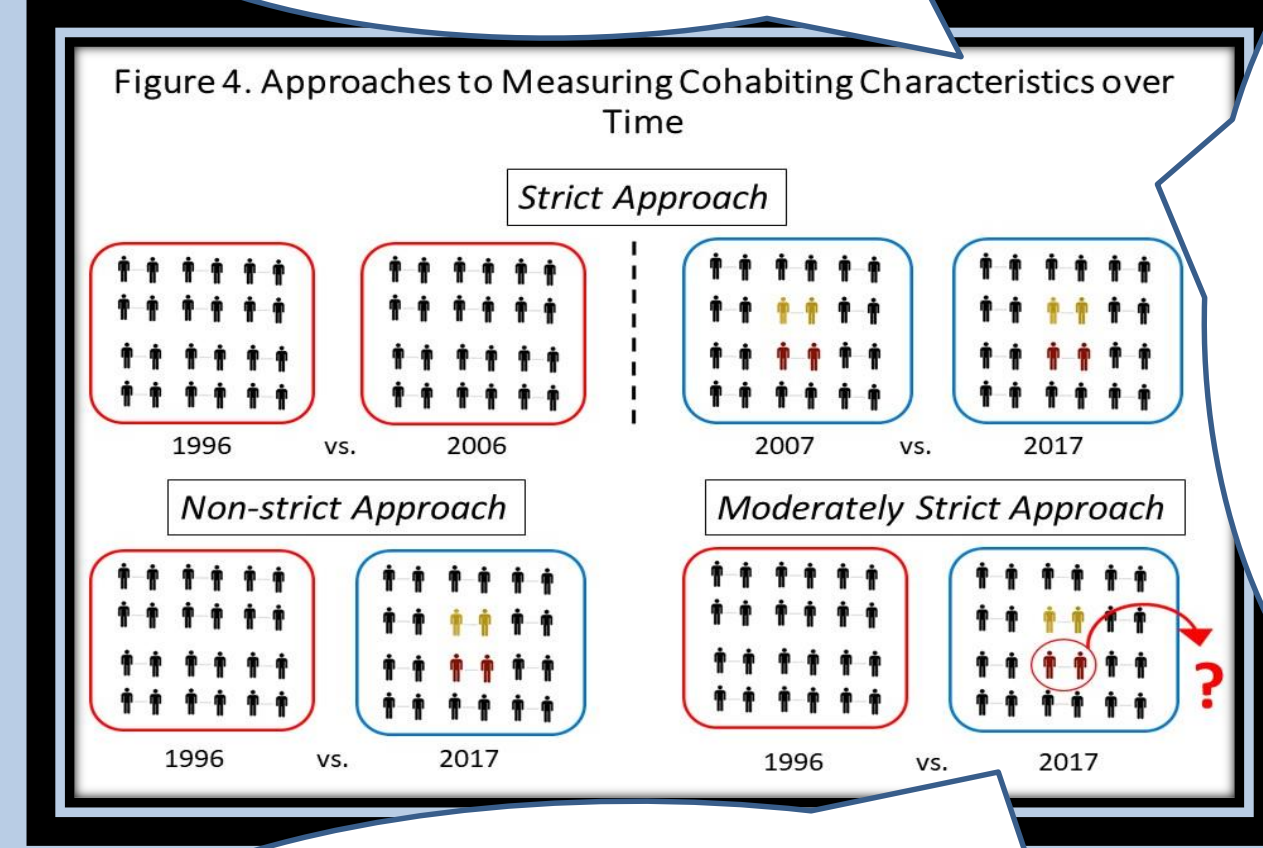
RESEARCH QUESTION

- Methodological Question:** How do we compare the demographic characteristics of cohabiters over the last 20 years in light of measurement changes and ability to capture additional cohabiters?
- Substantive Question:** Do the changing characteristics of cohabiters reflect increased normalization (i.e., groups traditionally underrepresented as cohabiters) and/or increased disadvantage (growing concentration of marginalized groups)?

DATA AND METHODS

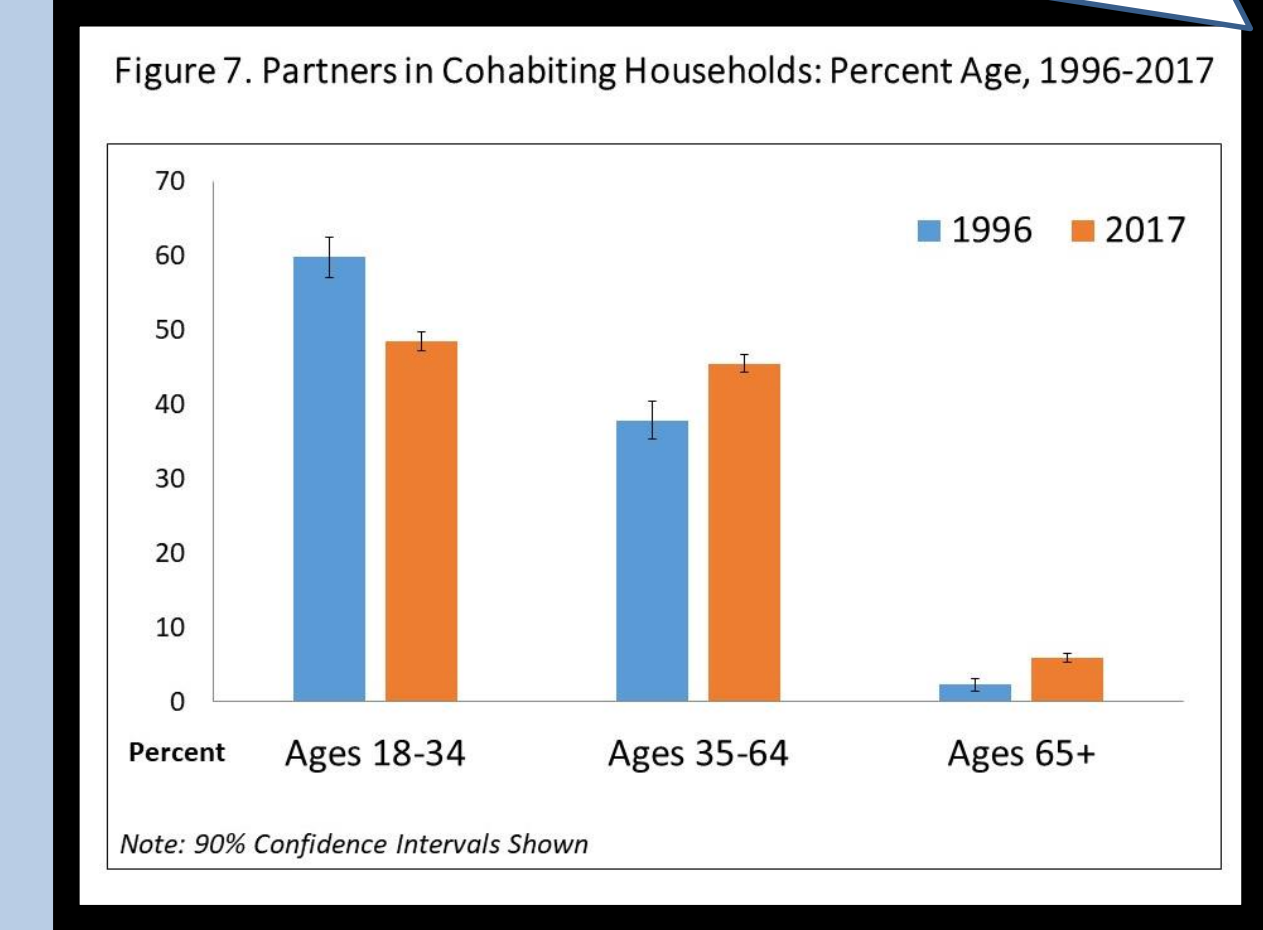
- Data: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 1996, 2006, 2007, 2017
- Characteristics: age, race/Hispanic origin, nativity, marital status, presence of children, educational attainment, labor force participation (civilian population only), and income (adjusted for current dollars).
- Universe: Cohabiting Adults (Person Level), Ages 18+

There are three different approaches to comparing characteristics given the measurement change.



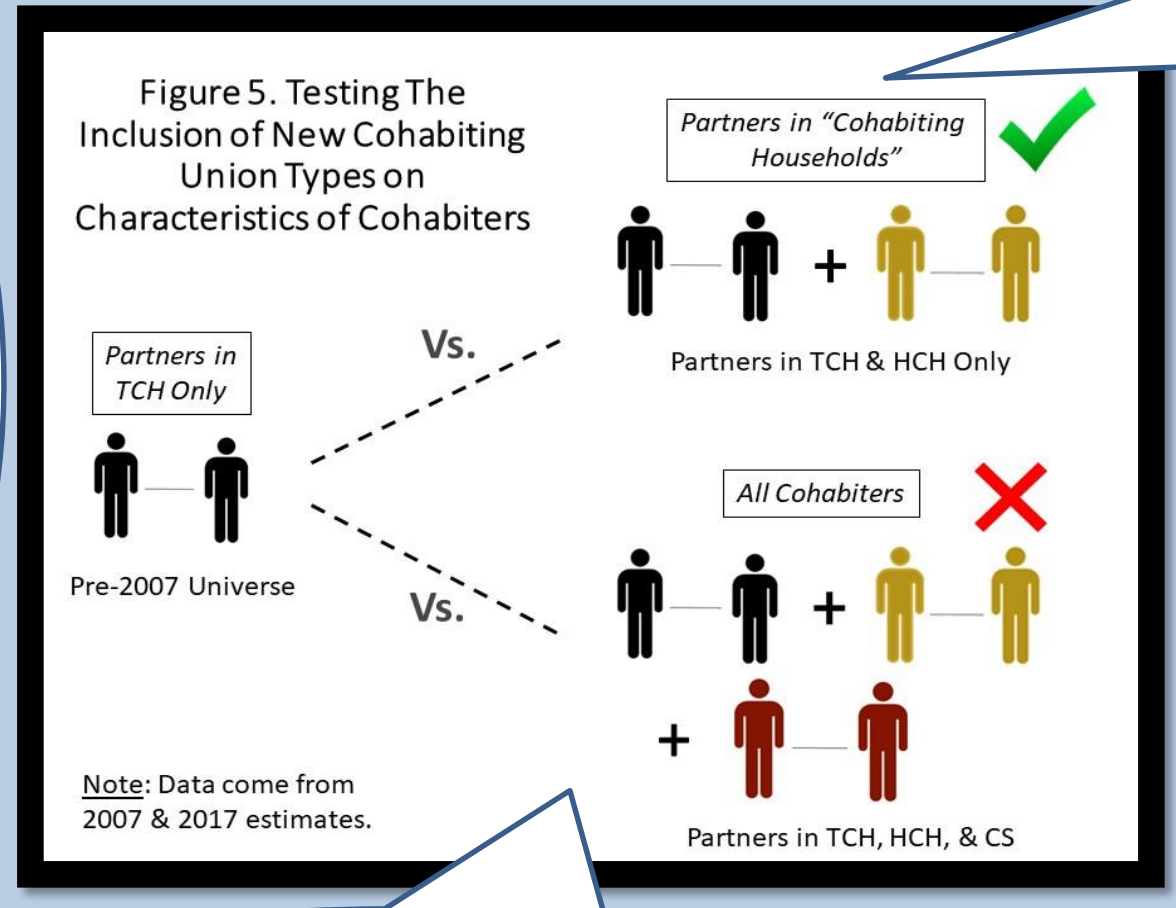
A moderately strict approach involves excluding new cohabiting union types from the universe if they significantly shift the overall characteristics of cohabiters.

Partners in cohabiting households are significantly older in 2017 compared to 1996.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1996, 2006, 2007, and 2017 Annual Social and Economic Supplements

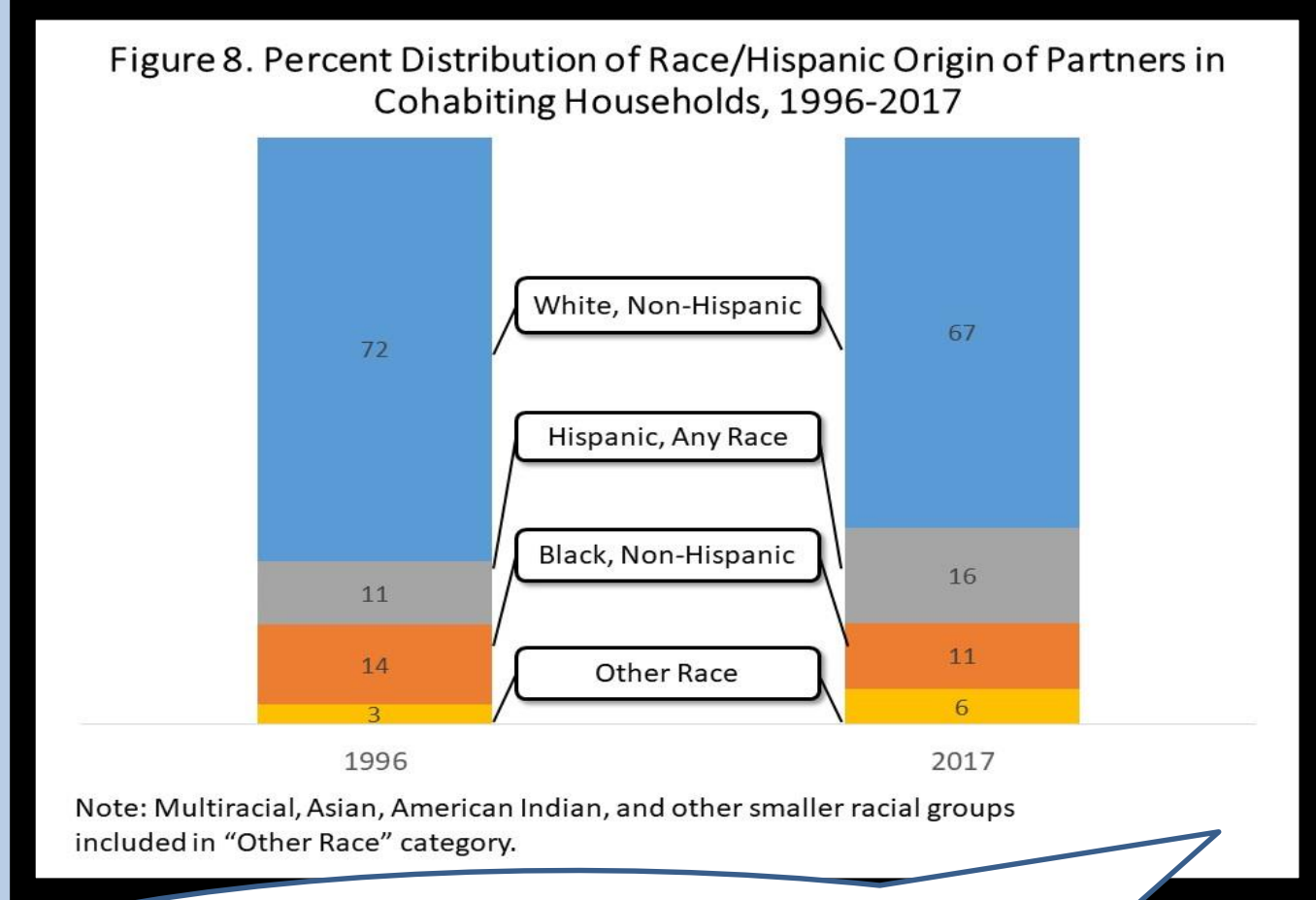
DETERMINING AN APPROPRIATE COHABITING UNIVERSE



A strict approach only compares years with consistent measurement, while a non-strict approach compares all cohabiters regardless of measurement.

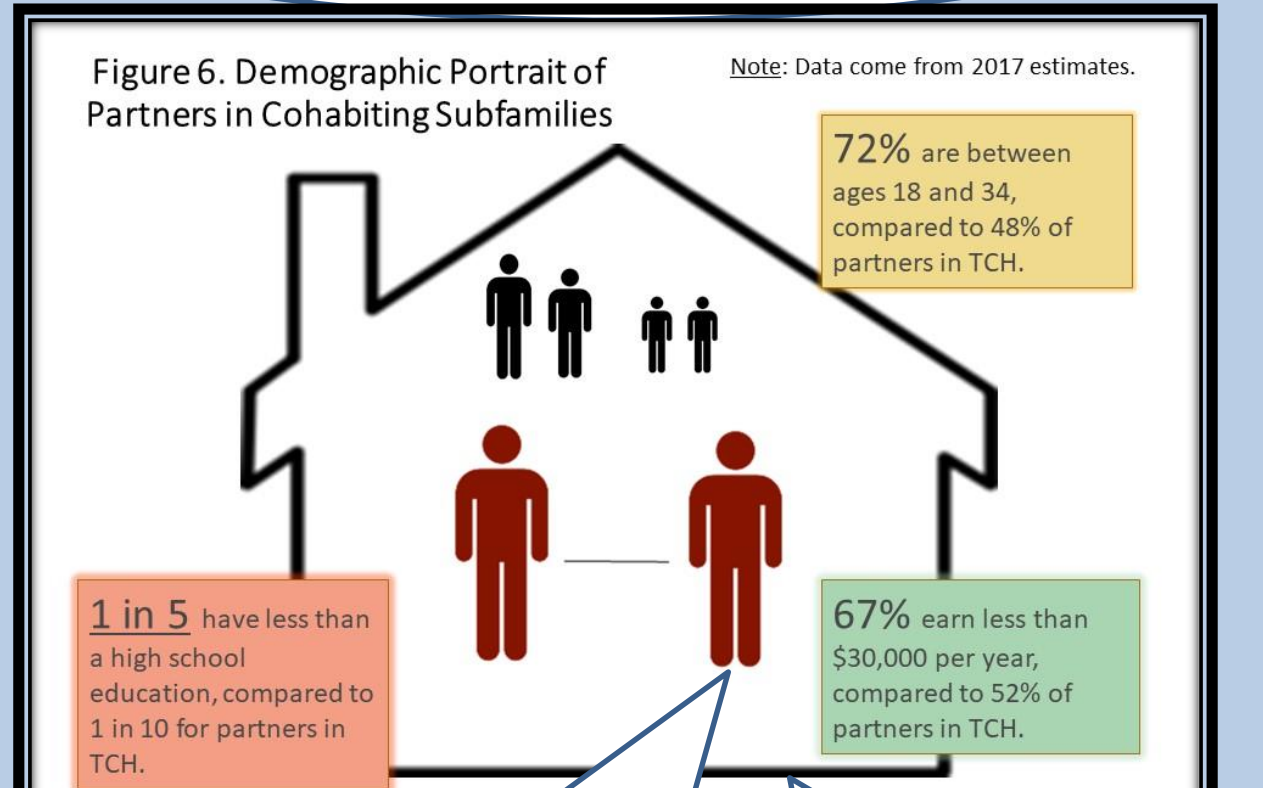
Inclusion of partners in CS, however, does shift certain age, education, and earnings estimates.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTNERS IN COHABITING HOUSEHOLDS¹ OVER TIME



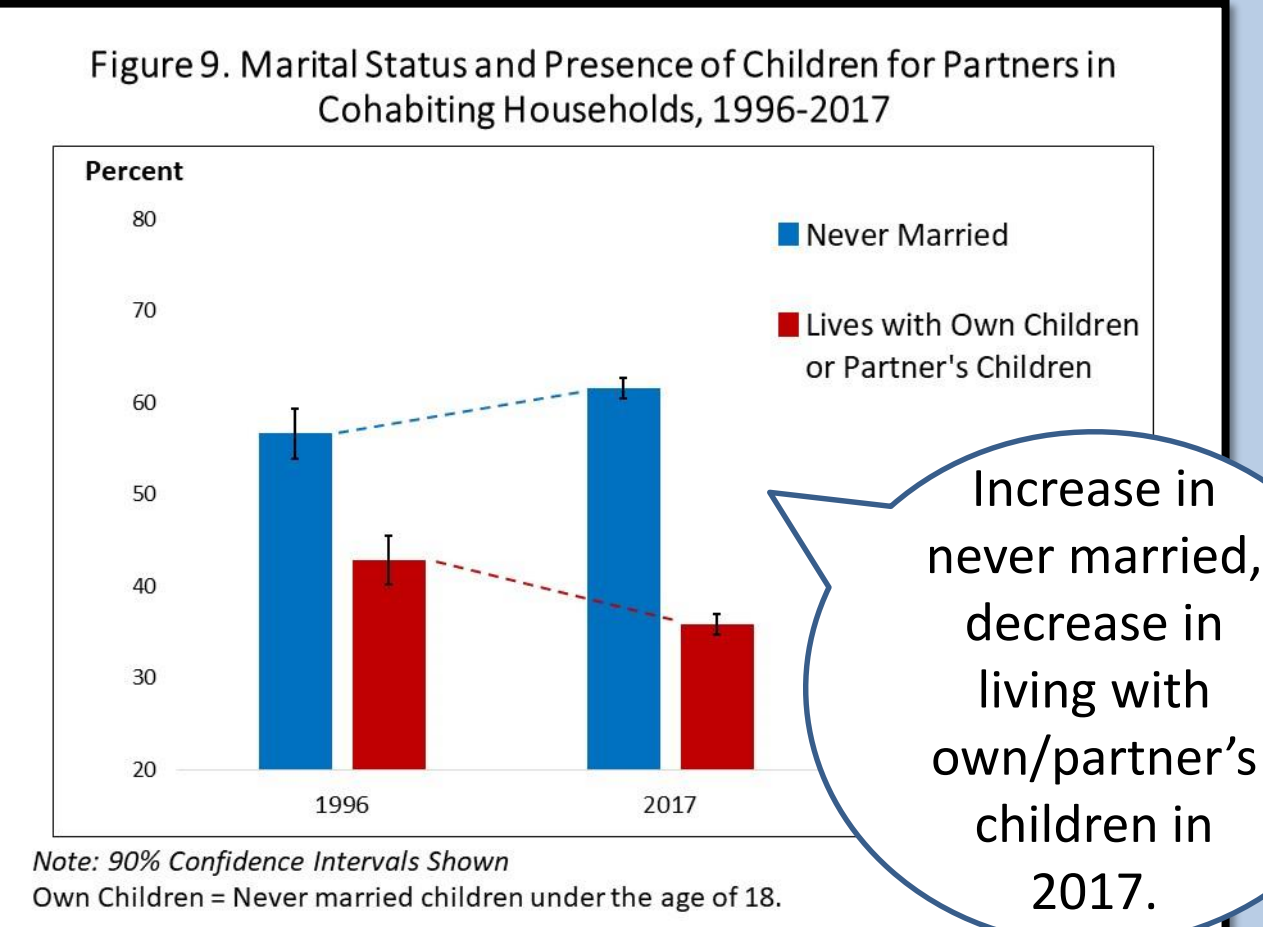
While White, non-Hispanics have decreased as a percentage of partners in cohabiting households, Hispanics have increased.

Inclusion of partners in HCH does not significantly shift characteristics of universe compared to cohabiters in TCH only. Thus, they are included in 2017 estimates for historical comparisons.

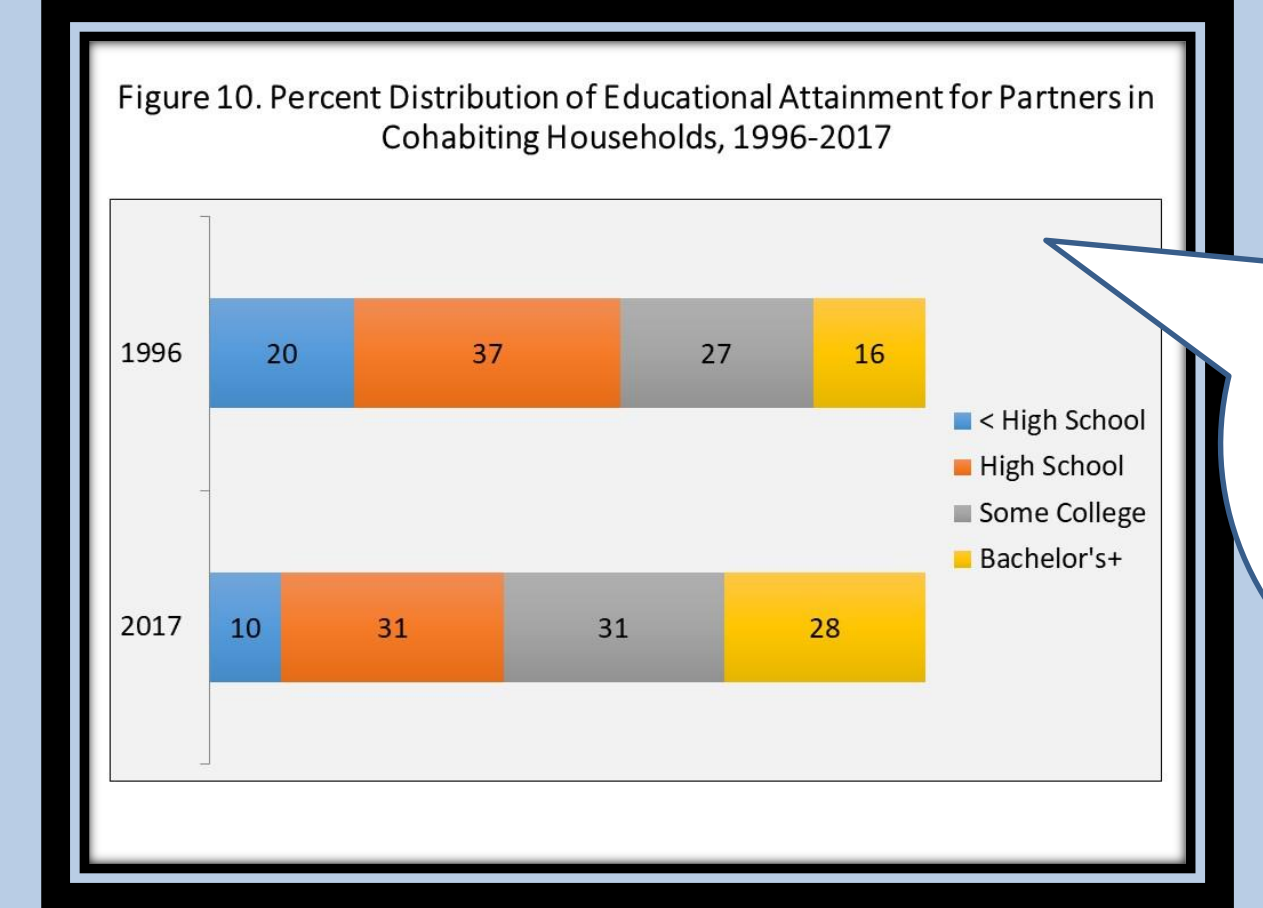


This is because individuals in CS on average are younger, have lower educational attainment, and earn significantly less than those in TCH.

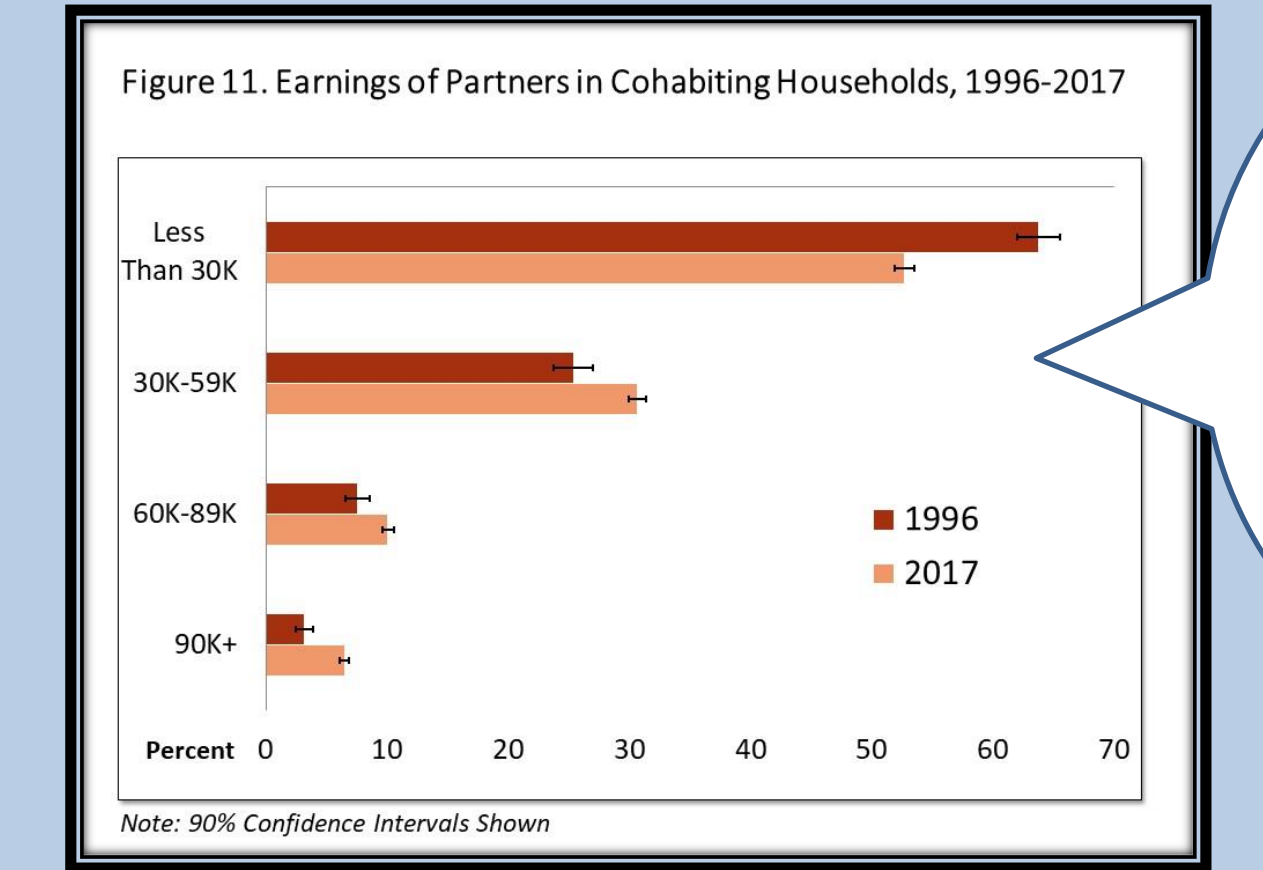
Because of this, partners in CS are excluded in historical comparisons in all further figures.



Note: All comparative statements have been tested and are significant at the 90% confidence level.
¹ Cohabiting households are partners in TCH for 1996 estimates and TCH or HCH in 2017 estimates



Partners in cohabiting households have higher educational attainment in 2017 compared to 1996.



In adjusted 2017 dollars, the percent with low earnings (<30K) decreased from 1996 to 2017, while the percent with high earnings (90K+) increased.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1996, 2006, 2007, and 2017 Annual Social and Economic Supplements

OTHER NOTABLE FINDINGS

- Increase in interracial relationships² and percent foreign born.
- Decrease in percent unemployed.

SUMMARY

- Evidence of increased normalization – more ages 65+, more college-educated, less low earners, less unemployment.
- Partners in cohabiting households exhibit more diversity compared to 20 years ago.
- When making historical comparisons of cohabiters' characteristics, I recommend a moderately strict approach.

² To be consistent with 1996 estimates, the racial categories that help define couples as "interracial" are: White, Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, and other.



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