The Gray Divorce Revolution: Rising Divorce among Middle-aged and Older Adults, 1990-2009

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: Our study documents how the divorce rate among persons ages 50 and older has changed between 1990 and 2009 and identifies the sociodemographic correlates of divorce among today's middle-aged and older adults.

Design and Methods: We used data from the 1990 U.S. Vital Statistics Report and the 2009 American Community Survey (ACS) to examine the change in the divorce rate over time. ACS data were analyzed to determine the sociodemographic correlates of divorce.

Results: The divorce rate among adults ages 50 and older doubled between 1990 and 2009. Roughly 1 in 4 divorces in 2009 occurred to persons ages 50 and older. Sociodemographic factors, including age group, race-ethnicity, education, and the marital biography were associated with the risk of divorce in 2009. The rate of divorce was 2.5 times higher for those in remarriages versus first marriages. And, the divorce rate declined as marital duration rose.

Implications: The traditional focus of gerontological research on widowhood must be expanded to include divorce as another form of marital dissolution. Over 600,000 people ages 50 and older got divorced in 2009, but little is known about the predictors and consequences of divorces that occur during middle and later life.

Key Words: Age, Divorce, Marriage Order, Marital Duration, Sociodemographic Characteristics

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Introduction

The U.S. has the highest divorce rate in the world, with roughly 45% of marriages expected to end through divorce (Amato, 2010; Cherlin, 2010). Although divorce has been studied extensively among younger adults, the research to date has essentially ignored divorce that occurs among older adults (Amato, 2010; Cooney & Dunne, 2001; Sweeney, 2010). This omission is notable considering the U.S. is an aging society. Baby Boomers, the first to divorce and remarry in large numbers during young adulthood, are moving into the older adult population, and this portends a growing number of older adults will experience divorce. Moreover, as remarriages become a larger share of all marriages, the proportion of marriages at higher risk of divorce also climbs since remarriages are more likely than first marriages to end through divorce (Sweeney, 2010). Indeed, the proportions ever-divorced, currently divorced, and married at least twice are highest among individuals ages 50 and over (Kreider & Ellis, 2011).

The increasingly complex marital biographies experienced earlier in the life course have ramifications for the marital status composition of America's older population, which is becoming more diverse. Marriage is likely to be less common in the near future as Baby Boomers continue to swell the ranks of the aged. And, the divorced are expected to constitute a larger share of older persons (Cooney & Dunne, 2001). A recent study by Manning and Brown (2011) documents a rise in the prevalence of divorced elders since 1980, but does not address whether the *risk* of divorce during this life stage has actually increased in recent decades.

In this paper, we establish how the divorce rate among middle-aged and older (i.e., ages 50 and older) adults has changed between 1990 and 2009 by combining the 1990 age-specific divorce rate data from the U.S. Vital Statistics (Clarke, 1995) with our own estimate of today's

divorce rate using the 2009 American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS offers a unique opportunity to measure the incidence of divorce because all sample members are asked whether they divorced in the past 12 months, which can be used to calculate an annual divorce rate. Additionally, we are able to establish the sociodemographic correlates of divorce among today's middle-aged and older adults, paying special attention to the role of the marital biography to distinguish the relative risks of divorce for those in first versus higher order marriages as well as by marital duration.

Divorce Prevalence among Older Adults

The prevalence of divorced older adults has increased in recent decades. At the same time, the prevalence of widowhood has declined. Manning and Brown (2011) compared the marital status composition of the older adult (ages 65 and older) population in 1980 and 2008 using Census and ACS data. The share of older adults who were divorced doubled among men between 1980 and 2008, rising from 5% to 10%. Among women, the percentage divorced tripled during this time period, climbing from 4% to 12%. In contrast, levels of widowhood among older men remained unchanged and actually fell among women between 1980 and 2008.

These dramatic shifts in the marital status composition of older adults are not entirely unexpected, but have occurred at a quicker pace. Uhlenberg, Cooney, and Boyd (1990) projected 20 years ago that by 2024, women ages 65-69 would be equally likely to be either widowed or divorced. This projection is already a reality, as 20% in this age group were widowed and 19% were divorced in 2008 (Manning & Brown, 2011), suggesting that the pace of divorce among older adults is accelerating more rapidly than anticipated (alternatively, the proportions widowed may be declining more quickly).

Although these prevalence measures illustrate the changing marital status composition of older adults, they obscure when the divorce occurred. Many older adults that are currently divorced actually experienced divorce much earlier in the life course. Moreover, it is not clear why the prevalence of divorce has increased. It is possible that today's older adults are simply less likely to remarry following divorce and thus their prevalence in the population is greater now. Alternatively, the actual risk of divorce may have increased.

Prior Research

Researchers pointed to the importance of studying divorce among older adults decades ago, arguing that the plateau in the overall divorce rate belied the trend among older adults, for whom divorce will continue to rise (Berardo, 1982; Hammond & Muller, 1992). Uhlenberg and Myers (1981) posited several reasons why the divorce rate for older adults is likely to climb. First, a growing share of older adults is in a higher order marriage, reflecting divorce experienced at earlier stages of the life course. Remarriages are more likely to end in divorce than are first marriages. Second, divorce in the U.S. is a common occurrence, which means older adults will continue to be more accepting of divorce in the future as either they themselves or people around them experience divorce (cf. McDermott, Fowler, & Christakis, 2009). Third, rising female labor force participation is also conducive to divorce in that women have the economic autonomy (e.g., employment, retirement benefits) to support themselves outside of marriage. Finally, lengthening life expectancies decrease the likelihood that marriages will end through death and increase the length of exposure to the risk of divorce (Uhlenberg & Myers, 1981).

More recently, Wu and Schimmele (2007) argued that the weakening norm of marriage as a lifelong institution coupled with a heightened emphasis on individual fulfillment and

satisfaction through marriage may contribute to an increase in divorce among older adults, including those in long-term first marriages. Marriages change and evolve over the life course and may no longer meet one's needs at later life stages. Qualitative research indicates that many older couples that divorce simply have grown apart (Bair, 2007). Life-long marriages are increasingly difficult to sustain in an era of individualism and lengthening life expectancies; older adults are more reluctant now to remain in empty shell marriages.

Despite these theoretical suppositions for a sustained rise in divorce among older adults, there is a paucity of empirical research on this topic, and most studies are quite dated (Berardo, 1982; Hammond & Muller, 1992; Uhlenberg et al., 1990; Uhlenberg & Myers, 1981; although see Wu & Penning, 1997). Early research documented empirically that divorce was on the rise for older adults during the 1980s (Hammond & Muller, 1992; Uhlenberg et al., 1990), but did not establish the predictors of divorce in later life.

One study (Wu & Penning, 1997) using Canadian data from 1990 suggests a modest increase in the divorce rate for women in their 40s and 50s during the 1980s, with factors such as marital duration negatively associated with the odds of divorce. However, women in a remarriage were less likely to divorce than those in a first marriage and education was positively associated with divorce, results that are not consistent with U.S. patterns (cf. Amato, 2010), suggesting limited applicability of findings from the Canadian context.

The AARP conducted an internet survey of people ages 40-79 who divorced between the ages of 40-69, but their study did not include a comparison sample of continuously marrieds, so it was not possible to identify correlates of older adult divorce (Montenegro, 2004). Instead, the report emphasized individuals' (retrospective) interpretations of the reasons for and consequences of divorce as well as their subsequent family formation behaviors (e.g.,

remarriage). Thus, a key contribution of the present study is that it examines the sociodemographic factors associated with divorce in middle and later life to illustrate how those who divorce differ from those who remain married.

The Present Study

The current investigation is designed to examine whether the risk of divorce is higher now than it was in the past for middle-aged and older adults. The present study also attends to heterogeneity in the divorce experience of today's middle-aged and older adults by estimating divorce rates across subgroups and examining the sociodemographic correlates of divorce. This topic is salient not only because the U.S. population is aging, but also because the marital biographies of adults ages 50 and older are increasingly complex, reflecting earlier experiences of divorce and remarriage. We anticipate that the rate of divorce among middle-aged and older adults may have increased since 1990 as cohorts (e.g., the Baby Boomers) that came of age during the rapid acceleration of divorce during the 1970s and early 1980s reach age 50 and beyond. Most divorced people eventually remarry and remarriages are at greater risk of divorce than first marriages (Sweeney, 2010), meaning that in the coming decades greater proportions of middle-aged and older marrieds—who are actually remarrieds—face a higher risk of divorce.

Our approach is primarily descriptive as we aim to provide trend data on divorce and to identify the sociodemographic characteristics associated with divorce among today's middle-aged and older adults. To begin, we calculate the 1990 and 2009 divorce rates (and numbers of divorces) for individuals ages 50 and older as well as separately for middle-aged (ages 50-64) and older (ages 65 and older) adults to determine whether the risk of divorce has increased over the past two decades. Additionally, we estimate 2009 divorce rates for various subgroups to show how the likelihood of divorce varies by age group, gender, race-ethnicity, education,

marriage order, and marital duration. Next, we present bivariate comparisons of those who divorced versus remained married across these same sociodemographic characteristics. Finally, we estimate a regression model predicting divorce to evaluate how these characteristics operate in a multivariate context. This model provides correlational evidence only; divorces took place during the past 12 months whereas the sociodemographic characteristics are measured at interview. Thus, only factors that would not have changed in response to divorce are included in the model. Other factors associated with divorce, such as income, employment status, and region of residence, are excluded for this reason.

Methods

We conducted original analyses of the 2009 American Community Survey (ACS) data to estimate the current divorce rate for middle-aged and older adults, which we compared to existing data from the U.S. Vital Statistics (Clarke, 1995) on the divorce rate in 1990 to illustrate how the risk of divorce has changed over the past two decades. We also used the 2009 ACS to examine subgroup variation in divorce rates and the sociodemographic correlates of divorce, including the role of the marital biography in the risk of divorce among middle-aged and older adults.

2009 American Community Survey

The 2009 ACS is a nationwide annual survey designed to obtain information formerly gathered through the Census long-form sample, including demographic, economic, housing, and social characteristics of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Marital history questions have been added to the survey since 2008 in response to the lack of national data on the incidence of marriage and divorce (Elliott et al., 2010). We considered middle-aged and older adults both together and separately. The ACS sample was weighted to represent the entire

population that was at risk of divorce, yielding 62,104,729 people ages 50 and older, 39,331,775 people ages 50-64, and 22,722,954 people ages 65 and older.

The divorce rate. ACS respondents are asked whether they experienced a divorce in the past 12 months. To calculate the divorce rate, we divided the number of people who reported a divorce in the past 12 months by the number at risk of divorce during the past 12 months. Those at risk of divorce include: those who divorced or were widowed in the past 12 months and those who remained married or separated at the time of the interview. A recent report documents the superiority of the ACS versus other data sources (e.g., the National Survey of Family Growth and the Survey of Income and Program Participation) for estimating the divorce rate (Ratcliffe, Acs, Dore, & Moskowitz, 2008).

Sociodemographic characteristics. The ACS includes several indicators that prior research has shown are related to divorce. *Age* is coded dichotomously to compare those 50-64 (i.e., middle-aged adults) with those 65 and older (i.e., older adults, reference category). *Gender* is coded 1 for women and 0 for men (reference category). *Race/ethnicity* is a series of dummy variables: Black, Hispanic, Other, and White (reference category). *Education* distinguishes among those with less than a high school degree, a high school degree (reference category), some college, and a college degree or more. There are two variables that capture the marital biography. First, a *marriage order* dummy variable differentiates between those in a first (reference category) versus higher-order (i.e., remarriage) marriage. Second, *marital duration* is coded categorically: 0-9 years, 10-19 years, 20-29 years, 30-39 years, and 40 or more years (reference category).

Logistic regression was used to estimate the correlates of divorcing in the past 12 months (coded 1) versus remaining married (coded 0). Individuals who were widowed in the past 12

months are included in the remained married category. Excluding them from the analysis produced substantively similar findings (results not shown). All analyses were conducted using replicate weighting techniques as recommended by the U.S. Census Bureau to generate robust standard errors since the ACS involves a complex sampling design (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

1990 U.S. Vital Statistics Report

The U.S. Vital Statistics Report (Clarke, 1995) includes both the divorce rate and the number of persons who divorced during 1990 by five year age intervals separately for men and women. The characteristics (including age) of divorcing couples come from the divorce-registration area (DRA) sample of 31 states and District of Columbia. Two states (Ohio and South Dakota) in the DRA sample did not report the ages of divorcing persons in 1990. Nonetheless, the age-specific divorce rates for men and women reported in the U.S. Vital Statistics Report are representative of the 1990 population (Clarke, 1995). To calculate the divorce rate, we begin by dividing the number of divorced persons by the divorce rate to obtain the number of persons at risk of divorce. Summing the numbers divorced and numbers at risk across age intervals (and gender) as appropriate and then dividing the numbers divorced by the numbers at risk yields the 1990 divorce rates for persons ages 50 and older, 50-64, and 65 and older.

Estimating the numbers of persons ages 50 and older, 50-64, and 65 and older who divorced at the national level requires adjusting the data to reflect the fact that the DRA sample represents 49% of all divorces that occurred in the U.S. in 1990 (Clarke, 1995). We explored two approaches. First, we divided the age-specific numbers of persons in the DRA sample by 0.49. Second, we multiplied the 1990 divorce rate by the number of married persons in the 1990 Census (Ruggles, et al., 2010) to estimate the national number of divorces for each of the three

age groups. The second approach generated a larger increase in the number of divorces over time (i.e., between 1990 and 2009) than the first method and thus we report the numbers from the first method for a more conservative estimate.

Despite its limitations, the Vital Statistics offers the best available data with which to estimate the national divorce rate in 1990. A state-by-state validation study conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau staff (Elliott, Simmons, & Lewis, 2010) indicates that marital events data in the ACS and U.S. Vital Statistics (including the DRA sample) are comparable. Estimates for more recent years are not possible because the federal government discontinued the collection of vital statistics on marriages and divorces at the state level in 1996.

To ensure that our results are robust, we performed a supplemental analysis by restricting the 2009 ACS data to only the DRA sample states for which age at the time of divorce was reported in 1990. The results from this supplemental analysis are nearly identical to those based on the entire nation, as reported in the Results section below, suggesting that the rise in the divorce rate is not an artifact of including ACS data from all states.

Results

As shown in Figure 1, the divorce rate has doubled since 1990, rising from 4.7 to 9.7 (9.5 in the supplemental analysis) divorced persons per 1,000 married persons. This pattern belies the overall trend in the U.S. divorce rate during this time period, which was essentially flat (Amato, 2010). The doubling of the rate of divorce among middle-aged and older adults translates into a substantial increase in the number of people over age 50 that experience divorce. In 1990, approximately 206,007 people over age 50 got divorced, whereas in 2009 about 604,643 got divorced. To contextualize this trend, consider that fewer than 1 in 10 persons who divorced in 1990 was over age 50 compared to more than 1 in 4 today (result not shown). That is, more than

one-quarter of people who divorced in 2009 were ages 50 or older. Furthermore, assuming the divorce rate remains constant over the next two decades—a conservative assumption based on the recent trend—the number of persons over age 50 that would experience divorce in 2030 would rise by one-third to over 807,229 (authors' calculation based on age-specific projected population sizes in 2030 [U.S. Census Bureau, 2004]), reflecting the accelerating growth in the older adult population that will occur over the next 20 years.

[Figure 1 about here]

This pattern holds for middle-aged (ages 50-64) and older (ages 65 and older) adults as shown in Figure 2. Both groups exhibit approximately a doubling in the divorce rate since 1990. Among the middle-aged, the divorce rate rose from 6.9 to 12.6 (12.3 in the supplemental analysis) divorced persons per 1,000 married persons between 1990 and 2009. Similarly, the divorce rate climbed from 1.6 to 4.7 (4.4. in the supplemental analysis) among older adults. The difference in magnitude of the divorce rates for the two age groups means that the number of persons divorcing is much higher among middle-aged than older adults. In 2009, about 496,754 persons ages 50-64 got divorced versus roughly 107,889 persons ages 65 and older. Assuming that the respective divorce rates for middle-aged and older adults remain constant over the next two decades, the numbers of persons that we estimate would experience divorce in 2030 would climb by over 30,000 among the middle-aged and more than 80,000 among older adults.

[Figure 2 about here]

Table 1 shows the divorce rates for various subgroups, both for adults ages 50 and older as well as separately for middle-aged and older adults. The divorce rates are quite similar for older men and women. There is some racial and ethnic variation in the risk of divorce among those ages 50 and older, with Whites (8.7 divorced persons per 1,000 married persons)

experiencing the lowest rate of divorce and Blacks the highest (18.6 divorced persons per 1,000

married persons). Hispanics are in the middle (12 divorced persons per 1,000 married persons).

The divorce rate also differs by education. Those with a college degree experience a

considerably smaller risk of divorce (8.4 divorced persons per 1,000 married persons ages 50 and

older) compared to those with lower levels of education (the divorce rate ranges from 9.6-11

divorced persons per 1,000 married persons ages 50 and older among those with less than a

college degree). But perhaps the most striking differentials are those for marital biography. The

risk of divorce varies dramatically by both marriage order and marital duration. The rate of

divorce among those ages 50 and older is 2.5 times higher for individuals in remarriages than

first marriages. During middle age, the divorce rate is about 2 times greater for remarrieds than

first marrieds. During older adulthood, the differential approaches a factor of 4. In terms of

marital duration, the divorce rate among individuals ages 50 and older is 10 times greater for

those married 0-9 years versus those married 40 or more years. The rate of divorce declines

roughly linearly with rising marital duration. The stark differences in the rate of divorce in first

versus higher order marriages and by marital duration suggest that the marital biography is

central to the risk of divorce during middle and older adulthood.

[Table 1 about here]

The sociodemographic characteristics of adults ages 50 and older who divorce versus

remained married are shown in Table 2. The two groups significantly differ across all

characteristics except gender. Those who divorce are young compared to those who remain

married. Whereas over 80% of those who divorce are middle-aged, slightly less than two-thirds

of those who remain married are middle-aged. Relative to individuals who remain married

(21%), those who divorce are disproportionately non-White (30%). They are also less likely to

have a college degree—24% of those who divorce have at least a college degree versus 28%

among those who remain married. The most striking differences between the two groups emerge

in their marital biographies. Less than one-half (47%) of those who divorce are in first marriages

compared to 70% of those who remain married. That is, a majority of those who divorce are in

remarriages whereas most of those who remain married are in first marriages. Not surprisingly

then, marital duration is much lower, on average, among those who divorce (46% have been

married fewer than 20 years) than those who remain married (59% have been married at least 30

years).

[Table 2 about here]

Table 3 shows the coefficients and odds ratios from the logistic regression model

estimating the probability of divorce during the last 12 months. As expected, the odds that

middle-aged adults divorce are 1.6 times greater than those of older adults. There is no

significant gender difference in the likelihood of divorce. Blacks and Hispanics are more likely

than Whites to divorce and the likelihood for Blacks significantly exceeds that of Hispanics ($p <$

.001, result not shown). Those with a college degree are just 0.83 times as likely to divorce as

those with a high school degree. The odds of divorce are roughly 40% higher in remarriages than

first marriages. The association between marital duration and divorce is negative. For example,

the odds of divorce are more than 6 times larger among those married less than 10 years versus

those married at least 40 years. Relative to those married 40 or more years, the odds of divorce

are 3.6, 2.8, and 2 times greater for those married 10-19, 20-29, and 30-39 years, respectively.

Thus, the risk of divorce is lowest for long-term first marrieds (although marriage order and

marital duration do not significantly interact in their effects on the likelihood of divorce, result

not shown).

[Table 3 about here]

In supplemental analyses (results not shown, available upon request from the authors), we estimated logistic regression models predicting divorce separately for middle-aged and older adults. The pattern of findings obtained for middle-aged adults was the same as described above for individuals ages 50 and older. Among older adults, the results were largely similar, with two exceptions. First, older women are more likely than older men to divorce. Second, having a college degree or more is not associated with lower odds of divorce although those with less than a high school degree experience greater odds of divorce than those with a high school degree ($p < .05$).

Discussion

The divorce rate among middle-aged and older adults has doubled over the past two decades. This trend is at odds with the overall pattern of divorce for the U.S. population as a whole, which is characterized by stability and perhaps even a slight decline in the rate of divorce (Amato, 2010; Cherlin, 2010). The rise in the rate of divorce among adults ages 50 and over is substantively significant; it should not be dismissed as a mere artifact of a small base rate. The doubling of the divorce rate coupled with the aging of the population translates into a considerable share of today's divorces occurring to middle-aged and older adults. In fact, 1 in 4 persons who divorced in 2009 was age 50 or older. More than 600,000 adults ages 50 and older got divorced in 2009. This is a significant share of the divorcing population, especially compared to 1990, when fewer than 1 in 10 persons who divorced was age 50 or older.

Our national portrait illustrates the linkages between key sociodemographic characteristics and the risk of divorce among today's middle-aged and older adults. The divorce rate is higher among middle-aged than older adults, non-Whites than Whites, and those with a

high school compared to a college degree. Additionally, the divorce rate is 2.5 times higher for those in remarriages versus first marriages and it is highest among those with the shortest marriages. These patterns persist in a multivariate analysis predicting the likelihood of divorce among married people ages 50 and older. Older adults are less likely to divorce than middle-aged adults. Blacks are most likely to divorce, followed by Hispanics, and then Whites. This result is distinctive from that observed among younger adults for whom Hispanics and Whites share similar odds of divorce (Amato, 2010). Education is negatively associated with divorce. The two components of the marital biography—marriage order and marital duration—are both related to the odds of divorce. Higher order marriages and marriages of shorter duration are more likely to end through divorce. Results are similar for both middle-aged and older adults, but among older adults, having a college degree is not protective against divorce.

Although this profile identifies the rise in divorce among middle-aged and older adults as well as its sociodemographic correlates, it does not explicitly address the important question of why divorce has doubled among adults ages 50 and older. Indeed, the causes underlying the rapid rise in divorce among middle-aged and older adults are difficult if not impossible to establish using existing data. Nonetheless, our analyses provide indirect evidence of what could be the primary factor in this trend: the shifting marital biographies of middle-aged and older adults. The composition of the middle-aged and older population arguably has not changed sufficiently on other dimensions (e.g., education, race-ethnicity) related to divorce to yield such a dramatic rise in the risk of divorce. But the marital biographies of older adults have altered considerably in recent decades as individuals that came of age during the rise of divorce and remarriage during the 1970s and early 1980s are now entering middle and later adulthood.

Today, individuals ages 50 and older have the most complex marital biographies of the U.S. population (Kreider & Ellis, 2011).

In 1980, just 19% of married persons ages 50 and older were in remarriages versus 30% in 2009 (Ruggles et al., 2010). We rely on 1980 as a baseline rather than 1990 because data on marriage order were not collected in the 1990 decennial census and the 1990 CPS June Supplement that collected information on marital history does not include persons over age 65. This pattern is characteristic of both middle-aged and older adults: the proportions in remarriages rose from 18% to 32% and 20% to 27%, respectively. Our analyses show that the odds of divorce are roughly 40% higher for those in higher order than first marriages, net of demographic characteristics and marital duration. Moreover, the actual rate at which remarrieds divorced in 2009 is 2.5 times larger than that of first marrieds. Over half of adults ages 50 and older who divorced in 2009 were in remarriages compared to less than one-third of those who remained married.

The other component of the marital biography is marital duration, which is confounded with marriage order. This is particularly true for middle-aged and older adults, who tend to be in either long-term first marriages or shorter-term remarriages. Still, marital duration is associated with the risk of divorce net of marriage order, with individuals in long-term marriages much less likely to divorce than their counterparts in marriages of shorter durations. Nearly one-half of those who divorced in 2009 were married less than 20 years whereas among those who remained married, most were married for 30 or more years.

Gerontological research has conceptualized marital dissolution in terms of widowhood, largely ignoring the ramifications of divorce that occurs during middle and older adulthood. Our research demonstrates that this approach is outmoded. Since 1990 the divorce rate has doubled

among persons ages 50 and older. One-quarter of those who divorced in 2009 were ages 50 and older. Future research should address the predictors and consequences of divorce that occurs during middle and older adulthood. As the U.S. population ages, the number of persons ages 50 and older that experience divorce will continue to climb by one-third even if the divorce rate remains unchanged. The rise in divorce among middle-aged and older adults is not only likely to shape the health and well-being of those who experience it directly, but also to have ramifications for the well-being of family members (e.g., children and grandchildren) and intensify the demands placed on the broader institutional support systems available to middle-aged and older adults.

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Figure 1. Divorce Rate and Number of Persons that Experience Divorce, Ages 50+

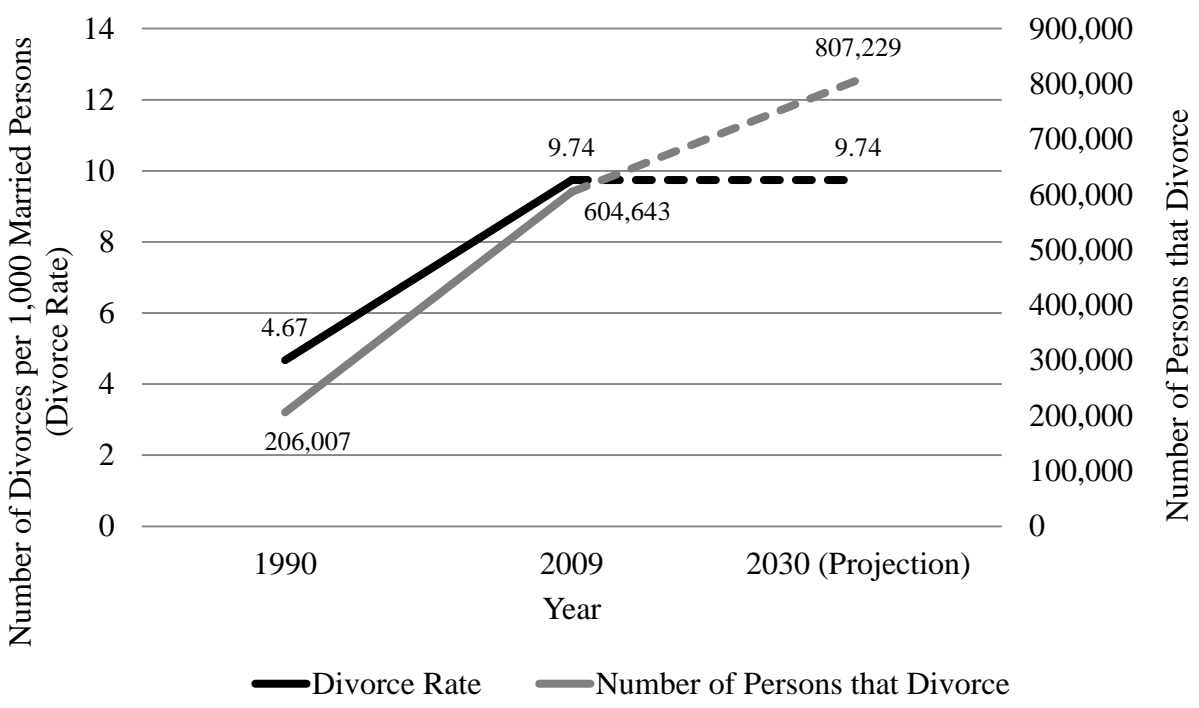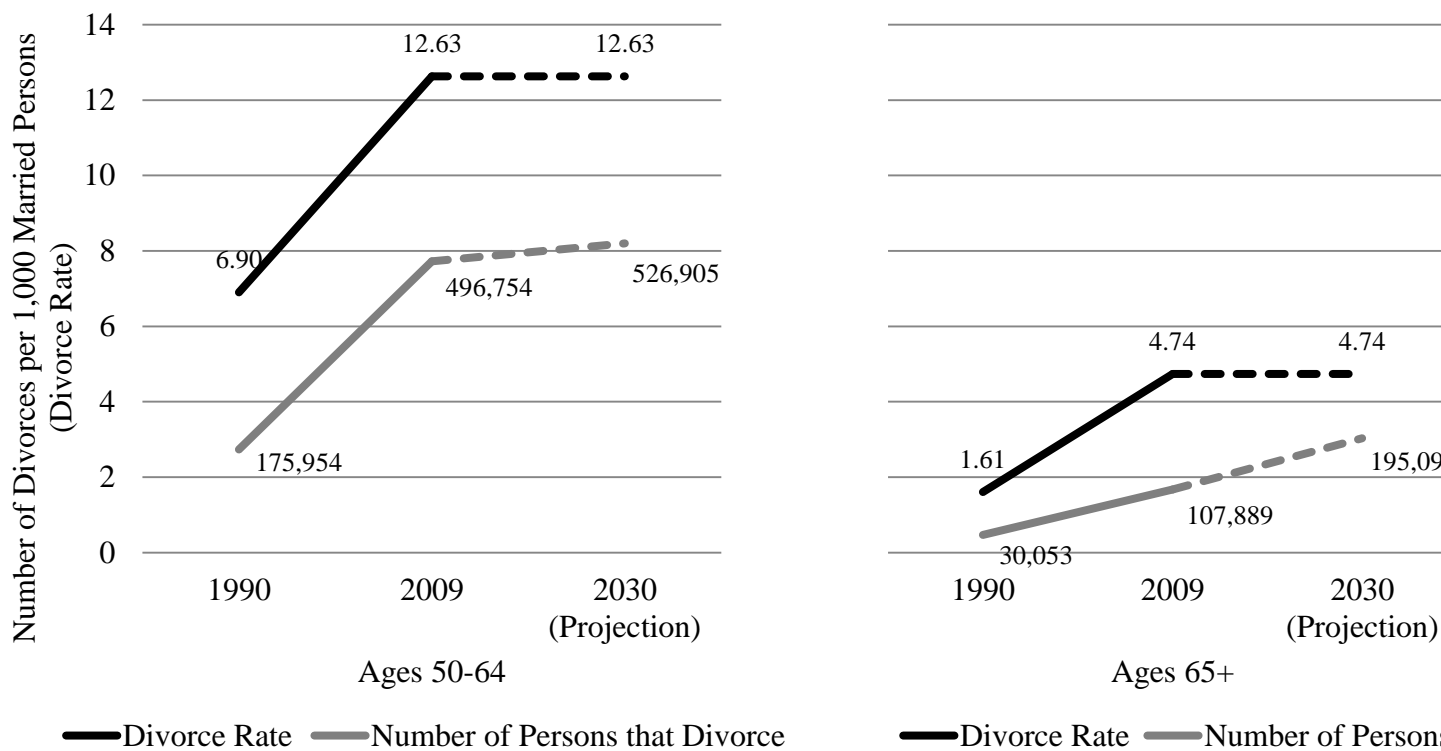Figure 2. Divorce Rate and Number of Persons that
Experience Divorce, Ages 50-64 and Ages 65+

Note: The 2030 projections of the numbers of persons that divorce (i.e., 526,905 for ages 50-64 and 195,095 for ages 65+) do not sum to the 2030 projection of the number of persons ages 50 and older that divorced shown in Figure 1 (807,229) because each estimate is derived from an age-group-specific divorce rate.

Table 1. Divorce Rates for Selected Demographic Characteristics by Age

	50+	50-64	65+
Total	9.74	12.63	4.74
Gender			
Men	9.81	13.10	4.58
Women	9.65	12.14	4.93
Race and ethnicity			
White	8.70	11.57	4.09
Black	18.58	22.23	10.36
Hispanic	12.01	14.18	6.80
Others	9.49	11.14	5.81
Education			
Less than high school	10.17	14.20	6.24
High school graduate	9.62	13.20	4.43
Some college	11.04	13.77	4.93
Bachelor's degree or more	8.39	10.46	3.73
Marriage order			
First marriage	6.53	8.89	2.75
Higher order marriage	17.03	20.34	10.11
Marital duration			
0-9 years	29.22	31.03	21.45
10-19 years	16.62	17.99	10.58
20-29 years	11.68	12.14	9.19
30-39 years	7.46	7.70	6.05
40+ years	2.79	4.05	2.44
Weighted N	62,104,729	39,331,775	22,772,954

Source: 2009 ACS

Note: The divorce rate is the number of divorced persons per 1,000 married persons.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Persons Who Divorced and Persons Who Remained Married in the Last 12 Months, Ages 50+

	Divorced	Married
Age***		
50-64	82%	63%
65+	18%	37%
Gender		
Men	53%	52%
Women	47%	48%
Race and ethnicity***		
White	70%	79%
Black	14%	7%
Hispanic	10%	8%
Others	6%	6%
Education***		
Less than high school	15%	14%
High school graduate	30%	30%
Some college	31%	27%
Bachelor's degree or more	24%	28%
Marriage order***		
First marriage	47%	70%
Higher order marriage	53%	30%
Marital duration***		
0-9 years	26%	8%
10-19 years	20%	12%
20-29 years	25%	20%
30-39 years	20%	26%
40+ years	9%	33%
Weighted N	604,643	61,500,086

*** $p < .001$

Source: 2009 ACS

Note: Column total for some variables may not equal 100% because of rounding error.

Table 3. Coefficients (b), Odds Ratios [exp(b)], and Standard Errors (s.e.) from the Logistic Regression of the Likelihood of Divorce in the Last 12 Months, Ages 50+

	b		exp(b)	s.e.
Age				
50-64	0.468	***	1.597	0.044
65+ (reference group)				
Gender				
Women	0.033		1.034	0.026
Men (reference group)				
Race and ethnicity				
White (reference group)				
Black	0.558	***	1.747	0.039
Hispanic	0.191	**	1.210	0.055
Others	0.088		1.092	0.071
Education				
Less than high school	0.098		1.102	0.051
High school graduate (reference group)				
Some college	0.007		1.007	0.041
Bachelor's degree or more	-0.187	***	0.830	0.043
Marriage order				
First marriage (reference group)				
Higher order marriage	0.342	***	1.408	0.039
Marital duration				
0-9 years	1.815	***	6.141	0.058
10-19 years	1.287	***	3.621	0.068
20-29 years	1.040	***	2.831	0.058
30-39 years	0.668	***	1.950	0.053
40+ years (reference group)				
Constant	-6.083	***	0.002	0.049
Weighted N		62,104,729		
	F(13, 67) = 232.84			

** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$
Source: 2009 ACS