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## Are We Really Bowling Alone? Family Changes and Social Capital in American Society

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ARE WE REALLY BOWLING ALONE? FAMILY CHANGES AND SOCIAL  
CAPITAL IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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in

The Department of Sociology

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

I explore the relationship between family changes and social capital in American society. Since the mid-20th century, new types of and additions to the family structure have emerged, including cohabitation family, single-parent family, employed women, and NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, and Training). Although new types of families symbolize a more flexible definition of family, some problems have emerged which are worthy of studying. In fact, these families have recently become a primary focus of study in academia, but their social lives are rarely mentioned. I argue in my dissertation that these new types of arrangements not only changed how we define family, but also brought about changes in how we are involved in society. Members of these new types of families have difficulty accumulating social capital due to some unique conditions which stem from these family types. The unstable relationship between cohabitating couples, the scarcity of family resources in single-parent families, the heavy burdens for employed wives, and the indifferent attitudes among non-employed young people may explain why they have less social capital. The results indicated a complicated relationship between family changes and social capital. In general, family changes negatively affected social capital acquisition to some degree. However, different family changes may make different impacts on social capital. It is my hope that my research will encourage social scientists to seriously (re)examine the social life of people involved in these new types of families.

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Since the publication of *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam (Painter II and Paxton 2014), the decline in social capital has become an important topic of discussion in academic circles. Putnam concluded that American civil society was in danger because social capital, which included civic engagement and trust between members of society, had been in decline in the United States since 1960 (Putnam 2000). Social capital serves a multitude of functions in civil society, such as generating trust between people, producing a group of skillful and enthusiastic citizens, and helping sustain democracy. Thus, low social capital in a given society will engender numerous problems.

Although Putnam's research spurred discussions on social capital in American civil society, many scholars have argued against his thesis. First, the trend in civic engagement is more complicated than what Putnam described. The change in civic engagement may not be linear, and may also be inconsistent for different types of civic engagements (Park 2006; Rotolo and Wilson 2004). Furthermore, Putnam's discussion stressed the positive aspects of civic engagement, although he later acknowledged the drawbacks (Putnam 2002). Since civic engagement is very diverse, their effects have the potential to be either beneficial or harmful (Beyerlein and Hipp 2005). Generally, Putnam's lack of acknowledgment of the negative aspects of civic engagement

affects the validity of his argument. More importantly, his explanations for the decline in civic engagement are also questionable.

Specifically, Putnam concluded that the decrease in personal interactions between members of society resulted in the decline of social capital in American society. However, some studies propose different explanations for the decline and provide examples of the positive effects of non-physical interactions between members of society. In fact, non-physical communication is becoming an important method of interaction. For example, the Internet is a critical tool for people to mobilize resources and collect information (Carty 2010; Christensen and Bengtsson 2011; Drentea and Moren-Cross 2005). In addition, the decline of social capital may result from cohort differences or an increase in women's employment until the mid-1990s (Rotolo and Wilson 2007; Syvertsen, Wray-Lake, Flanagan, Osgood, and Briddell 2011).

The United States witnessed dramatic family changes since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (almost the same time as the decline in social capital), including increases in the number of cohabitating couples, single-parent families, NEETS (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), and women in the labor force. As industry has shifted in the U.S. from predominately manufacturing to service-oriented, family structures have also become more diverse, and family relations have become more unstable. While cohabitating and single-parent families are currently more common in the United States than before (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Ruggles 1997), people living

in cohabitating and single-parent households, are less likely to gain sufficient physical and emotional support (Eggebeen 2005; Cairney, Boyle, Offord, and Racine 2003). As a result, these types of families are more likely to suffer from insufficient resources and unstable relationships than other types of families (Cairney, Boyle, Offord, and Racine 2003; Demuth and Brown 2004; Skinner, Bahr, Crane, and Call 2002). Additionally, NEETS has attracted greater public attention (Toivonen 2011), particularly in relation to the recent crisis in the youth labor market (Bell and Blanchflower 2011). For example, many NEETS live with their parents or relatives, spending much of their time watching TV or on the Internet, rather than participating in civic activities (Rose, Daiches, and Potier 2012; Wattenberg 2003). Traditional gender roles have also changed. Women are more economically independent today compared to their counterparts in the past (Villarreal and Yu 2007). Women have more responsibilities and less free time, because they tend to fulfill the domestic needs of their families, as well as the financial needs. Thus, the economic achievements of women may not make a positive impact on their social capital, since employed women may be less interested in civic engagement because of their greater time constraints compared to men.

The decline in social capital negatively affects civil society and democracy. It is necessary to figure out what has negatively affected social capital in the past few decades. Few social scientists consider the relationship between social capital and changes in family structure. On the



surface, the connection seems weak; however, I argue that the family changes and the decline in social capital are related to each other. Family, as the primary institution responsible for an individual's socialization, greatly affects individual behaviors, including civic engagement (Alesina and Giuliano 2008; Kim and Wilcox 2013). The quality of relationships among family members also impacts social capital (Pong, Hao, and Gardner 2005; Sandefur, Meier, and Campbell 2006). Recent changes in families, including the rise in single-parent households, cohabitating couples, NEETS, and female employment, undoubtedly alter a family's ability to produce social capital. Overall, I argue that family changes provide useful insights to understanding the recent decline in social capital in the U.S.

## **1.2 Motivation**

Changes in family structure and family culture have resulted in a more diverse society characterized by various family types. Nonetheless, in the process of change, families have lost their ability to protect and support their members. Some changes in family dynamics might result in negative effects for individual family members and society. For instance, cohabitating unions often end after a short period of time and tend to end in the demise of the relationship, rather than resulting in marriage (Lichter, Qian, and Mellott 2006). People in single-parent households are more likely to experience difficulties with finances, poorer educational quality for their children, and distant parent-child relationships (McLanahan and Sandefur 2009). Similarly, without stable

employment, NEETS usually express less interest in social life (Newman 2012). With women's increased participation in the labor force between 1960s and the mid-1990s, they may have lost leisure time to engage in civic activities because of their increased responsibilities for both the domestic and financial needs of the family (Rotolo and Wilson 2007; Tiehen 2000). In spite of the profound influence of family on individuals, the relationship between family changes and the decline in social capital is rarely mentioned in the extant literature.

Family is a critical venue for people to accumulate social capital (Coleman 1988). Spouses expand their network size through partners' personal networks. Children's networks and their civic engagements are affected by their parents (Coulton and Irwin 2009). With the aforementioned problems resulting from changes in family structure and employment, I expect that the prevalence of cohabitating couples, single-parent households, NEETS, and female employment may have led to the decrease in social capital in the United States.

### **1.3 Research Question**

The main purpose of this dissertation is to explain how and why family changes affect social capital. Social capital is the key to keeping democracy operational and maintaining enough generalized trust in societies (Baldassarri and Diani 2007; Fukuyama 1995). However, American civil society is in danger because social capital, which includes civic engagement and trust between members of society, is in decline (Anderson, Curtis, and Grabb 2006; Putnam 2000).

This dissertation adopts a family perspective to examine what negatively affects social capital.

The family is still the most critical institution in our society, largely responsible for shaping individual social capital. Thus, this study attempts to argue that changes in the stability of family structures and the quality of family relationships have affected social capital in American society.

A strong and stable family can help its members to gain social capital. By introducing the family perspective, I believe that this dissertation can open new ways to realize why and how social capital has changed in the United States.

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Social Capital**

Social capital is defined as the investment in social relations with expected returns (Lin 2001). The returns could be physical or emotional, such as money or emotional support. On the one hand, as with other kinds of capital (e.g. human capital and cultural capital), social capital can help individuals to achieve personal goals. People with more social capital are more likely to have good academic performance in school, find jobs in the labor market, or even maintain good mental health (Coleman 1988; Lin 1987; Almedom 2005). However, social capital is different from other capitals because it is a relational resource. Social capital does not belong to any specific person, but it is a collective asset (Lin 2001; Portes 2000). Therefore, social capital can be measured on an aggregate level. Research also proves that the volume of social capital of a community or a society is related to criminal activities or the operation of politics (Putnam 1995). Because of the uniqueness of social capital, the change in social capital in a given society has become an important issue of discussion in academic circles. An abundance of studies focus on the volume of social capital and what affects social capital. However, the complexity of social capital also makes measurement very difficult. In order to measure social capital, scholars typically utilize civic engagement, social trust, and networks as proxies for social capital (Putnam 1997; Son and Lin 2008). People have more social capital if they engage in more civic

activities, interact with others often, and have more social trust. The proceeding section provides overviews of civic engagement, social trust, and networks, including the definitions and trends.

## **2.2 Civic Engagement, Social Trust and Networks**

Civic engagement has been used to measure social capital in academic research (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Rosenfeld, Messner, and Baumer 2001; Son and Lin 2008). By participating in civic activities, individuals are able to build new relationships (bridging groups of different people) or strengthen established relationships (bonding groups of similar people). As a result, participants in civic activities tend to have more relational resources (Bekkers, Völker, Gaag, and Flap 2008; Glanville 2004; Lin 2001; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006). Civic engagement participants usually have more social capital, and people who engage in civic activities are more politically and civically skilled since they also tend to have greater political awareness from frequent interactions in public affairs (Erickson and Nosanchuk 1990; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Nonetheless, civic engagement may result in different effects due to the complexity of civil society. Civic associations have a variety of functions and goals. Some associations focus more intently on the instrumental goal (i.e. labor unions), while others stress the expressive goal (i.e. recreational associations) (Kalmijn and Flap 2001; Lin 2001; Putnam 2000). Distinguishing among these different civic engagements is necessary in studies on social capital. Finally, participants in civic activities may share greater trust with others in society (Fukuyama 1995).

Social trust can be viewed as the main component of social capital (Newton 2001). Specifically, trust is defined as an individual's personal attitude towards the general public, rather than a set of concrete behaviors. Although different, civic engagement and social trust are strongly related (Paxton 2007; Sønderskov 2011) since frequent interaction between individuals in civic activities is key to creating social trust amongst members of society (Glanville and Paxton 2013; Park and Subramanian 2012). In general, the more social connections people build, the greater the social trust they have (Delhey and Newton 2003; Glanville, Andersson, and Paxton 2013; Welch, Sikkink, and Loveland 2007). Therefore, civic engagement is considered as the foundation of democracy and a generator of trust in society (Baldassarri and Diani 2007; Fukuyama 1995; Fung 2003; Schofer and Gourinchas 2001). Although civic engagement and social trust are correlated, the relationship between them is not simple. Because civic engagements are so diverse, the effect of various civic engagements on social trust might vary. For example, contextual factors (i.e. country level factors) may also mediate the effect of civic engagement. The findings of Wollebæk and Strømsnes (2008) and Park and Subramanian (2012) prove that civic engagement affects social trust differently across nations. Sometimes, civic engagement might even negate social trust (Uslaner and Conley 2003).

Social networks are another feature of social capital. Social capital is the resource embedded in personal networks (Adam and Rončević 2003). Two kinds of network structures

may contain more resources. First, scholars suggest that a closure network (stable and strong relationships) produces social norms and sanctions that facilitate trust and cooperative exchanges (Gargulo and Benassi 2000). For example, Coleman (1988) clearly states how a closure network among families, neighbors, and schools improves students' academic performance. Secondly, Granovetter (1985) and Burt (1995) adopt a different viewpoint. They assert that the volume of social capital is related to the extensity of networks. A closure network could make a negative impact because it creates obstacles to the transmission of information or new ideas (information is also a type of resource). In contrast, Granovetter and Burt believe that an open network with better extensity is more beneficial. The amount of social capital people have depends on how far they are able to access in networks. Although the relationships in an open network are not as strong and stable as those in a closure network, the amount of trust and exchanges might be even higher because individuals are able to contact more people with lower restraints in an open network. In sum, while there are some arguments regarding the pros and cons for a closure network and an open network, social networks certainly act as indicators of social capital in social science research.

### **2.3 The Trend in Civic Engagement, Social Trust, and Social Networks**

There are many ways to measure civic engagement, but it can generally be classified into three categories, including associational involvement (e.g. joining civic associations), political

participation (e.g. attending a political rally or voting), and public participation (e.g. engaging in volunteer activities or public discussions) (Galston 2007; Putnam 2000; Rosenfeld, Messner, and Baumer 2001; Rotolo and Wilson 2004; Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001; Son and Lin 2008). Trends in civic engagement are inconsistent, depending on which measurements researchers utilize. Taking associational involvement as an example, based on diary data, Anderson, Curtis, and Grabb (2006) found that Americans spend less time on civic association activities from 1960s to the late 1990s. In contrast, Rotolo (1999) did not find a significant change in the trend for associational involvement. Furthermore, the number of associational memberships may show different changes at the same time. After observing individual associations, Bear, Curtis, and Grabb (2001) found that associational involvement has not changed in American society, except for churches and unions. In other words, the decline in associational involvement may only concentrate on some specific civic associations. Hence, in order to measure the complexity of civic engagement and further understand the factors responsible for historical changes, it is important to examine each civic engagement individually and distinguish between different types of associations.

Similarly, the trend in social trust is inconclusive in prior research. Paxton's research does not fully support the claim of a decline in social capital as posited by Putnam. While the trust in individuals has declined over time, the trust in institutions has remained unchanged (Paxton



1999). Park (2006) did not confirm this declining trend in social trust in his analysis either, although he found evidence that social tolerance has declined. Overall, it is difficult for social scientists to conclude that social trust has increased, decreased, or remained the same in American society.

The size of social networks is also a concern of research on social capital. McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears (2006) used the General Social Survey to attempt to describe the changes in core discussion networks over two decades in American society. They found that the network shrunk during the period from 1985 to 2004. In addition, people's core discussion networks tend to be concentrated on family members. However, Wang and Wellman (2010) discovered that friendships continued to be abundant among adult Americans and that they actually grew from 2002 to 2007. Individuals who heavily used the Internet have the most friends both online and offline, which contradicts Putnam's theory. Consequently, the change in social networks is still controversial.

Since the indicators are so diverse, the same factor (e.g. individualism) may make different impacts on these measurements. This explains the inconsistent trends in civic engagement, social trust, and social networks in the United States. Therefore, this situation reflects the importance of diverse indicators in empirical research. The next section will discuss how social scientists view this issue and proposes explanations.

## **2.4 What Affects Social Capital?**

If some types of civic engagements and social trust have declined, it is appropriate to assume that social capital in American society may also be declining. Nevertheless, the question remains: what causes this decline? Putnam argues that the popularity of television and the Internet is the main factor behind the recent decline in social capital, since the use of these mediums negates face-to-face contact essential for the production of social capital. Olken (2009) supports Putnam's argument that television and Internet have a negative impact on social capital. Other studies, however, do not support the negative relationship between the use of television and the Internet and civic engagement (Boulianne 2009; Shah, McLeod, and Yoon 2001; Norris 1996). For example, Franzen (2003) pointed out that while television has an influence on civic engagement, the Internet does not. In contradicting Putnam, some scholars have even posited the benefits of the Internet on personal networks (Chang 2006; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007; Moy, Manosevitch, Stamm, and Dunsmore 2005).

Declines in social capital may also be due to decreased participation in civic engagement by specific generations or birth cohorts. Putnam (2000) concluded that young people have dropped out of almost all forms of civic engagement. Other studies have found that some generations participate less in civic engagement in the United States (Schwadel and Stout 2012). In addition, Schwadel and Stout also demonstrated how the effects of generations or birth cohorts vary

depending on the specific measures of civic engagement. In sum, there are many possible explanations regarding the decline of social capital in social science research.

Although a number of studies try to describe how social capital has changed and what may have caused these changes, few consider the role of the family in building social capital.

Family plays an important role in civic engagement. First, the family shapes personal behaviors.

Family is one of the most critical and primary institutions responsible for the formation of basic values, beliefs, and ideologies. Family culture and parenting practices affect how individuals

socialize with other members of society outside of the family (Cicognani, Zani, Fournier, Gavray,

and Born 2011). For example, children have fewer interactions with others and reduced trust of

individuals outside of their family if their parents stressed religious beliefs and intimate

relationships within the family over interactions with other members of society (Alesina and

Giuliano 2011; Bertrand and Schoar 2006).

In addition, family structures and family relations strongly affect individual social capital. If

a family is able to provide more resources, its members naturally possess greater social capital

(Bianchi and Robinson 1997; McBride, Sherraden, and Suzanne 2006; Sloam 2014). People

living in two-parent households typically have more advantages than their counterparts living in

single-parent households, because of the greater earnings potential of two parents and more

available caretakers. Previous studies show that two-parent households greatly benefit children's

educational attainment, occupational development, and civic engagement (Bianchi and Robinson 1997; Fomby and Cherlin 2007; Sun and Li 2011). Furthermore, the quality of relationships among family members significantly affects the formation of social capital. Individuals are able to use family members' networks to expand their own network size when family relationships are strong and stable (Milardo 1982; Huston 2000; Schimmele and Wu 2011). Similarly, Wolfinger and Wolfinger (2008) conclude that people are more likely to engage in civic activities if they live in a more stable family environment.

In fact, Putnam (2000) mentioned the possible relationship between the decline in social capital and family changes (e.g. fewer marriages or more divorces) since these two phenomena occurred at almost the same time (beginning in the 1960s). Yet, Putnam cannot arrive at a consistent conclusion due to the complexity of civic engagement. According to Putnam, these family changes have both positive and negative effects on civic engagement. For example, married or parent status boosts membership in some groups, such as churches or community organizations, while also decreasing the involvement in other groups, like sports, political, or cultural groups. People without partners also usually have large personal networks. Similarly, Schimmele (2011) found that there was no significant effect of marital status on civic engagement. Several factors may explain the inclusive results of previous studies. First, it is much more difficult to build a theory capable of covering all of the different marital situations

(single, married, widowed, divorced, separated, or cohabitating). Some types of marital statuses might affect one civic activity similarly, but possibly affect another civic engagement differently. Therefore, a better strategy is to focus on two comparable marital situations and see how they affect civic engagement. For instance, since married people and cohabitating people are both in relationships, they are suitable targets to compare patterns of civic engagement (people with partners and people without partners could be two totally different situations in civic engagement and personal networks). Although civic engagement is a useful way to accumulate social capital, not every civic engagement has the same effect on social capital. Some civic engagements may not produce social capital at all (Uslaner and Conley 2003). We should consider not only how marital status affects civic engagement, but also why various kinds of civic engagements have different effects.

Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, families in American society have experienced changes that have shaken the traditional family structure and family relations. This study argues that there are four major changes regarding family that may be related to the decline in social capital, including the rise in cohabitation, single-parent households, female employment, and NEETS. Although these family changes may have a positive impact on individuals, they are also likely to hurt without sufficient supports. People living in single-parent households and parents living with NEETS are often burdened with heavier economic and emotional duties. Cohabitating couples may

experience relatively unstable relationships. Finally, working mothers must work longer than men and non-working mothers as they tend to take on both the domestic and financial needs of the family. Consequently, they may not be able to spend much time on personal connections and civic engagement.

## **2.5 Major Changes Leading to the Decline in Civic Engagement**

There are increasing numbers of cohabitating unions in American society (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Jose, O'Leary, and Moyer 2010; Smock 2000). According to the United States Census Bureau, the number of cohabitating couples in the United States has increased from 3 million in 1996 to 8 million in 2014 (Census Bureau 2015). On the one hand, cohabitation may be viewed as a step before marriage. Many individuals who decide to cohabit often intend to eventually get married (Cohan and Kleinbaum 2002). Therefore, increasing numbers of people experience cohabitation before marriage (Hewitt and de Vaus 2009; Manning and Smock 2005; Raymo, Iwasawa, and Bumpass 2009). On the other hand, some people see cohabitation as an alternative to marriage or singlehood (Kiernan 2001). For them, marriage is not an ultimate goal for each romantic relationship anymore. Hence, we see not only the quantity change (the number of cohabitation couples) but also the quality change (the meaning of cohabitation in American society).

Since cohabitation is not just a temporary transition, it is necessary to carefully examine it.

Current cohabitation research focuses on several topics. First, why do people choose cohabitation?

For example, Smock and Gupta (2013) argue that the rise in cohabitation can be attributed to individualism, economy transformation (more women in the job market), and more egalitarian gender role attitudes. Edin and Kefalas (2005) also found that individuals from lower socioeconomic classes are more likely to cohabit because of scant resources and a limited pool of suitable partners. Second, some studies are concerned with how cohabitating couples interact with each other. Generally speaking, cohabitation promotes greater instability in family life (Smock and Gupta 2013). Many researchers have found that cohabitating couples are less committed to the institution of marriage and have poor communication skills (Cohan and Kleinbaum 2002; Heuveline and Timberlake 2004; Stanley, Whitton, and Markman 2004; Thomson and Colella 1992). Consequently, cohabitation is very likely to dissolve once couples experience crises or find better partners (Lichter, Qian, and Mellott 2006). Even though some couples may transition from cohabitation into marriage, cohabitation experiences may be related to future marriage instability and increase the risk of divorce (Dush, Cohan, and Amato 2003; Hall and Zhao 1995; Skinner, Baher, Crane, and Call 2002; Teachman 2003). Third, some researchers pay attention to those children who live in cohabitating families. These children are considered disadvantaged (Bourdais and Juby 2013). For example, Dunifon and Jones (2003)

found that cohabitation is associated with greater delinquency and lower math scores. Also, children born to cohabitating parents enhance union instability in the future (Manning, Smock, and Majumdar 2004).

The social capital of cohabitating couples is worthy of noticing. Putnam (1995) mentioned that family transformations (e.g. few marriages and children) may be related to the decline in social capital because married people are more involved in civic activities. Moreover, cohabiters are less likely to gain partners' support or utilize partners' networks to build new connections, since the quality of the relationship between cohabiters is relatively poor because of more negative communication techniques and physical aggression (Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman 2009). For example, Brown, Bulanda, and Lee (2005) found that cohabiters report more depressive symptoms than married people. Their study reflects how the quality of relationships could affect individual mental health (emotional support is one function of social capital). Social capital is the resource embedded in personal networks. Cohabitating people have difficulty gaining social capital without stable relationships. Thus, cohabitating people tend to have lower social capital. Therefore:

Hypothesis 1: Cohabitation status negatively affects social capital.

The increase in single-parent families is another factor that is possibly related to social capital, especially for children. In the United States, single-parent households have become a



common family type. Seventy-three percent (73%) of all children younger than 18 years old lived with two biological parents in 1960, but the number dropped to less than 46% in 2013 (Hernandez 1988; Pew Research Center 2014). The prevalence of single-parent families is associated with the improvement in women's social status in the economy, the rise of individualism, and industrialization and urbanization (Riley 1991; Ruggles 1997). However, children living in single-parent households may encounter more difficulties when they grow up (Breivik and Olweus 2006).

Parents play critical roles in children's development, including socialization and children's networks. Children can use parents' resources and networks to increase their own social capital (Leonard 2005; Pong, Hao, and Gardner 2005). For example, if parents are highly involved in neighborhood activities, their children can also build more connections with neighbors. Without the assistance from their fathers or mothers, children in single-parent families are more likely to experience low education, poverty, and greater tension in parent-child relationships (Amato and Cheadl 2006; Carlson 2006; Cavanagh and Huston 2006; DeLeire and Kalil 2002; McLanahan and Sandefur 2009). More importantly, many single-parent families are also cohabitating households in American society. The unstable relationship between cohabitating couples may result in the deterioration of children's well-being. Scant resources and relatively poor relationships with parents may hurt these children's ability to further accumulate social capital

through their parents. Therefore, people from single-parent families are expected to accumulate less social capital. Thus:

Hypothesis 2: Living in a single-parent household is negatively related to social capital.

The term “NEETS” specifically refers to young people who are not in education, employment, or training (Roberts 2011). In other words, instead of establishing their own home and living independently, increasing numbers of adult children rely on their parents for economic support. NEETS has already become a common scenario in some countries (Hsu 2010; Maguire and Thompson 2007; Toivonen 2011). In the EU, the number of NEETS has sharply increased since 2008. In 2011, 13% of young people (7.5 million) aged 15-24 were excluded from the labor market and education in Europe (European Commission 2012). The percentage of NEETS is over 17% in Bulgaria, Ireland, Italy, and Spain (Mascherini, Salvatore, Meierkord, and Jungblut 2012). In Japan, there were at least 640,000 NEETS in 2005 (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare). NEETS have grown rapidly in American society. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 15% of American youth qualified as NEETS in 2011 (Time 2012). Undoubtedly, the economic dependency of NEETS on their parents dilutes family resources, which might negatively affect social capital for parents and children. More importantly, the characteristics of these young people and their relationship with their parents make a great impact on their social capital.

Recently, some studies have found that more young people are unconcerned about public issues and civic activities (Social Exclusion Unit 1999; Twenge, Campbell, and Freeman 2012). This may be due to the greater prevalence of NEETS in modern society. Young people now meet a greater challenge in making smooth transitions to stable employment, previously synonymous with adulthood (Toivonen 2011). In the past, five transitions were considered to lead to adulthood: leaving home, completing school, entering the workplace, getting married, and having children (Settersten and Ray 2010). Recently, social scientists have paid greater attention to these pathways to adulthood because of the obvious delays in these transition patterns amongst NEETS (Messineo and Wojtkiewicz 2004). A number of youth cannot find employment after graduating, and persistent unemployment makes it difficult for young people to survive in the short and long-run. NEETS, unable to find employment, are also prone to engage in problematic behaviors, and reduce their social and political involvements (Bay and Beckesaune 2002; Bynner and Parsons 2002; Hagquist 1998; Hammer 2007; Isengard 2003). NEETS also tend to experience psychological distress. For example, NEETS tend not only to lack communication skills and confidence due to long-term unemployment, but also to feel lonely, anxious, and depressed (Creed and Reynolds 2001; Hammer 2000; Toivonen 2011). Overall, early research shows that NEETS lack social capital (physical and mental support).

Without stable employment, NEETS generally have no choice but to live with parents or relatives (Newman 2008; Rossi and Rossi 1990; Szydlik 2008). They also tend to remain single because of insufficient economic stability. This co-residence between generations has its consequences. On the one hand, young people have more opportunities to interact with their parents when living in the same household. In the short term, these adult children could build closer and more equal relationships with their parents or older relatives (Antonucci and Jackson 1990; Isengard and Szydlik 2012; Leopold 2012). On the other hand, when adult children rely economically on their parents, their parents inevitably feel stressed. When adult children stay at home longer, the parent-child relationship may also suffer (Mitchell 2006; Newman 2012). A stable and strong family relationship is premised on the creation of additional connections outside of the family, but NEETS may not join in civic activities and have few contacts outside of the family because of their lack of employment.

Increasing numbers of young people encounter disappointing economic situations that force them to stay at home. They have fewer opportunities to make contact with others and fewer resources to engage in civic activities. As a result, NEETS have less social capital. Therefore:

Hypothesis 3: NEET status negatively affects social capital.

In the past, women were major civic participants. However, with the increase in their employment, women tend to spend less time on civic engagement (Rotolo and Wilson 2007;

Taniguchi 2006; Tiehen 2000). Changing gender roles in families symbolize the economic independence of women. In the recent past, men were predominately employed outside of the home, and women were primarily responsible for home and childcare responsibilities. Currently, more women participate in the labor force than in the past, although this increase stopped beginning in the mid-1990s. Between 1980 and 2000 in the United States, statistics show that female employment rates (for women over 15) increased from 44% to 57% (World Bank 2013). Undeniably, women have made great economic achievements, but have also taken on more responsibilities for both the financial and domestic needs of their families.

Even though women play a critical role in the labor force, they are still responsible for significantly more housework than their male counterparts (Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, and Robinson 2012). According to OECD, among couples in which both partners work, women spend more than two extra hours per day in unpaid work. Even in couples in which the woman is the breadwinner, men only do as much housework as women (OECD 2012). Women are obviously overburdened when unpaid work at home is combined with paid work (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie 2006; Milkie, Raley, and Bianchi 2009; Sayer 2005). As a result, employment may decrease the leisure time of women, but not for men (Taniguchi 2006).

Time is a necessary component of ensuring participation in civic engagements and the development of personal connections. A high stress environment that leaves women

overburdened and fatigued prevents them from participating in civic activities and interacting with others. Overall, employed women participate less in civic engagements than non-employed women. The burdens on employed women can be alleviated if the government offers useful supports, such as daycare centers or parental leave. For example, Andersen, Grabb, and Curist (2006) find that the declines in associational involvement are not significant in Canada, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom because of better welfare policies that have streamlined women's greater participation in the labor force, while allowing for the continued care for their family's domestic needs. In contrast, the U.S. has a poor welfare system, leading to a decline in associational involvement as women have increased their labor force participation. Thus, I expect employed women will have less social capital. Therefore,

Hypothesis 4: Employment status negatively affects social capital for women.

## **CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Data Collection**

This analysis used quantitative methods to investigate the primary research question: how and why has social capital changed in U.S. society? In order to investigate this research question, this analysis utilized two nationally representative data sets, the Social Capital Benchmark Survey and National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97). The Social Capital Benchmark Survey is an important survey regarding social capital because it collects plentiful information on social trust and individual civic engagement (e.g. associational involvement, public participation, political participation, and voting behavior). Social interactions are also included in this survey. Although this survey was only conducted in 2000 and 2006, it provides many details on social capital.

NLSY97 is panel data comprised of 8,984 men and women born between 1980 and 1984. Respondents were first interviewed in 1997 when they were ages 12 through 17 and were interviewed annually since the outset of the data collection. The latest data was collected in 2013. NLSY97 contains detailed information about family history, which is useful to address the research questions in this analysis. Although this survey does not target social capital, it includes data on personal civic engagement, including charitable behaviors, volunteerism, community engagement, voting behaviors, and political awareness. More importantly, the advantage of

NLSY97 is that we can test the effect of family structure on the civic engagement of young people.

The difference between the Social Capital Benchmark Survey and National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 is clear. Specifically, they represent two different academic concerns, which is reflected in the questionnaire designs for each. The two surveys also use entirely different measurements of social capital. Although these differences might affect the validity of the present analysis, there are nevertheless advantages to using both surveys. First, since the two surveys adopt different methods of collecting data (they are both nationally representative data sets), the validity of the current study will be strongly confirmed if both data are able to show similar results. Second, the analysis will provide comprehensive understandings of the change in social capital in American society by using these two data sets. For example, the Social Capital Benchmark Survey provides detailed civic engagement behaviors. Therefore, we can test how family structure is related to those indicators. NLSY97 offers time-series data on youths, which is useful to clarify the causal mechanisms, especially for young people. Since social capital is very complicated in content, the different indicators of social capital in the Social Capital Benchmark Survey and NLSY97 should help us to completely examine social capital in the United States.



### **3.2 Data Analysis**

This research utilized surveys to examine the relationship between family structure and social capital. The data in the Social Capital Benchmark Survey can be used to analyze the effects of cohabitating households and female employment on social capital. First, I used civic engagement, social trust, and social interactions as the indicators of social capital. Depending on the measurements of social capital (binary or interval-ratio variables), logit models and OLS were applied. Furthermore, I focused on the married group and cohabitating group to examine the effects of civic engagement on social trust. In order to obtain more cases, I combined the data for 2000 and 2006. The final sample size was 28,791.

The effects of single-parent households and NEETS were tested using NLSY97. The latest household information about single-parent family was in 2003 when young respondents were over 18 years old. Other variables were measured from 2006 to 2011, excluding household types. The sample size was different for different models. I decided to use a random effects model for two reasons. First, the data in NLSY97 are in panel format. With the data in multiple time points, the random effects model is a better choice than the OLS model (Breusch and Pagan's Lagrangian Multiplier test also supported this decision). Second, since a time-invariant variable (household type) is very critical in this study, using a fixed effects model is not a possible option.

### 3.3 Variables in Social Capital Benchmark Survey

#### Dependent Variables (Social Capital)

##### I. Civic engagement

1. Associational Involvement: whether respondents were members of any of 16 associations.

Based on the results of factor analysis (Table 1), I further classified 3 types of associations.

- (1) Supporting Associations (0 or 1): supporting associations include most civic associations (religious association, veteran's groups, neighborhood associations, senior groups, social welfare organizations, fraternal organizations, self-help programs, youth organizations, and PTA). Supporting associations offer some kind of assistance to their members. The help can be either emotional (religious association) or physical (social welfare organizations). If respondents joined any kind of supporting associations, they were coded as 1. Otherwise, they were coded as 0. Cases with missing values were deleted.
- (2) Self-interest Associations (0 or 1): Self-interest associations include sports clubs, professional organizations, hobby clubs, and art groups. People in self-interest associations share similar interests or tastes. People who joined self-interest associations were coded as 1 and people who did not join were coded as 0. Cases with missing values were dropped.

(3) Political Associations (0 or 1): Political associations include labor unions, ethnic organizations, and political organizations. People joining political associations typically do so to achieve instrumental goals. Most of these goals are political, such as racial equality for an ethnic organization or political positions for a political organization. Members of political associations were coded as 1 while others were coded as 0. Cases with missing values were deleted.

Table 1. Summary of Factor Analysis Results for Associational Involvement Using Principle Axis Factoring Estimation

| Item                         | Factor loadings |          |          |
|------------------------------|-----------------|----------|----------|
|                              | Factor 1        | Factor 2 | Factor 3 |
| social welfare organizations | .537            |          |          |
| senior groups                | .474            |          |          |
| self-help programs           | .453            |          |          |
| religious association        | .369            |          |          |
| fraternal organizations      | .341            |          |          |
| neighborhood associations    | .312            |          |          |
| youth organizations          | .264            |          |          |
| veteran's groups             | .246            |          |          |
| PTA                          | .212            |          |          |
| hobby clubs                  |                 | .501     |          |
| professional organizations   |                 | .433     |          |
| sports clubs                 |                 | .393     |          |
| art groups                   |                 | .375     |          |
| political organizations      |                 |          | .516     |
| ethnic organizations         |                 |          | .491     |
| labor unions                 |                 |          | .203     |

Here, I decide to use 0 or 1 (whether join civic associations or not), instead of the number of civic associations people participate in. The major reason is that I believe that the difference between people who do not join associations and people who join association is theoretically more important in this study. First, in Putnam' research, he found that American people had been less interested in any type of civic engagement, especially for association involvement. Therefore, I intend to figure out in this study why some people choose to join associations and why others want to be loners. Second, these different kinds of associations are named by survey designers. There are many ways to classify associations in different surveys. Furthermore, the number of categories in associations could also be adjusted by researchers (e.g. I re-categorize these 16 associations in this paper). The exact number of associations people participate in is meaningless in this regard.

2. Public Participation: when respondents took any action regarding public affairs, which was measured by the following five items.

- (1) Served as an officer or on a committee (0-1).
- (2) Worked on a community project in the past 12 months (0-1).
- (3) How often attended a club meeting (0-11)?
- (4) How often attended public meeting discussing town or school affairs (0-11)?
- (5) Number of times volunteered (0-11).

The result of the factor analysis showed that the five items loaded on a single dimension. Raw scores were not used. Instead, the scores for each item were standardized. The mean score was calculated for each respondent. If a case had 3 or more missing values out of these five questions, it was dropped. Total means were then calculated for these five (or fewer) items.

3. Vote (0 or 1): whether respondents voted in the 1996 presidential election (2000 data) or in the 2004 presidential election (2006 data).
4. Political Participation: when respondents took any action regarding political issues, which was measured by the following four items.
  - (1) Belonged to any group that took local action for reform (0-1).
  - (2) Signed a petition in the past 12 months (0-1).
  - (3) Attended a political meeting or rally in the past 12 months (0-1).
  - (4) Participated in demonstrations, boycotts, or marches in the past 12 months (0-1).

The result of the factor analysis showed that the four items loaded on a single factor. The mean score was calculated for each respondent. If a case had 2 or more missing values, it was dropped. Total means were then calculated for these four (or three) items.

- II. Social Trust: measures how much respondents trust the general public. The result of the factor analysis showed that the four items loaded on a single factor. The mean score

was calculated for each respondent. If a case had 2 or more missing values, it was dropped.

- (1) How much you can trust people in your neighborhood (1-4)?
- (2) How much you can trust people you work with (1-4)?
- (3) How much you can trust people at your church (1-4)?
- (4) How much you can trust people who work at stores (1-4)?

III. Social Interaction: social interaction is another measurement of social capital. Since social capital is the resource embedded in social networks, more interactions usually imply more social capital. Social interaction measures how frequently these respondents interact with their relatives and friends. The mean score was calculated for each respondent. If a case had 6 or more missing values, it was dropped.

- (1) How often respondent played cards or board games with others (0-11)?
- (2) How often the respondent took part in an artistic activity with a group (0-11)
- (3) How often the respondent hung out with friends in a public place (0-11)?
- (4) How often the respondent had a friend of a different race at their home (0-11)?
- (5) How often the respondent socialized with co-workers outside of work (0-11)?
- (6) How often the respondent played a team sport (0-11)?
- (7) How often the respondent was in an online Internet discussion (0-11)?

(8) How often the respondent attended a parade, local sports or art event (0-11)?

(9) How often the respondent visited with relatives (0-11)?

(10) How often the respondent had friends over to their home (0-11)?

#### Independent Variables

1. Marital Status: there were five categories, including single, widowed, divorced, married, and cohabitating. Married was taken as the reference category in the model.
2. Age: age in years
3. Female: male (0) or female (1)
4. Education Level (10-18): years of formal education the respondents received. Less than high school (10), high school diploma or GED (12), some college (14), associate's degree or specialized technical training (14), bachelor's degree (16), some graduate training (17), graduate or professional degree (18)
5. Household Income: annual household income in ten thousand dollars
6. Nonwhite: non-Hispanic white (0) or others (1)
7. Employment: employed (1) or not (0)
8. Number of Children: how many children respondents have
9. Year of data: the data were collected in 2000 (0) or 2006 (1)

10. Liberal Ideology (1-5): how respondents describe their general outlook--as being very conservative (1), moderately conservative (2), middle-of-the-road (3), moderately liberal (4) or very liberal (5)

### **3.4 Variables in National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997**

#### **Dependent Variables (Social Capital)**

1. Charitable Donations (0 or 1): whether respondents have donated money in the past 12 months. This variable was measured in 2005, 2007, and 2011.
2. Volunteerism in 2005, 2007, and 2011 (1 to 4): how often respondents did any unpaid volunteer work in the past 12 months-- never (1), 1-4 times (2), 5-11 times (3), 12 times or more (4).
3. Community Engagement in 2005, 2007, and 2011 (1 to 4): how often respondents attended a meeting or event for political, environmental, or community groups--never (1), 1-4 times (2), 5-11 times (3), 12 times or more (4).
4. Vote (1 to 4): voting behavior was measured in, 2006, 2008, and 2010. I did not vote (1), I thought about voting this time, but didn't (2), I usually vote, but didn't this time (3), I am sure I voted (4).



5. Political Interest (1-4): how interested respondents are in government or public affairs.

Political interest was measured in 2006, 2008, and 2010. It is considered as an interval variable in the model.

#### Independent Variables

1. Household Types in 2003: There were four types of families, including single-parent family, two-parent family, step family, and no-parent family. I created 3 dummy variables (single-parent family, step family, and no-parent family) and used two-parent family as the reference category.
2. Age: age in years
3. Female: male (0) or female (1)
4. Education Level (10-18): years of formal education the respondents received. None (10), high school diploma or GED (12), Associate/Junior college (14), Bachelor's degree (16), Master's (18), Professional degree (18), PhD (18)
5. Marital Status: There were four categories, including single, married, cohabitating, and others. Three dummies were created (single, cohabitating, and others). The married group was the reference category.
6. Race: Respondents were categorized as Black, Hispanic, or others. Others was used as the reference category.

7. Employment: Respondents were categorized as employed, student, or non-employed.

Employed was used as the reference category.

8. Household income: annual household income in ten thousand dollars

## CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

According to data availability, the results section is divided into two parts. At first, this study will talk about cohabitation and female employment. Then, the second part will include a discussion of the results for single-parent households and NEETS.

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics of the Social Capital Benchmark Survey. This study focuses on the comparison between marital status and cohabitating status. According to the table, married and cohabitating respondents are much different in terms of their social life. For example, the percentage of individuals involved in supporting associations (religious association, veteran's group, neighborhood association, senior group, social welfare organization, fraternal organization, self-help program, youth organization, and PTA) and self-interest associations (sport club, professional organization, hobby club, and art group) was higher for married people compared to cohabitating people (75.94% vs. 64.18% for supporting and 59.52% vs. 55.39% for self-interest associations, respectively), although there was no significant difference for involvement in political associations for these two groups. Married respondents engaged in voting more than cohabitating respondents. Almost 81% of married respondents voted, compared to only 60% for cohabitating respondents. Excluding social interaction, married people expressed a higher degree of public participation and social trust. In general, although cohabitating

individuals possessed more social capital in some dimensions (namely, social interaction), they had lower social capital on average than married individuals. Nevertheless, since these findings were only based on descriptive statistics, these differences between married couples and cohabitating couples might result from other variables. For example, married people are relatively older than cohabitating people and old people are more likely to take some actions. This issue should be solved after the regression model is utilized later.

Moreover, cohabitating people have lower socio-economic status than their married counterparts. Cohabitating couples in the sample were younger (36.05 vs. 46.85) and were slightly lower educated (13.832 vs. 14.362) compared to married couples. Additionally, 79.12% of cohabitating couples were employed (69.00% of married couples), but their household incomes were lower than married couples (\$48,600 vs. \$60,800 per year). A lower percentage of cohabitating people were white (64.84%) and had children (40.38%) in comparison to married people (80.03% and 50.44% respectively). Finally, cohabitating people were also more liberal than married people.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Variables by Marital Status, Social Capital Benchmark Survey

|                            | Single |       | Widowed |       | Divorced |       | Separated |       | Married |       | Cohabiting |       |
|----------------------------|--------|-------|---------|-------|----------|-------|-----------|-------|---------|-------|------------|-------|
|                            | Mean   | SD    | Mean    | SD    | Mean     | SD    | Mean      | SD    | Mean    | SD    | Mean       | SD    |
| Age                        | 34.80  | 13.46 | 69.94   | 12.70 | 50.39    | 12.40 | 43.96     | 12.82 | 46.85   | 14.20 | 36.05      | 12.44 |
| Female                     | 52.51% |       | 81.84%  |       | 64.61%   |       | 63.34%    |       | 56.55%  |       | 54.51%     |       |
| Education                  | 14.550 | 2.69  | 13.299  | 2.27  | 14.208   | 2.26  | 13.673    | 3.31  | 14.365  | 2.33  | 13.832     | 2.24  |
| Income                     | 4.40   | 2.76  | 2.92    | 2.25  | 3.95     | 2.53  | 3.88      | 2.78  | 6.08    | 2.82  | 4.86       | 2.85  |
| White                      | 64.64% |       | 83.30%  |       | 76.75%   |       | 54.31%    |       | 80.03%  |       | 64.86%     |       |
| Employed                   | 76.59% |       | 23.31%  |       | 72.32%   |       | 69.41%    |       | 69.00%  |       | 79.12%     |       |
| Children                   | 22.26% |       | 9.90%   |       | 31.22%   |       | 50%       |       | 50.44%  |       | 40.38%     |       |
| Ideology                   | 3.07   | 1.15  | 2.63    | 1.10  | 2.91     | 1.12  | 2.91      | 1.13  | 2.68    | 1.10  | 3.11       | 1.15  |
| Supporting associations    | 64.55% |       | 75.13%  |       | 72.38%   |       | 70.35%    |       | 75.94%  |       | 64.18%     |       |
| Self-interest associations | 58.97% |       | 45.91%  |       | 56.68%   |       | 52.43%    |       | 59.52%  |       | 55.39%     |       |
| Political associations     | 23.20% |       | 16.57%  |       | 24.44%   |       | 20.08%    |       | 22.93%  |       | 24.27%     |       |
| Vote                       | 65.04% |       | 85.88%  |       | 77.55%   |       | 66.71%    |       | 80.93%  |       | 59.92%     |       |
| Social interaction         | 5.749  | 2.55  | 4.245   | 2.25  | 5.065    | 2.34  | 4.950     | 2.49  | 5.116   | 2.24  | 5.640      | 2.43  |
| Public Participation       | -.0661 | .07   | -.0622  | .69   | -.0207   | .71   | -.0588    | .70   | .0897   | .73   | -.1254     | .66   |
| Political participation    | .233   | .27   | .149    | .21   | .225     | .26   | .216      | .28   | .227    | .26   | .219       | .27   |
| Social trust               | 3.148  | .64   | 3.448   | .59   | 3.296    | .60   | 3.045     | .69   | 3.400   | .57   | 3.074      | .68   |
| N                          | 4,694  |       | 2,252   |       | 3,363    |       | 742       |       | 15,422  |       | 2,327      |       |

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997. I only show the latest information for convenience if a variable was measured at different time points. For example, NLSY97 has collected data for voting behaviors in 2006, 2008, and 2010. This study only presents the frequencies of voting in 2010 by household types (single-parent, two parent, or other family type). In addition, since 95% of respondents grew up in either single-parent or two-parent families, and the comparison between the two groups is my concern, most discussions focus on these two categories. Compared to their counterparts raised in two-parent families, people coming from single parent families had less social capital in all five dimensions, including charitable behaviors (29.20% vs. 21.97%,  $p < .001$ ), volunteerism (1.67 vs. 1.56,  $p < .001$ ), community engagement (1.29 vs. 1.22,  $p < .001$ ), vote (2.68 vs. 2.46,  $p < .001$ ), and political interest (2.43 vs. 2.28,  $p < .001$ ). Tests showed significant differences between these two groups for the five dimensions. The averages in age do not show significant differences among these two groups (e.g. 29.00 for two-parent families and 28.98 for single-parent families in 2011) since NLSY has collected panel data from young people of roughly the same age.

Socioeconomic variables were much different between these two groups. In comparison with people growing up in two-parent families, young people growing up in single-parent families were lower educated (12.63 vs. 13.61), had lower household income (\$51,360.5 vs. \$75,178.76), and were less likely to work (66.18% vs. 75.47%). More people that came from single-parent families were black (36.87%), single (43.29%), or cohabitating (21.22%), compared to those from the two-parent family group (14.38%, 35.80%, and 17.10%, respectively). The high percentages of black and cohabitating may be due to low socioeconomic status for single-parent families.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Variables by Household Types, NLSY97

|                              | Single-parent family |        | Two-parent family |        | Other family |        |
|------------------------------|----------------------|--------|-------------------|--------|--------------|--------|
|                              | Mean                 | SD     | Mean              | SD     | Mean         | SD     |
| Charitable Behavior in 2011  | 21.97%               |        | 29.20%            |        | 20.91%       |        |
| Volunteerism in 2011         | 1.56                 | 0.86   | 1.67              | 0.91   | 1.49         | 0.80   |
| Community Engagement in 2011 | 1.22                 | 0.56   | 1.29              | 0.63   | 1.23         | 0.53   |
| Vote in 2010                 | 2.46                 | 1.32   | 2.68              | 1.13   | 2.50         | 1.32   |
| Political Interest in 2010   | 2.28                 | 1.07   | 2.43              | 1.08   | 2.21         | 1.07   |
| Age in 2011                  | 28.98                | 1.39   | 29.00             | 1.41   | 28.88        | 1.37   |
| Female                       | 50.49%               |        | 47.24%            |        | 50.30%       |        |
| Education in 2011            | 12.63                | 1.99   | 13.61             | 2.28   | 12.24        | 1.62   |
| Household Income in 2011     | 51,361               | 47,810 | 75,179            | 64,045 | 49,151       | 57,484 |
| Black                        | 36.87%               |        | 14.38%            |        | 47.05%       |        |
| Hispanic                     | 21.13%               |        | 21.44%            |        | 17.52%       |        |
| Mixed                        | 0.94%                |        | 0.79%             |        | 1.83%        |        |
| Non-hispanic/non-black       | 41.06%               |        | 63.39%            |        | 33.60%       |        |
| Employed in 2011             | 66.18%               |        | 75.47%            |        | 60.87%       |        |
| Non-employed in 2011         | 22.48%               |        | 12.74%            |        | 25.36%       |        |
| Student in 2011              | 11.33%               |        | 11.79%            |        | 13.77%       |        |
| Single in 2011               | 43.29%               |        | 35.80%            |        | 43.93%       |        |
| Married in 2011              | 29.86%               |        | 42.07%            |        | 26.70%       |        |
| Cohabiting in 2011           | 21.22%               |        | 17.10%            |        | 21.60%       |        |
| Others                       | 5.63%                |        | 5.03%             |        | 7.77%        |        |
| N in 2011                    | 3,914                |        | 4,534             |        | 491          |        |

## 4.2 Cohabitation and Social Capital

Since the relationship of cohabitating couples is relatively unstable, they may have greater difficulty in gaining social capital from their partners. In order to investigate the independent effects of cohabitation, I used a logit or OLS model with a focus on social trust and civic engagement (associational involvement, vote, public participation, political participation, social interaction). In Table 4, cohabitating status showed both positive and negative effects after control variables were included in the model. Cohabiting individuals were more likely to join political associations and engage in more political participation and social interactions, but were less likely to join supporting associations, vote, and engage in public participation. In other

words, cohabitating people were not particularly less interested in civic engagements than the married.

However, Table 4 shows that cohabitating respondents had a lower degree of social trust. If people are able to produce trust through civic engagement, and cohabitating people participate in some types of civic activities, they should not express such low trust. This result may imply that the relationship between civic engagement and social trust is special for cohabitating people. For the regression analysis in Table 5, I only chose married and cohabitating couples for further analysis. For the cohabitating sample, only social interaction was positively related to social trust. In contrast, for married respondents, supporting associations, vote, public participation, and social interaction were all positively associated with social trust. Cohabitating and married couples showed differences in the relationship between civic engagement and social trust. In other words, the correlation between participation in civic engagements and social trust for cohabitating people was much weaker than that for married couples. Thus, cohabitating people still engage in civic activities (especially political affairs), but had significantly less social capital.



Table 4. The Effects of Marital Status on Civic Engagement, Social Capital Benchmark Survey (n=28,791)

|   | Supporting<br>Associations | Self-interest<br>Associations | Political<br>Associations | Vote        | Public<br>Participation | Political<br>Participation | Social<br>Interaction | Social<br>Trust |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Single                                  | -.097*                     | .067                          | .065                      | -.078       | -.035**                 | .019***                    | .167***               | -.080***        |
| Widowed                                 | .150*                      | .129*                         | .017                      | -.151       | -.002                   | -.016*                     | .378***               | -.072***        |
| Divorced                                | .026                       | .131**                        | .118*                     | -.292***    | -.033*                  | .011*                      | .382***               | -.096***        |
| Separated                               | .023                       | .122                          | -.104                     | -.246**     | -.019                   | .018*                      | .149                  | -.177***        |
| Cohabiting                              | -.139**                    | .040                          | .153**                    | -.295***    | -.082***                | .014*                      | .182***               | -.139***        |
| Married                                 | --                         | --                            | --                        | --          | --                      | --                         | --                    | --              |
| Age                                     | .033***                    | .001                          | .041***                   | .101***     | .007***                 | .004***                    | -.115***              | .009***         |
| Age <sup>2</sup> /100                   | -.015**                    | --                            | -.030***                  | -.049***    | -.004**                 | -.004***                   | .071***               | --              |
| Female                                  | .201***                    | -.233***                      | -.332***                  | .181***     | .107***                 | -.003                      | .042                  | .061***         |
| Education                               | .198***                    | .244***                       | .134***                   | .316***     | .083***                 | .026***                    | .116***               | .041***         |
| Non-white                               | .148***                    | -.114**                       | .543***                   | -.458***    | -.099***                | .001                       | -.612***              | -.383***        |
| Employed                                | -.105***                   | .222***                       | .337***                   | .146**      | .022*                   | .009*                      | .132***               | .062***         |
| Household<br>income/10000               | .083***                    | .113***                       | .056***                   | .088***     | .028***                 | .007***                    | .101***               | .014***         |
| Children                                | .256***                    | -.024                         | -.013                     | -.002       | .060***                 | .006***                    | .007                  | -.008**         |
| Ideology                                | -.018                      | .074***                       | .226***                   | -.034*      | .012**                  | .027***                    | .085***               | -.010**         |
| Year-2000                               | -.058                      | .000                          | .005                      | -.178***    | .002                    | .003                       | -.024                 | .079***         |
| Constant                                | -3.364***                  | -4.063***                     | -4.977***                 | -7.169***   | -1.719***               | -.386***                   | 5.716***              | 1.901***        |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> or R <sup>2</sup> | .0704                      | .1039                         | .0593                     | .2045       | .1367                   | .1100                      | .1529                 | .2198           |
| LR $\chi^2$ or F                        | 2,385.33***                | 4,080.17***                   | 1,827.67***               | 6,453.13*** | 303.78***               | 237.22***                  | 346.31***             | 579.20***       |

\* p&lt;.05, \*\* p&lt;.01, \*\*\* p&lt;.001

$$\text{McFadden's Pseudo } R^2 = 1 - \frac{\ln \hat{L}(M_{\text{Full}})}{\ln \hat{L}(M_{\text{Intercept}})}$$

Table 5. The Effects of Civic Engagement on Social Trust, Social Capital Benchmark Survey

|                         | Social Trust |          |
|-------------------------|--------------|----------|
|                         | Cohabiting   | Married  |
| Supporting associations | .009         | .052***  |
| Self-interest           | .027         | .004     |
| Associations            |              |          |
| Political Associations  | -.051        | -.028*   |
| Vote                    | .051         | .145***  |
| Public Participation    | .022         | .052***  |
| Political Participation | -.010        | -.025    |
| Social Interaction      | .043***      | .022***  |
| Age                     | .012***      | .008***  |
| Age <sup>2</sup> /100   | --           | --       |
| Female                  | .087**       | .051***  |
| Education               | .040***      | .027***  |
| Non-white               | -.298***     | -.352*** |
| Employed                | .089**       | .033**   |
| Household income/10000  | .008         | .008***  |
| Children                | -.022        | -.009*   |
| Ideology                | .019         | -.018*** |
| Year-2000               | .091**       | .079***  |
| Constant                | 1.344***     | 1.989*** |
| R <sup>2</sup>          | .2185        | .2247    |
| n                       | 2,327        | 15,417   |

\* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

Tables 6 and 7 distinguish female and male samples for two reasons. First, some studies indicate that women are more affected by family and marriage because of heavy duties compared to their male counterparts. Therefore, by analyzing the male and female samples separately, I can make a comparison and see how the effects of marital status on civic engagement may vary by gender. Second, this study was able to test the relationship between female employment and civic engagement/social trust with female samples. Generally speaking, the impact of marital status on civic engagement for men is smaller than for women (especially on associational involvement). Men's marital status was not related to associational involvement and public participation, while women's marital status was. The correlation of cohabitating status with social capital was largely

derived from female samples. Based on Tables 6 to 7, I found that the relationship between cohabitating status and civic engagement were not consistent between men and women, and that women were more likely to be influenced by their marital status.

So far, this study has not found that cohabitating status was negatively related to all types of civic engagements, providing little support to Hypothesis 1. The result is not surprising since civic engagements are too diverse. In fact, cohabitation encourages the development of participation in some civic engagements, but simultaneously discourages others. This finding also helps to explain why previous studies have found that not every type of civic engagement has declined in the United States. However, cohabitation status may attribute to the decline in social capital since it is negatively related to social trust.

#### **4.3 Female Employment and Social Capital**

Many studies point out that women are the key to understanding the trend in social capital in the United States because they played an important role in the past in terms of civic engagement. According to Table 3, women were very active in civic engagement and showed higher trust than their male counterparts. Being a woman showed a negative correlation with self-interest associations and political associations. Thus, we can say that women generally have more social capital than men. Yet, the question remains: with increases in women's employment, what happened to civic engagement in American society?

Table 7 helps to elucidate how employment is related to social capital for women. Except for supporting associations, the relationship between female employment and social capital was either significantly positive or insignificant. On the one hand, and in contrast to my expectations, Table 7 showed that employed women were more interested in civic activities and had more social trust. On the other hand, female employment was negatively associated with supporting

associations. How do we interpret this result? Does this mean previous studies are all wrong? In fact, I think that this finding may even support the conclusions of early research. Because of the data limitations, associational involvement was taken as the only indicator of civic engagement in a number of studies. Since female employment is negatively related to supporting associations, the relationship between female employment and associational involvement might still be negative because supporting associations include most of the associations in my classification. As a result, the data did not fully support Hypothesis 4, that female employment is negatively related to social capital. Instead, employed women were more likely to engage in some civic activities and were less likely to engage in others, as reflected by the results. This result merely reflected the complexity of social capital.

#### **4.4 Single-Parent Family and Social Capital**

People who grow up in single-parent families may encounter more difficulties in accumulating social capital in the long run. Growing up in a home with both parents provides children with many personal network resources. The effect of a single-parent family experience is presented in Table 8. Although I do not control the effect of parental socioeconomic status in the models, that should not cause a serious problem in explaining the relationship between household structures and personal social capital. It is because respondents' education and household income were included in the model and they were expected to be highly correlated to parental socioeconomic status.

Hypothesis 2 was supported in the five measures of social capital. With all control variables, young people who grew up in a single-parent family in their youth were less likely to participate in charitable behaviors, volunteering, community engagement, and voting. They were also less interested in government or public affairs. According to this analysis, the experience of growing

up in a single-parent family has undoubtedly negative effects on young people's social capital in the future.

The data in NLSY97 also allowed me to examine how marital status (particularly cohabitating status) affects social capital, although the measurements for social capital were not as diverse as those in Social Capital Benchmark Survey. Surprisingly, cohabitation presented more consistent results on social capital for young people. Young cohabitating people showed less social capital in all indicators. They were less likely to engage in charitable activities, be volunteers, be involved in community affairs, and vote in elections. Also, they showed low interest in political affairs. However, without political participation, political association or even social trust, I was unable to further test the causal mechanism between cohabitation and social capital.

Finally, I was able to test how female employment affects social capital by using the NLSY97. Table 9 shows the results. The data in NLSY97 do not support the hypothesis that female employment is negatively related to social capital because of inconsistent results. Female employment positively affected charitable behavior and voting, while it negatively affected volunteerism (no significant effect on community engagement or political interest). The positive influence might result from better economic abilities for employed women, but job duties also reduce how much time they are able to do volunteer work (relatively speaking, donating and voting do not take much time).

In sum, both sets of data indicate that female employment does not negatively affect social capital (Tables 7 and 9)

Table 6. The Effects of Marital Status on Civic Engagement for Men, Social Capital Benchmark Survey (n=11,872)

|   | Supporting<br>Associations | Self-interest<br>Associations | Political<br>Associations | Vote        | Public<br>Participation | Political<br>Participation | Social<br>Interaction | Social<br>Trust |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Single                                  | -.122                      | -.116                         | -.035                     | -.182*      | -.030                   | .009                       | .122                  | -.071***        |
| Widowed                                 | .007                       | -.097                         | .005                      | .052        | -.044                   | -.017                      | .161                  | -.076*          |
| Divorced                                | -.031                      | .059                          | .063                      | -.269**     | -.029                   | -.000                      | .324***               | -.092***        |
| Separated                               | .082                       | .010                          | -.321*                    | -.183       | .014                    | .011                       | .318*                 | -.149***        |
| Cohabiting                              | -.094                      | -.028                         | .103                      | -.320***    | -.050*                  | .015                       | .237**                | -.158***        |
| Married                                 | --                         | --                            | --                        | --          | --                      | --                         | --                    | --              |
| Age                                     | .021***                    | -.031***                      | .041***                   | .108***     | .003***                 | .004***                    | -.149***              | .008***         |
| Age <sup>2</sup> /100                   | --                         | .026**                        | -.032***                  | -.062***    | --                      | -.003**                    | .098***               | --              |
| Education                               | .167***                    | .190***                       | .048***                   | .299***     | .069***                 | .023***                    | .112***               | .042***         |
| Non-white                               | .149**                     | -.165**                       | .367***                   | -.618***    | -.062***                | .009                       | -.506***              | .343***         |
| Employed                                | -.122*                     | .231***                       | .203**                    | -.071       | .043*                   | .009                       | .106                  | .064***         |
| Household<br>income/10000               | .094***                    | .118***                       | .062***                   | .097***     | .026***                 | .007***                    | .121***               | .010***         |
| Children                                | .248***                    | .011                          | -.002                     | -.002       | .053***                 | .004                       | .033                  | -.004           |
| Ideology                                | -.049*                     | .053**                        | .185***                   | -.073**     | .012*                   | .022***                    | .129***               | -.010           |
| Year-2000                               | -.082                      | .055                          | .017                      | -.214**     | -.032*                  | .002                       | -.053                 | .080***         |
| Constant                                | -2.652***                  | -2.519***                     | -3.604***                 | -6.785***   | -1.406***               | -.319***                   | 6.561***              | 1.963***        |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> or R <sup>2</sup> | .0735                      | .0815                         | .0273                     | .2149       | .1137                   | .0858                      | .1818                 | .1885           |
| LR $\chi^2$ or F                        | 1,064.01***                | 1,283.65***                   | 375.15***                 | 2,876.42*** | 117.00***               | 79.45***                   | 188.24***             | 211.94***       |

\* p&lt;.05, \*\* p&lt;.01, \*\*\* p&lt;.001

$$\text{McFadden's Pseudo } R^2 = 1 - \frac{\ln \hat{L}(M_{\text{Full}})}{\ln \hat{L}(M_{\text{Intercept}})}$$

Table 7. The Effects of Marital Status on Civic Engagement for Women, Social Capital Benchmark Survey (n=16,919)

|   | Supporting<br>Associations | Self-interest<br>Associations | Political<br>Associations | Vote        | Public<br>Participation | Political<br>Participation | Social<br>Interaction | Social<br>Trust |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Single                                  | -.066                      | .182**                        | .142*                     | -.028       | -.042*                  | .026***                    | .190**                | -.083***        |
| Widowed                                 | .268***                    | .122                          | .082                      | -.227*      | .010                    | -.013                      | .343***               | -.078***        |
| Divorced                                | .055                       | .188***                       | .136*                     | -.338***    | -.038*                  | .016**                     | .394***               | -.094***        |
| Separated                               | -.020                      | .223*                         | .045                      | -.316**     | -.040                   | .021                       | .066                  | -.185***        |
| Cohabiting                              | -.178*                     | .072                          | .192*                     | -.302***    | -.105***                | .012                       | .138*                 | -.120***        |
| Married                                 | --                         | --                            | --                        | --          | --                      | --                         | --                    | --              |
| Age                                     | .045***                    | .005**                        | .043***                   | .099***     | .011***                 | .005***                    | -.090***              | .009***         |
| Age <sup>2</sup> /100                   | -.029***                   | --                            | -.030***                  | -.043***    | -.007***                | -.004***                   | .051***               | --              |
| Education                               | .222***                    | .289***                       | .214***                   | .330***     | .094***                 | .028***                    | .125***               | .041***         |
| Non-white                               | .142**                     | .091                          | .687***                   | -.342***    | -.038**                 | -.008                      | .683***               | -.409***        |
| Employed                                | -.109*                     | .189***                       | .392***                   | .238***     | .010                    | .006                       | .110**                | .058***         |
| Household<br>income/10000               | .074***                    | .116***                       | .054***                   | .083***     | .029***                 | .007***                    | .086***               | .016***         |
| Children                                | .261***                    | -.040*                        | -.018                     | .008        | .068***                 | .006***                    | .004                  | -.008*          |
| Ideology                                | .003                       | .084***                       | .252***                   | -.005       | .010*                   | .030***                    | .054***               | -.011**         |
| Year-2000                               | -.039                      | -.032                         | .006                      | -.149**     | .026*                   | .003                       | -.006                 | .078***         |
| Constant                                | -3.752***                  | -5.126***                     | -6.597***                 | -7.236***   | -1.881***               | -.438***                   | 5.062***              | 1.903***        |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> or R <sup>2</sup> | .0679                      | .1189                         | .0879                     | .1985       | .1513                   | .1294                      | .1368                 | .2434           |
| LR $\chi^2$ or F                        | 1,312.45***                | 2,773.43***                   | 1,487.37***               | 3,602.46*** | 215.18***               | 179.40***                  | 191.38***             | 418.23***       |

\* p&lt;.05, \*\* p&lt;.01, \*\*\* p&lt;.001

$$\text{McFadden's Pseudo } R^2 = 1 - \frac{\ln \hat{L}(M_{\text{Full}})}{\ln \hat{L}(M_{\text{Intercept}})}$$

#### 4.5 NEETS and Social Capital

Young people who are not in education, employment, and training are another concern in this study. Here, the results did not show significant effects of NEETS on all indicators of social capital. First, we can examine the effect of NEETS on social capital by simply observing both single and non-employment status because these young people are usually single and are not in the job market. Table 10 shows that charitable behaviors are very uncommon among NEETS. Secondly, I used the interaction term of single and non-employment to refer to the additional effect of NEETS (rather than predicting by their single and non-employed status individually).

The interaction variable is also shown in Table 10. The interaction term did not negatively affect charitable behaviors, volunteerism, or community engagement, but did have a negative impact on voting (Wald  $\chi^2$  increased from 1349.01 to 1358.38) and political interests (Wald  $\chi^2$  increased from 649.16 to 655.84). In sum, according to Table 10, this study found that NEETS were particularly less interested in voting and government/public affairs (the interaction term) and charitable behaviors (both single and non-employment), but not volunteerism and community engagement. Finally, although Hypothesis 3 was only partially supported based on the data, the increase in NEETS might still cause the decline in social capital as a whole in American society (NEETS make negative impact on three indicators and insignificant impact on the others).



Table 8. The Effects of Household Types on Social Capital, NLSY97

|                                    | Charitable<br>Behavior | Volunteerism | Community<br>Engagement | Vote       | Political<br>Interest |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Two-parent family (reference)      | --                     | --           | --                      | --         | --                    |
| Single-parent family               | -.148**                | -.056**      | -.027*                  | -.163***   | -.049*                |
| Other family                       | -.287*                 | .076*        | -.021                   | -.175**    | -.133**               |
| Married (reference)                | --                     | --           | --                      | --         | --                    |
| Single                             | -.280***               | -.007        | .013                    | -.043      | -.045*                |
| Cohabiting                         | -.207**                | -.092***     | -.034**                 | -.133***   | -.049*                |
| Others                             | -.388**                | -.021        | -.006                   | -.220**    | -.102*                |
| Age                                | -.052**                | .006**       | .001                    | .046***    | -.017***              |
| Female                             | .545***                | .058***      | .027**                  | .240***    | -.176***              |
| Education                          | .075***                | .019***      | .013***                 | .060***    | .042***               |
| Non-black/Non-Hispanic (reference) | --                     | --           | --                      | --         | --                    |
| Black                              | .027                   | -.023        | .015                    | .320***    | .104***               |
| Hispanic                           | -.206**                | -.134***     | -.072***                | -.230***   | -.093**               |
| Mixed race                         | -.336                  | -.044        | -.073                   | -.153      | -.050                 |
| Employed (reference)               | --                     | --           | --                      | --         | --                    |
| Non-employed                       | -.441***               | .020         | -.015                   | -.332***   | -.077***              |
| Student                            | -.011                  | .174***      | .117***                 | .139***    | .095***               |
| Household income/10000             | .024***                | .002*        | -.000                   | .008***    | .006***               |
| Constant                           | -1.472***              | 1.147***     | 1.030***                | .402***    | 2.272***              |
| Wald Chi-square                    | 503.51***              | 480.67***    | 418.21***               | 1349.01*** | 649.16***             |
| N                                  | 19,332                 | 19,149       | 19,255                  | 13,844     | 18,809                |

\* p&lt;.05, \*\* p&lt;.01, \*\*\* p&lt;.001

Table 9. The Effects of Female Employment on Social Capital, NLSY97 (Female Sample)

|                                    | Charitable<br>Behavior | Volunteerism | Community<br>Engagement | Vote      | Political<br>Interest |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Two-parent family (reference)      | --                     | --           | --                      | --        | --                    |
| Single-parent family               | -.171*                 | -.074**      | -.046*                  | -.130**   | -.059                 |
| Other family                       | -.483**                | -.090        | -.008                   | -.187*    | -.111                 |
| Married (reference)                | --                     | --           | --                      | --        | --                    |
| Single                             | -.183*                 | .057*        | .048**                  | -.020     | -.017                 |
| Cohabiting                         | -.203**                | -.096***     | -.029                   | -.131**   | .003                  |
| Others                             | -.437*                 | -.053        | -.014                   | -.239**   | -.095                 |
| Age                                | -.045***               | .009**       | .004                    | .051***   | -.018***              |
| Education                          | .090***                | .024***      | .015***                 | .057***   | .039***               |
| Non-black/Non-Hispanic (reference) | --                     | --           | --                      | --        | --                    |
| Black                              | -.256**                | -.056*       | .001                    | .430***   | .208***               |
| Hispanic                           | -.413***               | -.142***     | -.079***                | -.204***  | -.076*                |
| Mixed race                         | -.508                  | .084         | -.008                   | -.140     | -.021                 |
| Employed (reference)               | --                     | --           | --                      | --        | --                    |
| Non-employed                       | -.319***               | .071***      | .009                    | -.289***  | -.047                 |
| Student                            | -.024                  | .166***      | .097***                 | .094*     | .072**                |
| Household income/10000             | .024***                | .004*        | -.000                   | .010***   | .005***               |
| Constant                           | -.670***               | 1.102***     | .991***                 | .727***   | 2.614***              |
| Wald Chi-square                    | 279.31***              | 308.34***    | 221.40***               | 628.21*** | 281.55***             |
| N                                  | 9,650                  | 9,562        | 9,627                   | 6,746     | 9,314                 |

\* p&lt;.05, \*\* p&lt;.01, \*\*\* p&lt;.001

Table 10. The Effects of NEETS on Social Capital, NLSY97

|                                    | Charitable<br>Behavior | Volunteerism | Community<br>Engagement | Vote       | Political<br>Interest |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Two-parent family (reference)      | --                     | --           | --                      | --         | --                    |
| Single-parent family               | -.148**                | -.056**      | -.027*                  | -.163***   | -.049*                |
| Other family                       | -.286*                 | .076*        | -.021                   | -.173**    | -.131**               |
| Married (reference)                | --                     | --           | --                      | --         | --                    |
| Single                             | -.273***               | -.003        | .015                    | -.023      | .033                  |
| Cohabiting                         | -.207**                | -.092***     | -.034**                 | -.134***   | -.050*                |
| Others                             | -.389**                | -.022        | -.006                   | -.226***   | -.105*                |
| Age                                | -.052***               | .006**       | .001                    | .046***    | -.017***              |
| Female                             | .544***                | .057***      | .026**                  | .235***    | -.179***              |
| Education                          | .075***                | .019***      | .013***                 | .060***    | .042***               |
| Non-black/Non-Hispanic (reference) | --                     | --           | --                      | --         | --                    |
| Black                              | .028                   | -.023        | .015                    | .323***    | .107***               |
| Hispanic                           | -.205**                | -.134***     | -.072***                | -.229***   | -.093**               |
| Mixed race                         | -.337                  | -.045        | -.073                   | -.152      | .051                  |
| Employed (reference)               | --                     | --           | --                      | --         | --                    |
| Non-employed                       | -.405***               | .039         | -.008                   | -.246***   | -.026                 |
| Student                            | -.012                  | .173***      | .117***                 | .137***    | .093***               |
| Household income/10000             | .024***                | .002*        | -.000                   | .008***    | .006***               |
| Single*non-employed                | -.071                  | -.035        | -.013                   | -.168***   | -.101*                |
| Constant                           | -1.478***              | 1.146***     | 1.029***                | .394***    | 2.276***              |
| Wald Chi-square                    | 503.38***              | 481.78***    | 418.48***               | 1358.38*** | 655.84***             |
| N                                  | 19,332                 | 19,149       | 19,255                  | 13,844     | 18,809                |

\* p&lt;.05, \*\* p&lt;.01, \*\*\* p&lt;.001

## **CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

This study takes a family perspective to understand how and why social capital has been affected in American society. I believe that this opens a new way to examine the decline in social capital. In the past decade, families have changed dramatically. Although two-parent families and married couples are the predominant family forms in U.S. society, there are more options for family structure and family relations than in the past. Cohabiting couples, single-parent families, NEETS, and employed women are more common today. The popularity of these non-traditional family structures makes great impacts not only on people's family life, but also on their social life. Consequently, social capital is inevitably affected.

An abundance of previous literature discusses why social capital has declined in the United States, and proposes divergent explanations on this issue. Nonetheless, only a few scholars see the possible connection between family changes and social capital (Putnam 1995; Schimmele 2011). Since people stay in families for a long time, there is no reason to doubt that family changes would affect personal social capital. A number of studies already show how family members access social capital through their family members (Coleman 1988). People also usually participate in activities with their family members. Unfortunately, current systematic analyses between family changes and social capital are still scant in academic research.

Social capital represents the resources embedded in personal networks, so a stable relationship is necessary for people to take advantage of resources. The family relations in households involving cohabitation and single-parent families, however, are relatively unstable. People often gain social capital through their family members (especially their partners and parents), but couples in cohabitating households/children in single-parent families cannot gain social capital as easily as married couples/children growing up in two-parent families. Moreover,

huge burdens on employed women prevent them from engaging in civic activities to meet both their family's financial and domestic needs. Finally, more young people stay at home and do not work after graduating. They become indifferent and socially inactive. Therefore, my hypotheses stated that cohabitating couples, people growing up in single-parent families, NEETS, and employed women may negatively affect social capital. These factors may help to explain why social capital has declined in the United States.

My first hypothesis was only partially supported. Cohabitation negatively affected most indicators of social capital in both data sets, except political associations, political participation, and social interactions. Civic engagements were divided into social civic engagement (e.g. supporting associations or public participation) and political civic engagement (e.g. political participation). Cohabitating people were only more likely to engage in political engagements, except voting. The question remains: why are political civic engagements so different? The answer might be related to the cohabiters' lifestyle in American society. First, Table 2 shows that cohabitating respondents have lower education and lower household income on average than married respondents, although they are more likely to work (79% vs. 69%). Previous research also indicates that people choose cohabitation rather than marriage largely due to their poor socioeconomic status (Edin and Kefalas 2005). The experience of living in the lower social strata may encourage people to seek political reform (e.g. a better social welfare program), since they are likely to feel that society is not equal. Second, like many minority groups, cohabitating couples are legally discriminated in the United States, especially same-sex couples (they were considered as cohabitating couples before gay marriage was admitted). They cannot enjoy all the legal rights and benefits of marriage, such as inheritance and welfare (Bowman 2004). The lack of legal rights may thus encourage cohabitants to engage in political activities. For instance,

many people were involved in the same-sex marriage movement for obtaining civil marriage right since the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was passed in 1996. Voting is the only political behavior in which cohabitants seemed less interested. This situation may be associated with the disadvantage of being a minority: the number. Because the number is the disadvantage for minority, their assertions usually cannot be achieved by voting (e.g. the legalization of gay marriage was not done by voting). Ideology is a possible explanation: those who decide to cohabitate are may be liberal. However, since I control ideology in the model, the selection bias should not be an issue here. In sum, cohabiters may engage less in socially civic engagement and have lower social trust, while they take more political activities in order to fight for legal rights.

Cohabiting couples interact with their friends and relatives more often. Putnam (2000) points out that individual networks may narrow if people get married because people will spend more time with their families, instead of friends (this does not mean that personal social capital will decline because married couples are more involved in civic activities). In addition, cohabiting couples are relatively disadvantaged in many aspects. They tend to be from lower socioeconomic statuses. It is, however, more difficult for them to utilize social welfare programs due to their cohabitating status (compared to married couples).

Civic engagement is supposed to be positively related to social trust. However, this is not the case for cohabitating couples. For them, attending civic activities does not improve their general trust towards people. Social capital has long been considered a useful property, but this concept is now being challenged. Most people agree that social capital can be either beneficial or detrimental (Beyerlein and Hipp 2005; Paxton 2002). Social capital has two major functions: bridging and bonding (Lin 2008; Lockhart 2005; Putnam 2002). On the one hand, social capital can be used to connect different people in networks. On the other hand, social capital strengthens

existing connections and forms a closed network. According to Burt (2005), these repeated interactions among actors are the key to produce trust inside the network. However, these functions sometimes exert detrimental effects. Some scholars, such as Granovetter and Burt, mentioned that strong ties may cause limited network extensity (Granovetter 1973; Burt 2001). Based on the bonding function, social capital can strengthen existing relationships and form a cohesive group. Since people in a cohesive group focus more on established networks, they are less likely to interact with people outside their social network. Without repeated interactions, people cannot generalize trust with other people who are not in their networks (Claibourn and Martin 2000; Latusek and Cook 2012). In other words, the relationships in the current network become stronger, while the relationships outside the current network become weaker. As a result, it becomes difficult for people in tight networks to produce general trust. The same mechanism may explain why cohabitating people do not express greater trust after engaging in civic activities.

The second hypothesis, that the experience of growing up in single-parent families negatively affects social capital, was confirmed in NLSY97 data. People growing up in single-parent families were less likely to donate, to volunteer, to engage in community activities, to vote, and to be interested in public affairs. Without sufficient support from parents, people growing up in single-parent families were restrained from how much social capital they can really access. For example, in a study of single mothers, Edin and Kefalas (2005) indicated that the support from the families of origin for single mothers was very critical. Therefore, more personal interactions may be necessary for them to survive. More importantly, the data in NLSY97 indicated that the negative influence still exist even after children became adults. As a result, these people had difficulty competing with others because they usually had lower human

and social capitals. In fact, this result may just reflect American welfare program. Pong, Dronkers, and Hampden-Thompson (2003) found the relatively poor national family policies in the United States led to a large gap in students' school performance, compared to ten other countries (including Ireland and Canada). Single-parent families should be a core issue for American government. Relevant policies are needed in order to alleviate the disadvantages of people with single-parent family backgrounds.

My third hypothesis was not fully supported in this study. NEETS (single and non-employment) does not negatively affect every indicator of social capital. NEETS were not interested in political affairs (voting and government affairs) and charitable behaviors, while they were still engaged in some civic engagements (volunteering and community engagement) as often as other people were. First, why was political involvement so unique for NEETS? It might be because long term unemployment hurts NEETS' confidence in governments. They may not believe that politicians or the bureaucracy really care about them or are able to solve their problems. Also, the indifferent attitude toward politics among NEETS may explain why the younger generation had particularly low political involvement and low political trust in recent surveys (O'Toolea, Listera, Marsha, Jonesa, and McDonagha 2003). Second, it is not difficult to explain why NEETS show few charitable behaviors since they are not in the job market. Without stable income, NEETS naturally are less likely to engage in charitable behaviors. Overall, since NEETS had negative effects on some dimensions of social capital and no positive effects in this study, they indeed have lower social capital.

The fourth hypothesis was not supported either. According to the Social Capital Benchmark Survey and NLSY97, this study did not find that employment status made a significantly negative impact on social capital. Instead, women were even more likely to engage in some



activities (e.g. self-interest associations, political associations, or charitable behaviors). This result reflects that employment symbolizes a more independent status, because employed women do not have to rely on someone else for their financial wellbeing. As a result, employed women may present a more positive attitude towards some activities, such as self-interest and political associations. Previous studies that attribute the decline in social capital to female employment was not supported by this research. Yet, the current research does not present the full story. Female employment status still shows negative influences on social capital. First, supporting associations included most associations in my classification. Most early studies only utilize associational involvement as the variable representing social capital, rather than multiple indicators (Anersen, Curtis, and Grabb 2006; Rotolo and Wilson 2007; Tiehen 2000). This may explain why prior studies found a negative relationship between female employment and social capital. Although employed women are more economically independent, they are not more likely to engage in all civic activities. In the analyses of NLSY97, employment status showed positive effects only on charitable behavior and voting (these two activities take the least amount of time). These results show that the effects of female employment are both positive and negative. With jobs, women are more capable of engaging in civic activities, but they also have less leisure time. Female civic engagement is negatively affected in some aspects: they cannot engage in civic activities that take time. This finding is consistent with the finding by Anersen, Curtis, and Grabb: American women spent less time in civic activities (Anersen, Curtis, and Grabb 2006).

The results of this study demonstrate how complicated social capital is and the importance of diverse indicators in social capital research. Social capital itself includes different concepts and contents. It is difficult to get a full picture without complete measurements. As previously mentioned, one single social force does not necessarily make a definitive impact on civic

engagement. Similarly, most family changes do not affect every dimension of social capital (e.g. cohabitation). Some of them only affect a particular dimension (e.g. NEETS on political affairs). This is why previous studies cannot make a definite conclusion about the decline in social capital. For example, women may engage in associational involvement less frequently if employed, but they may become involved in other types of civic engagement that require less time. In future studies, we have to carefully consider the characteristics of each type of civic engagement and how various civic engagements are affected.

Finally, some unsolved questions remain in this research. First, why family changes only affect some types of civic engagements. This research cannot offer sufficient explanations. For example, cohabitating couples are particularly interested in political activities, but not other civic engagements. Why is politics so special for cohabitants? What are the consequences for those cohabitants taking political actions? Is there any way that we could encourage cohabitating people to engage in different kinds of civic engagement? Similar questions could be applied to employed women, single-parent families, and NEETS as well. Based on the current data, this research cannot really answer these questions. More data and further analyses are needed to clarify these issues.

In addition, although the Social Capital Benchmark Survey and NLSY97 both provide measures of family backgrounds and social capital, data limitations still exist. For example, the Social Capital Benchmark Survey includes many questions about social capital, but it is a cross-sectional survey. Thus, causal mechanisms cannot be established in this data set. The panel structure of NLSY98 allowed me to test causal relationships, while the incomplete indicators of social capital also presented some problems. For example, the other two dimensions of social capital, social trust and social interaction, are not included in NLSY97, and therefore I could not

test how single-parent family and NEETS affect social interactions and social trust. Moreover, it was not possible to examine the relationships between civic engagement, social interaction, and social trust, either. Future studies should collect panel data on social capital and family backgrounds.

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## **VITA**

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