

Sixth Family Research Network (FRN) Forum:

“Singlehood in Singapore: Issues and Challenges”

Monday, 23 May 2011
Auditorium, Level 3, Faculty of Law

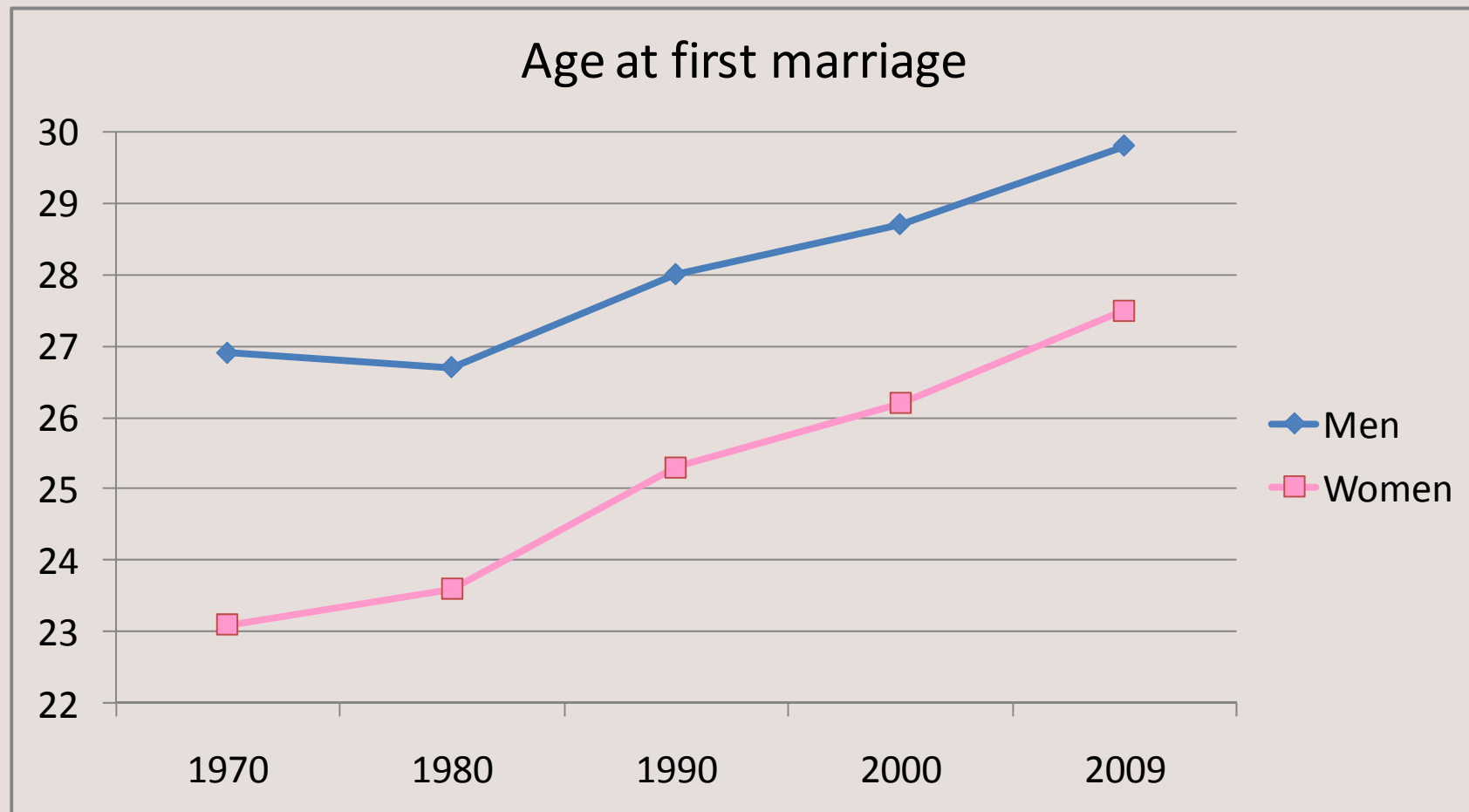
Why are People Staying Single?
(and Delaying Marriage and Family)

Insights from Three Lines of
Social/Evolutionary Psychological Research

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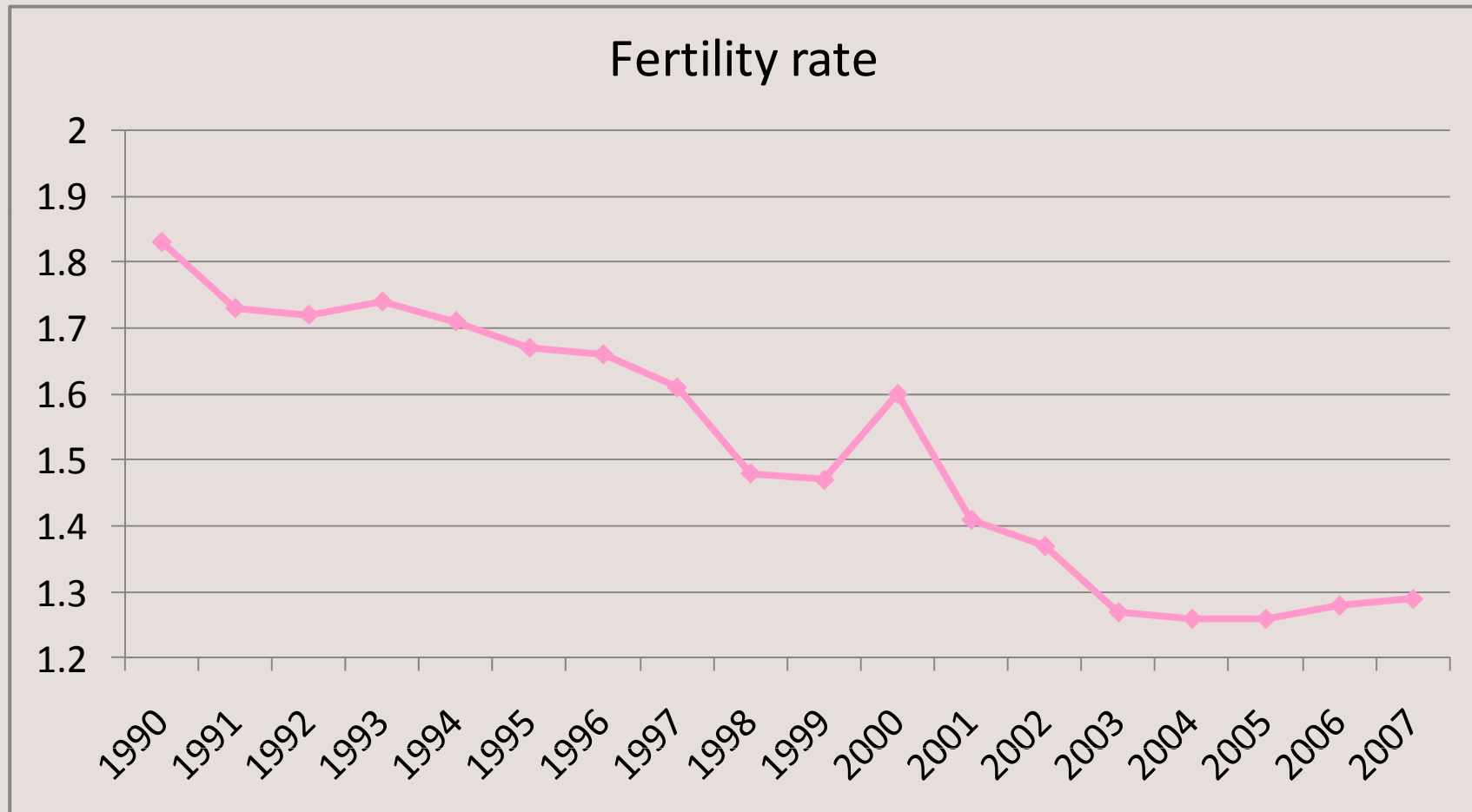
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Singaporeans are staying single longer...



Data source: Singapore Department of Statistics

and are having less children...



Data source: Singapore Department of Statistics

1) Mate Selection Criteria

- Mate preference studies across cultures and time:
 - For long-term mates, women not only place greater value on social status than men do (Buss, 1989; Buss & Barnes, 1986; Hill, 1945, McGinnis, 1958, Sprecher, Sullivan, & Hatfield, 1994)...
 - but they also *prioritize* having a minimum level of social status (Li, Bailey, Kenrick, Linsenmeier, 2002; Li & Kenrick, 2006)
 - Even though most women aren't holding out for the most affluent men, they tend to require that their long-term mates meet or exceed *some minimum level* of social status

Hypergamy: Women want to marry up

- Correlation between women's expected post-college earnings and importance ascribed to "good financial prospect" (Weiderman & Allgeier, 1992)
- Female medical school students expecting a high income want to marry men with equal or higher incomes and status (Townsend, 1989)
- Online ads: Women who offer financial resources or resource acquisition skills are more likely to request these qualities (Weiderman, 1993)
- Singaporean women place much higher value on "social level" than do American women (Li, Valentine, & Patel, 2011)

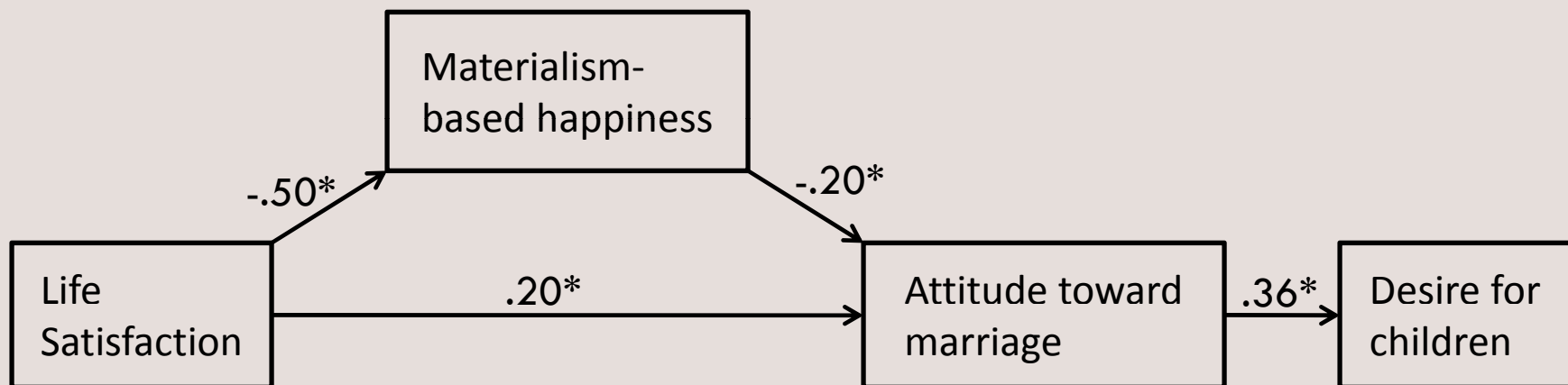
So...

- On average, as women become more educated and earn more income, their requirements for a mate's social status and earning power *tend to increase*
- Why? Mate selection criteria may be rooted in evolutionary history:
 - Even though a higher male income may not be necessarily for offspring survival in the modern world, our brains evolved in ancestral times when male provisioning may have been necessary
 - Not *easily* overturned (for example, women prefer men who are taller than themselves)

2) Materialism

- In modern economies, people value and strive for material possessions (Fromm, 1976; Leach, 1993)
- Materialism may compete with other values (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002)
- People who are more materialistic and value financial goals
 - place less value on:
 - affiliative goals (Kasser & Ryan, 1993)
 - relational warmth (Richins & Dawson, 1992)
 - close relationships (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002)
 - have more conflicts with friends and romantic partners (Kasser & Ryan, 2001)
 - have less satisfaction with family life (Nickerson et al., 2003)

The incompatibility of materialism and children



$\chi^2 = 2.16, p = .34, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .01, LL = .00, UL = .02, SRM = .02$

Source: Figure 1 from Li, Valentine, & Patel (2011)

So...

- In the modern world, there may be a built-in tradeoff between economic prosperity and procreational success

3) Life History Theory

- Developed by evolutionary biologists to explain how organisms (including humans) adaptively allocate energy, time, and resources across their lifetime toward different activities (e.g., Charnov, 1993; Daan & Tinbergen, 1997; Low, 2000)
- Primary tradeoff – reproductive vs. somatic effort
- Reproductive effort – intrasexual competition for mates, courtship, copulation, gestation, birth, offspring care
- Somatic effort – maintaining and growing the body/mind; acquiring size, immunity, knowledge, skills; ultimately leading to enhanced *future* reproduction

Slow versus Fast Life History Strategy

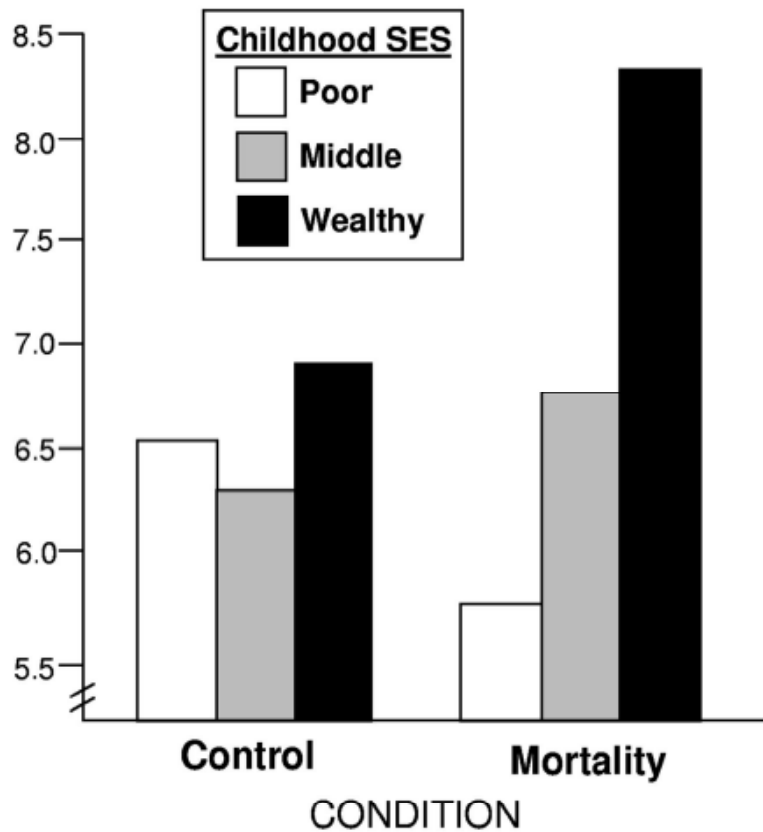
- Fast strategy: invest less in somatic development, reproduce as quickly as possible
- Slow strategy: invest more in somatic development before reproducing
- Species that evolved in harsh and unpredictable environments tend to adopt fast LH strategies
- Species that evolved in harsh but predictable environments tend to adopt slow LH strategies



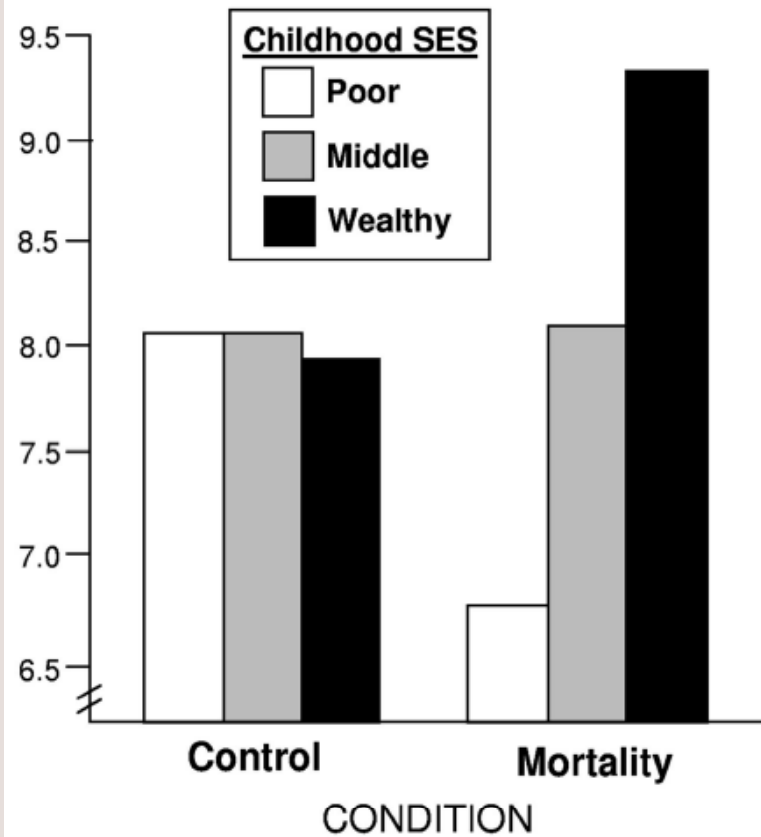
Individuals' LH strategy are not necessarily fixed

- A person's LH strategy may be sensitive to environmental CUES (Daan & Tinbergen, 1997; Ellis et al., 2009), including availability of resources during childhood and how safe and predictable the current environment is
- Griskevicius, Delton, Robertson, & Tybur (2011) – primed people with mortality cues via a NY Times “article” – *Dangerous Times Ahead: Life and Death in the 21st Century*

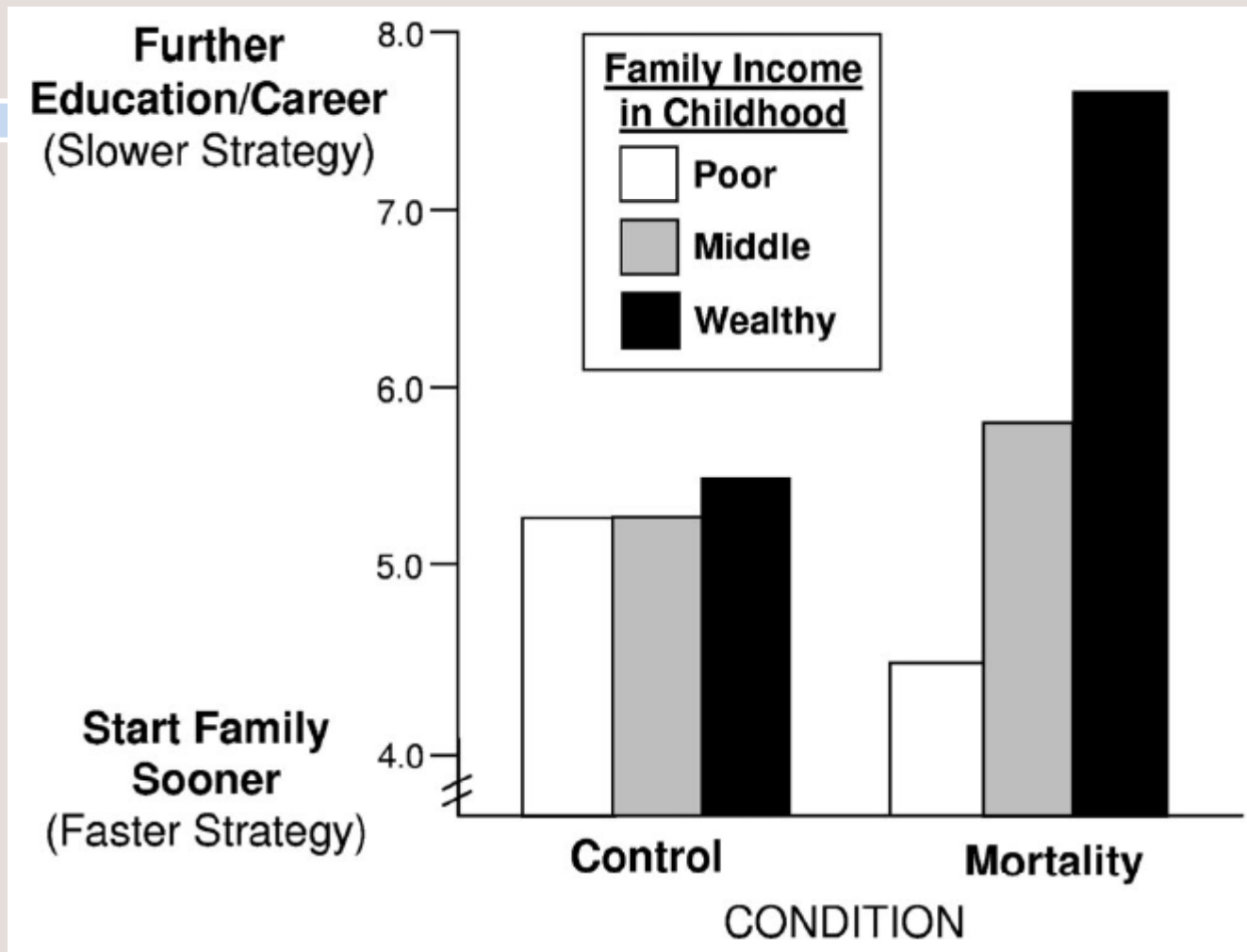
In How Many Years Do You Want to Get Married?



In How Many Years Do You Want to Have Your First Child?



Source: Griskevicius, Delton, Robertson, & Tybur (2011)



Source: Griskevicius, Delton, Robertson, & Tybur (2011)

So...

- When people who grow up in safe, resource-rich environments face danger/uncertainty, they may react by investing more time and energy in somatic development and *delaying* marriage and family

Takeaways from 3 lines of research

- Mate selection research – education and advancement may induce women to price themselves out of the marriage market
- Materialism – economic prosperity encourages materialism, which may compete with desires for marriage and family
- Life history theory – greater uncertainty may lead slow LH folks to further delay reproduction

Conclusion

- Policymakers hoping to halt or reverse the trend of extended singlehood may benefit from a consideration of these factors, aided by an understanding of evolutionary social psychology