

(more than) Three Figures on the Phantom Boomerang. Updated in January 2012 with new figures on the rapid rise of living alone among all age groups (but especially among female seniors).

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The Myth of the Boomerang Generation

One of the stories parents like to tell ourselves is that our young adult children want to move back in with us. Our 20-somethings are referred to as the Boomerang Generation, noted for their failure to launch. There is just one problem with the story of the Boomerang Generation: It is not true.

Census data show that what is really new about young adulthood is the percentage of young adults who live on their own. From 1880 to 1970 the percentage of US born women in their twenties who lived on their own (not with parents and not with a husband) was always less than 15%. By 1980 the percentage of young adult women who lived on their own had risen to 27%, and to 33% in 1990, to 39% in 2000, and to 42% today. The delay of marriage and the extension of singleness can make it appear as if young people are more likely to return to the parental nest. If one examines single people in their twenties, who are the people who have the option of living with their parents, the percentage who live with their parents is now about 45%. Forty five percent may seem high, but it is not: in the past single people in their 20s nearly always lived with their parents.

And what of the Great Recession of 2009? The Great Recession has actually had *no effect* whatsoever on the percentage of young adults living with their parents in the US. This is not so surprising; the (even greater) Great Depression did not affect family structure much, and neither did the Industrial Revolution. Family structure changes slowly over time. Economic ups and downs have little effect on who lives with whom.

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Figure 1: Where is the Boomerang? Percent of Young Unmarried Americans who Live with Their Parents Currently near an all-time low.

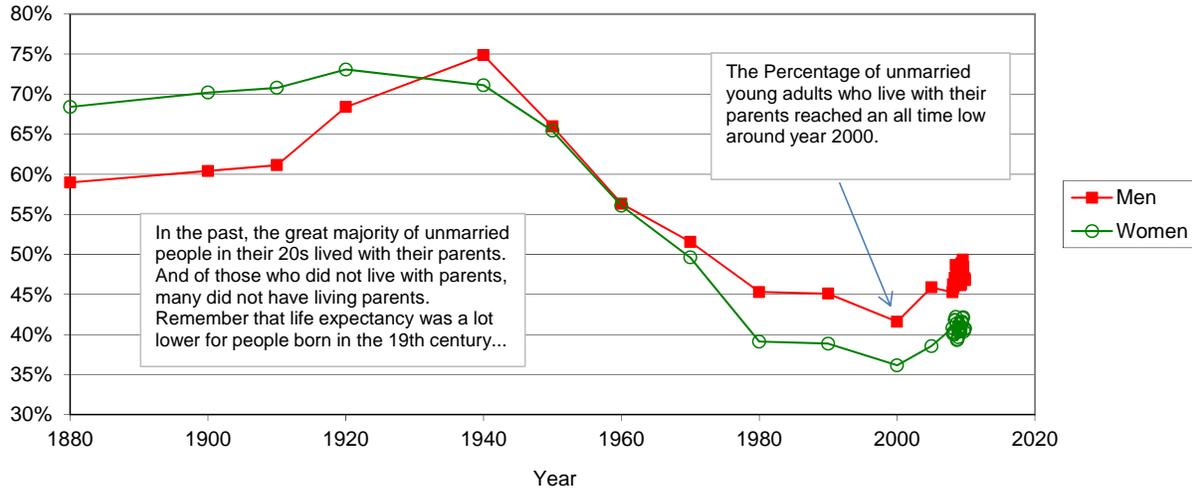


Figure © 2011 M. Rosenfeld, based on Rosenfeld's tabulations of US Census microdata via IPUMS, 1880-2000; American Community Survey 2005; Current Population Survey data for each month Jan 2008-November 2009, via NBER. All Individuals are US born, age 20-29, never married. Percentages are weighted by household weights. "Living with Parents" means living with either or both parents.

**Figure 2: Where is the Effect of the Great Recession?
Detail View of Monthly Percentage of Single Young Adults Living with Parents**

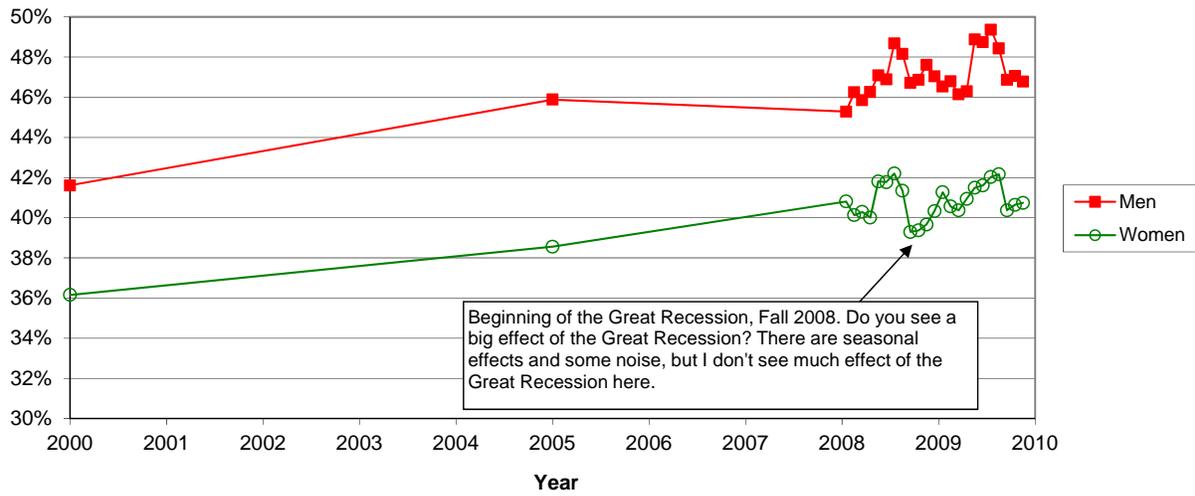
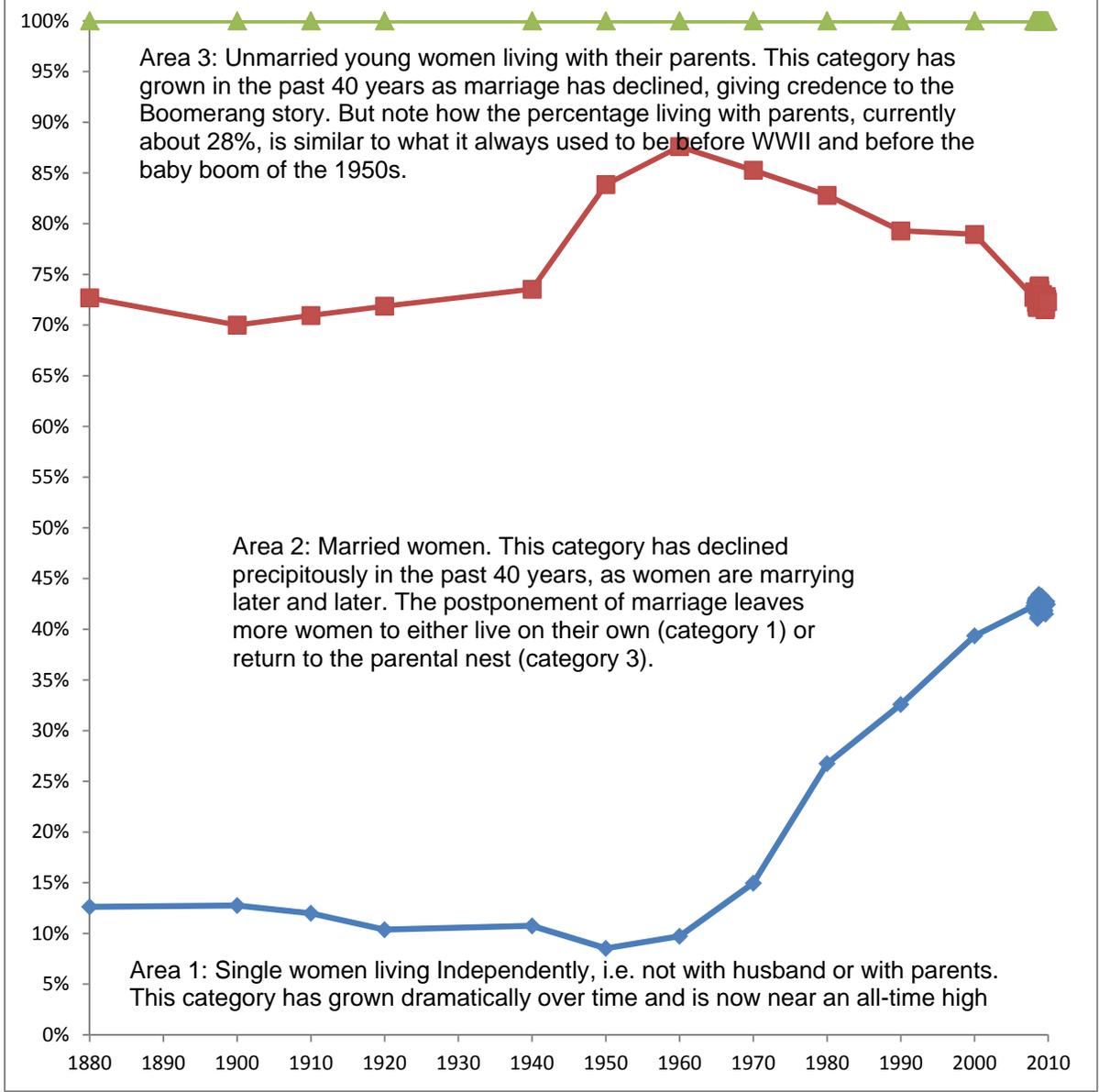
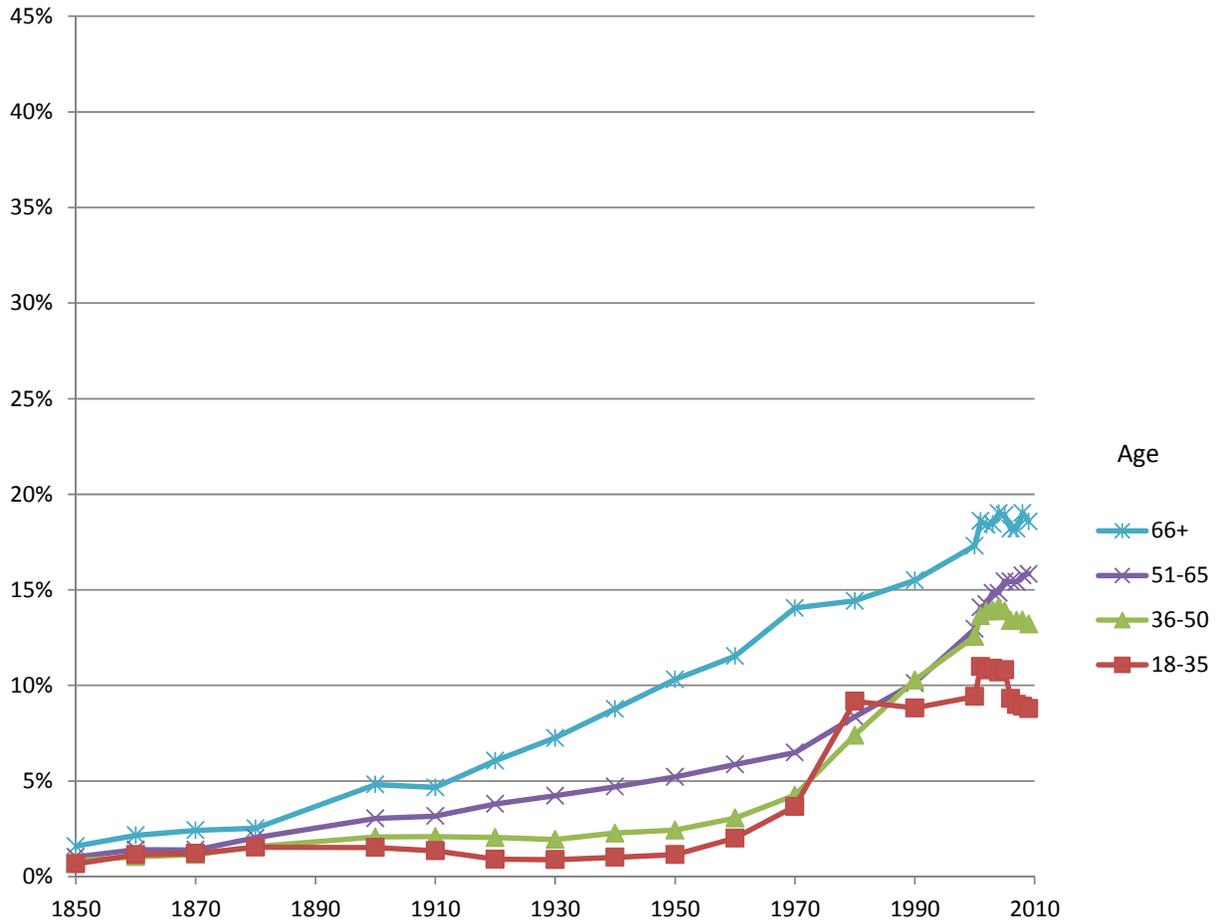


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Figure 3: Living Arrangements for US born women in their 20s, divided into 3 mutually exclusive categories



**Figure 4: The rise of Solo Living:
The Percentage of US-born Males who live alone,
by age**



© M.J. Rosenfeld 2012. Source: Weighted UC census data 1850-2000, weighted data from the American Community Survey 2001-2009, via ipums. Includes US born men. Anyone living in group quarters (i.e. dormitories, assisted living, or state facilities) is counted as *not* living alone.

Note the rapid rise of senior women living on their own.

