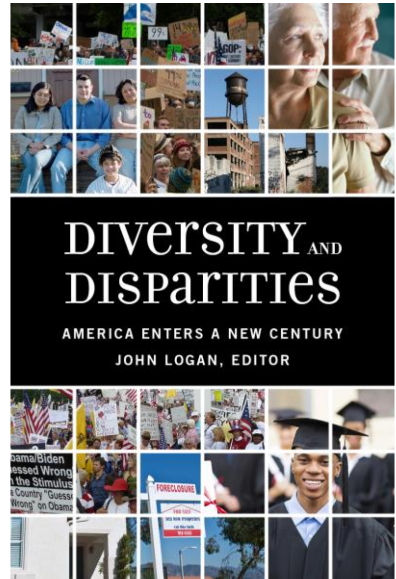

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Part II

The Persistence of Change: Dealing with Diversity

Chapter 8

The Divergent Paths of American Families

Zhenchao Qian

For a very long time, a typical American family consisted of a working husband, a stay-at-home wife, and children.[1] This traditional family was portrayed during the 1950s and 1960s in popular TV dramas and sitcoms such as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver* and represented what an ideal family looked like. Over time, especially since the 1970s, American families have been undergoing fundamental changes. The so-called traditional family is now much less common, and the transformation of marriage as a social institution has given young adults today many more options about partnering and parenting (Cherlin 2004). Some young Americans delay marriage, and others forgo marriage altogether (Lichter and Qian 2004; McLanahan and Casper 1995). Unmarried cohabitation, which is typically a short-lived arrangement, has emerged as the initial coresidential choice for most young men and women. Marriage is no longer "till death do us part" for all because divorce and separation have become commonplace. Over the life course, individuals now experience more cohabitations, remarriages, and relationship disruptions (Cherlin 2004).

As a result, marital and cohabiting unions have become transitory in the United States. Men and women cohabit, marry, and separate or divorce, once or even multiple times, a phenomenon described as the "American marriage-go-round" (Cherlin 2009). Family structure has become more diverse, with smaller shares of traditional families and more dual-earner families, declining percentages of married families and more cohabiting or single-parent families, multigenerational families, and same-sex couples (Casper and Bianchi 2002; Ellwood and Jencks 2004; Lichter and Qian 2004). Consequently, fewer children today live in traditional families with both biological parents, and more live with single parents, with stepparents, or with parents and their cohabiting partners.

After documenting rapid changes in American families in the earlier decades, the sociologists Lynne Casper and Suzanne Bianchi (2002) noted the "quieting" of family change: a halt in the rise of the single-mother family and in the decline of the two-parent family in the latter half of the 1990s. Casper and Bianchi posited that if that trend were to continue in the 2000s, the transformation of family formation and dissolution might be complete and that American family structures would then stabilize. Yet the halt may have been temporary because of the good economic conditions of the latter half of the 1990s. Rapid family change apparently resumed during the first decade of the new century, especially during the "Great Recession" of the late 2000s, when unemployment was high, family incomes stagnated, and housing markets collapsed. In this study, I examine changes in marriage, cohabitation, divorce, remarriage, and children's living arrangements to explore whether the "quieting" of family change continued in the 2000s.

An overall portrait of changes in American families does not provide diverse family pictures for large segments of average Americans. The reason is simple. Americans differ in fundamental ways—by race and ethnicity, educational attainment, and nativity. Whites are more likely to marry, to have children while married, and to stay married than African Americans (McLanahan and Casper 1995). Yet Americans can no longer be viewed in simple black and white, or even in single-race terms (Lee and Bean 2010). Increasing shares of minority populations, especially Hispanics and Asian Americans, also have different family structures. Hispanics, despite economic status similar to African Americans', have higher marriage rates than African Americans (Saenz 2004). Asians, on the other hand, marry at later ages and tend to have stable families (Xie and Goyette 2004). Clearly, America's growing racial and ethnic diversity has added new variation to America's families (Oropesa and Gorman 2000; Zhou and Bankston 1998).

Meanwhile, continuous improvement in levels of schooling, especially women's surpassing of men in education, has had a profound impact on American families (Buchmann and DiPrete 2006) and made educational attainment a more important factor in how men and women choose spouses. During the 1950s, when traditional families were common, husbands typically had more schooling than their wives. In recent decades, educational homogamy (husbands and wives with the same levels of education) increased dramatically, especially among those at the two ends of the education distribution (Schwartz and Mare 2005). Educational attainment is an important sorting mechanism for marriage (and for cohabitation as well), as men and women with more schooling are far more likely to marry than those with fewer years of schooling (Qian 1998). In addition, highly educated men and women are more likely to stay married than their less-educated counterparts (Amato 2010). The impact of educational attainment on marriage, divorce, and assortative mating undeniably leads to increasing diversity among American families.

Another dimension of diversity is nativity status. A continuous influx of immigrants to the United States has increased the number and share of racial-ethnic minorities. In 2010 immigrants accounted for nearly 13 percent of the population, and over 85 percent of the immigrants were racial-ethnic minorities (Grieco et al. 2012). When immigrant and minority groups are small in size, pressure to assimilate into mainstream America is strong. When they grow in size, cultural differences become more salient owing to increases in the number of ethnic restaurants, places of worship, and communities. To be sure, many immigrants bring to America more "traditional" values attached to marriage, including greater stigma associated with divorce. It is not a surprise that immigrants consist of proportionately more married families than the U.S.-born (Clark, Glick, and Bures 2009). The impact of immigration extends beyond immigrants themselves, however, because the rise in inter-nativity interactions may reinforce immigrant and minority cultures (Lichter, Carmalt, and Qian 2011; Stevens, Ishizawa, and Escandell 2012). To say the least, immigration contributed to the recent "quieting" of family change in America.

Children are on the front line of recent changes in American families. While men and women exercise their individual freedom as they go through transitory marital and cohabiting unions, children are often caught in between, and sometimes their well-being is at risk. Children living with married parents perform better at school and achieve greater socioeconomic status later in life than children living in single-parent, cohabiting, or step families (Cherlin 2004; Manning and Brown 2006). In large part, this is because married couples have higher levels of education and are more financially stable. Persistent income and socioeconomic status inequality has created diverse family structures (McLanahan and Percheski 2008). Children living in female-headed single families or cohabiting families are more likely to live in poverty than those living in married-couple families (Lichter and Qian 2004; Manning and Smock 1997). The Great Recession presumably has affected family living arrangements and heightened the prospect of poverty among America's children.

My intention here is to provide a descriptive portrait of changes in American families. I address the question of whether the "quieting" of family change continued in the 2000s by presenting evidence of change in marriage, cohabitation, divorce, remarriage, and children's living arrangements during that period. The data present a mixed picture of whether the "quieting" of the 1990s continued into the 2000s. I highlight the contribution of race-ethnicity, educational attainment, and nativity to changes and diversity in family structure.

I use Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) data from the 2000 census and the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 American Community Survey (ACS). I have pooled three years of ACS data in order to obtain sufficiently large samples for special populations (including, for example, racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, and single-parent families). When examining remarriage, I use the ACS data as well as the IPUMS data from the 1980 census, which is the last census that includes information on marriage order. I include three main variables in my analyses: nativity, race-ethnicity, and educational attainment. Nativity is classified as U.S.-born and immigrants; race-ethnicity is classified as non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic African American, non-Hispanic Asian American, non-Hispanic American Indian, and Hispanic (multiracial individuals are not included in the analysis); and educational attainment is classified as less than high school, high school, some college, and college and more.

MARRIAGE

Evidence suggests that married individuals are happier and healthier and that they have better socioeconomic status than their unmarried counterparts (Waite and Gallagher 2000). Because of these benefits, marriage promotion was included in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)—the welfare reform bill that sought to end the dependence of low-income single mothers on government benefits (Lichter, Graefe, and Brown 2003). Of course, marriage promotion does not necessarily lead to marriage. More importantly, it is unclear whether marriage itself would actually improve well-being. Nevertheless, marriage as a social institution brings a sense of permanence. Economies of scale and family and friendship networks are just a few of the marriage benefits that protect against unexpected events and play a positive role in health outcomes and socioeconomic well-being (Waite 1995).

Marriage has many benefits, and an overwhelming majority of Americans expect to marry (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001). Yet marriage rates have declined over recent decades (Casper and Bianchi 2002; Lichter and Qian 2004; McLanahan and Casper 1995). The reasons for the decline are multiple, including the weakened connection between marriage and childbearing, the growing popularity of nonmarital cohabitation, the persistent high divorce rates, and the declining remarriage rates (Amato et al. 2007).

Of course, a decline in marriage rates does not necessarily mean that young Americans today are not getting married. Continuous improvement in educational attainment indicates that delays in marriage stem in part from young Americans spending more years in college and more time pursuing a professional career. Even those with no college education may be delaying marriage at least in part owing to the rise in cohabitation; the first coresidential union for the majority of young adults today is cohabitation rather than marriage. Meanwhile, mate selection patterns have changed over time in response to improvements in educational attainment. The traditional social norm of a man marrying a woman with less education has become passé. Today men value women's educational attainment and labor market positions as equally as women value men's (Sweeney and Cancian 2004). This suggests that highly educated men and women marry each other and that they do so after they complete their educations and launch their careers.

Educational attainment varies significantly among racial-ethnic groups. Some of the racial-ethnic differences in marriage are attributable to compositional differences in educational attainment. For example, Asian Americans have the highest percentage of college education and also have the latest age at marriage (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Of course, other factors may also help account for racial-ethnic differences in marriage. Male partners, especially those with potential economic resources, are much less available for African American women than for white women (Ellwood and Jencks 2004; Lichter and Qian 2004). The shortage of marriageable men is especially serious among college-educated African American women: not only do they outnumber college-educated African American men (Buchmann and DiPrete 2006), but highly educated African American men are much more likely to marry interracially than their female counterparts (Qian and Lichter 2007). Therefore, more African American women than white women forgo marriage and remain single. On the other hand, Hispanics tend to exhibit marriage patterns similar to whites', despite Hispanics' lower levels of educational attainment (Saenz 2004).

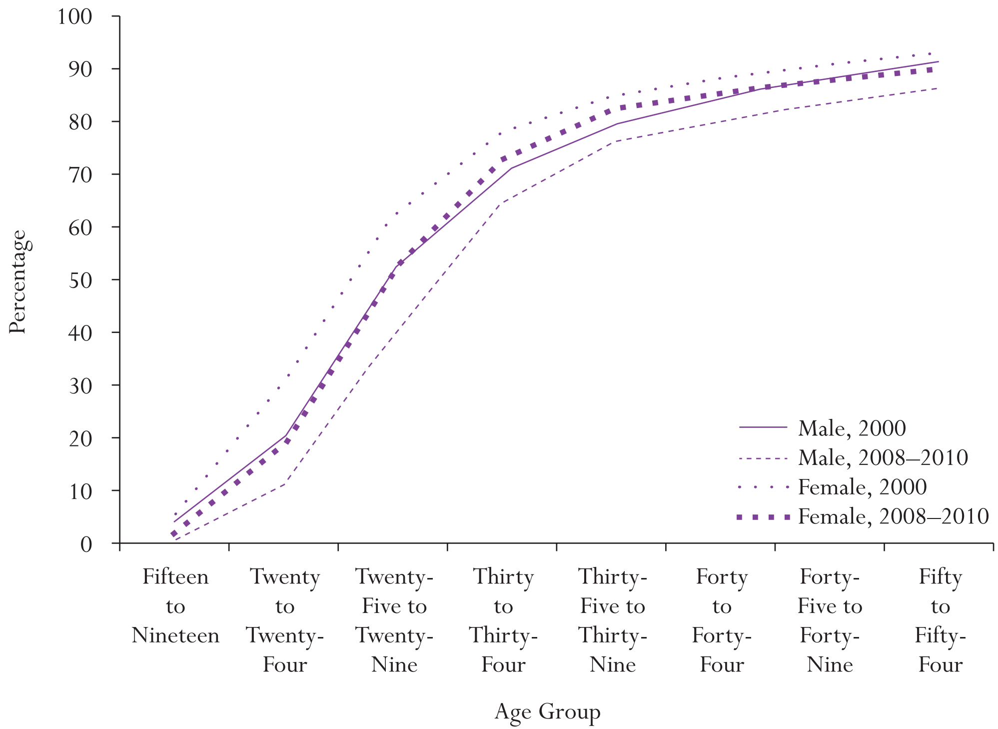
In my examination of changing marital status, I use data from the 2000 U.S. decennial census and the 2008–2010 ACS and classify marital status as "never married," "currently married," "divorced," "separated," and "widowed." "Ever married" includes all but those who have never been married. A percentage distribution of men or women ever married by age is a good indicator of marital prevalence, and at later ages it offers an estimate of permanent singlehood. Changes in "ever married" in the 2000s provide answers to whether men and women continue delaying marriage.

Figure 8.1 presents the percentage of those who were ever married by sex and nativity in 2000 and in 2008–2010. The percentage ever married declined from 21 to 11 percent and from 31 to 19 percent, respectively, among U.S.-born men and women age twenty to twenty-four. The declines were equally large among the twenty-five- to twenty-nine-year-olds; only two-fifths of U.S.-born men and about half of U.S.-born women were ever married. The large declines indicate continuing delays in marriage. Most young people in their twenties attend college, explore romantic relationships, pursue jobs and careers, and strive for independence. Yet independence may be hard to come by during the Great Recession. For example, in 2008–2010, 43 percent of twenty- to twenty-four-year-olds and 19 percent of twenty-five- to twenty-nine-year-olds lived with their parents, a phenomenon in large part attributable to financial difficulties or relationship instabilities (Qian 2012). The declines in the percentage of the ever-married over the period were relatively small among U.S.-born men and women over age thirty, indicating that marriage for many was delayed rather than forgone. Figure 8.1 also reveals that U.S.-born men married at later ages, picked up the pace of marriage, and inched closer to the ever-married levels of U.S.-born women by their thirties.

Some people never marry for various reasons—for example, because they choose their career over marriage and children, or because they live in a same-sex relationship in a state where they are not allowed to legally marry, or because they are simply unable to find someone to marry (Lichter and Qian 2004). Singlehood by ages fifty to fifty-four increased notably between 1980 and 2000 (Lichter and Qian 2004) and continued to rise in the 2000s (see figure 8.1). In 2008–2010, 13 percent and 10 percent of U.S.-born men and women, respectively, age fifty to fifty-four had never married—five and three percentage points greater compared with the corresponding figures in 2000. I return to this issue when discussing racial-ethnic and education differences in permanent singlehood.

Immigrants have played a more significant role in American society as their share of the population has increased. As shown in figure 8.2, the percentage of those who had ever been married declined in the 2000s among immigrants as well. In fact, the decline was sharper among

FIGURE 8.1 *U.S.-Born Adults Ever Married, by Age and Sex, 2000 and 2008–2010*

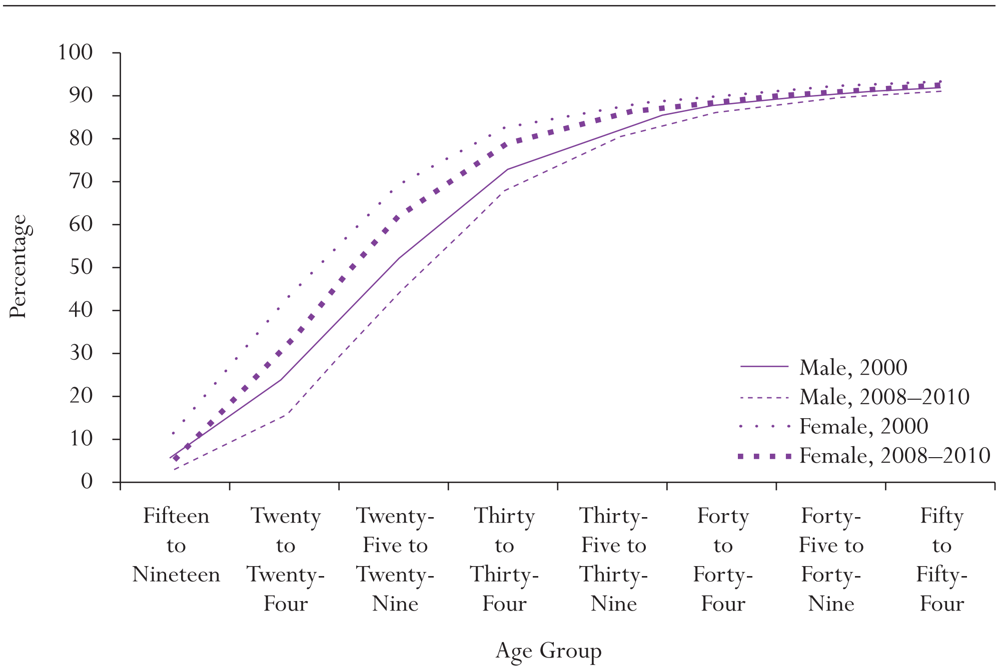


Source: Author's calculations based on Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) data from the 2000 census and the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 American Community Survey (ACS).

immigrants than among the U.S.-born. The Great Recession may have hit immigrants particularly hard, reducing marriage prospects among young immigrants, slowing down immigration, or driving more married immigrants back to their home countries (Cherlin, Cumberworth, Morgan, and Wimer, 2013). Nevertheless, despite declines in the percentage of the ever-married, immigrants married at a higher level at every age group compared with the U.S.-born. Yet gender differences were greater among immigrants than among the U.S.-born. For example, the percentage of the ever-married among immigrant men and women age twenty-five to twenty-nine was 43 percent and 62 percent, respectively. The gender difference was largely due to a much younger age at marriage among immigrant women than among immigrant men. Overall, the percentages of immigrants who had ever been married in 2008–2010 were similar to the levels of their U.S.-born counterparts in 2000. This suggests that immigrants were about ten years away from approaching the U.S.-born in the percentage of the ever-married, a lag that helped lessen the further delay in marriage at the national level.

Race-ethnicity is an important form of diversity. Table 8.1 presents the percentage of the ever-married by race-ethnicity as well as by age, sex, and nativity in 2008–2010. Almost all Americans expect to marry, but not all individuals of various racial-ethnic groups marry at the same level. U.S.-born non-Hispanic whites had the highest percentage of the ever-married at every age group, and nine out of ten had been married by ages fifty to fifty-four. Whites, despite

FIGURE 8.2 *Immigrants Ever Married, by Age and Sex, 2000 and 2008–2010*



Source: Author's calculations based on IPUMS data from the 2000 census and the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

their declining share of the population, had the largest marriage market and were most likely to find marriageable partners. Compared to whites, the percentages of the ever-married among Hispanics, Asian Americans, and American Indians were lower. Among Asian Americans, women were more likely to marry than men at every age group, a finding that can be explained in part by higher levels of interracial marriage among women than among men (Qian and Lichter 2007). In contrast, African Americans had the lowest percentage of those who had ever been married, and only three-quarters were ever married by ages fifty to fifty-four. The frequently cited reason for African Americans' low rates of marriage is limited economic resources (Casper and Bianchi 2002). There are two likely reasons for marriage rates among African American women being the lowest among the racial-ethnic groups considered here: African American men marry interracially at a much higher rate than African American women do, and African American women, on average, have much more schooling than their male counterparts in similar age groups and are faced with shortages of African American men with economic resources (Brien 1997; Buchmann, DiPrete, and McDaniel 2008; Goldman, Westoff, and Hammerslough 1984; Qian and Lichter 2007).

Many immigrants come from countries where marriage is more prevalent than in the United States. Some married before they immigrated to the United States, and many of them undoubtedly followed cultural traditions in their home countries by entering marriage in early adulthood. The results in table 8.1 reveal higher levels of marriage among immigrants of various racial-ethnic groups. The differences were particularly large between U.S.-born and immigrant Asians—the overall percentages of immigrant men and women who had ever been married were more than two times those for their U.S.-born counterparts. Another notable finding is that racial-ethnic differences were much smaller among immigrants, indicating stronger cultural

TABLE 8.1 *Individuals Ever Married, by Age, Sex, Race, and Nativity, 2008–2010*

	White		Black		Hispanic		Asian		American Indian	
	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant
Men										
Fifteen to nineteen	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	3%	1%	1%	1%	—
Twenty to twenty-four	12	13	6	9	13	21	4	7	12	—
Twenty-five to twenty-nine	44	46	23	35	37	47	21	35	34	—
Thirty to thirty-four	69	72	42	62	59	66	52	73	50	—
Thirty-five to thirty-nine	80	84	57	76	72	77	66	85	64	—
Forty to forty-four	84	89	64	82	76	85	72	90	72	—
Forty-five to forty-nine	86	91	68	87	80	88	76	92	76	—
Fifty to fifty-four	89	93	74	89	85	90	79	95	81	—
Total	61	73	40	63	40	64	30	70	47	62
Women										
Fifteen to nineteen	2	3	1	2	3	8	1	2	2	—
Twenty to twenty-four	21	27	8	17	21	39	8	21	20	—
Twenty-five to twenty-nine	57	66	25	47	50	63	33	62	45	—
Thirty to thirty-four	78	84	43	67	69	77	63	84	61	—
Thirty-five to thirty-nine	87	91	56	77	78	84	76	89	72	—
Forty to forty-four	90	93	64	80	83	88	82	92	78	—
Forty-five to forty-nine	91	95	70	83	86	90	84	94	82	—
Fifty to fifty-four	93	95	75	85	88	91	87	94	85	—
Total	68	80	43	65	49	74	36	78	55	77

Source: Author's calculations based on IPUMS data from the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

influences from home countries and weaker associations with marriage market constraints in the United States.

Educational attainment, another dimension of diversity, is closely related to economic resources. Andrew Cherlin (2004) argues that marriage is a status symbol and that those with economic resources are more likely to tie the knot than those with fewer economic resources. Table 8.2 strongly supports that argument. At every age, the percentage of the ever-married was lower among the least-educated. Of course, the fact that only a little over one-fifth of U.S.-born men and women with less than high school education were ever married can be misleading. A large proportion of fifteen- to nineteen-year-olds have neither completed high school nor married. In contrast, three-quarters of men and women who had completed a college education had been married, the highest percentage among all education groups. Individuals with less than a high school education had higher levels of marriage in their earlier twenties, but their levels of marriage did not increase as much at older ages compared with those who had some college or had completed their college education. This suggests that the likelihood of marriage among less-educated men and women becomes smaller at older ages. Compared to the nineteenth century, when half of all college-educated women never married, and to 1960, when 29 percent of college-educated women never married, college education today increases a woman's likelihood of marriage, compared with the likelihood of marriage for women with fewer years of schooling (Isen and Stevenson 2010). This education profile of marriage is similar for men.

Nativity differences in the percentage of the ever-married were large by race-ethnicity but small by educational attainment, as shown in table 8.2. Those with less than a high school education were the exception. The educational gradient of marriage was less prominent among immigrants. Indeed, less-educated immigrants were much closer to those with higher levels of educational attainment than to their U.S.-born counterparts in the percentage of the ever-married. Clearly, marriage is prevalent and not seen as a status symbol among immigrants, regardless of race-ethnicity and educational attainment.

In summary, marriage became increasingly delayed in the 2000s, especially among young men and women in their twenties. The period of "emerging adulthood" has lengthened in recent decades, providing young people with more opportunities than ever to attend school, develop their careers, and explore new relationships before settling down to marry (Arnett 2004). To be sure, the Great Recession toward the end of the 2000s may have further discouraged more young men and women from getting married as they returned to their parental homes to weather economic hardship (Qian 2012). Nevertheless, the percentage of the ever-married increased rapidly starting in the thirties, especially among those with high levels of education, which suggests that most young adults simply delay marriage. A significant minority (13 percent of U.S.-born men and 10 percent of U.S.-born women) had still not married by ages fifty to fifty-four.

Racial-ethnic and educational differences in marriage support the notion that economic resources are the key to marriage among the U.S.-born. Although white men and women on average marry at later ages, they have the highest percentage of those ever married. From a demographic standpoint, balanced sex ratios mean that whites have sufficient opportunities to marry, unlike African American women, who face large deficits in the supply of men, especially men with jobs that can support a family. Yet whites may be more likely to marry because they face fewer structural barriers than racial-ethnic minorities. Racial-ethnic minorities may have to invest more time and social and human capital in their workplace goals than whites, which may cut down on their investments in marriage markets. Similarly, men and women who have completed a college education are more likely to marry than those with less education. Interestingly, the economic resources argument does not apply to immigrants, as the less-educated and racial-

TABLE 8.2 *Individuals Ever Married, by Age, Educational Attainment, Sex, and Nativity, 2008–2010*

	Less Than High School		High School		Some College		College or Higher	
	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant
Men								
Fifteen to nineteen	1%	2%	2%	3%	1%	3%	3%	17%
Twenty to twenty-four	13	24	13	18	8	9	11	9
Twenty-five to twenty-nine	33	47	40	47	42	41	40	37
Thirty to thirty-four	50	65	61	67	67	69	70	73
Thirty-five to thirty-nine	62	75	73	79	79	80	82	85
Forty to forty-four	67	84	79	85	83	87	86	90
Forty-five to forty-nine	72	87	83	89	86	90	88	92
Fifty to fifty-four	77	90	87	91	88	92	89	94
Total	22	60	58	65	60	64	74	78
Women								
Fifteen to nineteen	1	4	3	7	2	4	16	13
Twenty to twenty-four	26	48	24	36	15	20	17	23
Twenty-five to twenty-nine	47	65	53	65	55	61	48	58
Thirty to thirty-four	61	76	71	80	75	79	74	81
Thirty-five to thirty-nine	70	82	80	86	84	87	84	88
Forty to forty-four	75	86	86	90	87	91	87	91
Forty-five to forty-nine	80	89	89	92	90	92	88	92
Fifty to fifty-four	84	90	92	93	91	93	89	93
Total	23	69	66	76	66	73	74	82

Source: Author's calculations based on IPUMS data from the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

ethnic minorities married at levels similar to those of their highly educated and white counterparts. Many immigrants who come to the United States hold traditional values about marriage and children and marry regardless of their economic resources. Indeed, immigration has helped slow down the marriage decline in American society.

COHABITATION

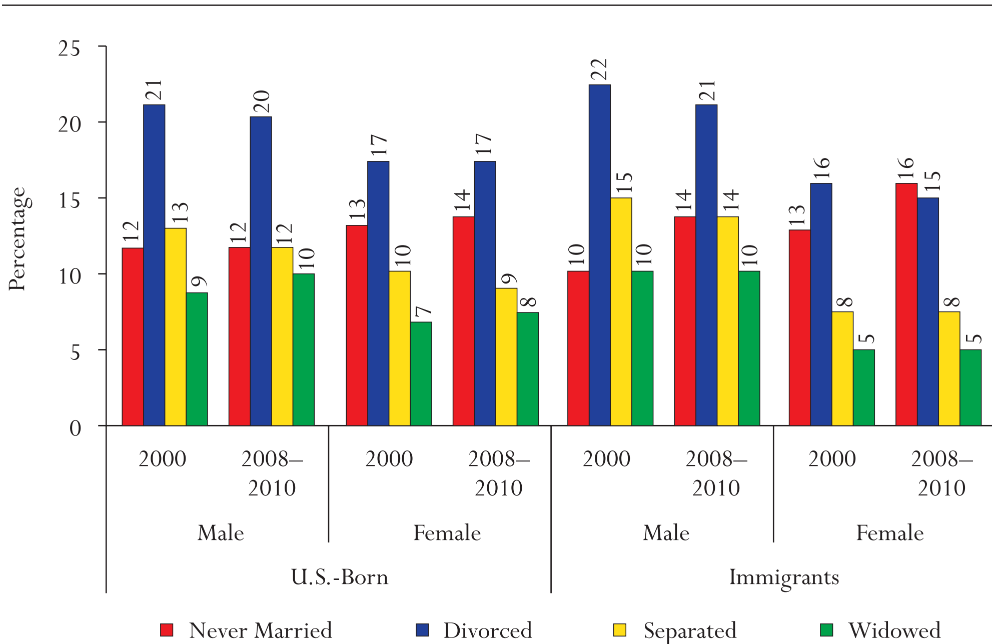
The decline in marriage has given rise to more cohabitation, which emerged as a new living arrangement in the 1960s and has become prevalent over time (Cherlin 2004). The number of cohabiting couples grew from 400,000 in 1960 to 3.8 million in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). Unlike marriage, cohabitation is typically a short-lived arrangement, mostly lasting one or two years (Bumpass and Lu 2000). Many young adults view cohabitation as a step between dating and marriage. Nearly 60 percent of the couples who formed their marriage in the early 1990s cohabited prior to marriage (Bumpass and Lu 2000). Those who have made the transition to marriage tend to be those with economic resources (Lichter, Qian, and Mellott 2006). Meanwhile, some others consider cohabitation an alternative to marriage, move from one cohabitation to another, and become serial cohabitors (Lichter and Qian 2008). Working- and lower-middle-class individuals are particularly likely to be in such relationships (Manning and Smock 2005). They expect to marry and aspire to have a big wedding, but limited financial resources constrain their ability to do so. They resort to cohabitation as a way of adapting to their economic hardships (Sassler and McNally 2003).

The marriages of couples who cohabited before marriage are more likely to break up than the marriages of those who did not (Lichter and Qian 2008). Some argue that cohabitors' learning and experience of alternative intimate relationships outside of marriage raises the risk of divorce (Axinn and Thornton 1992; Smock 2000). Others posit that married couples with prior cohabitation experience may not be as committed to the relationship in the first place. Not only are they more likely to cohabit, but they also are more likely to divorce compared to those without cohabitation experience (Thomson and Colella 1992). However, Bo Lu and others (2012) find that the selection effect of cohabitation on subsequent marital disruption has weakened over time because cohabitation has become less selective (of "divorce-prone" persons) as it has become the modal pathway to marriage (see also Manning and Cohen 2012).

Over the life course, many individuals experience singlehood, cohabitation, marriage, and divorce once or more than once. Even among the elderly, cohabitation has increasingly become commonplace (Brown, Lee, and Bulanda 2006). Clearly, cohabitation is no longer a living arrangement that is only common among never-married young men and women. Previously married individuals often cohabit rather than marry or at least cohabit and then move on to marriage (Smock 2000).

Delays in marriage suggest that cohabitation may have surged over the period between 2000 and 2008–2010. Figure 8.3 provides answers to this question by presenting the percentage of cohabitors by sex and nativity among never-married, divorced, separated, or widowed individuals ages eighteen to sixty-four. The rapid increase in cohabitation witnessed prior to 2000 appeared to have been halted, but only because cohabitation is usually a temporary rather than permanent arrangement and the prevalence measure of cohabitation provided only a snapshot of cohabitations at the time of the interviews. Most young people today cohabit before they marry. Among the U.S.-born, the percentage cohabiting remained largely unchanged between 2000 and 2008–2010 for every marital status group. The story was the same among immigrants, with one important exception—the percentage cohabiting increased from 10 to 14 percent and

FIGURE 8.3 *Individuals Ages Eighteen to Sixty-Four Cohabiting, by Marital Status, Sex, and Nativity, 2000 and 2008–2010*



Source: Author's calculations based on IPUMS data from the 2000 census and the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

from 13 to 16 percent over the period between 2000 and 2008–2010 among never-married immigrant men and women, respectively.

Among individuals ages eighteen to sixty-four who were not currently married, the divorced had the highest percentage cohabiting, while the widowed had the lowest, for both sexes and every nativity group. The percentage cohabiting was lower among the separated than among the divorced because separated individuals had started the divorce process more recently and their marriage was not officially over. Gender differences in cohabitation were evident: a higher percentage of never-married women were cohabiting compared with their male counterparts, while divorced and separated men had a higher percentage cohabiting than their female counterparts. The reason is simple: custody of children may discourage divorced and separated women from developing intimate relationships, but divorced and separated men, especially those with economic resources, have more opportunities to form cohabiting relationships with never-married women (Shafer 2013). Nativity differences are surprisingly small—for each marital status group, the difference in the percentage cohabiting is within two percentage points. As shown, this small difference is in part due to wide acceptance of cohabitation among Hispanic immigrants (Landale and Fennelly 1992).

Table 8.3 presents racial-ethnic differences in cohabitation among individuals age eighteen to sixty-four. U.S.-born whites and American Indians had the highest percentage of cohabitation and U.S.-born African and Asian Americans had the lowest. Along with the findings on marriage, it is clear that U.S.-born Asian Americans married at later ages but did not cohabit as much either. African Americans, especially African American women, exhibited the lowest levels of cohabitation and marriage. Nativity differences are generally small. Hispanic immigrants were

TABLE 8.3 *Individuals Ages Eighteen to Sixty-Four Cohabiting, by Marital Status, Race, Sex, and Nativity, 2008–2010*

	White		Black		Hispanic		Asian		American Indian	
	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant
Men										
Never married	13%	11%	9%	10%	11%	18%	6%	7%	14%	—
Divorced	21	20	16	19	21	23	16	15	21	—
Separated	12	10	10	13	11	16	6	10	11	—
Widowed	10	10	9	11	9	11	6	7	14	—
Total	15	14	10	12	13	19	7	8	16	15%
Women										
Never married	16	13	8	9	13	24	9	9	18	—
Divorced	18	16	7	8	17	16	18	14	19	—
Separated	11	6	5	5	8	9	9	6	12	—
Widowed	8	5	4	4	9	7	8	5	9	—
Total	16	13	7	8	14	19	10	9	17	20

Source: Author's calculations based on IPUMS data from the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

the only immigrant group with higher levels of cohabitation compared with their U.S.-born counterparts because cohabitation is more culturally acceptable and commonly practiced in Latin America (Landale and Fennelly 1992).

Unlike in the past, today the percentage of those who have ever been married increases with educational attainment. For less-educated individuals, marriage is often regarded as a status symbol because a wedding has become too expensive (Cherlin 2004). Do they respond by cohabiting more? The answer is no. As revealed in table 8.4, never-married individuals with less than a high school education had the lowest percentage of cohabitation. There could be two possible explanations. One is that the measure used here is based on prevalence. It is possible that less-educated individuals cohabit, but that their cohabiting relationships became more unstable and short-lived during the Great Recession. As a result, the percentage cohabiting—a prevalence rather than incidence measure—captures fewer cohabiting relationships among the less-educated. Another possible explanation is that less-educated individuals lack economic resources, which diminishes the prospect for them not only of marriage but also of cohabitation, as well as the duration of cohabitation. Earning potential, highly correlated with educational attainment, was not a strong predictor of entry into cohabitation in the past (Xie, Raymo, Goyette, and Thornton 2003). It is likely to have become a strong predictor of whether one cohabits and how long each cohabitation episode lasts. After all, cohabitation is a more formal living arrangement than a casual relationship because the expectation is strong that cohabitation will transition into marriage, as seen among those with economic resources (Lichter, Qian, and Mellott 2006). Among the previously married, men and women who had completed a college education had the lowest percentage of cohabitation. Because proportionally fewer college-educated men and women divorce, the few who do may have greater remarriage prospects and less incentive to cohabit because of their economic independence compared with their less-educated counterparts.

Gender differences in cohabitation were surprisingly small by educational attainment and nativity. Immigrants and the U.S.-born had similar percentages of cohabitation for most categories, except that never-married immigrants with less than a high school education had much greater levels of cohabitation than their U.S.-born counterparts (19 percent versus 9 percent for men and 27 percent versus 10 percent for women), and never-married immigrants with at least a college education had much lower levels of cohabitation than their U.S.-born counterparts (12 percent versus 17 percent for both men and women). The reason is compositional: Hispanic immigrants come from cultures in which cohabitation is normative, and immigrants with less than a high school education are more likely to be Hispanic. In contrast, immigrants who have completed a college education are less likely to be Hispanic and thus are less likely to form cohabiting relationships.

Bucking the trend in the past, the prevalence of cohabitation among the U.S.-born did not increase in the 2000s, even with increases in the incidence of cohabitation.[2] This suggests that cohabitation is a transitory stage in the life course rather than a permanent living arrangement that serves as an alternative to marriage. Are changing patterns of cohabitation a part of the "quieting" of family change documented by Lynne Casper and Suzanne Bianchi (2002)? Or is the Great Recession the culprit for low levels of cohabitation? After all, cohabitation prevalence is lowest among those with less than a high school education and among racial-ethnic minorities, especially African Americans. This is a finding that we did not witness in the past. It is possible that these individuals cannot afford even cohabitation or that they have unstable cohabiting relationships owing to poor employment opportunities and few economic resources. Another possible explanation is that cohabitation is now so prevalent that it has become a social institution, which comes with its own expectations and norms. As a result, some young men and women

TABLE 8.4 *Individuals Ages Eighteen to Sixty-Four Cohabiting, by Marital Status, Educational Attainment, Sex, and Nativity, 2008–2010*

	Less Than High School		High School		Some College		College or Higher	
	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant
Men								
Never married	9%	19%	11%	13%	12%	9%	17%	12%
Divorced	20	22	21	22	20	21	19	18
Separated	13	15	13	15	11	14	8	9
Widowed	11	10	11	10	10	12	8	9
Total	11	19	14	15	14	12	17	13
Women								
Never married	10	27	13	16	13	11	17	12
Divorced	19	15	19	16	16	15	13	13
Separated	12	10	10	7	8	7	5	5
Widowed	8	5	8	6	8	6	6	4
Total	12	19	14	15	14	11	15	12

Source: Author's calculations based on IPUMS data from the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

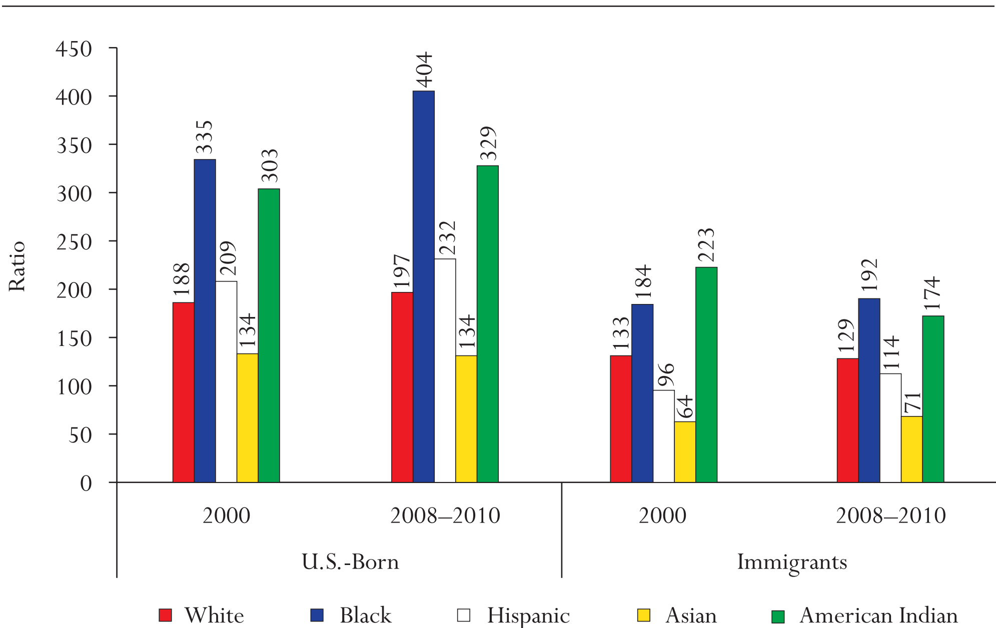
may be discouraged from entering cohabiting relationships that have become more institutionalized.

DIVORCE

The annual divorce rate (the number of divorces per 1,000 individuals) rose from 2.2 in 1960 to 5.2 in 1980 and then dropped to 3.6 in 2006 (Amato 2010). The rise in age at marriage contributes to the decline in the divorce rate because of the denominator. In other words, the denominator includes fewer married individuals and fewer individuals at risk of divorce (Heaton 2002). In addition, marriage has become selective, and those who marry have lower risks of divorce. For example, less-educated individuals and racial-ethnic minorities, who tend to have higher divorce rates, are now much less likely to marry than their highly educated counterparts or whites (McLanahan 2004; Sweeney and Phillips 2004).

What happened to the divorce rate when marriage rates continued to decline in the 2000s? The annual divorce rate is confounded by the proportion who are married, so I use a more refined divorce rate: the ratio of the number of divorces over 1,000 married individuals. Sara McLanahan and Lynne Casper (1995) showed that the ratio of divorced to married adults grew over fourfold from 1960 to 1990, from 33 to 133 among whites and from 62 to 282 among African Americans. Figure 8.4 presents the ratio by race-ethnicity and nativity among men and women ages eighteen to sixty-four in 2000 and 2008–2010. The ratio among whites increased slightly, from 188 divorces per 1,000 marriages in 2000 to 197 in 2008–2010. The ratio was a little higher for Hispanics than for non-Hispanic whites. For African Americans, the ratio was

FIGURE 8.4 *Ratio of Divorced Individuals Ages Eighteen to Sixty-Four per 1,000 Married Individuals, by Race and Nativity, 2000 and 2008–2010*

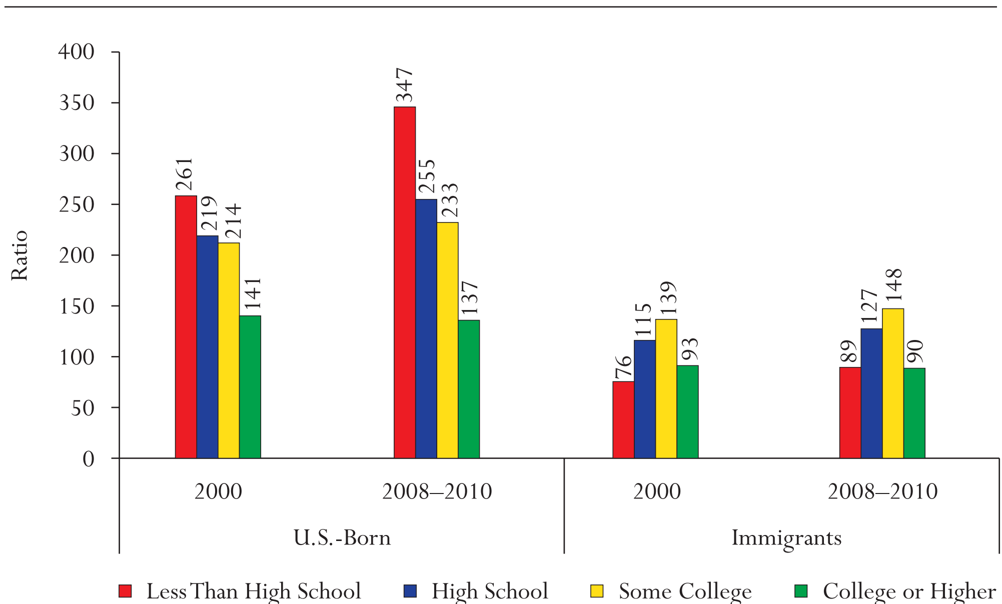


Source: Author's calculations based on IPUMS data from the 2000 census and the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

highest in 2000 and rose from 335 in 2000 to 404 in 2008–2010. American Indians had the second-highest ratio. The ratio among U.S.-born Asians was lowest (134) and remained unchanged in the 2000s. Although race-ethnicity differs in compositional effects, including age at marriage and educational attainment, the racial-ethnic effect on divorce does not disappear when compositional effects are taken into account (Sweeney and Phillips 2004). For each racial-ethnic group, immigrants had a much lower ratio and more stable marriages than their U.S.-born counterparts. One cautionary note is that the ratio does not control for marital duration. Compared with the U.S.-born, immigrants may be younger and their marriages may be of shorter duration, thus making them less exposed to the risk of divorce. In other words, nativity differences may be smaller if marital duration is taken into account.

Figure 8.5 presents the divorce-to-marriage ratio by educational attainment. Among the U.S.-born, the higher the level of educational attainment, the lower the likelihood of divorce, a finding consistent with the previous research (Isen and Stevenson 2010; Martin 2006). The ratio among U.S.-born individuals with less than a high school education was high and continued to increase, by 33 percent, from 261 in 2000 to 347 in 2008–2010. In contrast, the ratio among U.S.-born individuals who had completed a college education was 141 in 2000 and 137 in 2008–2010. The ratio was one and a half times greater among those with less than a high school education. Immigrants offer a different story. The divorce-to-marriage ratio among immigrants increased by educational attainment, except for those who had completed a college education. For those immigrants who live in immigrant communities where divorce is frowned upon and strongly discouraged, divorce may be less of an option, especially for those with less education.

FIGURE 8.5 *Ratio of Divorced Individuals Ages Eighteen to Sixty-Four per 1,000 Married Individuals, by Educational Attainment and Nativity, 2000 and 2008–2010*



Source: Author's calculations based on IPUMS data from the 2000 census and the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

Marriage and cohabitation rates among individuals with lower levels of education and among racial-ethnic minorities such as African Americans declined between 2000 and 2008–2010. Yet the divorce rates among these groups continued to increase. In contrast, highly educated individuals, whites, and Asians had high rates of marriage and continued to maintain low divorce-to-marriage ratios in the 2000s. Such differences cannot be explained by differences in age at marriage (Stevenson and Wolfers 2007). The results reveal that the stably married population disproportionately consists of those who are white and highly educated. Economic resources appear to be the key. U.S.-born individuals with few economic resources are less likely to marry or cohabit and more likely to divorce after marriage compared with those with more economic resources. The Great Recession in 2008–2010 may have exacerbated the situation. Among immigrants, racial-ethnic differences in the divorce-to-marriage ratio mirror those among the U.S.-born, but immigrants had much lower divorce-to-marriage ratios. Among immigrants, educational attainment did not play a role in determining the likelihood of marriage, and the effect of educational attainment on divorce shows an inverted-U—those with less than a high school education and those who had completed a college education had the lowest rates of divorce. The economic resources argument did not play a role in immigrants' marriage and divorce rates.

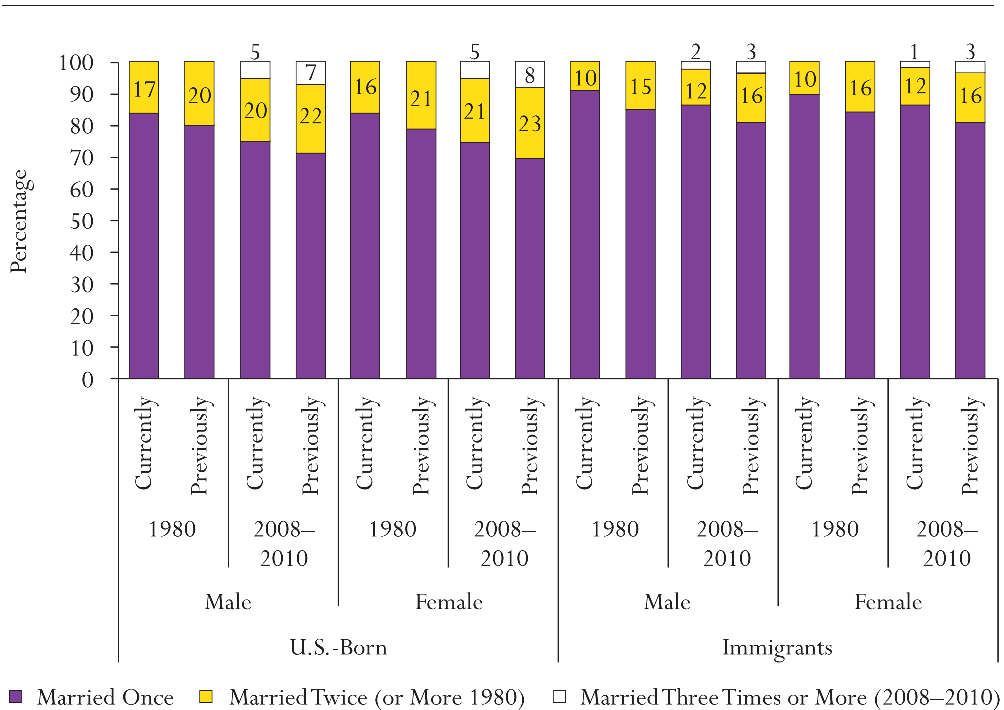
REMARRIAGE

As early as 1981, the sociologist Andrew Cherlin (1992) identified an emerging life-course pattern of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In his 2009 book *The Marriage-Go-Round,* he draws attention to a uniquely American family life that no other countries in the world have experienced: Americans start relationships at younger ages, experience short-term cohabitations often, divorce quickly after marriage, and move into other cohabiting or marital relationships (Cherlin 2009). Remarriage is unique compared to first marriage because remarried individuals are a select group of all first or previously married individuals—that is, they have been divorced or widowed. Because many of them have minor children, they often face the complications associated with child support, visitation rights, and stepfamilies (Sweeney 1997). Divorced women with economic resources may have less motivation to remarry because of their ability to support themselves and their children, while those with fewer economic resources may have more motivation to remarry in order to escape from poverty (Sweeney 1997). Most divorced women have physical or legal custody of their children, which tends to reduce their attractiveness in the marriage market. On the other hand, divorced men with economic resources remarry at a higher rate. Their pool of marriageable women is larger and often includes never-married, younger women (Shafer 2013).

To examine whether remarriages have increased over time, I rely on data from the 1980 census and the 2008–2010 American Community Survey. The 1980 census was the latest census, and the 2008 ACS was the first ACS, to include information on marriage order. These two data sources are not exactly comparable: marriage order for the 1980 census was classified as "married once" and "married twice or more," while marriage order for the 2008–2010 ACS had information on those who had been married once, twice, and three times or more, a difference that reflects changes in the prevalence of remarriage over time.

Figure 8.6 compares marriage order between 1980 and 2008–2010 among currently and previously married individuals age eighteen to sixty-four. Among currently married men, the share of remarriage increased from 17 percent in 1980 to 25 percent (20 percent married twice and 5 percent married three times or more) in 2008–2010. Among previously married men, the corresponding percentages in 1980 and 2008–2010 were 20 and 29 percent (22 percent

FIGURE 8.6 *Distribution of Marriage Order Among Currently and Previously Married Individuals Ages Eighteen to Sixty-Four, 1980 and 2008–2010*



Source: Author's calculations based on IPUMS data from the 1980 census and the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

married twice and 7 percent married three times or more), respectively. Currently and previously married women had remarried at rates similar to those of their male counterparts. Of course, previously married individuals had already disrupted a marriage and experienced more marital transitions than the currently married. Increases in remarriage reflect the "marriage-go-round"—more individuals are moving from one marital state to another (marriage, divorce, remarriage, divorce) over the life course. Again, the share of remarriage was small among immigrants. The nativity differences were stronger among the previously married than among the currently married, suggesting that immigrants experienced fewer marital transitions than their U.S.-born counterparts.

How did marriage order vary by race-ethnicity in 2008–2010? As shown in table 8.5, U.S.-born whites and American Indians had the highest percentages of remarriage. Among U.S.-born white men, 20 percent and 5 percent of the currently married were in their second or third or higher order marriage, respectively, and the percentages for the previously married were 23 percent and 8 percent, respectively. Among U.S.-born white women, the numbers were one or two percentage points higher. The share of remarriage was lower among U.S.-born African Americans and Hispanics than among their white counterparts, especially among the previously married. Given that divorce was less likely among whites than among racial-ethnic minorities, the findings suggest that whites after divorce have greater prospects of remarriage compared to African Americans or Hispanics. Whites may have a larger pool of remarriageable partners than is available to racial-ethnic minorities. And again, economic resources were probably a factor.

TABLE 8.5 *Distribution of Marriage Order Among Individuals Ages Eighteen to Sixty-Four, by Marital Status, Race, Sex, and Nativity, 2008–2010*

	White		Black		Hispanic		Asian		American Indian	
	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant
Men										
Currently married										
Once	74%	81%	73%	76%	79%	87%	88%	91%	72%	78%
Twice	20	16	22	21	17	12	11	8	21	19
Three or more	5	3	5	3	4	2	2	1	8	3
Previously married										
Once	69	76	76	78	78	82	83	83	70	—
Twice	23	20	19	19	18	15	14	15	21	—
Three or more	8	4	4	3	4	3	3	2	9	—
Women										
Currently married										
Once	73	82	76	84	79	87	87	90	70	80
Twice	21	16	20	15	18	12	11	9	22	18
Three or more	6	3	4	1	3	1	2	1	8	2
Previously married										
Once	66	75	77	81	77	82	82	85	68	—
Twice	25	21	19	17	19	16	15	14	23	—
Three or more	9	4	4	2	5	2	3	2	10	—

Source: Author's calculations based on IPUMS data from the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

Immigrants in general had lower levels of remarriage than their U.S.-born counterparts, for two reasons. First, immigrants had lower rates of divorce than the U.S.-born. Second, fewer divorced immigrants remarried. Clearly, considering marriage, cohabitation, divorce, and remarriage, immigrants tend to marry and stay married and do not experience as many marital transitions as their U.S.-born counterparts.

The distribution of marriage order varies by educational attainment as well, as shown in table 8.6. Among currently married U.S.-born individuals, the share of first marriages increased by educational attainment, to around 82 percent among men and women who had completed a college education, but only 69 and 66 percent, respectively, among men and women with less than a high school education. The highly educated are not only more likely to marry but more likely to stay married. Nearly one-tenth of men and women with less than a high school education had married three times or more. These results indicate that individuals with low levels of education are more likely to experience multiple marital transitions than those with high levels of education. Higher percentages of U.S.-born women with less than a high school education had remarried compared with their male counterparts, suggesting that women are more likely to make multiple marital transitions than men. Nativity differences were strongest among those with less than a high school education because less-educated immigrants were the most likely to be in their first marriage.

Indeed, more individuals follow the paths of marriage, divorce, and remarriage during their life course. Serial marriage increased rapidly between 1980 and 2008–2010. The data presented here demonstrate that U.S.-born, less-educated individuals are more likely to go through multiple marital transitions than their highly educated counterparts because proportionately more less-educated individuals divorce and are exposed to the risk of remarriage. Meanwhile, whites experience these marital transitions more often than racial minorities. After all, remarriages are more formal than serial cohabitations and receive better legal protections. Once again, immigrants differ significantly from their U.S.-born counterparts. The explanation is straightforward: immigrants do not divorce as much as natives, and those who divorce are less likely to remarry.

THE IMPACTS OF FAMILY CHANGE ON CHILDREN

The family has always been the principal source of support for America's new generations, and family change affects children in various ways. On the one hand, delays in marriage, prevalent cohabitation, relationship instability, and fertility decline increase childlessness, whether voluntary or involuntary. For example, Pew Research (2010) shows that 13 percent of ever-married women age forty to forty-four and 56 percent of never-married women in the same age group in 2006–2008 had no children. An increasing proportion of the population with no young children may lead to a decline in public support for America's children (Preston 1984). On the other hand, rapid changes in American families indicate that children are likely to fare differently than in the past: some will gain resources and parental time because of delays in marriage and the decline in family size, while other children will lose resources and attention because of divorce, nonmarital childbearing, and transitory unions (Cherlin 2009; McLanahan 2004).

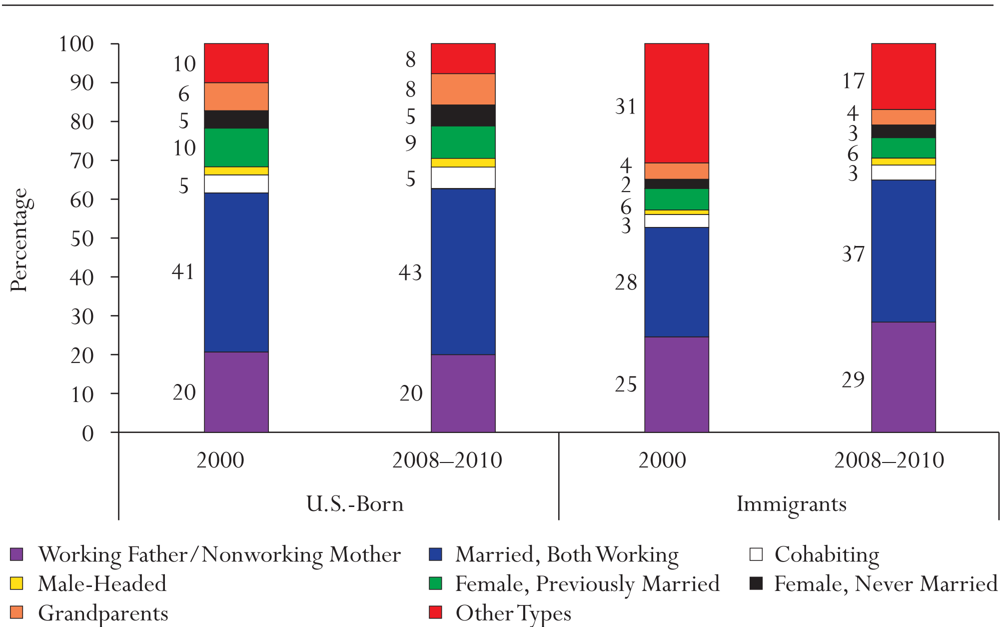
Marriage and childbearing are less likely today to go hand in hand. Social norms against unmarried childbearing are weak, "shotgun weddings" are on the decline, and childbearing outside of marriage is on the rise. This increase in recent decades is largely due to the growing proportion of births among cohabitating couples (Raley 2001; Sassler, Miller, and Favinger 2009). Unfortunately, most cohabiting relationships are unstable and have a negative impact on children (Bulanda and Manning 2008). Children born to cohabiting parents are far more likely to experience single-parenthood or frequent changes of their parents' live-in boyfriends or

TABLE 8.6 *Distribution of Marriage Order Among Individuals Ages Eighteen to Sixty-Four, by Marital Status, Educational Attainment, Sex, and Nativity, 2008–2010*

	Less Than High School		High School		Some College		College or Higher	
	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant
Men								
Currently married								
Once	69%	90%	70%	85%	73%	81%	82%	87%
Twice	23	9	23	14	22	16	15	12
Three or more	8	1	7	2	6	2	3	2
Previously married								
Once	69	85	70	81	70	77	75	79
Twice	23	13	23	16	23	19	20	18
Three or more	9	2	7	3	7	4	5	3
Women								
Currently married								
Once	66	90	69	84	72	83	83	88
Twice	25	9	24	14	22	15	15	11
Three or more	9	1	7	2	6	2	3	1
Previously married								
Once	64	85	66	80	68	77	76	82
Twice	25	13	25	17	24	20	20	16
Three or more	11	2	9	3	8	3	4	2

Source: Author’s calculations based on IPUMS data from the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

FIGURE 8.7 *Distribution of Living Arrangement of Children Ages Zero to Seventeen, by Nativity, 2000 and 2008–2010*



Source: Author's calculations based on IPUMS data from the 2000 census and the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

girlfriends than those born to married parents. Even if their mothers or fathers later marry, their educational attainment and economic well-being in a remarried family pales compared with life for children born in families with two biological parents (Cherlin 1999).

The relationship between children's living arrangements and their socioeconomic well-being is strong. Children living in married-couple families are the least likely to live in poverty, while children growing up in female-headed, single-parent families are the most likely (Lichter and Qian 2004). Meanwhile, children living in cohabiting families also do poorly, at levels that are likely to be overstated because only the income of the householder (not the income of the householder's cohabiting partner) is used to estimate poverty (Lichter, Qian, and Crowley 2005). In addition, when parents move from one relationship to another or have difficulties making ends meet, their children often live with grandparents, a pattern most common among African Americans (Edin 2000).

Family changes such as marriage delay, a growing proportion of children born to unmarried mothers, prevalent cohabitation, and high levels of divorce influence children's well-being. Children often witness every relationship breakup their parents experience. Relationship transitions may be good for their parents, but the children's well-being is often at risk. I now provide a snapshot of changes in children's living arrangements by race-ethnicity and nativity (see figure 8.7). I include all children ages zero to seventeen in my analysis.

The years between 2000 and 2008–2010 saw a period of relative stability in living arrangements among U.S.-born children. In 2000 the highest proportion of children were living with two working parents (41 percent), followed by those living with traditional families (working father and nonworking mother, 20 percent). In 2008–2010 the percentage of children living in

dual-earner families had increased by two percentage points. Of course, living with two working parents or in a traditional family does not necessarily mean that a child lives with two biological parents, and we do not know whether the distribution of children living with both biological parents changed over the period. There was almost no change in other living arrangements. Changes, if any, were within two percentage points. For example, the percentage of children living with previously married mothers declined by nearly one percentage point, to 9 percent, and the percentage living with grandparents increased from 6 percent to 8 percent. This stability was good news for children, because many families did not do well economically during the Great Recession in 2008–2010.

Immigrants tend to have more traditional living arrangements. In 2000 one-quarter of immigrant children lived in a family with a working father and a nonworking mother, and in 2008–2010 nearly 30 percent of immigrant children did so, a rate nine percentage points higher than for their U.S.-born counterparts. Importantly, much lower percentages of immigrant children (18 percent) than their U.S.-born counterparts (30 percent) lived in cohabiting, single-parent, and grandparent families. A higher percentage of immigrant children, on the other hand, lived in "other types" of families, including (but not limited to) living with siblings, in families with married parents but where one parent was absent, and with parents who were not in the labor force.

Table 8.7 reveals strong racial-ethnic differences in children's living arrangements. Among U.S.-born non-Hispanic white children, 22 percent lived in a traditional family with a working father and nonworking mother, and half lived with a dual-earner family. The only racial group that had higher percentages for these two categories was Asian Americans, at 24 and 53 percent, respectively. Over half of U.S.-born Hispanic children also lived in these two types of families (21 and 33 percent, respectively). U.S.-born African American children were clearly an exception—nearly one-quarter lived with a never-married single mother, and 13 percent lived with a previously married single mother. Among American Indian children, one-tenth lived in a cohabiting family. Living with grandparents was relatively common among African American and American Indian children (15 and 18 percent, respectively). Cultural norms of extended family support may explain why African American and American Indian grandparents are more likely to take on a parental role with their grandchildren (Dunifon and Bajracharya 2012; Luo et al. 2012).

Lower percentages of immigrant children lived in a dual-earner family compared with their U.S.-born counterparts, but higher percentages lived with a working father and nonworking mother. Lower percentages of immigrant children lived in single families, in cohabiting families, or with grandparents than their U.S.-born counterparts. Although similar proportions of black immigrant children lived with a previously married single mother compared with their U.S.-born counterparts, much lower percentages lived with a never-married mother or with grandparents than was the case for African American children.

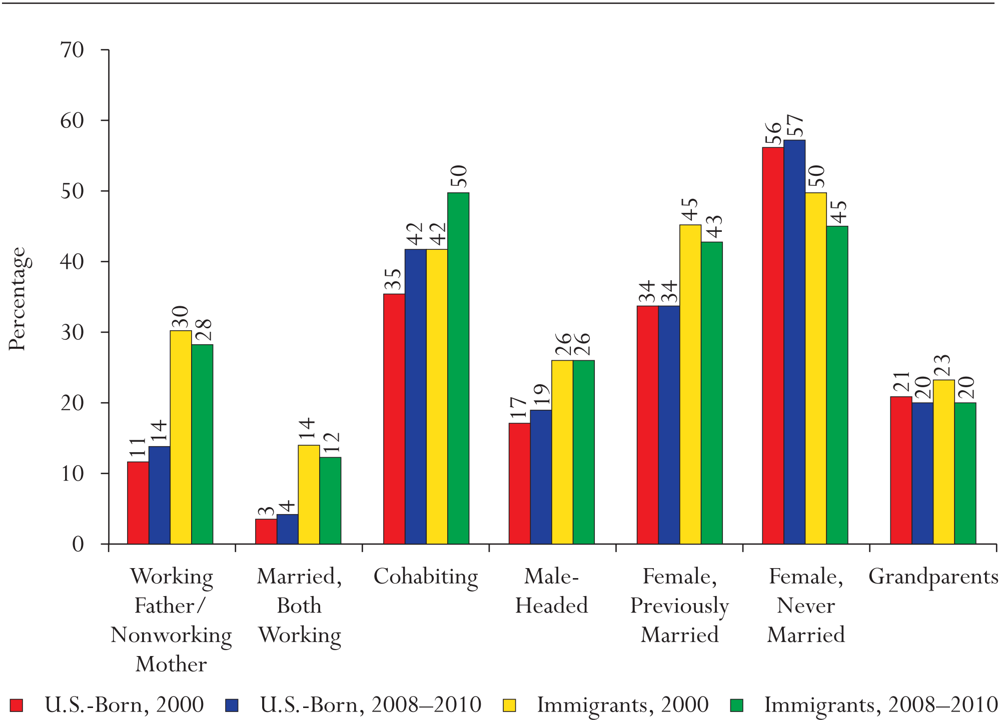
Children's living arrangements are associated with their well-being in multiple ways (Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991; Ginther and Pollak 2004). In figure 8.8, I examine whether children age zero to seventeen lived in poverty, by living arrangement, in 2000 and 2008–2010. In 2000 the percentage of children living in poverty was lowest among U.S.-born children living in dual-earner families (3 percent), followed by 11 percent among those living in a family with a working father and nonworking mother; the highest percentage of children living in poverty were in a never-married single-mother family (56 percent). Despite the Great Recession, the percentage living in poverty rose only slightly in 2008–2010, with one exception: children living in cohabiting families experienced a large increase in poverty, from 35 percent in 2000 to 42 percent in 2008–2010. As mentioned earlier, however, poverty levels among cohabiting families

TABLE 8.7 *Distribution of Living Arrangement of Children Ages Zero to Seventeen, by Race and Nativity, 2008–2010*

	White		Black		Hispanic		Asian		American Indian	
	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant
Working father/nonworking mother	22%	34%	5%	14%	21%	29%	24%	29%	12%	—
Married, both working	50	43	24	37	33	32	53	42	26	—
Cohabiting	4	1	6	2	8	6	2	1	10	—
Male-headed	3	1	3	3	2	2	1	1	4	—
Female, previously married	8	5	13	11	9	6	4	4	9	—
Female, never married	2	1	24	6	7	4	1	2	8	—
Grandparents	6	2	15	6	9	4	5	4	18	—
Other types	6	13	11	21	10	17	9	17	14	—
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	—

Source: Author’s calculations based on IPUMS data from the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

FIGURE 8.8 *Children Ages Zero to Seventeen Living in Poverty, by Living Arrangement, 2000 and 2008–2010*



Source: Author's calculations based on IPUMS data from the 2000 census and the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

may be overstated because only the income of the householder, not the income of the householder's cohabiting partner, is used to estimate poverty. Living with grandparents is indeed beneficial to children, because alternatives such as living with a single parent would mean a much higher level of children living in poverty.

Immigrant children are more likely than U.S.-born children to live with married parents who are "working poor." In 2000, the percentage of children living in poverty was significantly higher among immigrant families with a working father and nonworking mother (30 percent) and immigrant dual-earner families (14 percent) than among their U.S.-born counterparts (11 and 3 percent, respectively). Nativity differences were much smaller among children in other types of living arrangements, but immigrants generally had higher levels of children living in poverty than their U.S.-born counterparts for each type of living arrangement. Despite the Great Recession, the percentage living in poverty declined among immigrant children in 2008–2010 for most living arrangements, maybe owing in part to sharper declines in immigration among disadvantaged populations and greater levels of return migration among immigrants who did not do well economically in the United States (Cherlin et al., 2013).

Table 8.8 presents racial-ethnic differences in the percentage of children age zero to seventeen living in poverty, by living arrangement. The lowest percentages of children living in poverty, for every type of living arrangement, were U.S.-born whites and Asian Americans. The percentages of U.S.-born African American, Hispanic, and American Indian children living in

TABLE 8.8 *Children Ages Zero to Seventeen Living in Poverty, by Living Arrangement, Race, and Nativity, 2008–2010*

	White		Black		Hispanic		Asian		American Indian	
	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant	U.S.-Born	Immigrant
Working father/nonworking mother	9%	16%	21%	34%	29%	41%	11%	15%	24%	—
Married, both working	3	7	6	15	9	19	3	7	8	—
Cohabiting	37	24	47	40	47	55	29	25	55	—
Male-headed	14	7	33	24	25	35	21	19	31	—
Female, previously married	29	23	41	44	45	54	28	27	46	—
Female, never married	49	13	60	45	61	61	44	10	60	—
Grandparents	14	11	31	28	23	24	12	11	30	—

Source: Author's calculations based on IPUMS data from the pooled sample of the 2008–2010 ACS.

poverty were relatively similar, with several exceptions. More Hispanic children lived in poverty among the working poor (working father and nonworking mother families and dual-earner families); more American Indian children lived in poverty among cohabiting families; more African American and American Indian children lived in poverty among male-headed families; and more African American children lived in poverty among grandparent families. Overall, immigrant children were more likely to be poor than their U.S.-born counterparts among those living in families with a working father and nonworking mother and in dual-earner families. In contrast, immigrant children living in other types of families did better compared to their U.S.-born counterparts, except that Hispanic immigrant children were more likely to live in poverty than their U.S.-born counterparts in almost every living arrangement.

In summary, U.S.-born children continued to have diverse living arrangements. The good news is that the Great Recession did not witness a significant increase in the percentage of children living in single or cohabiting families. Yet proportionally more African American, Hispanic, and American Indian children lived in single or cohabiting families, in which the risk of poverty is higher, and fewer African American children lived in traditional families or dual-earner families, in which the risk is low. For U.S.-born children, living arrangement is a strong indicator of poverty status. Immigrants are different. Low percentages of immigrant children lived in single or cohabiting families, and higher percentages lived in traditional or dual-earner families, but the percentage of immigrant children who lived in poverty was relatively high because more of these children, especially Hispanics, lived in poverty than did their U.S.-born counterparts among traditional and dual-earner families. Overall, the results show that there are strong disparities in the economic resources of America's children (McLanahan 2004).

CONCLUSION

American families have been transformed over the past several decades. Since the 1960s, delayed marriage, prevalent cohabitation, high divorce rates, and rising remarriage rates have dramatically changed the fabric of American families and influenced children's well-being. In this chapter, I examined how family change evolved in the 2000s and how American families fared during the Great Recession. Was there evidence of a "quieting" of family change during the recession (Casper and Bianchi 2002)? Or was there evidence of continued marriage decline? The answers are not straightforward. We witnessed both a "quieting" and continued change in America's families over the 2000s. Importantly, however, the trajectories of American families have become more divergent, owing to race-ethnicity, educational attainment, and nativity status.

There is strong evidence that family change continued in the 2000s. Marriage was further delayed and the percentage of those who had ever been married by age thirty reached new lows in 2008–2010. Young men and women continued to explore schools, jobs, and relationships, and the Great Recession appeared to extend young adults' period of exploration. Permanent singlehood by ages fifty to fifty-four also rose over the period. Although individuals remained single for various reasons, larger proportions of the single were racial-ethnic minorities and less-educated individuals with inadequate economic resources. Meanwhile, divorce and remarriage continued increasing. The continuity of family change suggests that Americans are experiencing more marital transitions during the life course today than in the past and that marital unions have become more transitory (Cherlin 2004).

Yet the 2000s also witnessed a halt in family change. The surge in cohabitation seen in recent decades appeared to have stopped, for several possible reasons. The impact of the Great Recession might have been severe enough that fewer men and women could afford cohabitation, or perhaps cohabitation during the Great Recession became so volatile and short-lived that the

prevalence measure of cohabitation did not capture many short-term cohabitation episodes. Alternatively, cohabitation might have been transformed over the years from a socially unacceptable living arrangement into a widely accepted practice and even a permanent social institution with established expectations and social norms, which could have discouraged some people from forming such relationships. Clearly, more research is needed to understand this new phenomenon. During the 2000s, we also witnessed some renewed stability in children's living arrangements, at least as measured by the changing percentages of children living in two-parent families. The percentage of children living in poverty also was little changed by type of living arrangement. This is good news because any stability in children's living arrangements presumably thwarted even larger increases in the percentage of children living in poverty during the Great Recession, when nearly 22 percent of children were officially poor (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2012).

A national portrait of change in American families misses a picture of strong and growing diversity by race-ethnicity, educational attainment, and nativity status. U.S.-born non-Hispanic whites delayed marriage in ways similar to those of racial-ethnic minorities, but they had higher rates of marriage and cohabitation and low divorce-to-marriage ratios (second only to Asian Americans), and relatively large percentages remarried. U.S.-born whites were most likely to be in relationships, whether cohabitation, first marriage, or remarriage, in part because U.S.-born whites were the most numerous racial group. Although interracial marriage increased rapidly in recent decades, most Americans searched for spouses or partners within their own racial-ethnic group (Qian and Lichter 2007). A large marriage market provided white Americans with ample opportunities to find a suitable partner or spouse for cohabitation or marriage (Lichter, LeClere, and McLaughlin 1991). Of course, a sizable marriage market was only one necessary condition for forming relationships. Another reason for white Americans' relative success was that they faced fewer structural barriers during the life course than racial-ethnic minorities did and thus had more time to explore relationships and build families. Although this was true for whites regardless of their socioeconomic status, the fact is that socioeconomic status matters. More U.S.-born whites had a college education, a key factor in their high levels of marriage and cohabitation and low levels of divorce. As a result, most white children lived in families with a working father and nonworking mother or a dual-earner family, and the percentage of white children living in poverty was among the lowest across all living arrangements.

At the other end of the spectrum were African Americans, who had the lowest percentage of those who had ever been married in every age group, and the highest percentage of permanent singlehood by ages fifty to fifty-four, lower levels of cohabitation, the highest divorce-to-marriage ratios, and a larger share of remarriages. As a result, African Americans were the least likely to be in formal marital or cohabiting relationships, owing in large part to their poorer economic circumstances; unemployment, underemployment, and limited economic prospects for African American men have a strong negative effect on union formation and stability (McLanahan and Percheski 2008). Consequently, the lowest percentage of children living in a family with a working father and nonworking mother or a dual-earner family and the highest percentage who lived in a female-headed single family were African American. Children in female-headed single families represented the highest percentage of children living in poverty, and, unfortunately, that disadvantage was likely to exacerbate racial-ethnic inequalities (McLanahan and Percheski 2008).

In the 2000s, American families became more diversified by educational attainment. Individuals with less education married and cohabited less and divorced more, despite low marriage rates. The growing racial-ethnic and educational divide in American families had a lot to do with economic resources, a factor that was especially important during the Great Recession. His-

torically disadvantaged minorities retreated not only from marriage but also from cohabitation. Although America's retreat from marriage is no longer a surprise, the slowdown in cohabitation is a relatively new phenomenon. As discussed, the Great Recession may have made cohabitation an expensive living arrangement as more young men and women with poor economic resources returned home to live with their parents (Qian 2012).[3]

Immigrants often come from countries where marriage and family are highly valued. It is indeed true that regardless of educational attainment and race-ethnicity, higher percentages of immigrants tend to be married and lower percentages cohabit (except for Hispanic immigrants), divorce, and remarry compared with their U.S.-born counterparts. Thus, immigrants are unlikely to experience multiple marital transitions. An overwhelming majority marry and stay married, or if they are among the few who end their first marriage, they remain divorced. Clearly, immigrants present another divergent path of American families—a path toward traditional families—and are likely to slow down the retreat from marriage and cohabitation among blacks and less-educated individuals. Yet, although a much higher percentage of immigrant children live in married-couple families, the risk of living in poverty is much greater because more married-couple immigrant families are among the working poor. With fewer economic resources, immigrant children and later-generation immigrants are likely to adopt American ways of marriage and family life rather quickly, especially racial-ethnic minorities and those with less education. This likelihood casts doubt on the strength of immigrants' tendency toward traditional families. If only immigrants, by and large, value the traditional family, it should be noted that the immigration effect is not long-lasting.

The analysis in this chapter sheds light on the future of America's families. One thing is clear: American families are diverse, and we can no longer describe a typical American family. On the one hand, American families are resilient. Despite the poorer economic conditions experienced by most Americans during the Great Recession, marriage as a social institution remains strong and children's living arrangements are stable. On the other hand, marital unions have become increasingly transitory, with more individuals living in cohabiting relationships and single-parent families, and this relationship instability often puts children's well-being at risk. The polarization of American families raises concern not so much because American families have become more diverse but because they are diverse along racial-ethnic and economic lines. African Americans and individuals with fewer years of schooling are more likely to remain single and to have multiple relationship transitions. Economic inequality is key to the polarization of American families, and the disadvantages of children living in single-parent and unstable families are likely to reproduce and exacerbate class and racial-ethnic inequalities (Edin 2000; Ellwood and Jencks 2004; McLanahan and Percheski 2008).

Family diversity along racial-ethnic and class (as measured by educational attainment) lines has important implications for America's children. Marriage is selective of those who are white and have high levels of education (Blackwell and Lichter 2004; Charles, Hurst, and Killewald 2013). Married couples who are highly educated tend to have stable marriages. The selection of marriage and marriage itself benefit their children. These children more often have financial resources, enjoy time with both parents, reside in comfortable neighborhoods, attend good schools, enjoy extracurricular activities, and go to colleges and have successful careers when they grow up (Ginther and Pollak 2004). In contrast, less-educated individuals and African Americans are the least likely to marry. Their children tend to live in single-parent families and to experience their parents' multiple transitory marital or cohabiting unions. A greater share of these children live in poverty, perform poorly in school, and have difficulties finding and securing jobs when they grow up (Downey, Ainsworth, and Qian 2009; Ellwood and Jencks 2004). The contrast between these two groups of children has become much starker, possibly as a result of the Great Recession.

There is no doubt that the gap between America's haves and have-nots grew larger than ever during the 2000s (Grusky, Western, and Wimer 2011). This gap has shaped American families in multiple ways. It influences the kind of families we live in and the kind of family environments in which we raise our children. As a result, some children excel while others lag behind. Unfortunately, public support for all America's children, especially those who lag behind, is often weak. While marriage promotion may encourage couples to marry and raise a family, it does not solve the deep-rooted economic hardship of the have-nots. Now may be the time to have government policies in place to help those children growing up in disadvantaged families.

NOTES

1. The author thanks Yue Qian for her research assistance.
2. Yet Philip Morgan, Erin Cumberworth, and Christopher Wimer (2011) show that the proportion of people age sixteen and older living with an unmarried partner, based on the estimates of the monthly Current Population Survey (CPS), continued to increase, by a little over one percentage point, during the 2000s.
3. We would miss the cohabitations of young people who live with each other but also with their parents. Such cohabiting couples would be considered to be living in subfamilies of their parents' households. The ACS does not collect information on cohabiting couples living in subfamilies.

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