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# Divergent Paths of American Families\*

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For a very long time, a typical American family consisted of a working husband, a stay-at-home wife, and children. This traditional family was portrayed in popular TV dramas and sitcoms during the 1950s and 1960s, 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; the transformation of marriage as a social institution means that young adults today have 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 living arrangement, has emerged to be the initial coresidential choice among most young men and women. Marriage is no longer “till death do us apart” for all because divorce and separation have become commonplace. Over the life course, individuals 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, separate or divorce, once or even multiple times, a phenomenon described as “American marriage-go-round” (Cherlin 2009). Family structure has become more diverse — 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 step-parents, or with parents and their cohabiting partners.

After documenting rapid changes in American families in the earlier decades, Casper and 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. If the halt continues in the 2000s, Casper and Bianchi (2002) posited that the transformation of family formation and dissolution may be complete and 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 has apparently resumed during the first decade of the new century, especially during the late 2000s “Great Recession,” 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, have children while married, and 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, have brought more varieties to American families. Hispanics, despite similar economic status compared with 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 in America’s families (Oropesa and Gorman 2000; Zhou and Bankston 1998).

Meanwhile, continuous improvement in schooling, especially the surpassing of women over men in education, has a profound impact on American families (Buchmann and DiPrete 2006). It influences how men and women choose spouses by educational attainment. During the 1950s when traditional families were common, marriages typically consisted of couples in which the husband had more schooling than the wife. In recent decades, educational homogamy (husbands and wives with same levels of education) increased dramatically, especially among those at both ends of the education distribution (Schwartz and Mare 2005). Educational attainment is an important sorting mechanism for marriage (and for cohabitation as well) — 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 immigration 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 immigrants and minorities are small in size, pressure to assimilate into mainstream America is strong. When they grow in size, cultural differences become more salient, due to increases in ethnic restaurants, churches and temples, and communities. To be sure, immigrants bring to America more “traditional” values — high values attached to marriage and 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 can go beyond immigrants

themselves 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 frontline of recent changes in American families. While men and women exercise individual freedom, going through transitory marital and cohabiting unions, children are often caught in the crossfire. Their wellbeing is at risk. Children living with married parents perform better at schools 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, married couples have high levels of education and are 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 whether the “quieting” of family change continued in the 2000s. I examine this question by presenting evidence of change in marriage, cohabitation, divorce, remarriage, and children’s living arrangements during the 2000s. The data present a mixed picture of whether the “quieting” of the 1990s has continued into the 2000s. I highlight how race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and nativity contribute 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 2008-2010 American Community Survey (ACS). Three years of ACS data are pooled in order to obtain sufficiently large samples for special populations (including, for

example, racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, 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 whites, non-Hispanic African Americans, non-Hispanic Asian Americans, non-Hispanic American Indians, and Hispanics (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

Married individuals are happier, healthier, and have better socioeconomic status than their unmarried counterparts (Waite and Gallagher 2000). Because of these benefits, marriage promotion was included in the 1996 welfare reform bill — the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act — which sought to end 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 marriage itself would actually improve wellbeing. 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 wellbeing (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, Booth, Johnson, and Rogers 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 young Americans spend more years in college and more time pursuing a professional career, which contributes to delays in marriage. Even among those with no college education, marriage may be delayed at least in part due to rise in cohabitation; for the majority of young adults today, first coresidential unions come in the form of cohabitation rather than marriage. Meanwhile, mate selection patterns have changed over time in response to improvement in educational attainment. The traditional social norm that the husband marries the wife with less education than his no longer is the norm. 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 they do so after they complete their educations and launch their careers.

Educational attainment varies significantly among racial/ethnic groups. Part of the racial/ethnic differences in marriage is attributable to compositional differences in educational attainment. For example, Asian Americans have the highest percent in college education and also have the latest age at marriage (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Of course, other factors may also play a role in accounting for racial/ethnic differences in marriage. The availabilities of male partners, especially those with potential economic resources, are much lower 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: college-educated African American women outnumber college-educated African

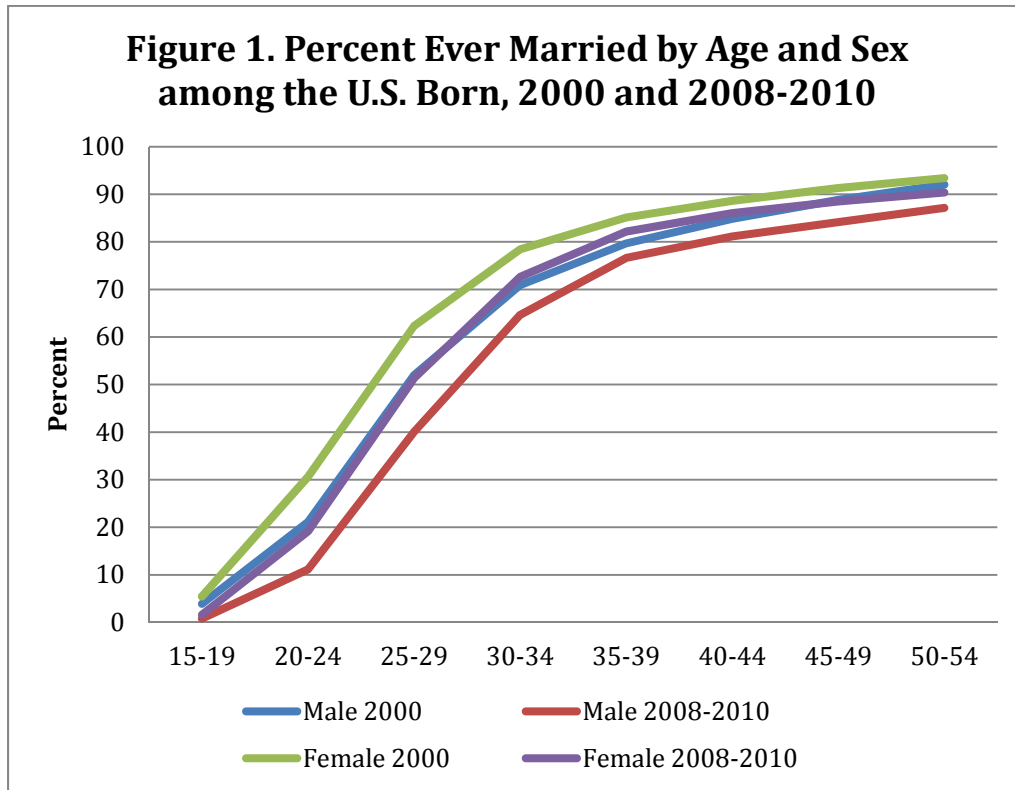
American men (Buchmann and DiPrete 2006); and highly educated African American men are much more likely to form interracial marriage than their female counterparts (Qian and Lichter 2007). Therefore, more African American women forgo marriage and remain single than white women. On the other hand, Hispanics tend to place strong values to families and exhibit similar levels of marriage patterns as whites despite Hispanics' lower levels of educational attainment (Saenz 2004).

I examine changing marital status using data from the 2000 census and the 2008-2010 ACS. Marital status is classified as never married, currently married, divorced, separated, and widowed. Ever married includes all but never married. A percentage distribution of men or women ever married by age is a good indicator of marital prevalence and, at later ages, offers an estimate of permanent singlehood. Changes in ever marriage in the 2000s provide answers to whether men and women continue delaying marriage.

Figure 1 presents percent ever married by sex and nativity in 2000 and 2008-2010. The percent ever married declined from 21 percent to 11 percent and from 31 percent to 19 percent, respectively, among U.S.-born men and women aged 20-24. The declines were equally large among the 25-29 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 20s attend colleges, 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 20-24 year olds and 19 percent of 25-29 year olds lived with their parents, a phenomenon in large part attributable to financial difficulties and/or relationship instabilities (Qian 2012). The declines in percent ever married over the period were relatively small among U.S. born men and women over age 30, indicating marriage for many

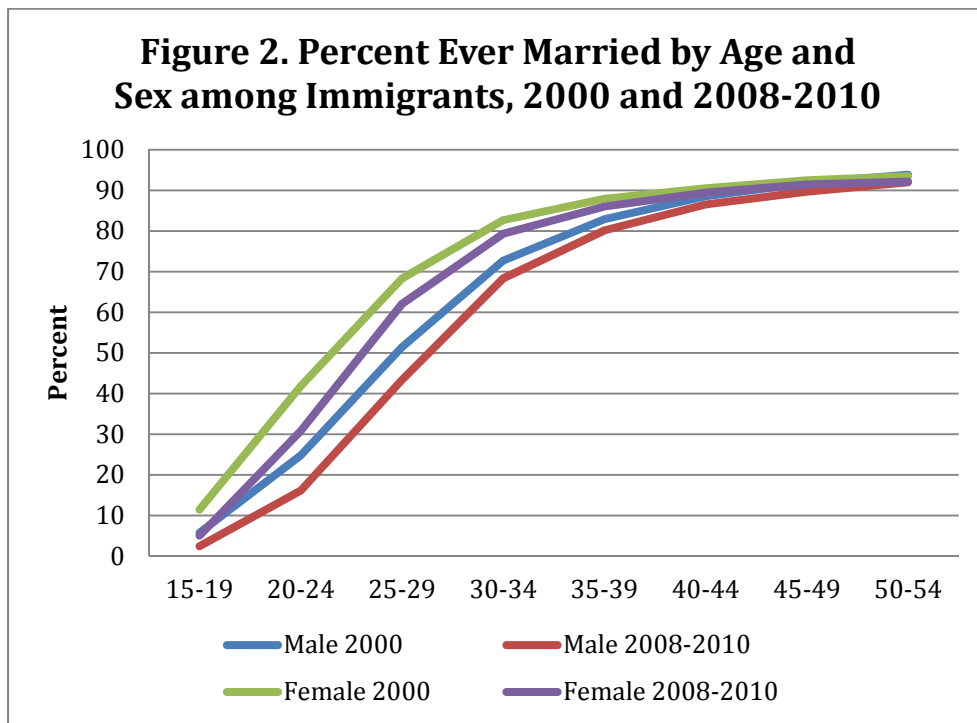


was delayed rather than forgone. Figure 1 also reveals that U.S. -born men married at later ages, picked up the pace of marriage, and inched closer to the levels of ever-marriage for U.S.-born women by ages 30s.



People remain never married for various reasons, for example, choosing careers over marriage and children, living in same-sex relationships, or simply not being able to find someone to marry (Lichter and Qian 2004). Singlehood by ages 50-54 increased notably between 1980 and 2000 (Lichter and Qian 2004) and continued to rise in the 2000s (see Figure 1). In 2008-2010, 13 percent and 10 percent of U.S. born men and women, respectively, aged 50-54 remained never married, 5 and 3 percentage points greater compared with the corresponding figures in 2000. I will return to this issue when discussing racial/ethnic and education differences in permanent singlehood.

Immigrants have played an increasing role in American society because of their increasing share. As shown in Figure 2, percent ever married declined in the 2000s as well among immigrants. In fact, the decline was sharper among 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, and/or driving more married immigrants back to their home countries (Cherlin, Cumberworth, Morgan, and Wimer Forthcoming). Nevertheless, despite declines in percent 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, percent ever married among immigrant men and women aged 25-29 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 ever 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 approaching the U.S. born in percent ever married and helped lessen the further delay in marriage at the national level.

Race/ethnicity is an important form of diversity. Table 1 presents percent ever married by race/ethnicity, along 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 percent ever married at every age group and 9 out of 10 were ever married by ages 50-54. Whites, despite its declining share of the population, had the largest marriage market and were most likely to find marriageable partners. Compared with whites, percentages ever married among Hispanics, Asian Americans, and American Indians were lower. Among Asian Americans, women married at a much higher percentage 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 percent ever married and only three quarters were ever married by ages 50-54. Limited economic resources are often the cited reason for African Americans' low rates of marriage (Casper and Bianchi 2002). The marriage rates among African American women were the lowest among racial/ethnic groups considered here. There are two likely reasons: one is that African American men marry interracially at a much higher rate than African American women, and the other is that African American women, on average, have much more schooling than their male counterparts 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).

**Table 1. Percent 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
<b>Men</b>										
<b>15-19</b>	1	1	1	2	1	3	1	1	1	-
<b>20-24</b>	12	13	6	9	13	21	4	7	12	-
<b>25-29</b>	44	46	23	35	37	47	21	35	34	-
<b>30-34</b>	69	72	42	62	59	66	52	73	50	-
<b>35-39</b>	80	84	57	76	72	77	66	85	64	-
<b>40-44</b>	84	89	64	82	76	85	72	90	72	-
<b>45-49</b>	86	91	68	87	80	88	76	92	76	-
<b>50-54</b>	89	93	74	89	85	90	79	95	81	-
<b>Total</b>	61	73	40	63	40	64	30	70	47	62
<b>Women</b>										
<b>15-19</b>	2	3	1	2	3	8	1	2	2	-
<b>20-24</b>	21	27	8	17	21	39	8	21	20	-
<b>25-29</b>	57	66	25	47	50	63	33	62	45	-
<b>30-34</b>	78	84	43	67	69	77	63	84	61	-
<b>35-39</b>	87	91	56	77	78	84	76	89	72	-
<b>40-44</b>	90	93	64	80	83	88	82	92	78	-
<b>45-49</b>	91	95	70	83	86	90	84	94	82	-
<b>50-54</b>	93	95	75	85	88	91	87	94	85	-
<b>Total</b>	68	80	43	65	49	74	36	78	55	77

Immigrants come from countries in which marriage is more prevalent than in the United States. Some married before they immigrated to the United States and some others undoubtedly adopted culture traditional from home by entering marriage in early adulthood. The results in Table 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 ever marriage for immigrant men and women 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 influences from home countries and weaker associations with marriage market constraints in the United States.

<b>Table 2. Percent Ever Married by Age, Educational Attainment, Sex, and Nativity, 2008-2010</b>									
	<b>Less than high school</b>		<b>High school</b>		<b>Some college</b>		<b>College or more</b>		
	<b>U.S. Born</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>U.S. Born</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>U.S. Born</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>U.S. Born</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	
<b>Men</b>									
<b>15-19</b>	1	2	2	3	1	3	3		17
<b>20-24</b>	13	24	13	18	8	9	11		9
<b>25-29</b>	33	47	40	47	42	41	40		37
<b>30-34</b>	50	65	61	67	67	69	70		73
<b>35-39</b>	62	75	73	79	79	80	82		85
<b>40-44</b>	67	84	79	85	83	87	86		90
<b>45-49</b>	72	87	83	89	86	90	88		92
<b>50-54</b>	77	90	87	91	88	92	89		94
<b>Total</b>	22	60	58	65	60	64	74		78
<b>Women</b>									
<b>15-19</b>	1	4	3	7	2	4	16		13
<b>20-24</b>	26	48	24	36	15	20	17		23
<b>25-29</b>	47	65	53	65	55	61	48		58
<b>30-34</b>	61	76	71	80	75	79	74		81
<b>35-39</b>	70	82	80	86	84	87	84		88
<b>40-44</b>	75	86	86	90	87	91	87		91
<b>45-49</b>	80	89	89	92	90	92	88		92
<b>50-54</b>	84	90	92	93	91	93	89		93
<b>Total</b>	23	69	66	76	66	73	74		82

Educational attainment, another dimension of diversity, is closely related to economic resources. Cherlin (2004) argued that marriage is a status symbol and those with economic resources are more likely to tie the knot than those with fewer economic resources. Table 2 strongly supports the argument. At every age, the percent 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 15 to 19 year olds have neither completed high school nor married. In contrast, three quarters of men and women with completed college education were ever married, the highest among all education groups. Individuals with less than high school or high school education had higher levels of marriage in their earlier 20s but the levels of marriage did not increase as much at older age groups compared with those with some college or completed education. This suggests that the likelihood of marriage among less educated men and women became 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 the college-educated women were never married, college education today increases a woman's marriage chance. This education profile of marriage is similar for men. The likelihood of marriage has increased for women with a college degree compared with women with fewer years of schooling (Isen and Stevenson 2010).

Nativity differences in percent ever married were large by race/ethnicity, but small by educational attainment, as shown in Table 2. Those with less than high school education are 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 in percent ever married than their U.S.-born counterparts. 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 20s. The period marking the "emerging adulthood" has apparently 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 them from getting married as more young men and women returned to their parental homes to weather economic hardship (Qian 2012). Nevertheless, percent ever married increased rapidly starting age 30s, especially among those with high levels of education, which suggests that most young adults simply delay their marriages. Nevertheless, a significant minority (13% of U.S. born men and 10% of U.S. born women) remained never married by ages 50-54.

Racial/ethnic and educational differences in marriage support the notion that economic resource is the key to marriage among the U.S. born. Although White men and women on average marry at later ages, they have the highest percent 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. To achieve a goal in workplace, racial/ethnic minorities may have to invest in more time and social and human capital than whites, which may cut down minorities' investment in marriage markets. Similarly, men and women with completed college education are more likely to marry than those with less education. Interestingly, the economic resource argument does not apply to immigrants — Less educated and racial/ethnic minorities married at the similar levels as their highly educated and white counterparts. Immigrants came to United States with their traditional norms which value marriage and children. They marry regardless of economic resource. Indeed, immigration has helped slow down the marriage decline in American society.

## Cohabitation

Decline in marriage have given rise to more cohabitation. Cohabitation emerged as a new living arrangement in the 1960s and became prevalent over time (Cherlin 2004). The number of cohabiting couples grew from 0.4 million in 1960 to 3.8 million in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). Different from marriage, cohabitation is a short-lived arrangement, mostly lasting one or two years (Bumpass and Lu 2000). Many young adults view cohabitation as an added step between dating and marriage. Nearly 60% 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

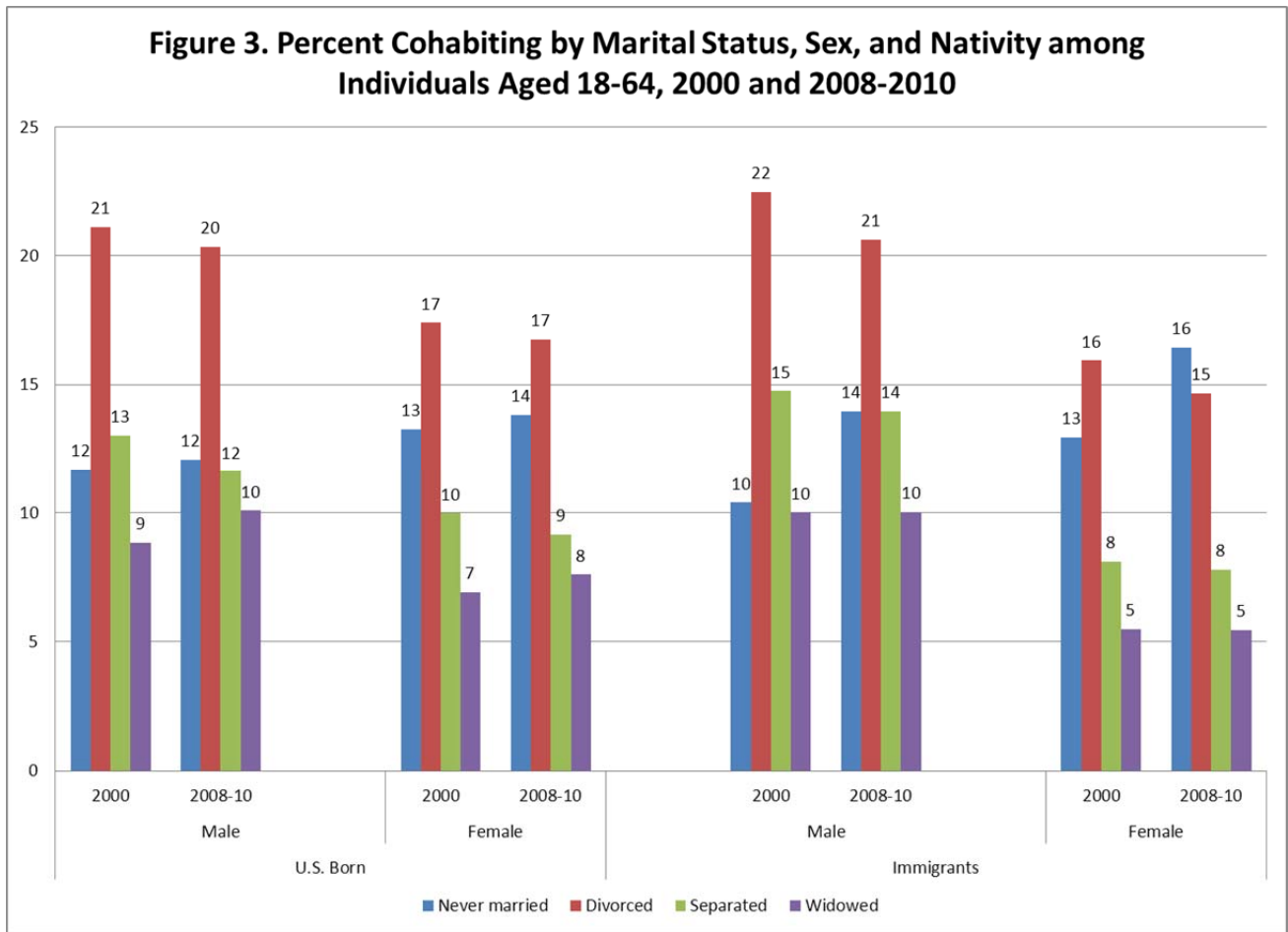
to marriage tend to be those with economic resources (Lichter, Qian, and Mellott 2006). Meanwhile, some others consider cohabitation an alternative to marriage, move from one cohabitation to another, and become serial cohabitators (Lichter and Qian 2008). Working- and lower-middle-class individuals are likely to be in such relationships (Manning and Smock 2005). They expect to marry and aspire to have a big wedding but are unable to do so due to limited financial resources. As a result, they resort to cohabitation as a way of adapting to their economic hardships (Sassler and McNally 2003).

Marriages are more likely to break up among couples who cohabited than among those who did not cohabit prior to marriage (Lichter and Qian 2008). Some argue that cohabitators' 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 be not as committed in relationships in the first place — Not only are they more likely to cohabit, but also more likely to divorce compared with those without cohabitation experiences (Thomson and Colella 1992). However, 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 cohabitation has become the modal pathway to marriage (also see 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 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 3 provides answers to this question by presenting percent cohabiting by sex and nativity among never married, divorced, separated, or widowed individuals aged 18 to 64. The rapid increase in cohabitation witnessed prior to 2000 appeared to



be halted, but only because cohabitation is a temporary rather than permanent arrangement and the prevalence measure of cohabitation provides only a snapshot of cohabitations at the time of the interviews. Most young people today cohabit before they marry. Among the U.S. born, percent cohabiting remained largely unchanged between 2000 and 2008-10 for every marital status group. Immigrants had the same story with one important exception — the percent cohabiting increased from 10 percent to 14 percent and from 13 percent to 16 percent over the

period between 2000 and 2008-10 among never married immigrant men and women, respectively.

Among non-currently-married individuals aged 18 to 64, the divorced had the highest percent cohabiting while the widowed had the lowest for every gender and nativity group. The percent cohabiting was lower among the separated than among the divorced because separated individuals started the divorce process recently and the marriage was not officially over. Gender differences in cohabitation were evident: never married women had a higher percent cohabiting than their male counterparts while divorced and separated men had a higher percent cohabiting than their female counterparts. The reason is simple: custody of children may have discouraged 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 2012). Nativity differences are surprisingly small — for each marital status group, the difference in percent cohabiting is within 2 percentage points. As shown below, this is in part due to wide acceptance of cohabitation among Hispanic immigrants (Landale and Fennelly 1992).

	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
<b>Men</b>										
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	-
<b>Total</b>	15	14	10	12	13	19	7	8	16	15
<b>Women</b>										
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	-
<b>Total</b>	16	13	7	8	14	19	10	9	17	20

Table 3 presents racial/ethnic differences in cohabitation among individuals aged 18 to 64 years old. U.S.-born whites and American Indians had the highest percent 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 lowest levels of cohabitation and marriage. Nativity differences are generally small. Hispanic immigrants were the only immigrant group that had higher levels of cohabitation compared with their U.S.-born counterparts because cohabitation is more culturally acceptable and commonly practiced in Latin America (Landale 1992).

Unlike the past, percent ever married increased with educational attainment. For less educated individuals, marriage is a status symbol and a wedding has become too expensive (Cherlin 2004). Do they cohabit more? The answer is no. As revealed in Table 4, never married individuals with less than high school had the lowest percent 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 their cohabiting relationships have become more unstable and short-lived during the Great Recession. As a result, the percent 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 not only the prospect of marriage but also cohabitation or the duration of cohabitation. Earning potential, highly correlated with educational attainment, was not a strong predictor of entry in cohabitation in the past (Xie, Raymo, Goyette, and Thornton 2003). It is likely to have become a strong predictor of whether one cohabits and/or 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 would transition into marriage, as seen among those with economic resources (Lichter, Qian, and Mellott 2006). Among the previously married, men and women with completed college education had the lowest percent cohabiting. Because proportionately fewer college-educated men and women divorce, the few who do may have greater remarriage prospects and have less incentive to cohabit because of economic independence compared with their less educated counterparts.

<b>Table 4. Percent Cohabiting by Marital Status, Educational Attainment, Sex, and Nativity among Individuals Aged 18-64, 2008-2010</b>									
	<b>Less than high school</b>		<b>High school</b>		<b>Some college</b>		<b>College or more</b>		
	<b>U.S. Born</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>U.S. Born</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>U.S. Born</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>U.S. Born</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	
<b>Men</b>									
<b>Never Married</b>	9	19	11	13	12	9	17	12	
<b>Divorced</b>	20	22	21	22	20	21	19	18	
<b>Separated</b>	13	15	13	15	11	14	8	9	
<b>Widowed</b>	11	10	11	10	10	12	8	9	
<b>Total</b>	11	19	14	15	14	12	17	13	
<b>Women</b>									
<b>Never Married</b>	10	27	13	16	13	11	17	12	
<b>Divorced</b>	19	15	19	16	16	15	13	13	
<b>Separated</b>	12	10	10	7	8	7	5	5	
<b>Widowed</b>	8	5	8	6	8	6	6	4	
<b>Total</b>	12	19	14	15	14	11	15	12	

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 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 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

high school education are more likely to be Hispanics. In contrast, immigrants with completed college education are less likely to be Hispanic and, thus, 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 Casper and 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 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 might not even afford cohabitation or only have unstable cohabiting relationships due to poor employment opportunities and economic resources. Another possible explanation is that cohabitation has become so prevalent that it has become a social institution, which comes with expectations and norms. As a result, some young men and women may be discouraged from entering cohabiting relationships that have become more institutionalized.

## Divorce

The annual divorce rate (the number of divorces per 1000 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 the denominator consists of proportionately fewer married individuals (Heaton 2002). In other words, the denominator includes fewer

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<sup>1</sup> Yet, Mogan, Cumberworth, and Wimer (2011) showed that the proportion of people age 16 and older living with unmarried partners based on the estimates of the monthly Current Population Survey continued to increase, by a little over 1 percentage point, during the 2000s.

married individuals and fewer individuals at risk of divorce. In addition, marriage has become selective and those who marry have lower risks of divorce. For example, less educated individuals or 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 divorced rate is confounded by proportion married so I use a more refined divorce rate, the ratio of the number of divorces over 1000 married individuals. McLanahan and 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 4 presents the ratio by race/ethnicity and nativity among men and women aged 18 to 64 in 2000 and 2008-2010. The ratio among whites increased slightly from 188 in 2000 to 197 divorcees per 1000 marriages in 2008-10. The ratio was a little higher for Hispanics than for non-Hispanic whites. For African Americans, the ratio was 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 and remained unchanged in the 2000s (134). While 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 had 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, have a shorter duration of marriage, and thus may be less exposed to the risk of divorce. In other words, nativity differences may be smaller if marital duration is taken into account.

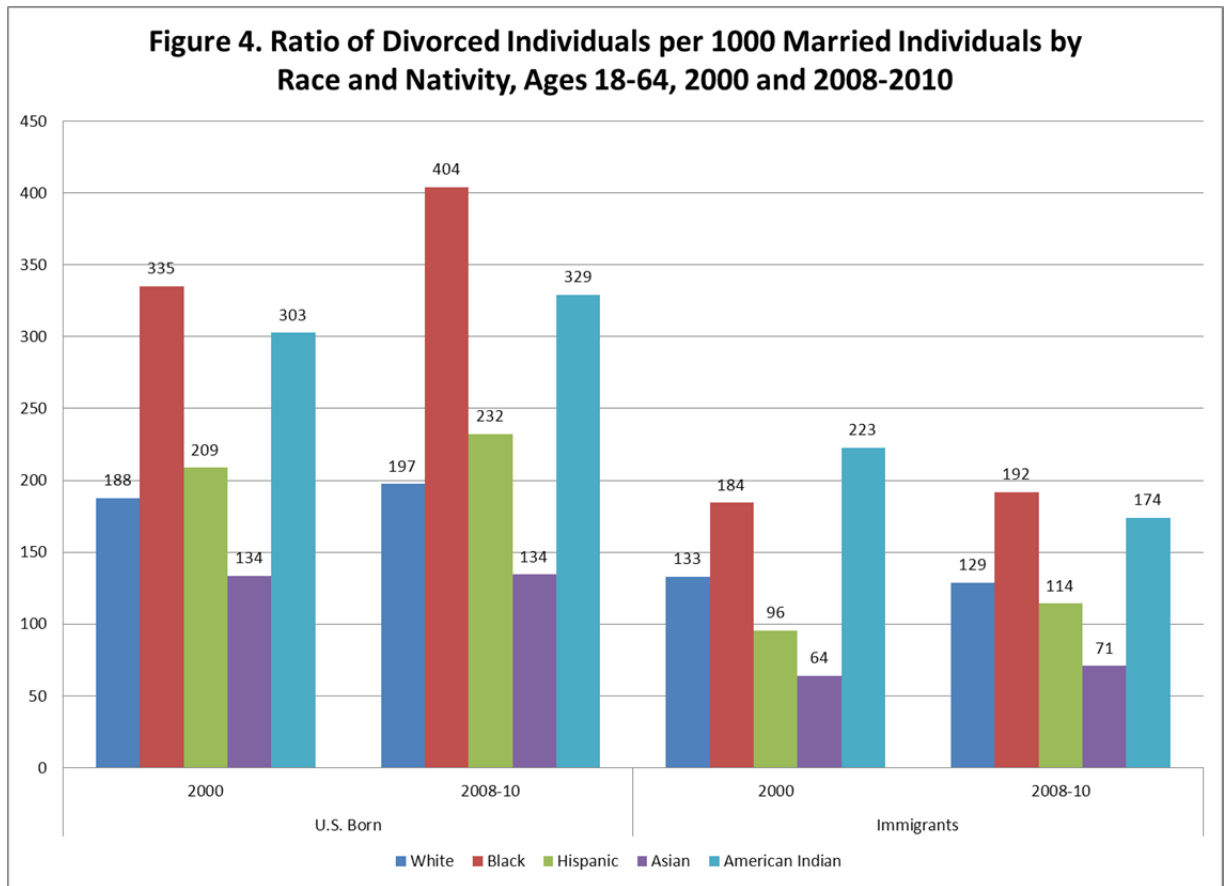
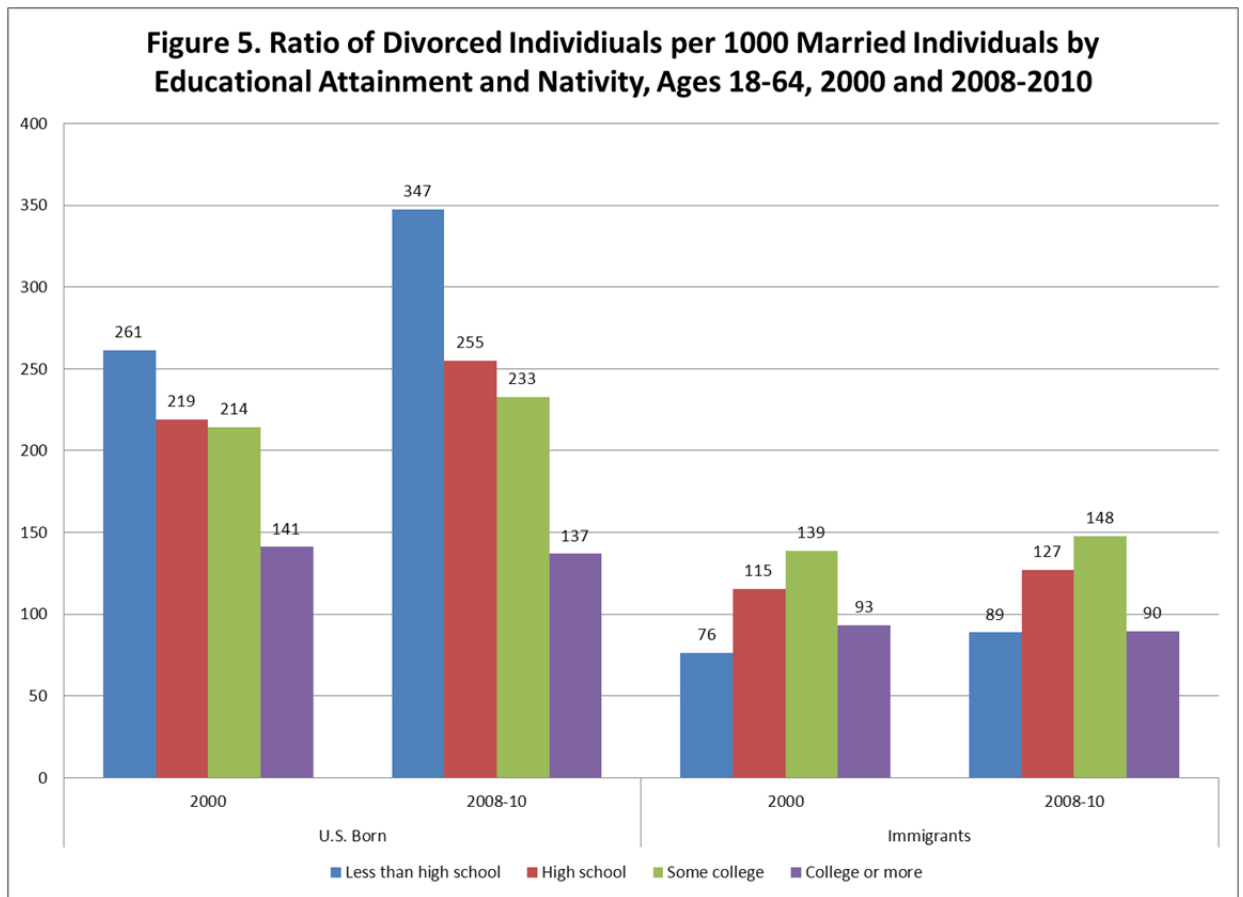


Figure 5 presents the divorce to marriage ratio by educational attainment. Among the U.S. born, the higher the level of educational attainment, the lower the likelihood of divorce, a finding consistent with the previous research (Isen and Stevenson 2010; Martin 2006). The ratio among U.S. born individuals with less than high school was high and continued to increase from 261 in 2000 to 347 in 2008-10, by 33 percent. In contrast, the ratio among U.S. born individuals with completed college education was 141 in 2000 and 137 in 2008-10. The ratio was evidently much greater among those with less than high school education, 1.5 times greater compared with those of completed college education. Immigrants offer a different story. The divorce to marriage ratio among immigrants increased by educational attainment, except for those with completed college education. It's likely that divorce in immigrant communities is frowned upon and

strongly discouraged. As a result, divorce is less an option among immigrants, especially those with less education.



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 can not 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. The U.S.-born 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 aggregated the situation. Among immigrants, racial/ethnic differences in divorce to marriage ratio mirror those among the U.S. born, but immigrants had much lower levels of divorce to marriage ratio. Among immigrants, educational attainment did not play a role determining the likelihood of marriage and the effect of educational attainment on divorce shows an inverted U — those with less than high school education and those with completed college education had the lowest rates of divorce. The economic resource argument did not play a role in immigrants' marriage and divorce.

## Remarriage

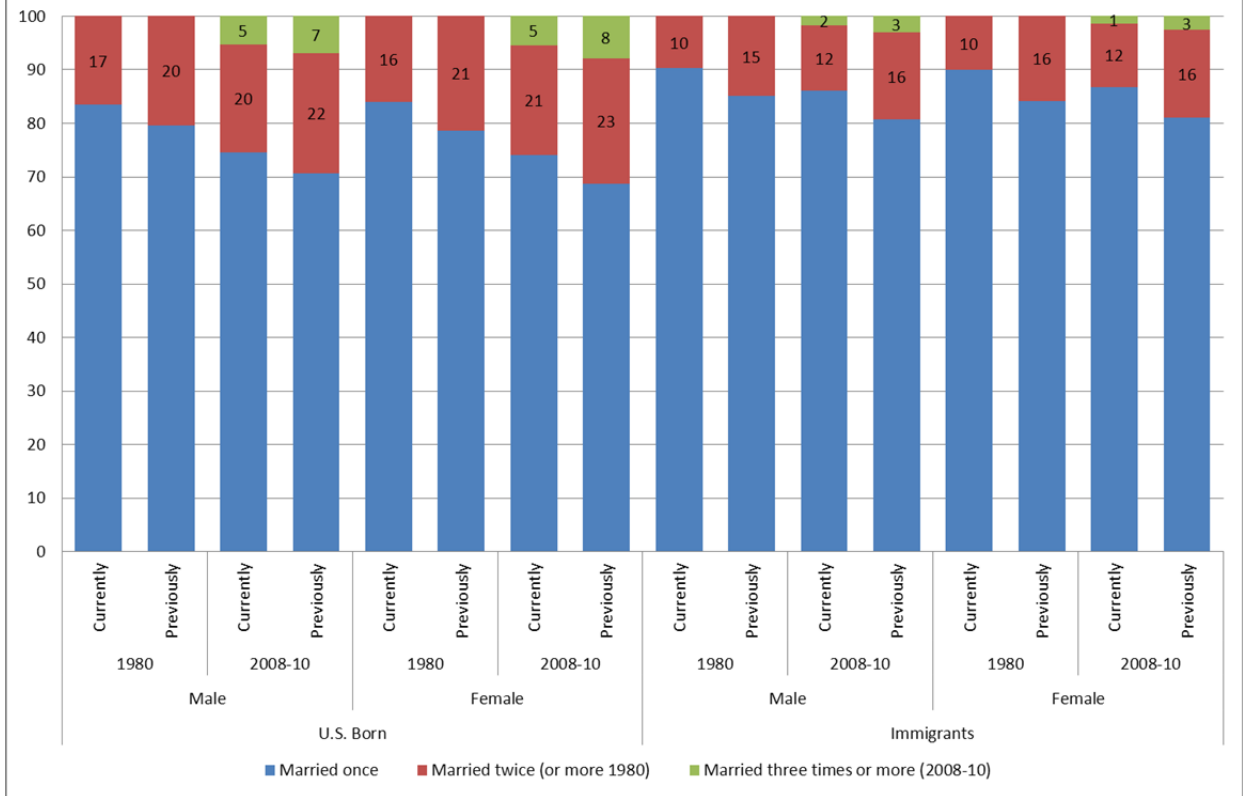
As early as in 1981, Cherlin (1992) identified an emerging life course pattern — marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In “Marriage-Go-Round,” Cherlin further draws attention to the unique American family life that no other countries in the world have experienced: Americans start relationships at younger ages, experience short-term cohabitations often, divorce quickly after marriage, and move into other cohabiting or marital relationships (Cherlin 2009). Remarriage is unique compared with first marriage because remarried individuals are a select group of all first or previously married individuals, i.e., they have been divorced or widowed. As such, they bring with them the emotional and financial baggage of failed previous marriage(s). They often have minor children, which means that they often face the complications associated with child support and visitation rights, and with step families (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 in order to escape from poverty (Sweeney 1997). Most divorced women have physical or legal custody of their children, which also reduces their attractiveness in the marriage market. On the other hand,

divorced men with economic resources remarry at a higher rate. Their pool of the marriageable women is larger and often includes never married, younger women (Shafer 2012).

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 that includes information on marriage order. These two data sources are not exactly comparable because marriage order for the 1980 census was classified as married once and married twice or more while marriage order for the 2008-10 ACS had information on married once, twice, and three times or more, a difference that reflects time change in prevalence of remarriage.

Figure 6 compares marriage order between 1980 and 2008-2010 among current and previously married individuals aged 18-64. 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 (22 percent married twice and 7 percent married three times or more), respectively. Currently and previously married women had similar shares of remarriage as their male counterparts. Of course, the previously married individuals already disrupted their remarriages 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 previously married than among currently married individuals, suggesting that immigrants experienced fewer marital transitions than their U.S.-born counterparts.

**Figure 6. Percent Distribution of Marriage Order among Currently and Previously Married Individuals Aged 18-64, 1980 and 2008-2010**



How does marriage order vary by race/ethnicity in 2008-10? As shown in Table 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 and 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 1 or 2 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 had greater prospects of remarriage compared with African Americans or Hispanics. Whites may have a larger pool of remarriageable partners than racial/ethnic minorities. Economic resource was again likely a factor. Immigrants in general had

	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
<b>Men</b>										
<b>Currently married</b>										
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
<b>Previously married</b>										
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	-
<b>Women</b>										
<b>Currently married</b>										
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
<b>Previously married</b>										
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	-

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 6. Among currently married U.S. born individuals, the share of the first marriages increased by educational attainment, around 82 percent among men and women with completed college education but only 69 percent and 66 percent, respectively, among men and women with less than high school education. The highly educated are not only more likely to marry but stay married. Nearly one tenth of men and women with less than high school education married three times or more. These results indicate that individuals with low levels of education were more likely to experience multiple marital transitions than those with high levels of education. U.S.

born women with less than high school education had higher percentages remarried than their male counterparts, suggesting that the former were more likely to make multiple marital transitions than the latter. Nativity differences were strongest among those with less than high school education because less educated immigrants were most likely to be in their first marriage.

<b>Table 6. Distribution of Marriage Order by Marital Status, Educational Attainment, Sex, and Nativity among Individuals Aged 18-64, 2008-2010</b>								
	<b>Less than high school</b>		<b>High school</b>		<b>Some college</b>		<b>College or more</b>	
	<b>U.S. Born</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>U.S. Born</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>U.S. Born</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>U.S. Born</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>
<b>Men</b>								
<b>Currently married</b>								
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
<b>Previously married</b>								
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
<b>Women</b>								
<b>Currently married</b>								
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
<b>Previously married</b>								
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

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.

## Impacts 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, voluntarily or involuntarily. For example, Pew Research Report (2010) shows that 13 percent of ever-married women aged 40 to 44 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 — some gain resources and time because of delay in marriage and decline in family size while others go the other way because of divorce, non-marital 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 unmarried childbearing is on the rise. The increase in unmarried childbearing in recent decades is largely due to the growing proportion of births among cohabitating couples (Raley 2001; Sassler, Miller, and Favinger 2009). Unfortunately, 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 go through single parenthood or frequent changes of their parent's live-in

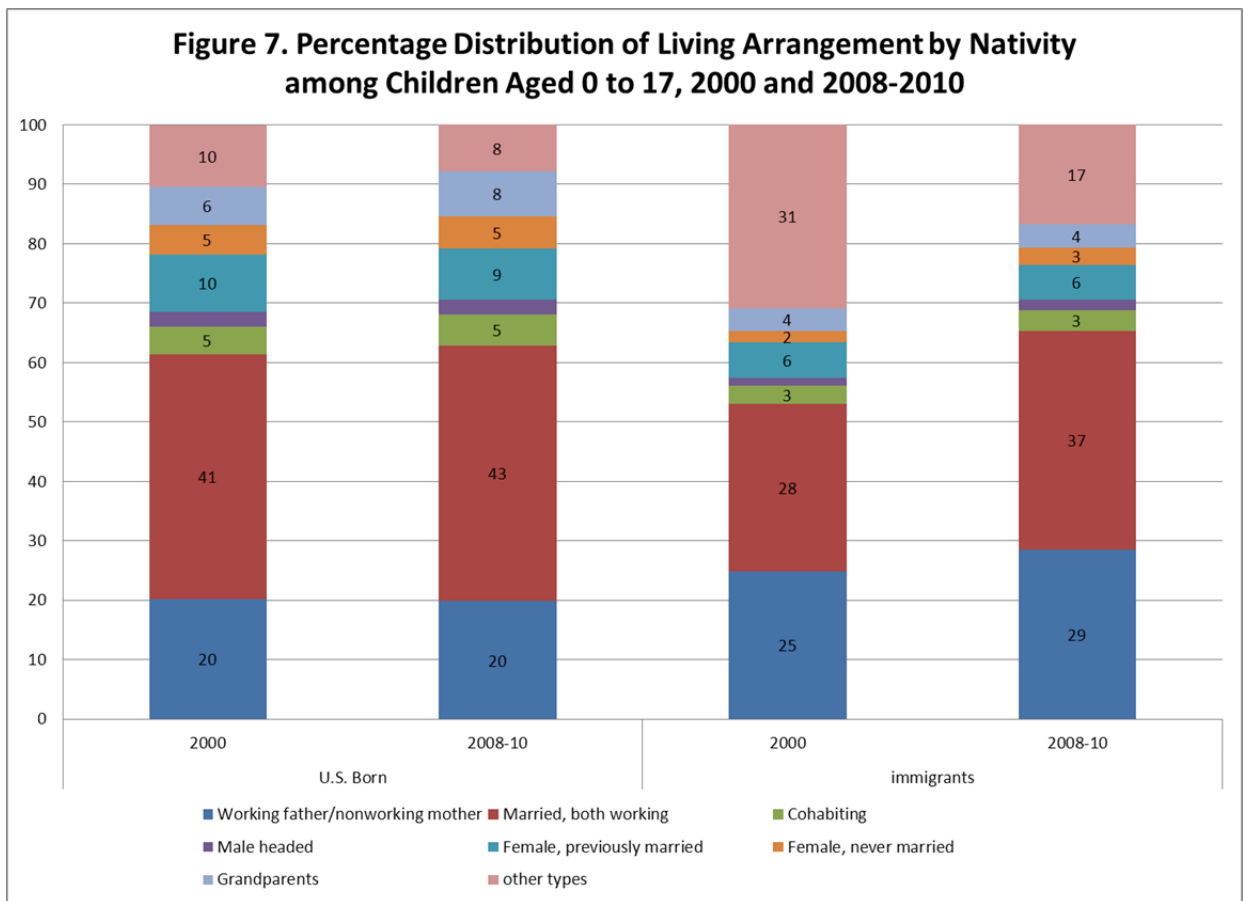
boyfriends or girlfriends than those born to married parents. Even if their mothers or fathers later marry, their academic and economic wellbeing in remarried families pales compared with children born in two biological parent families (Cherlin 1999).

The relationship between children's living arrangement and socioeconomic wellbeing is strong. Children living in married couple families are least likely to live in poverty while children growing up in female headed single parent families are most likely (Lichter and Qian 2004). Meanwhile, children living in cohabiting families also do poorly, a level that is likely 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 wellbeing. Children are often the witness of every relationship breakup their parents experience. Relationship transitions may be good for their parents, but the children's wellbeing is often at risk. I now provide a snapshot of changes in children's living arrangement by race/ethnicity and nativity. I include all children aged 0 to 17 in my analysis. Figure 7 presents children's living arrangements by nativity. The time period between 2000 and 2008-10 witnessed a period of relative stability in living arrangement among U.S. born children.

In 2000, children had the highest percent living with two working parents (41 percent), followed by living with traditional families (working father/non-working mothers, 20 percent). In 2008-10, the percent of children living with dual earner parents increased by 2 percentage

points. Of course, living with two working parents or traditional families does not necessarily mean that children live 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 percent living with previously married mothers declined to 9 percent by nearly one percentage point and the percent 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 traditional living arrangements. In 2000, a quarter of immigrant children lived with working father and non-working mother families and in 2008-10, nearly 30 percent of immigrant children did so, 9 percentage points higher than their U.S.-born



counterparts. Importantly, immigrant children had much lower percentages (18 percent) than their U.S.-born counterparts (30 percent) living in other types of families, such as cohabiting, single parent, and grandparent families. Immigrant children, on the other hand, had a higher percent living in “other types” of families, including but not limited to living with siblings, with married parents one of whom was absent, and with parents none of whom was in the labor force.

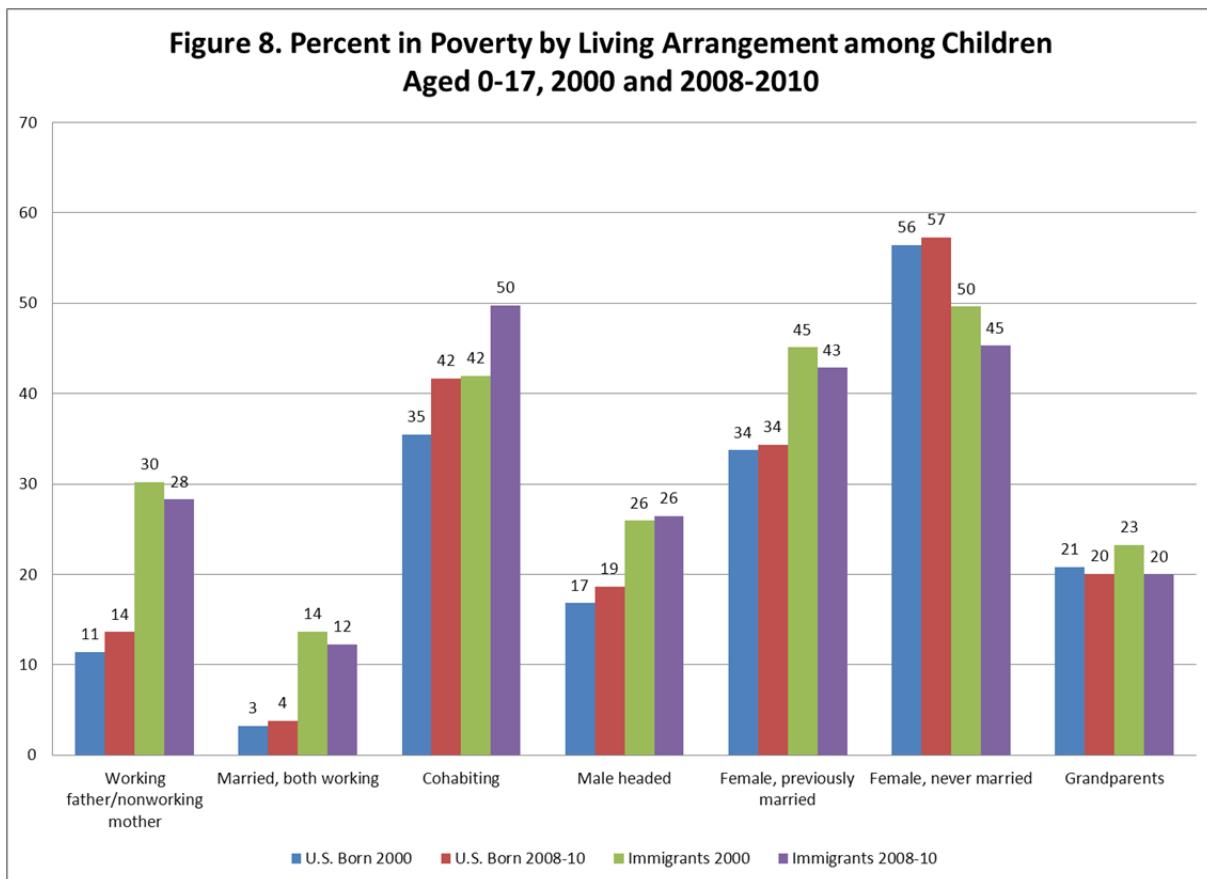
**Table 7. Percentage Distribution of Living Arrangement by Race and Nativity among Children Aged 0-17, 2008-2010**

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

Table 7 reveals strong racial/ethnic differences in children’s living arrangement. Among U.S.-born non-Hispanic white children, 22% lived with working-father/non-working-mother traditional families and half lived with dual earner families. The only racial group that had higher percentages for these two categories was Asian Americans, 24 percent and 53 percent, respectively. Over half of U.S.-born Hispanic children also lived in these two types of families (21 percent and 33 percent, respectively). U.S.-born African American children were clearly an exception — nearly one quarter lived with never married single mothers and 13 percent lived with previously married single mothers. Among American Indian children, one tenth lived in cohabiting families. Living with grandparents was relatively common among African American and American Indian children (15 percent and 18 percent, respectively). Cultural norms of extended family support may explain that African American and American Indian grandparents

are more likely to take on a parent role with their grandchildren (Dunifon and Bajracharya 2012; Luo, LaPierre, Hughes, and Waite 2012).

Immigrant children had lower percentages living with dual earner families but higher percentages living with working-father/non-working-mother families compared with their U.S.-born counterparts. Meanwhile, immigrant children had lower percentages living in single families, cohabiting families, or with grandparents than their U.S.-born counterparts. While black immigrant children had the similar percent living with previously married single mothers compared with their U.S.-born counterparts, they had much lower percentages living with never married mothers or grandparents than African American children.



Children’s living arrangements are associated with children’s wellbeing in multiple ways (Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991; Ginther and Pollak 2004). In Figure 8, I examine whether

children aged 0 to 17 lived in poverty by living arrangement in 2000 and 2008-10. In 2000, percent of children living in poverty was lowest (3 percent) among U.S.-born children living in dual earner families, followed by 11 percent among those living in working-father/non-working-mother families, and the highest among those living in never married single-mother families (56 percent). Despite the Great Recession, percent living in poverty only rose slightly in 2008-2010. One exception is that children living in cohabiting families experienced a large increase living in poverty, from 35 percent in 2000 to 42 percent in 2008-2010. However, as mentioned earlier, poverty levels among cohabiting families 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 single parents would mean a much higher level of children living in poverty.

Immigrant children are more likely to live with married parents who are working poor than U.S.-born children. Percent in poverty was significantly higher among immigrant working-father/non-working-mother or dual earner families than among their U.S.-born counterparts (30 percent and 14 respectively among immigrants versus 11 percent and 3 percent among the U.S. born in 2000). Nativity differences were much smaller among children in other types of living arrangements but immigrants, in general, had higher levels living in poverty than their U.S. born counterparts for each type of living arrangements. Despite the Great Recession, the percent in poverty declined among immigrant children in 2008-10 for most living arrangements, maybe in part due 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, Cumberworth, Morgan, and Wimer Forthcoming).

Table 8 presents racial/ethnic differences in percent living in poverty by living arrangement among children aged 0 to 17. U.S.-born white and Asian American children had the lowest percent in poverty for every type of living arrangement. Percent of children living in poverty among U.S.-born African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians was relatively similar with several exceptions. More Hispanic children lived in poverty among the working poor (working father and non-working families and dual earning 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 working-father/non-working mother families and dual earner families. In contrast, immigrant children living in other types of families did better compared with 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.

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

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 percent of children living in single or cohabiting families. Yet, proportionately 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. Immigrant children had low percentages living in single or cohabiting families and higher percentages living in traditional or dual earner families, but the percent living in poverty is relatively high because more immigrant children, especially those of Hispanics, lived in poverty than their U.S.-born counterparts among traditional and dual earner families. Overall, the results show that America's children have strong disparities in economic resources (McLanahan 2004).

## Conclusion

American families have been transformed over the past several decades. Since the 1960s, delayed marriage, prevalent cohabitation, high divorce, and rising remarriage have dramatically changed the fabric of American families and influenced children's wellbeing. 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 "quieting" of family change (Casper and Bianchi 2002)? Or was there evidence of continued marriage decline? The answer is not straightforward. We witnessed both "quieting" and continued change in America's families over the 2000s. Yet, importantly, American families have become Balkanized. Race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and nativity status are important dimensions of variation and change, which have placed American families divergent paths.

The evidence is strong that family change continued in the 2000s. Marriage was further delayed and percent ever married by age 20s reached new lows in 2008-2010. Young men and women continued to explore schools, jobs, and relationships and the Great Recession appeared to

have extended the period of exploration. Permanent singlehood by ages 50-54 also rose over the period. Although individuals remained single for various reasons, larger shares 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 marital unions have become more transitory (Cherlin 2004).

Yet, the 2000s also witnessed the halt of family change. Surge in cohabitation seen in the past decades appeared to have stopped. There may be potential reasons for the halt. The impact of the Great Recession might be severe enough that fewer men and women could afford cohabitation, or cohabitation during the Great Recession became so volatile and short-lived that the prevalence measure of cohabitation missed many short-term cohabitation episodes. Alternatively, over the years, cohabitation may have emerged from a socially unacceptable living arrangement to a widely accepted practice and has now become a permanent social institution with established expectations and social norms, which could discourage people from forming such relationships. Clearly, more research is needed to understand this new phenomenon. During the 2000s, we also witnessed some stability of children's living arrangement, at least as measured by changing shares of children living in two-parent families. The percent 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 arrangement presumably thwarted even larger increases in the percent 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 family change misses a picture of growing diversity in American families. The diversity is strong by race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and nativity status.

U.S.-born non-Hispanic whites delayed marriage in a similar way as racial/ethnic minorities but had higher rates of marriage and cohabitation, low divorce to marriage ratios (second only to Asian Americans), relatively large shares of remarriage. U.S.-born whites were most likely to be in relationships, whether they are cohabitation, first marriage, or remarriage. Part of the reason is that 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 groups (Qian and Lichter 2007). A large marriage market provided white Americans ample opportunities to find a suitable partner or spouse for cohabitation or marriage (Lichter, LeClere, and McLaughlin 1991). Of course, the size of a marriage market is only one sufficient condition. Another reason is that white Americans face fewer structural barriers during the life course than racial/ethnic minorities, regardless of socioeconomic status, which gives whites more time to explore relationships and build families. In addition, socioeconomic status matters. More U.S.-born whites have college education—another factor associated with high levels of marriage and cohabitation and low levels of divorce. As a result, most white children lived in working father/non-working mother or dual earner families and the percent of white children living in poverty was among the lowest across all living arrangements.

At the other end of the spectrum are African Americans, who had the lowest percent ever married at every age group, highest percent of permanent singlehood by ages 50-54, lower levels of cohabitation, highest divorce to marriage ratios, and a larger share of remarriages. As a result, African Americans were least likely to be in formal marital or cohabiting relationships. This is in large part due to poor economic circumstances of African Americans. Unemployment, underemployment, and poor economic prospects among African American men have a strong negative effect on union formation and stability (McLanahan and Percheski 2008).

Consequently, African American children had the lowest percent living in working father/non-working mother or dual earner families and the highest percent living in female-headed single families. Children in female-headed single families had the highest percent living in poverty and, unfortunately, such disadvantages are likely to exacerbate further 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 at lower levels and divorced at higher levels 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. Historically disadvantaged minorities retreated not only from marriage but also from cohabitation. While America's retreat from marriage is no longer a surprise, the slowdown in the prevalence of cohabitation is relatively a new phenomenon. As discussed above, the Great Recession may have made cohabitation an expensive living arrangement as more young men and women with poor economic resources returned homes to live with their parents (Qian 2012).<sup>2</sup>

Immigrants often come from countries in which marriage and family are highly valued. It is indeed true that immigrants regardless of educational attainment and race/ethnicity tend to be married at a higher percent, cohabit at a lower percent (except for Hispanic immigrants), divorce at a lower percent, and remarry at a lower percent compared with their U.S.-born counterparts. Thus, immigrants are unlikely to experience multiple marital transitions — An overwhelming majority married, stayed married, or remained divorced among the few who failed the first marriage. Clearly, immigrants presented another divergent path of American families— a path

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<sup>2</sup> If young people live with their parents and continue to cohabit, we would miss those cohabitations. Such cohabiting couples would be considered living in subfamilies of their parents' households. American Community Surveys do not collect information on cohabiting couples living in subfamilies.



toward traditional families—and are likely to slow down the retreat from marriage and cohabitation among blacks and less educated individuals. Yet, although immigrant children have a much higher percent living in married couple families, the risk of living in poverty is much greater because more married couple immigrant families are working poor. Due to fewer economic resources, immigrant children and later generation immigrants are likely to adopt American ways of marriage and family life, rather quickly, especially those of racial/ethnic minorities and with less education. As a result, it casts doubt about whether immigrants' push towards traditional families is strong. It is likely that the path toward traditional families occurs only among immigrants and the immigration effect is not long lasting.

The analysis in this chapter sheds light on America's families in the future. One thing is clear: American families are diverse and we can no longer describe and document a typical American family. On the one hand, American families are resilient and strong. Despite poorer economic conditions for most Americans during the Great Recession, marriage, as a social institution, remains strong, and children's living arrangement is stable. On the other hand, marital unions have become increasingly transitory, with more individuals living in cohabiting relationships and single families, and the relationship instability often puts children's wellbeing at risk. The polarization of American families raises the concern not so much because American families have become more diverse but more because they are diverse along racial/ethnic and economic lines. African Americans and individuals with fewer years of schooling are likely to live in single families and make multiple relationship transitions. Economic inequality is key to the polarization of American families and the disadvantages of children living in single 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 have high levels of educational attainment tend to have stable marriages. The selection of marriage and marriage itself benefit their children. These children 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 least likely to marry. Their children tend to live in single parent families or experience their parents' multiple transitory marital or cohabiting unions. A greater share of these children lives in poverty, performs poorly in school, and has 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 became much sharper today, 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 environment 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 the needs of children growing up in disadvantaged families.

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