National Symposium on Family Issues

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Editors

Families in an Era of Increasing Inequality

Diverging Destinies

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Volume 5

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Preface

In a provocative article published a decade ago, Sara McLanahan (2004) described the diverging destinies of American families and children. She noted that women were following two trajectories, one involving delays in childrearing and increases in employment, and the other involving high levels of divorce and non-marital childbearing. Women with the most economic opportunities were following the first trajectory, whereas women with the fewest opportunities were following the second. Because of these dynamics, changes in family demographics were exacerbating social class disparities in children's access to economic and social resources.

The diverging destinies of children have been unfolding within the context of three decades of growing economic inequality in the United States. Moreover, the Great Recession, which began in December 2007, increased economic hardship for millions of families. Although it ended officially in June 2009, rates of child poverty and unemployment, particularly among young adults, remain higher today (in 2014) than they had been a decade earlier. Parallel economic recessions in European countries have created similar problems for families and children.

These social trends provided the impetus for the 21st Annual Penn State Symposium on Family Issues held in October 2013. The Symposium focused on families and inequality, and the chapters in the current volume are based on papers presented at that meeting. The symposium was organized around four central topics: (1) Children's diverging destinies, (2) Social inequality, parenting, and child development, (3) Social inequality and the transition to adulthood, and (4) Program and policy responses to growing family inequality. Each session included a lead paper and commentary by several discussants. As in previous symposia, the paper presenters and discussants represented a range of social science disciplines.

In the lead chapter in Part I, Sara McLanahan, Professor of Sociology at Princeton University, and her colleague Wade Jacobsen update the diverging destinies thesis. They extend McLanahan's (2004) paper by including more recent data from the United States, Japan, Australia, and the European Union. Trends in these countries are generally consistent with the notion that changes in family behavior are increasing parental resources for children with well-educated mothers and reducing parental resources for children with less educated mothers. In his

comments on the McLanahan and Jacobsen chapter, Philip Cohen, Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, focuses on policy implications. He argues that much of the deprivation associated with single motherhood in the United States could be ameliorated through increasing educational levels and providing more public resources to single mothers and their children. Lynne Vernon-Feagans, Professor of Early Childhood, Intervention, and Literacy at the University of North Carolina, and her fellow authors focus on how the 24 h economy has transformed the lives of less educated mothers in rural America. As they note, the decline of manufacturing and the rise of the service economy have increased the percentage of parents working nonstandard hours, with problematic consequences for children and family life. Tim Smeeding, Professor of Public Affairs and Economics and Director of the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin, focuses his comments on the key steps children and youth must achieve to reach the American dream of middle class life. He argues that recent changes in the economy and family behavior are resulting in less upward mobility, equality of opportunity, and social progress in American society.

Part II begins with a chapter by Ariel Kalil, a developmental psychologist and Professor in the Harris School of Public Policy Studies at the University of Chicago. She argues that inequality can be traced to the differences in how advantaged and disadvantaged parents interact with their children. From this perspective, helping parents to prepare their children for educational success is likely to be the most effective way of reducing inequality in the long run. In his comments on Kalil's chapter, Flávio Cunha, Assistant Professor of Economics at Rice University, develops a model in which the behavior of low- and high-income parents is "subjectively rational." According to this model, parents employ parenting styles that are optimal given their subjective assessments of the constraints under which they operate. Martha Wadsworth, Associate Professor of Psychology at Penn State University, and her colleague, Jarl Ahlkvist, argue similarly that parenting is a mediating variable rather than the root cause of the achievement gap between children from low-income and affluent families. In their alternative model, income, wealth, and inequality are the basic causes of parenting behavior and other family and environmental conditions that affect children's cognitive and academic performance. Narayan Sastry, a Research Professor with the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan, also focuses on factors that affect parenting. His review emphasizes the debilitating effects of the psychological stress that frequently accompanies poverty and residence in impoverished neighborhoods.

In the lead chapter in Part III, Ingrid Schoon, Professor of Human Development and Social Policy at the University of London, shifts the focus to the transition to adulthood. She points out that most discussions of this topic are based on a simple distinction between late (optimal) or early (suboptimal) adoption of adult roles. Contrary to this view, her chapter emphasizes the complex, multiple pathways that contemporary youth follow to reach adulthood. Comments from Jeremy Staff, Associate Professor of Sociology and Criminology at Penn State University, and his colleagues focus on multilevel latent class models as a method for analyzing adult role trajectories. As they demonstrate, these models can be useful in showing how

socioeconomic factors in the family of origin set the stage for diversity in the pathways that young people follow. Bradford Wilcox, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia and his colleague, Charles Stokes, examine the role of family structure in shaping aspects of the transition to adulthood. Their analysis presents evidence that family structure during adolescence is related to young adults' odds of experiencing two outcomes, graduating from college and having a nonmarital birth, net of income and other family-of-origin variables. The final commentary in this section is from Matthew Diemer, Associate Professor of Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Special Education at Michigan State University. He argues that distinct domains of social class (such as parental income, wealth, education, and occupational status) affect the transition to adulthood differently. He points out, for example, that parental income is more closely related to the ability of youth to achieve residential independence and home ownership than is parental education.

In Part IV, Ron Haskins, Senior Fellow and Co-Director of the Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution, provides an informative overview of trends during the last several decades in family structure, economic inequality, and government support for single mothers. As he argues, the growth of single parent families has placed an increasing proportion of children at risk for poor academic outcomes, with problematic consequences for upward mobility. Because programs to reduce the growth of single-mother families have not been effective, future policy efforts should focus more strongly on direct efforts to improve the financial status of single mothers and their children. Cybele Raver, Professor of Applied Psychology at New York University, and her colleagues, Amanda Leigh Roy and Emily Pressler, supplement Haskin's paper by focusing on poverty-related risks for children. Their approach emphasizes the dynamic aspect of poverty and how multiple risk factors can accumulate over time for children in disadvantaged families. Kathryn Edin, Bloomberg Distinguished Professor in the Department of Sociology and the Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health at Johns Hopkins University, and her colleagues focus on the diverging destinies of fathers. As they point out, low-income men tend to have children early in relationships and often find it difficult to form stable relationships with their new families. They argue for interventions that (a) reduce early and unplanned childrearing among young men and (b) help these men to remain connected with their children, including enforced visitation agreements for nonresident fathers who pay child support.

A tradition of the Penn State Family Symposium series is to conclude each volume with a chapter written by two early stage family scholars. The concluding chapter of this volume was written by two senior graduate students at Penn State University, Maggie L. Thorsen (Sociology) and Bo-Ram Kim (Human Development and Family Studies). Their charge was to bring their disciplinary backgrounds to bear on the ideas and themes that emerged from the four sessions of the conference. The authors use their chapter to discuss the reciprocal links between income inequality and family structure and to discuss the different types of policies

and programs that might follow from the insights and evidence discussed during the symposium.

The growth in income inequality, and the corresponding diverging destinies of families in the US and other western countries, are some of the most distinctive features of contemporary society and create pressing challenges for family policy. We believe this volume of outstanding papers will help to define the issues, spark alternative ways of thinking about recent trends, and suggest strategies for improving the lives of children and parents in this time of social change.

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Reference

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The efforts of many individuals went into planning the 2013 symposium and producing this volume. The editors thank Valarie King, Molly Martin, Jenn Maggs, and Greg Fosco for presiding over symposium sessions and Peter Hudson for providing the welcoming remarks. We also are grateful for the assistance of the administrative staff in the Population Research Institute and the Social Science Research Institute at Penn State, including Sherry Yocum, Donna Panasiti, Angela Jordan, and Miranda Bair. Finally, the Symposium and book would not have been possible without Carolyn Scott's organizational skills, commitment, and attention to the many details that go into developing an engaging conference and producing a scholarly volume.

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Part I
Diverging Destinies for American Children

Chapter 1
Diverging Destinies Revisited

Sara McLanahan and Wade Jacobsen

Abstract In her 2004 presidential address to the Population Association of American, Sara McLanahan argued that in the USA and other Western countries, the second demographic transition was leading to two very different trajectories for women—with very different implications for children. Whereas for children born to mothers with a college degree, the changes in family behavior were associated with gains in parental resources, for children born to less educated mothers, the changes were associated with relative and, in some instances, absolute losses in resources. The authors extend the 2004 paper by updating the evidence with recent trends in the USA and new analyses from other countries, including Japan, Australia, and the EU countries, and by reviewing evidence on the causes of change. They conclude by noting that the changes in family formation are associated with negative outcomes for parents, children, and society and by discussing possible solutions to the growing disparities in family behaviors.

The second demographic transition (SDT), which is marked by delays in fertility and marriage, increases in non-marital cohabitation, divorce, and childbearing outside marriage, and a convergence in gender roles, unfolded throughout Western industrialized countries during the latter part of the twentieth century (Van de Kaa 1987). In her 2004 presidential address to the Population Association of American, Sara McLanahan argued that in the USA and other Western countries, the SDT was leading to two very different trajectories for women—with very different implications for children (McLanahan 2004). Whereas for children born to mothers with a college degree, the changes in family behavior were associated with gains in parental resources, for children born to less educated mothers the changes were associated with relative and, in some instances, absolute losses in resources.

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This chapter extends the 2004 paper in several ways. In the next section, we summarize the argument and evidence presented in the original paper on diverging destinies. Next we update the evidence by examining recent trends in the USA, by discussing recent studies of the US population that document polarization in domains not covered in the original paper, and by examining new cross-national comparisons of how the SDT is playing out in different countries. In the following sections, we revisit the causes of the changes in family behaviors, and then review new evidence on the consequences of these changes. Finally, we discuss possible solutions to the growing disparities in family behaviors.

The Argument and the Evidence

In her 2004 paper, McLanahan argued that changes in family behaviors since the early 1960s were leading to two very different trajectories for women and children. To support her claim, she used data from the US Census to construct trends in mothers' age, mothers' employment, and the prevalence of single motherhood. For age, which is associated with gains in children's resources, she found that the average age of mothers increased for all children between 1960 and 2000, but the increase was greater for children of more educated mothers. For employment, which also marks a gain in resources, she found a similar pattern. Employment increased among all mothers, but the increase was much greater for the most educated mothers as compared with the least educated mothers. Finally, for single motherhood, which is associated with a loss of parental resources, more educated mothers showed a much smaller increase than less educated mothers.

Findings from the census data were supplemented by evidence provided by other researchers. Work by Steve Martin (2004), for example, showed that while divorce rates increased among all couples during the 1960s and 1970s, they diverged after 1980, leveling off and then declining for college educated mothers while continuing to rise for mothers with less education. Similarly, work by Suzanne Bianchi (2000) showed that while fathers' time with children increased for all education groups between 1964 and 2000, the children of college-educated parents experienced greater gains than the children of less educated parents, primarily because the latter were less likely to be living with their fathers.

Using data from the Luxembourg Income Study, McLanahan also documented an education gradient in family behaviors in other Western countries, including the UK, Canada, Sweden, Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands. Consistent with the US data, in all of these countries, highly educated mothers were older, more likely to be working outside the home and less likely to be raising their child alone than mothers with less education. The education gap in single motherhood between the most and least educated mothers ranged from 3:1 to 4:1 in other countries. Finally, using analyses conducted by Gauthier (2004), McLanahan documented a similar gap in fathers' time with children.

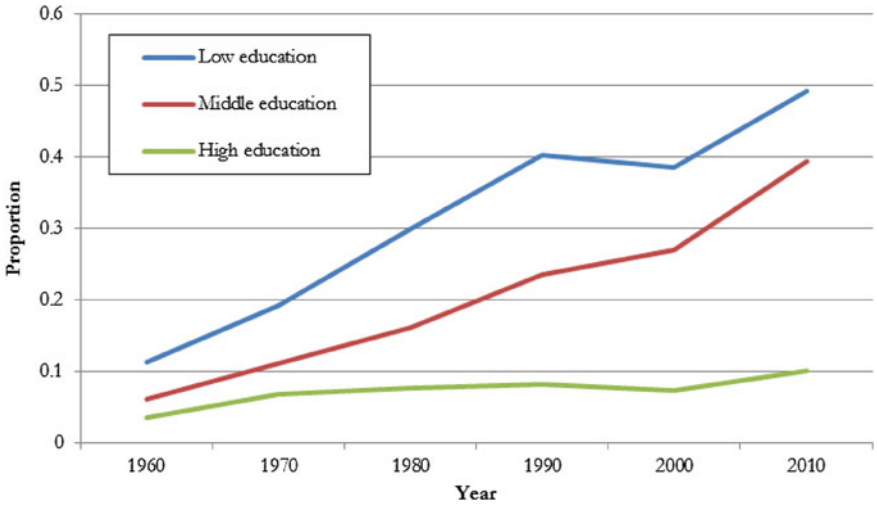

Fig. 1.1 Trends in single motherhood 1960–2010. *Source* IPUMS Census/ACS

New Evidence on Trends

Figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 present information on trends in age, mothers' employment, and single motherhood from 1960 to 2010. The original paper showed trends for 1960 through 2000. The new figures are updated to include information from the 2010 US Census. Mothers' education is measured in the same way it was measured in the 2004 paper: The high education category represents mothers in the top 25 % of the education distribution, the low education category represents mothers in the bottom 25 % of the distribution, and the middle education category represents the other 50 % of mothers. Mothers' age is measured as the age of mothers whose oldest child is <1 year old. This measure allows us to examine trends in mothers' age at first birth.[1] Mothers are coded as employed if they were working at least 15 h/week for at least 27 weeks/year. Finally, single motherhood is measured as being unmarried and having a child <1 year old. This specification allows us to examine trends in births to unmarried women.[2]

Figure 1.1 reports the trend in single motherhood. A high value on this measure suggests fewer parental resources since children born to unmarried mothers are much less likely to receive financial and emotional support from their biological fathers. As shown in Fig. 1.1, single motherhood was relatively rare in 1960, ranging from 4 % among the most educated mothers to 11 % among the least

[1] In the original paper, all mothers were included in the sample.

[2] A substantial proportion of mothers coded as "single" are cohabiting with their child's father at the time of the child's birth, and this proportion has increased over time (Kennedy and Bumpass 2008).

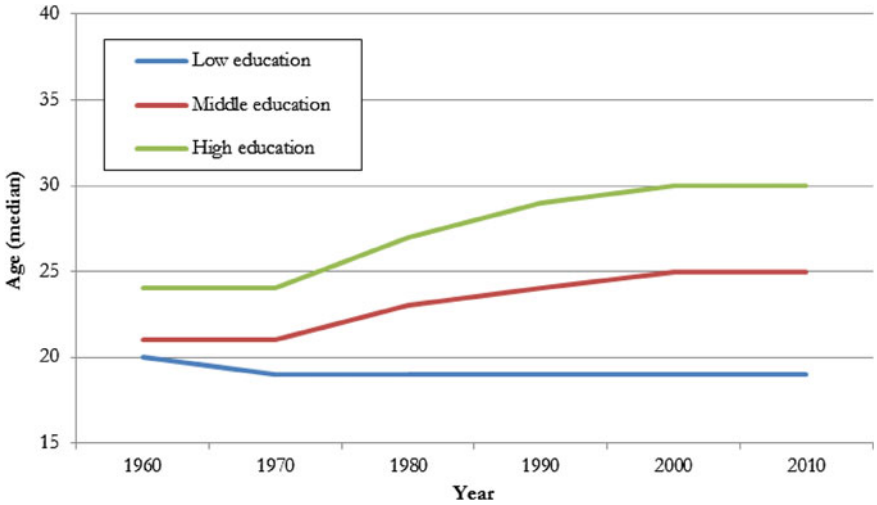

Fig. 1.2 Trends in mothers' median age 1960–2010. *Source* IPUMS Census/ACS

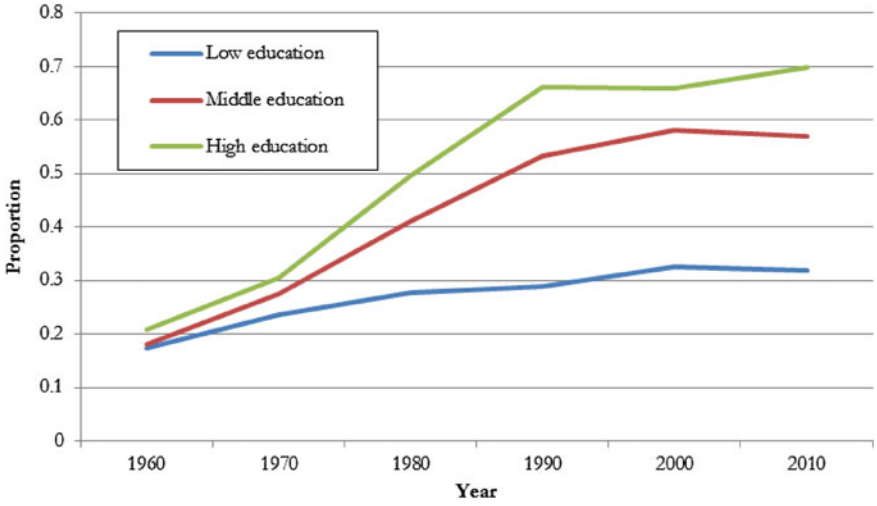

Fig. 1.3 Trends in mothers' employment 1960–2010. *Source* IPUMS Census/ACS

educated. By 2000, the proportion of new mothers in this status had quadrupled among less educated women while not even doubling among the most educated women. A couple of patterns are particularly noteworthy. First, during the 1990s, the trend for women in the lowest education group was flat and even showed a slight decline, which is consistent with the decline in births to teen mothers that began during this decade. Second, the increase in single motherhood among women

in the middle education group is particularly striking. Whereas prior to 1990, the trajectory for women in the middle education group was in between the trajectories for mothers in the highest and lowest education groups, after 1990, mothers in the middle group experienced the fastest increase in single motherhood, initially because the trend for the least educated group was flat and later because the trend for the middle education group was steeper than it was for the lowest education group. We should note that most of the increase in non-marital childbearing during this period was to women who were cohabiting with the fathers of their children, which means that the resources available to the children in these families were greater than is indicted by the term "single mother." Nevertheless, given the high rates of union dissolution among cohabiting parents, a substantial proportion of the children in this status can be expected to live with a single mother at some point during childhood (McLanahan and Beck 2010). The trend for the middle education group is consistent with Andrew Cherlin's (2011) argument that middle-income families in the USA are losing ground relative to higher income families.

Figure 1.2 reports the trend in mother's age. A high value of age is considered an advantage since older mothers are more mature and in a better position to care for their children. The trends in age are relatively flat for all education groups during the 1960s. After 1970, however, they begin to diverge, with mothers in the highest education group showing the more dramatic delays in fertility. The trends leveled off in the last decade, with college educated mothers having their first child around age 30, middle-educated mothers having their first child around age 25, and the least educated mothers continuing to have their first child around age 20.

Figure 1.3 reports trends for maternal employment. Maternal employment is also viewed as an advantage for children since employment is associated with higher family income. Whereas in the past, there was concern that working outside the home might reduce the amount of time mothers spend with their children; research by Sayer et al. (2004) indicates that this concern is not justified. According to Fig. 1.3, in 1960, about 20 % of mothers were working outside the home, with very little difference by mothers' education. By 2000, when the original diverging destinies paper was published, employment had grown by 250 % among the most educated mothers, but by only 10 % among the least educated mothers. In the case of employment, mothers in the middle of the education distribution are closer to mothers at the top end of the distribution than to mothers at the bottom end, although the gap between the two groups widened during the past decade, as the percentage of working mothers in the middle group declined in absolute terms.

Several new studies have extended the analysis of diverging destinies by documenting growing gaps in other domains of family behavior and social life in the USA. For example, as discussed by Kalil (Chap. 5), a recent study by Kornrich and Furstenberg (2013) finds that parents' spending on children increased dramatically between the 1970s and 2000s, with a much greater increase among college educated parents as compared with high school-educated parents. In 1970, the gap between the top and bottom groups was $800; by the mid-2000s, it was $1,700 (in 2008 dollars). The authors note that the proportion of income spent on children increased across the income distribution, suggesting that the rise in spending was due to

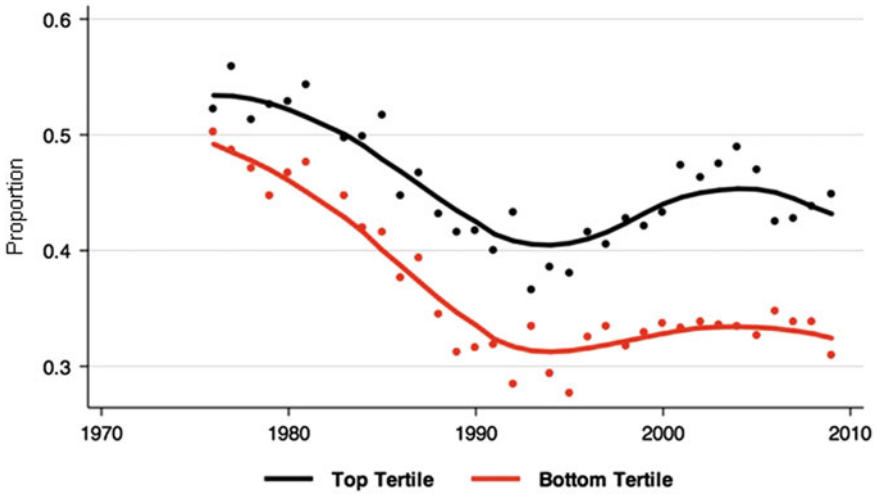

Fig. 1.4 Growing class gaps in social trust among twelfth graders, parental education tertiles. *Source* Putnam (2013)

increased pressure on parents of all income levels to invest more in their children as opposed to rising income levels at the top of the income distribution.

Other studies report a growing gap in children's social capital. A divergence in social trust, measured as whether people agree with the statement that "most people can be trusted," was found among high school seniors (Putnam 2013). As shown in Fig. 1.4, the gap in trust between students with high and low levels of parental education more than tripled between the 1970s and 2009, which the authors attribute to growing isolation among less affluent youth.

Similarly, these researchers find that whereas reports of social connectedness (support networks, friends, mentors, etc.) between the 1970s and 2000s remained fairly stable among youth whose parents were in the bottom third of the education distribution, they increased markedly among those whose parents were in the top of the distribution. While community involvement increased overall, church attendance went down, especially among youth whose parents were at the bottom of the education spectrum (Putnam 2013). For each of the behaviors examined by these authors, the education gap has roughly doubled since the 1970s.

Finally, in *Coming apart: The state of White America, 1960–2010*, Murray (2013) describes the divergence of upper and lower classes using a framework of what he calls the "founding virtues" of America: marriage, industriousness, honesty, and religiosity. Using census and other national survey data, his findings on marriage behavior are consistent with those reported in our tables. He also finds a widening class gap in marital happiness over time. Using data from the General Social Survey, for example, he finds that among college-educated whites, the proportion reporting "very happy" marriages declined through the 1970s and 1980s but has since risen back to where it was in the early 1970s (about 75 % report being

"very happy"). In contrast, among less educated whites, the proportion reporting that their marriages are "very happy" has declined steadily since the early 1970s, from more than 65 % to roughly 50 % in recent years. These findings are striking insofar as the decline in marriage was more pronounced among less educated couples making those who are married a more select group. These findings are also consistent with the turnaround in divorce among college-educated couples that occurred during the 1980s (Martin 2004).

Not all of the data that Murray (2013) presents shows a widening of the gap between those in the high and low classes. For example, the percentage of people who agree with the statement that "it is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family" decreased substantially through the 1970s and 1980s across all groups, with the difference between the upper and lower classes remaining relatively constant. Opinions about extramarital sex also became more similar. Whereas in the mid-1970s, the gap between the most and least educated was 30 % points, by 2010, the difference was only 10 points.

Cross-national Comparisons

In addition to the new studies that examine family change in the USA, a number of researchers have examined the diverging destinies hypothesis in other industrialized countries. These studies focus on variety of family behaviors, including divorce/union dissolution, age at first birth, and marriage/union formation. In most cases, the trends in other countries are consistent with those in the USA, although the size of the education gap is smaller, and in a few cases, the education gradient is positive rather than negative.

Divorce

Changes in the association between educational attainment and divorce in 17 European countries were investigated by Härkönen and Dronkers (2006), using data from the Fertility and Family Surveys (FFS), which were conducted between 1989 and 1999. The FFS surveys asked respondents about their marital histories and thus cover a long time period.

Table 1.1 summarizes their findings. Column 1 reports the coefficients for the association between educational attainment and divorce for women who ever married. The estimates for each country show considerable variation in the relationship between education and the risk of divorce across different countries. In Austria, Flanders, Lithuania, and the USA, highly educated women have a lower risk of divorce than less educated women, which is consistent with the diverging destinies hypothesis; in Greece, Italy, and Poland, however, the most educated

Table 1.1 International comparisons of changes in the gap between high and low education across time

Country	High education (ref: low education)	Includes interaction between education and marriage cohort	
		High education (ref: low education)	High education × year of marriage
Austria	−0.273**	−0.201***	−0.004
Flanders	−0.372**	1.050**	−0.138**
Estonia	−0.033	0.452	−0.032
Finland	−0.139	0.682*	−0.054**
France	0.154	0.679**	−0.033*
West-Germany	−0.376	0.376	−0.071
Greece	0.697**	0.635	0.010
Hungary	−0.074	0.642*	−0.072**
Italy	0.876***	2.288***	−0.092**
Latvia	−0.160	0.289	−0.032
Lithuania	−0.445**	−0.808*	−0.017
Norway	0.086	0.253	−0.018
Poland	0.363*	2.195***	−0.090***
Spain	0.390	1.628**	−0.068
Sweden	0.020	1.033***	−0.096***
Switzerland	0.014	0.219	−0.011
USA	−0.409***	−0.019	−0.030***

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$. *Source* Härkönen and Dronkers (2006)

women have a greater risk of divorce. There are no statistically significant differences between women with high and low levels of education in the other ten countries.

Columns two and three in Table 1.1 report estimates based on a model that takes account of the year in which a woman married and thus allows us to examine changes in the education gradient over time. Consistent with the diverging destinies hypothesis, the results in column three indicate that the risk of divorce among highly educated women, relative to the risk among less educated women, decreased among more recent cohorts in Flanders, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, and the USA. In no country was there a significant increase in the risk of divorce for women with high levels of education.

In a more recent study, Kalmijn (2013) provided additional support for the diverging destinies argument. Using data from five waves of the European Social Survey, he examined the education gradient in 25 European countries. He found that the gradient depends on the level of gender equality in the country. In countries with traditional attitudes about gender roles, highly educated women were more likely to divorce than their less educated counterparts. However, in countries with

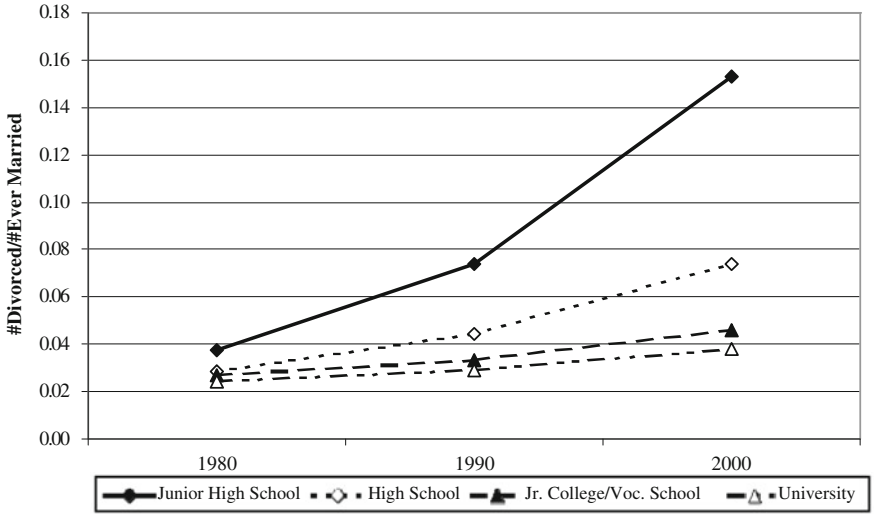

Fig. 1.5 Ratio of divorced to ever married 35- to 39-year-old women, by educational attainment in Japan: 1980, 1990, 2000. *Source* Raymo et al. (2004)

more egalitarian attitudes, educated women were less likely to divorce. The same pattern held for men.

Two other single-country studies have contributed to the international picture of the education gradient in divorce and separation. Using census data for Japan, Raymo et al. (2004) found that while the prevalence of divorce has increased for all education groups, it grew the fastest among women with the least education (see Fig. 1.5). In 1980, <5 % of ever-married women ages 35–39 were currently divorced, with minimal differences by education; by 2000, however, 15 % of women who had not completed high school, 7 % of those with a high school degree, and only about 4 % of those with a university degree were divorced. These results provide strong evidence of growing educational disparities in Japanese divorce.

In yet another paper, Kennedy and Thomson (2010) examined changes in family behavior in Sweden, using data from the Level of Living Surveys. The top panel of Table 1.2 reports estimates of children's exposure to parental separation by age 15. These researchers examined separations in cohabiting unions as well as marital unions, since a large proportion of first unions in Sweden are cohabiting couples. Consistent with other studies, they found evidence of diverging destinies in children's likelihood of experiencing parental separation by age 15. Whereas the gap in separation between parents with primary and tertiary educations was 3 % points (21 % versus 18 %) for children born in the 1970s, it was 11 % points (32 % versus 21 %) for children born in the 1990s. Stated differently, whereas the risk of separation grew by 50 % for children of less educated parents, it increased by only 16 % for children of the most educated parents.

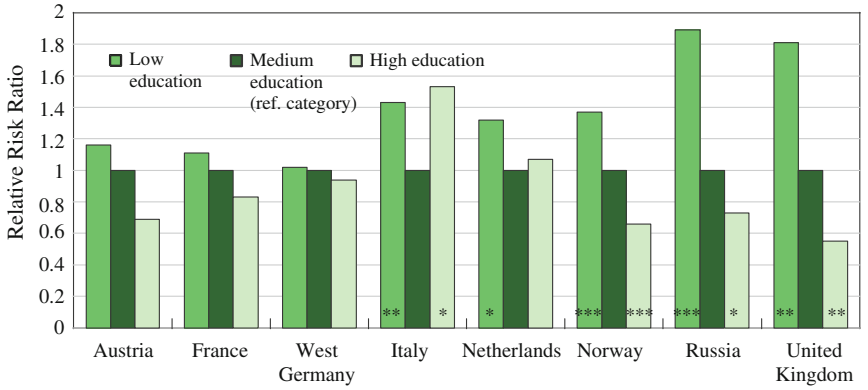

Fig. 1.6 Relative risk ratios for identifying the educational gradient of first births to cohabiting women relative to married women in eight European countries, 1970 to Latest Date Available. *Single asterisk* (*) $p < 0.05$; *double asterisk* (**) $p < 0.01$; *triple asterisk* (***) $p < 0.001$. *Source* Perelli-Harris et al. (2010)

Childbearing Outside Marriage

Whereas the previous studies tell us about changes in divorce and separation, other researchers have investigated the education gradient for childbearing outside marriage. Using data from the Family and Fertility Surveys, the Generations and Gender Surveys, the British Household Panel Surveys, and the Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics, Perelli-Harris and her colleagues (2010) focused on eight European countries. To investigate education differences in childbearing, they examined the risk of having a first birth within a marital union, a cohabiting union, or no union for women with low, medium, and high levels of educations. They found that the relative risk of having a cohabiting birth was greatest for women with the least education and smallest for women with the most education. This finding is consistent across all of the countries in their study except for Italy, where women with the highest and lowest levels of education show similar risks of having a birth within a cohabiting union. The starkest educational differences are found in the UK, Russia, and Norway (Fig. 1.6).

The education gradient for first births outside a union (i.e., births to single, non-cohabiting mothers) was also examined by Perelli-Harris and colleagues (2010). The results from this analysis are consistent with those for cohabiting unions, once again providing strong evidence of a negative education gradient for childbearing among single women. In each of the eight countries, except Russia, single women with low levels of education were significantly more likely to become mothers than single women with mid to high levels of education. In six of the eight countries, highly educated single women were significantly less likely to have a birth than their counterparts with medium education. France and the Netherlands are the two exceptions; in these countries, highly educated women had the same risk of having

Table 1.2 Children's exposure to single motherhood, cohabitation, and parental separation in Sweden

Parent education	1970s	1980s	1990s
Estimated percent experiencing parental separation by age 15			
Primary	21	24	32
Secondary	20	18	30
Tertiary	18	16	21
Percent born to single women			
Primary	5	4	6
Secondary	2	3	3
Tertiary	2	2	3
Percent born to cohabiting women			
Primary	45	56	59
Secondary	39	53	59
Tertiary	30	35	38

Source Kennedy and Thomson (2010)

a birth outside a union as women with middle levels of education. Both groups, however, had a lower risk than women with the least education.

Births to unmarried men and women were examined by Kennedy and Thomson (2010) in their analysis of family behaviors in Sweden. As shown in the middle and bottom panels of Table 1.2, births to single mothers remained rare in Sweden, comprising only 5 % of births among parents who did not complete a secondary education ("primary" category) in the 1970s compared to 6 % in the 1990s; and 2 % of births to parents with post-secondary training ("tertiary") in the 1970s compared to 3 % in the 1990s. Births to cohabiting mothers, however, increased steadily through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s among all education groups. Less educated mothers had the highest percentages of births to cohabiting mothers and the most pronounced change across the three time periods. In the 1970s, 45 % of births among the least educated group and 30 % of births among the highest educated group were to cohabiting mothers; by the 1980s, these figures had increased to 56 % and 35 %, respectively. While cohabitation continued to increase into the 1990s (59 % and 38 % respectively), the education gap remained stable.

Age at First Birth

In yet another cross-national comparison, Rendall and colleagues (2010) used a combination of population and survey data (primarily FFS) to examine changes in the relationship between educational attainment and mothers' age at first birth. Summarizing their findings, Table 1.3 presents the percentages of women having their first birth before age 21 by education category (International Standard Classification of Education) and country during the period between 1970 and 2000. For

all countries and for both cohorts, the least educated women were the most likely to have a first birth before age 21. The percentage of women having a first birth before age 21 also decreased from the 1950s to the 1960s cohorts for all education groups and all countries. However, whereas the education gap became narrower between the 1950s and 1960s cohorts in France and Norway, it grew substantially in the UK, USA, Greece, and Italy, with the greatest divergence occurring in Spain. Unlike trends in cohabitation and parental separation described above, the change in the education gradient for age at first birth appears to be caused by movement of the highest educated groups. From the 1950s to the 1960s cohorts, the likelihood of having a first birth before age 21 decreased at a much faster rate among highly educated women than it did among low-educated women.

Finally, several researchers have examined the relationship between educational attainment and union formation in Western countries. Using census data for Australia and New Zealand, Heard (2011) found declining rates of marriage overall and a growing gap between women with high and low levels of education. In Australia, for example, among 30- to 34-year-old women in 1996, there was no difference between the lowest and highest education groups in terms of the likelihood of marriage—64 % in each group were married. By 2006, however, the percent married had declined to 61 % among those with a bachelor's degree or higher as compared with 53 % among those with a basic vocational degree or less. A starker divergence can be seen in New Zealand. A total of 53 % of 30- to 34-year-old women who had not completed high school were married in 1996, compared to 59 % of those with a post-secondary degree. By 2006, these figures had declined to 32 % and 53 %, respectively, signifying a much greater drop among less educated women.

In contrast to marriage rates, cohabitation rates increased overall in the two countries, while differences between women with the highest and lowest levels of education remained fairly stable. The percent of 30 to 34-year-old women in Australia who were cohabiting grew from 9 % in 1996 to 14 % in 2006 for those with a bachelor's degree or higher, and from 9 % to 16 % for those with a vocational certification or less. Similarly in New Zealand, the percent of women in the same age group grew from 15 % to 22 % among women with the highest levels of education and from 15 % to 24 % among women with the lowest levels.

The educated gradient for first union formation in the USA, Canada, Italy, and Sweden for women born before 1951, between 1951 and 1960, and between 1961 and 1970 was examined by Goldscheider et al. (2001). Consistent with Heard, they find declines in marriage and increases in cohabitation in all countries. With respect to the education gradient, the patterns are mixed. Looking first at marriage, they find that in the USA, the most educated women have always been the most likely to marry, with very little change in the gradient. In contrast, in Canada, the least educated women were more likely to marry in the past, but the gradient has disappeared in more recent cohorts. In the other two countries—Italy and Sweden—there is no clear trend, with marriage being more common among women with the most and least education as compared to women with middle levels of education. The pattern for cohabitation is more consistent than the pattern for marriage. In the

Table 1.3 Percentage of cohort having a first birth before age 21, by cohort and education

	1960s cohort	1950s cohort	1960–1950 % change
France, 1955–59 and 1963–67			
Low education	24.7	29.1	−15.1
Medium education	9.2	13.7	−32.8
High education	1.0	2.9	−65.5
Norway, 1951–55 and 1961–65			
Low education	36.6	46.4	−21.1
Medium education	15.4	26.3	−41.4
High education	4.2	8.4	−50.0
Norway, 1955–59 and 1965–69			
Low education	32.1	44.2	−27.4
Medium education	13.9	22.1	−37.1
High education	3.2	7.1	−54.9
UK, 1954–58 and 1964–68			
Low education	34.0	34.9	−2.6
Medium education	12.7	15.5	−18.1
High education	3.5	5.6	−37.5
USA			
Low education	52.8	54.3	−2.8
Medium education	26.3	32.2	−18.3
High education	8.0	12.2	−34.4
Greece, 1955–59 and 1965–69			
Low education	39.9	39.0	2.3
Medium education	13.1	15.4	−14.9
High education	2.8	4.2	−33.3
Italy, 1951–55 and 1961–65			
Low education	23.5	25.8	−8.9
Medium education	5.0	8.2	−39.0
High education	0.8	4.8	−83.3
Spain, 1951–55 and 1961–65			
Low education	16.9	13.5	25.2
Medium education	7.1	9.1	−22.0
High education	1.6	5.7	−71.9

Source Rendall et al. (2010)

USA, there is no education gradient in the risk that a woman's first union will be a cohabiting partnership; in the other three countries, the education gradient is positive among the earliest cohorts, with more educated women being more likely to cohabit, and neutral among more recent cohorts.

Finally, Kalmijn (2013) examined the education gradient for marriage and cohabitation in 25 European countries. To adjust for the fact that education is associated with delays in marriage, he looked at whether men and women were in a

marital or cohabiting union in midlife (ages 40–49). As was the case for his analysis of divorce, he found that the association between education and marriage depended on country-level attitudes about gender roles and gender equality. In countries with egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles, women with high levels of education were more likely to be married than other women; in countries with more traditional attitudes, women with high levels of education were less likely to be married. The pattern for cohabitation was different. For this status, the education gradient was positive (more educated women were more likely to be in a cohabiting union) and there was no moderating influence of gender role attitudes. Cohabiting unions were also relatively rare. Only 9 % of women in the 40–49 age group were in a cohabiting union as compared with 68 % in marital unions.

Causes

To account for the changes in family behaviors and the growing gap between the children of more and less educated mothers, McLanahan (2004) highlighted four factors: the rise of feminism, the introduction of the birth control pill, declining labor market conditions for less skilled men, and increases in welfare state benefits for unmarried mothers. Feminism, she argued, gave women a new identity and encouraged them to invest in education and careers. Feminism also helped change the attitudes of college-educated men in ways that made them more accepting of women's demands for more egalitarian marriages. The spread of the birth control pill further contributed to the education gap in family behaviors by giving women who were motivated to become more economically independent, the capacity to control their fertility while pursuing a career. For women who wanted to be homemakers, however, the pill reduced their bargaining power vis a vis men, making it harder for them to obtain a promise of marriage in the case of an unintended pregnancy and leading to more non-marital births (Akerlof et al. 1996).

A third factor driving family change was the decline in employment and earnings among low-skilled men, which made them less able to support a family and therefore less attractive on the marriage market. Finally, McLanahan argued that welfare state policies in the USA discouraged marriage among poor mothers by imposing a steep income test on public benefits. Given the uncertainty of the low-wage labor market, welfare benefits provided more security than marriage for women with low levels of education.

Update on Causes

The international studies described in the previous section make several important contributions to the debate over the causes of family change, including the importance of "modern" ideas and changing economic conditions as well as the role

of government policies. Several papers emphasize the role of "ideational change" as a fundamental driver of changes in family behaviors (Härkönen and Dronkers 2006; Perelli-Harris et al. 2010; Kalmijn 2013). The ideational perspective argues that as countries become more prosperous, concerns about material needs decline, and ideas about individual freedom and self-fulfillment rise to prominence (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1988). These new ideas, in turn, lead to changes in norms about sexual behavior and gender roles, and ultimately to changes in family behaviors. The ideational perspective posits that the educated elite will be the vanguard of change, since members of this group will be the first to be exposed to the new ideas. A similar point was made by William Goode (1962), a leading family sociologist in the 1960s, when he argued that college educated women would be the vanguard of change, not only because they were more likely to be exposed to "modern" ideas, but also because they were in a better position to bear the economic and social costs (stigma) associated with the new family behaviors. Goode predicted that the gradient would become less steep over time as the social and economic costs of divorce and single motherhood declined. He also argued that divorce would become more common among lower SES groups due to greater marital strain.

In their comparative study of divorce, Härkönen and Dronkers (2006) provide support for the ideational perspective by showing a positive education gradient during the early stages of the second demographic transition (SDT). Indeed, Austria, Lithuania, and the USA are the only countries in their analysis that show no evidence of a positive education gradient among older cohorts. Similarly, Kalmijn's (2013) analysis of 25 European countries provides support for the ideational argument insofar as he finds that educated women are less likely to be married and more likely to divorce in more traditional countries. Although the ideational argument explains why highly educated women are the first to adopt the new family behaviors, it does not provide a good explanation for the reversal of the education gradient among recent cohorts. Kalmijn's analysis provides some insight into this issue by showing that the behavior of highly educated women depends strongly on their country's attitudes toward gender equality. In countries that adhere to traditional gender roles, educated women are less likely to marry and more likely to divorce. In countries that support women's equality, educated women are more likely to marry and less likely to divorce than other women. These findings indicate that educated women are rejecting traditional gender roles *but not marriage*. This distinction is important because ideational theory treats marriage as a traditional institution at odds with gender equality. In contrast, Kalmijn's analysis suggests that educated women are using their new economic independence to redefine marital roles in ways that are more compatible with egalitarian ideas.

The comparative studies also highlight the role of men's economic status in shaping family behaviors. For example, Perelli-Harris and her colleagues (2010) argue that the ideational perspective pays too little attention to the changes in macroeconomic conditions that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s and to the uncertainty these conditions created for less educated couples. They also argue that rather than being a "modern lifestyle choice," cohabitation is best seen as "a living situation that reflects uncertainty, whether resulting from job instability and

unemployment or prolonged education and the establishment of a career." The perspective presented by these researchers is consistent with the finding that less educated couples in the USA have set a high marriage bar for their relationships and that rising unemployment and declining earnings during the latter part of the twentieth century have made it increasingly difficult for them to reach the bar (Gibson-Davis et al. 2005).

An important methodological issue in this literature is whether the sample includes all women or is limited to women with children. The "diverging destinies" argument (McLanahan 2004) focuses on the experiences of children and the behavior of women with children, i.e., mothers. Much of the evidence for the ideational or modernization perspective comes from studies that focus on the behavior of women rather than mothers. This point applies to Härkönen and Dronkers' (2006) study of divorce as well as to Heard's (2011), Kalijn's (2013), and Goldscheider et al. (2001) studies of marriage and cohabitation. Whereas highly educated women may be more willing and able to experiment with new ideas and lifestyles than less educated women, their motivation may change once they decide to become mothers. Indeed in the USA and England, the association between education and cohabitation is much stronger for women with children than it is for all women. In testing ideas about the second demographic transition and children's diverging destinies, future studies should be careful to distinguish between all women and mothers.

Finally, several of the comparative papers have enriched our understanding of the role of government policies in shaping the education gradient in family behaviors. Using social expenditures as a percent of GDP to measure welfare state generosity, Härkönen and Dronkers (2006) find that greater generosity is negatively associated with divorce, especially among less educated couples. They interpret these findings as indicating that welfare state generosity helps to stabilize marriage by reducing economic strain among low-income couples. These findings extend McLanahan's original claim that income-tested benefits discourage marriage by suggesting that universal benefits may actually increase marriage and union stability.

Besides cash transfers, Rendall and his colleagues (2010) argue that fertility behavior is shaped by whether a country's social policies are "family friendly." These researchers develop a typology of policy regimes that classify countries according to their policies toward working mothers. "Universalist" regimes (France, Norway) have generous parental leave policies and policies that make it easy for mothers to return to work. Both benefits are conditional on mothers' working before they have children, and thus provide strong incentives for mothers to delay fertility, irrespective of education. These two countries also have generous subsidies for childcare. In contrast, "liberal or Anglo" regimes (USA, UK) provide income-tested benefits to low-skilled women and minimal support to working mothers, while "southern European" regimes countries (Greece, Italy, Spain) provide no support for working mothers. Their analyses yield a number of interesting findings. First, the gap between mothers with low and high levels of education is much narrower in the universalistic countries than it is in the Anglo and southern European countries.

Second, the chances that a woman in the bottom education category will have a child before age 20 is much higher in the liberal countries, especially the USA, than it is in the universalistic countries. The authors attribute both of these findings to the fact that less educated women in Norway and France have a much greater incentive to delay fertility and enter the labor force than less educated women in the USA and the UK (Gustafsson 2001). While delaying fertility and gaining work experience do not guarantee marriage, they increase the chances that a woman can reach the marriage bar.

Consequences

In 2004, McLanahan argued that whereas some amount of single motherhood is probably a good sign for society in that it indicates that women have the freedom to opt out of bad relationships, high levels of father absence are likely to be a sign of social disorganization and isolation (Wilson 1987). McLanahan also noted that children in single-mother families have much higher poverty rates than children in two-parent families, not only in the USA but in many European countries as well. Finally, she noted that in the USA, children born to cohabiting and single mothers were more likely to experience higher levels of family instability and stress and more likely to have poor outcomes than children born to married mothers. While acknowledging that researchers disagreed about whether father absence and single motherhood have a causal effect on children, as opposed to being a marker of some other disadvantage, McLanahan argued that researchers and policy makers should be concerned about the recent changes in family behavior in as much as they are so widespread and so unequally distributed throughout the population.

Update on Consequences

During the past 10 years, a large body of research has emerged, using quasi-experimental methods to examine the association between father absence and poor outcomes in children and adults. Included here are studies that use lagged-dependent variable models, growth curve models, individual and family fixed effects models, natural experiments, instrumental variable models, and propensity score models. The data for these studies come not only from the USA but also from countries such as the UK, Sweden, Australia, Germany, Norway, and Canada. In a recently published review of this new literature (McLanahan et al. 2013), the authors conclude that selection clearly plays a role in explaining the association between father absence and child outcomes. In general, estimates from quasi-experimental models are smaller than estimates from conventional models that do not control for selection bias.

Nevertheless, there is strong evidence that father absence negatively affects children's social–emotional development, particularly externalizing behavior measured as aggression, rule breaking, and problems paying attention. These effects are more pronounced when father absence occurs early in childhood, and they are more pronounced for boys than for girls. The evidence for an effect of father absence on children's cognitive ability is much weaker.

Differences in social–emotional development persist into adolescence, when children with nonresident fathers are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as smoking and early childbearing. Although the evidence of a negative effect continues to be weak for cognitive ability, there is strong and consistent evidence that father absence reduces high school graduation. The fact that graduation declines in the absence of a decline in cognitive test scores suggests that behavior problems rather than cognitive problems are responsible for the educational disadvantage.

The research base examining the longer-term effects of father absence on adult outcomes is considerably smaller, yet once again the preponderance of evidence shows a causal effect on adult mental health, suggesting that the psychological harms of father absence experienced during childhood persist throughout the life course. In contrast, the evidence that father absence affects adult economic or family outcomes is much weaker. A handful of studies find negative effects on employment in adulthood, but there is little consistent evidence of negative effects on marriage or divorce, on income or earnings, or on college education.

What Should be Done?

The second demographic transition is leading to growing disparities in children's access to parental resources in the USA, and a similar pattern appears to be occurring in virtually all Western countries. Regardless of whether the changes in family behaviors originate among the most or least advantaged women, the evidence is clear that over time the education gradient for behaviors associated with poor child outcomes—union instability and non-marital childbearing—is becoming increasingly negative over time. In a recent paper, Lundberg and Pollak (2013) argue that these trends are due in part to a new childrearing strategy pursued by educated parents that emphasizes high levels of parental investment and that treats marriage as a mechanism for ensuring commitment. If their argument is true, the diverging trends are not just the unintended consequence of changing norms and changing economic conditions but rather a deliberate childrearing strategy of high parental investment that is likely to further undermine the social mobility of disadvantaged children.

In order to reverse these trends, two things would have to happen. First, we would need to give women who are not planning to pursue a college degree a good reason to postpone motherhood. Women who are currently postponing motherhood are typically investing in education and careers. These women use contraceptive

methods that are more reliable, and they use these methods more consistently. Postponing fertility would have several benefits even for women who are not planning to pursue additional education or a career: First, these women would be more mature when they became mothers, which would improve the quality of parenting, and second, the potential partners of these women would be more mature and presumably in a better position to support a family. Early childbearing is part of a process in which women have children at the same time as they are searching for a suitable partner—a process that ultimately leads to high levels of family instability. The comparative studies described in this paper indicate that the USA is an outlier in terms of the proportion of women with a high school degree or less who have their first child before age 21. These studies also suggest that less educated women are more likely to delay fertility and work outside the home in countries that make it possible for women to combine work and motherhood. To date, policies for reducing early pregnancies have focused primarily on providing women with access to contraception. While access is a necessary condition for reducing early pregnancies, it is not a sufficient condition. Women must also be motivated to use contraception. Labor market opportunities and policies that reward women for gaining work experience prior to having children provide such a motivation.

That said, postponing fertility is not likely to solve the problem of union instability and single motherhood unless the economic prospects of young men also improve. Women are not likely to marry men whom they view as poor providers, regardless of their own earning capacity. The norm that couples must achieve a certain level of economic independence before they marry and that men should play a major role in providing economic support has existed throughout the Western world for centuries, and these norms are not likely to change. Thus, in addition to encouraging young women to delay fertility and become economically independent, we also need to improve the economic prospects of men, especially men with no more than a high school degree. Employment opportunities and wages for low-skilled men have declined markedly in the USA since the 1970s, making it harder for these men to provide for their families. Reversing this pattern will not be an easy task, but nothing could be more important for preserving the institution of marriage.

To sum up, the changes in family behaviors associated with the second demographic transition are having negative consequences for parents, children, and society. The fact that parental separation and divorce and childbearing outside marriage are concentrated among poor and working class parents is especially worrisome in that these families are struggling already. The basic drivers of the trend are the decline in economic opportunities for men with low levels of education combined with changes in social norms that have de-stigmatized premarital sex. In addition, the current fertility dynamic in which couples are having children *while* they are searching for a suitable partner is making things worse. To reverse the trend, we will need to provide stronger incentives for young women to postpone motherhood and we will need to make sure that their prospective partners have something to bring to the table. Failing to do so is likely to exacerbate inequality and reduce the mobility of the next generation.

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Chapter 2
Divergent Responses to Family Inequality

Philip N. Cohen

Abstract Single parenthood, resulting from nonmarital births and divorce, is increasingly becoming associated with lower levels of education for women. Cross-sectional comparisons show that children of married parents are less likely to suffer material deprivation. To reduce hardships for children, therefore, some analysts advocate policies that would increase marriage rates. I argue that alternative approaches offer more chance of success: increasing education levels and reducing the penalty for single parenthood. There is ample evidence to support both alternative approaches. Education levels are increasing and are associated with lower levels of child hardship net of family structure. And comparative research shows the negative economic consequences of single parenthood are ameliorable through state policy. In contrast, the hundreds of millions of dollars spent promoting marriage, and the reform of national welfare policy intended to compel poor mothers to marry, have produced no discernible effects on marriage rates or child well-being.

Divergent Responses to Family Inequality

McLanahan and Jacobsen (Chap. 1) express concern that family patterns associated with poverty—single motherhood, early age at first birth, mothers' non-employment, and divorce—are becoming increasingly associated with lower levels of education. The apparent effect of these trends is to concentrate disadvantage among children who not only have parents with low levels of education, but who also have family structures and trajectories that are not conducive to escaping poverty and its harms.

Although they focus on several trends, the core issue is single motherhood, and that is the focus of this comment. Single motherhood occurs through the birth of children to women who are not married—which continues to become more

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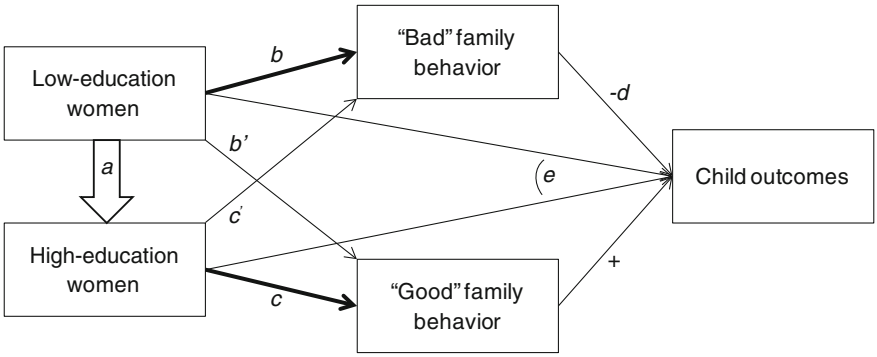

Fig. 2.1 "Diverging destinies." The McLanahan/Jacobsen strategy is to decrease *b*/*b*′ (decrease the tendency of low-education women to engage in "bad" family behavior). Alternatives include increasing *a* (moving women into the high-education group) or reducing *d* (mitigating the harms associated with "bad" family behavior)

prevalent, especially among younger women and those with relatively low education (Martin et al. 2013)—and through divorce, which is concentrated among couples with lower levels of education (Cohen 2014). To reverse that trend, McLanahan and Jacobsen (Chap. 1) suggest, first, a family intervention: giving less-educated women "a good reason to postpone motherhood" (p. 21). Their second recommendation is to "improve the economic prospects of men, especially men with no more than a high school degree," because "[w]omen are not likely to marry men whom they view as poor providers" (p. 21). Although this second recommendation focuses on economics, McLanahan and Jacobsen favor it because it will decrease the prevalence of single motherhood, concluding, "nothing could be more important for preserving the institution of marriage" (p. 22). Thus, in response to the trends by which "the second demographic transition is leading to growing disparities in children's access to parental resources," McLanahan and Jacobsen seek to alter family structure, to reduce single parenthood. The approach they propose, however, is just one of several logical responses to family inequality—and the one that recent history suggests is not likely to succeed. I illustrate their argument in Fig. 2.1. In Fig. 2.1, McLanahan and Jacobsen's "diverging destinies" appear as increases in *b*/*b*′ over time, or the increasing tendency of women with low levels of education to engage in "behaviors associated with poor child outcomes." That is, in addition to the direct effects of mothers' education on child outcomes (through income and other resources, labeled *e*), family behaviors exacerbate social class inequality. Changing the family behavior of the low-education group is their proposed response. Logically, however, to reduce harm to children, we might consider two alternative approaches: (1) promote the flow labeled *a*, which moves more women into the highly educated category or (2) reduce the quantity *d*, which indicates the negative outcomes associated with single motherhood. I discuss these alternatives first.

Increase Education

All else equal, it is probably safe to assume that further increasing education levels for women would lead to fewer nonmarital births. That is both because women with higher education have fewer children and because they are more likely to do so after marrying (Table 2.1). Of course, unmarried parenthood has continued to increase despite women's rising education levels. But poverty among the children of single mothers has no doubt been reduced by the increasing likelihood that their mothers will have education beyond high school.

This may be illustrated with a few simple statistics (Table 2.2). The proportion of single mothers with bachelor's degrees reached 18.9 % in 2013, and those with college degrees are much less likely to be poor. Only 18.2 % of college-graduate single mothers live below 150 % of the official poverty line, compared with 52 % for those who have not complete college. These education patterns simply suggest that more education for women would increase total child well-being by reducing single motherhood and its associated hardships—that is, through both *c* and *e* in Fig. 2.1. That may seem a banal conclusion, but it is one that somehow is not part of McLanahan and Jacobsen's (Chap. 1) recommendations, as they focus on changing family structure.

Table 2.1 Women's completed fertility and mothers' marital status, by education: 2010

	Completed fertility[a]	Proportion married[b]
High school or less	2.06	0.45
Some college	1.91	0.58
BA or higher	1.73	0.89

[a] Children ever born (women ages 40–44)
[b] Proportion married among women who had a birth in the previous year (all ages)
Source U.S. Census Bureau (2010)

Table 2.2 Education and poverty levels among single mothers: 1983–2013

	Education (percent of total)		Percent below 150 % poverty	
	Less than BA	BA or higher	Less than BA	BA or higher
1983	91.0	9.0	52.2	16.2
1993	88.8	11.2	50.4	14.1
2003	85.6	14.4	44.4	12.3
2013	81.1	18.9	52.0	18.2

Note Single mothers ages 25 or older. Single mothers are defined as women who are householders, spouses of householders, or unmarried partners of householders in households with at least one own child of the householder
Source My calculations from the Current Population Survey, accessed through IPUMS.org

The determinants of educational attainment and related policies are outside of my expertise, so after this brief discussion, I now turn to the consequences of single motherhood.

Reduce the Penalty for Single Motherhood

Single motherhood need not lead to inequality and hardship. Some single mothers are poor and some are not, and the negative outcomes statistically associated with single motherhood are much more related to material deprivation than they are to family structure itself. As McLanahan wrote two decades ago:

> For children living with a single parent and no stepparent, income is the single most important factor in accounting for their lower well-being as compared with children living with both parents. It accounts for as much as half of their disadvantage. Low parental involvement, supervision, and aspirations and greater residential mobility account for the rest (McLanahan 1994, p. 134).

Because single motherhood and poverty are highly correlated for children at a single point in time, and because poverty in one generation is highly correlated with poverty in the next, many people assume that growing up with a single mother—independent of its association with income—leads to poverty in adulthood. Careful longitudinal studies find this is not true, however. Musick and Mare, using the National Longitudinal Surveys to examine women born in the 1960s, conclude:

> Net of the association between poverty and family structure within a generation, the intergenerational transmission of poverty is significantly stronger than the intergenerational transmission of family structure, and neither childhood poverty nor family structure affects the other in adulthood (Musick and Mare 2006, p. 490).

Holding constant poverty status in adolescence, in other words, having lived with a single mother in adolescence did not increase the odds of a woman being in poverty when she reached adulthood. The unadjusted pattern from Musick and Mare's paper is shown in Fig. 2.2. Other research, such as that assessing school readiness, finds similar patterns in the cross section (Condron 2007; Denton et al. 2009).

Of course, if single mothers are poor, and their children experience the harms associated with that, the knowledge that such harms result more from economic status than from family structure provides cold comfort. From a policy perspective, however, that insight suggests that such travails are largely preventable by policy strategies that provide jobs or income supports. Despite the challenges single-parent families face, poverty need not be one of them: The effect *d* in Fig. 2.1 is mutable.

Cross-national research confirms this. Consider the poverty gap between single-parent and married-parent families. Several analyses of relative poverty across family types in Europe, Canada, and the USA find that single mothers in the USA are much more likely to have incomes below half the median, after accounting for income taxes and transfers, than those in these other rich countries (Brady and

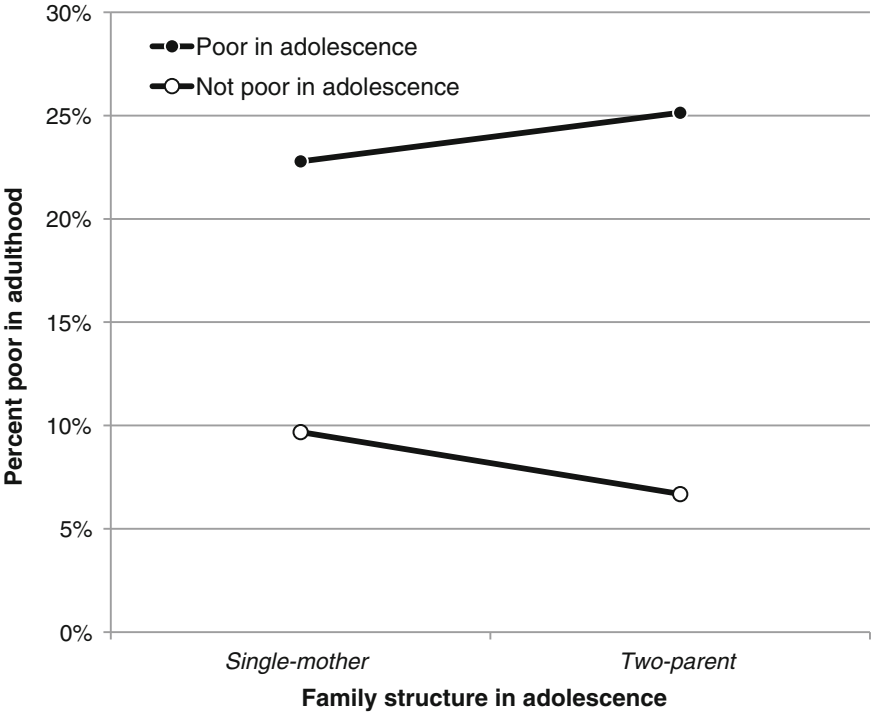

Fig. 2.2 Percent poor among adult mothers, by family structure and poverty level in adolescence. *Source* My calculations, combining Black and White mothers, from Musick and Mare (2006)

Burroway 2012; Misra et al. 2007). For example, Brady and Burroway found that not only did the USA have the highest poverty rate for single mothers among these countries (41 %), but it also had one of the largest differences in relative poverty rates between single-mother families and the population overall (24 % points). In contrast, in the Nordic countries, single mothers had poverty rates less than 5 % points higher than the population at large (Fig. 2.3).

Reducing the hardships associated with single parenthood is not a complicated proposition. The failure of basic needs provision for poor families is so stark that virtually any intervention seems likely to improve their well-being. Among single-mother families, more than one-in-three report each of food hardship, healthcare hardship, and bill-paying hardship in the previous year (Eamon and Wu 2011). Poor families, especially those with a single parent, need more money, which may come from a (better-paying) job, an income subsidy, or in-kind support such as food support.

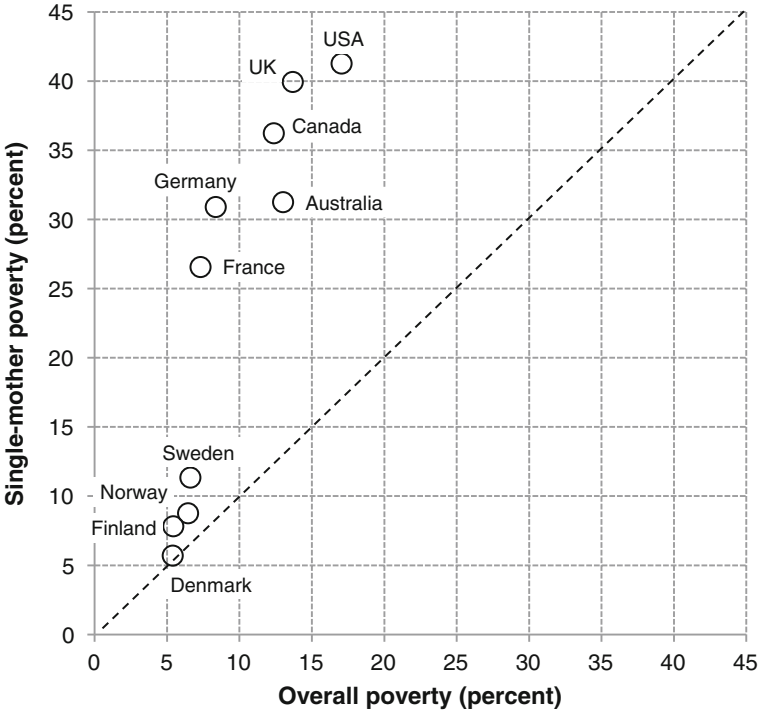

Fig. 2.3 Poverty rate for single mothers and overall poverty rate in 10 countries. *Source* Brady and Burroway (2012)

Change Family Structure

There is no denying that single-parent families have high poverty rates. Would not redirecting trends in family structure reduce child poverty and hardship and do it in a more politically feasible way than increasing welfare or jobs programs, given Americans' distaste for welfare programs? Of course, changing family structure is the longstanding goal of federal welfare policy. The 1996 welfare reform was premised on the necessity of "prevention of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and reduction in out-of-wedlock birth." Indeed, the first "finding" of the law was, "(1) Marriage is the foundation of a successful society" (Public Law 104–193, 1996). In the service of this ideological assertion (one that cannot be empirically assessed), the federal government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars attempting to promote marriage among the poor—money that came from the federal welfare program (Heath 2012).

The result, given the size of the effort, can only be described as a spectacular failure. Welfare reform did increase employment rates (Sayer et al. 2004), but it did nothing to change the direction of family structure trends. Program evaluations show that marriage intervention programs have had no measurable effect on

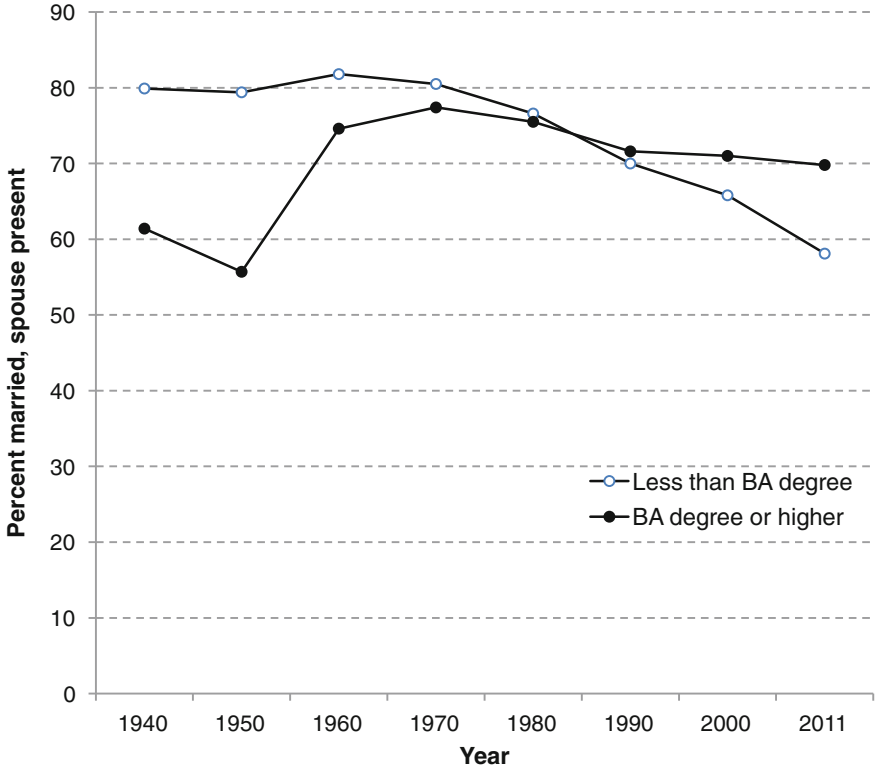

Fig. 2.4 Percent married: Ages 35–54, 1940–2011. *Source* Census and ACS data from IPUMS.org

marriage rates (Wood et al. 2010). And of course, marriage rates in the population have continued their long-run decline (Cohen 2013), most especially for those without college degrees. As Fig. 2.4 shows, those without college degrees in the 2000s experienced an *accelerating* drop in the percentage married.

There is simply no precedent to support the idea that government policy can reverse the long-run decline in marriage, or the increase in non-marital childbearing. And the advocates of such policies offer no evidence to support the idea that such a policy might work in the future. In contrast, we have voluminous evidence that such efforts do not work—and that they often come with religious or ideological baggage that selectively impose upon the freedoms and integrity of poor people and their families (Heath 2012).

The rise of women's independence, along with the decline in marriage and fertility, are interrelated parts of modern social development. And the overall consequence of these trends must be deemed positive—as life expectancies have increased, absolute poverty has decreased, and gender inequality has receded. The delay in age at marriage and the extension of divorce rights have no doubt

prevented or ended many unhappy or unsafe marriages, even as they have carried risks. But the advocates for marriage offer no attempt to specify the ideal marriage rate. How are we to know that the decline in marriage has gone too far? The unwavering advocacy for more marriage, in the face of its continued inefficacy and impracticality, dissolves into ideology and distracts from the important challenges we face in attempting to improve the quality of life for poor families and their children.

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Chapter 3
Diverging Destinies in Rural America

Lynne Vernon-Feagans, Margaret Burchinal and Irina Mokrova

Abstract This chapter extends McClanahan and Jacobsen's (Chap. 1) arguments to rural America with an emphasis on better understanding the converging downward destinies of women without a high-school education and those with a high school education in contrast to the increased gains in wealth and life circumstances of college-educated women. We examine how the 24-h economy has transformed the lives of less-educated women with more and more of them working nonstandard hours in rural America in comparison with college-educated women who work very few nonstandard hours. The impact on family life is explored using the Family Life Project, a representative sample of rural children followed since birth. Data suggest that parenting, including parental talk to children, is similar and much lower for women who have less than a college degree in comparison with the higher levels of parenting and talk to children for the college-educated mothers.

The diverging destinies between high- and low-income families have been a growing concern in the USA for many years (McLanahan 2004; McClanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1). Related to this income gap is the achievement gap between children from high- and low-income families which is now roughly 30–40 % larger than the gap 25 years ago (Reardon 2011; Duncan et al. 2010; Smeeding et al. 2011). Some of this gap is related to the second demographic transition (SDT) that describes the large changes in women's fertility, marriage, cohabitation, divorce, childbearing outside of marriage, and gender roles over the last 40 years (McLanahan 2004; McLanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1). The argument by McLanahan focuses our attention on maternal education, with growing inequities in living conditions between college-educated and less-educated women in the USA and, to some extent, other Western countries. "Whereas for children born to mothers with a college degree, the changes in family behavior were associated with gains in parental resources, for children born to less-

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educated mothers the changes were associated with relative and, in some instances, absolute losses in resources" (McLanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1, p. 3). Striking evidence that even women with a high school degree and some further education, but not a college degree, have been losing ground over the last 40 years is presented by McLanahan and Jacobsen (Chap. 1). A high school education no longer provides the ability to advance economically in the USA. This growing inequity for women and their families has grave implications for the next generation of children, and may be especially important to understand in the under-researched context of Rural America.

This chapter extends the work of McLanahan and Jacobsen by examining data from rural America. We argue that in rural America, there may be even fewer economic opportunities for women with only a high school degree, leading to an even greater convergence between women with less than a high school education and women with a high school education but not a 4-year college degree. The convergence of poorer life circumstances for the less-educated stands in stark contrast to the divergence between these less-educated women and the increasingly better life experiences of those women who completed a 4-year college degree over the last 40 years.

A demographic shift related to the SDT that may be driving at least some of the recent convergence of the two lower-educated groups, especially in Rural America, may be the shift over the last 40 years to a "24-h economy" (Presser 1999, 2004) wherein more and more adults are working evening, overnight, rotating and variable shifts, and weekends. This change in work schedules has disproportionately affected the lower-educated adults with 40 % of the current labor force working these nonstandard work hours (Presser 2004). A number of sociologists have argued that these nonstandard work hours have negatively impacted the lives of families (Enchautegui 2013; Smith and Tickamyer 2011). This shift in work has clearly not happened only in rural America, but its impact may be greater there because of the disappearance of key industries that previously fueled the economy in rural places (Vernon-Feagans et al. 2010).

In this chapter, we emphasize the more proximal impact that demographic change may have on family life with respect to mothers and their children from national data on rural families. In developing this argument, we draw from data on the Family Life Project (Vernon-Feagans et al. 2013), a representative sample of children growing up in rural North Carolina and Pennsylvania that has been followed since birth. We focus on how the "24-h economy," in conjunction with other structural changes, may be associated with the convergence between mothers who have less than a high school education, and high school-educated mothers. This will include an examination of education, income, and nonstandard work hours for mothers in support of McLanahan and Jacobsen's arguments. We present data from the FLP on mothers' language interactions with their children in early childhood, and on children's language development as a function of maternal education. We offer some possible connections between maternal education, nonstandard work hours, and chaotic living conditions that may be linked to poorer child outcomes. We also explore the possible buffers that can help protect children from poorer outcomes.

The Economic Context of Rural America

The economic restructuring in rural America that has occurred in conjunction with the second demographic transition that McLanahan and Jacobsen (Chap. 1) discuss has had a profound impact on the demographics of rural America and the ability of rural families to maintain a good home life. There has been a dramatic decrease in farming as a source of income in rural America (Vernon-Feagans et al. 2010). In 1900, about 41 % of the total US workforce farmed. This dropped to only 2 % in 2000 (Dimitri et al. 2005). In addition, there has been a disappearance of key industries, such as furniture, textile, steel, and railroad manufacturing (Smith and Tickamyer 2011; Vernon-Feagans et al. 2010). These industries provided steady and reliable employment 40 years ago, but have now vanished from rural America or moved overseas. Unfortunately, jobs in these industries have been replaced by jobs in the service industry (gas stations, grocery stores, and large retail chains) which are characterized by lower wages, poorer benefits, and nonstandard work hours (Smith and Tickamyer 2011). These economic factors have created the context for the outmigration of talented young adults, leaving behind an older and less-educated population. As a result of this outmigration as well as less access to higher education in rural America, there are now dramatic differences in the college graduation rates between urban and rural adults (see Fig. 3.1). Thirty percent of urban adults have a college degree, while only 17.5 % of rural adults have a college degree (USDA Economic Research Service 2012). These differences in education have more dire implications in rural America now than they did 40 years ago. For instance, in 1970, almost half of adults without a high school degre were in the middle class, but by 2007, the proportion had fallen to 33 %. Similarly, in 1970, about 60 % of high school graduates were in the middle class, but by 2007, this proportion had fallen to 45 %. Since 1970, people with college degrees or greater have remained in the middle class or "boarded the escalator upwards" to the highest income levels in comparison with high school graduates who have lost ground economically since 1970 (Carnevale et al. 2010). As Carnevale et al. (2010) summarize,

> A more accurate portrayal of the American class dynamic would be to say that the middle class is dispersing into two opposing streams of upwardly mobile college-haves and downwardly mobile college-have-nots. Dropouts, high school graduates, and people with some college but no degree, are on the down escalator of social mobility, falling out of the middle-income class and into the lower three deciles of family income. (pp. 3–4).

The much lower proportion of the college-educated in rural America has created even greater disparities in these education groups. The much lower proportion of college-educated adults in rural America, combined with the disappearance of key industries, has created a context where more and more jobs in rural America demand nonstandard work hours. Saenz (2009) reports the relative ratio of non-metropolitan (rural) and metropolitan (urban/suburban) workers' average work arrival time. As can be seen from Fig. 3.2, the most common times for rural adults to start work are around 3:30 a.m., 1:00 p.m., and 9:30 p.m. and the least common

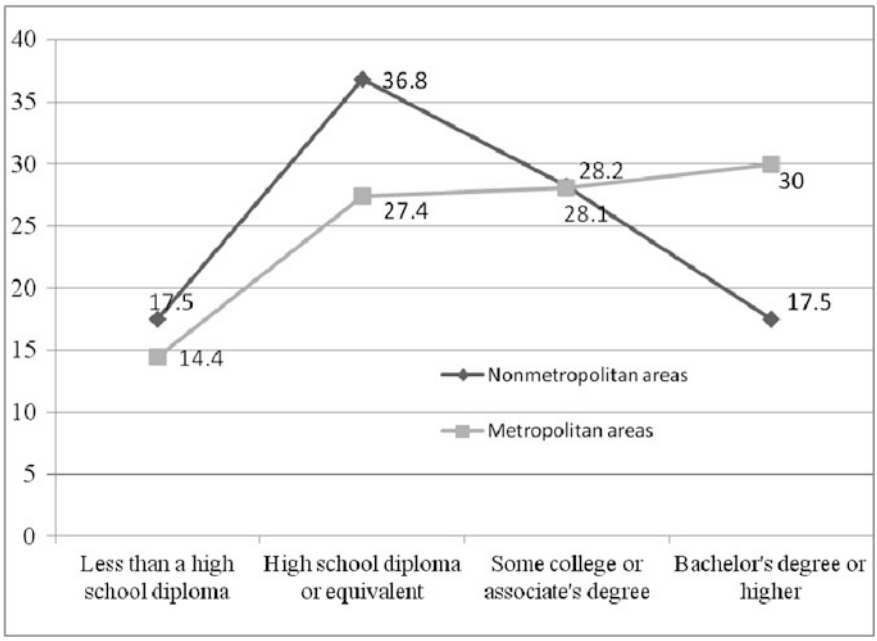

Fig. 3.1 Educational attainment for the population age 25 years and older, 2006–2010. *Source* USDA Economic Research Service (2012)

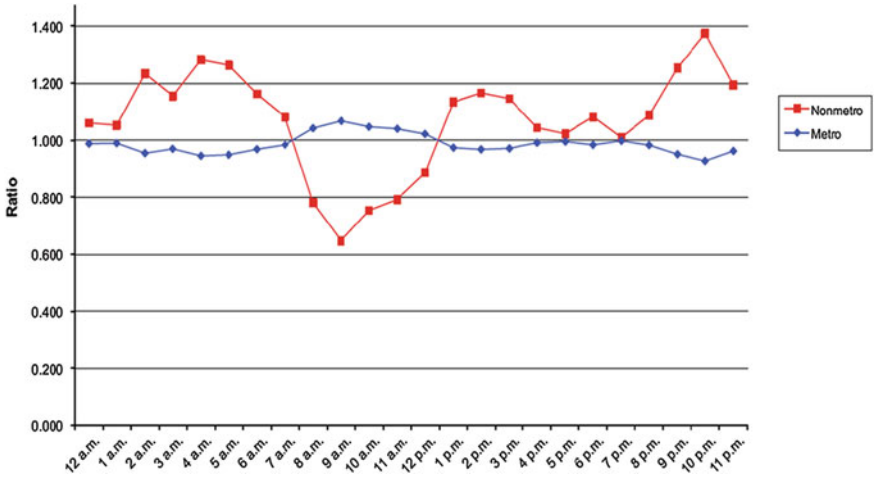

Fig. 3.2 Relative ratio of nonmetropolitan and metropolitan workers by time arrived at work. *Source* Saenz (2009)

time is 8:30 a.m. These times are in contrast to the more standard times of metropolitan adults.

These economic and demographic shifts in rural life (loss of good jobs, more nonstandard work jobs, and fewer skilled jobs) have contributed to higher family poverty rates, and perhaps more importantly, higher child poverty rates in rural America. Child poverty rates in rural areas are now approaching 29 % for young children (Mattingly and Stransky 2010), compared to about 23 % for urban young children. These economic trends in rural America may also be driving the convergence in the lives of the less-educated such that those with less than a high school education and those with a high school education are more alike compared to the more advantaged lives of the college-educated. That is, jobs that may have been relegated previously to the least-educated (women without a high school degree) are now also being filled by women with a high school degree or some college, but not a college degree. This downward trend for high school graduates to be employed in lower-paying jobs that once were mostly filled by non-high school graduates may be one of the reasons for the rising income gap between the college-educated and the non-college-educated groups (Presser 2003).

Research suggests that early child poverty may be the most powerful predictor of child achievement and adult competence, greater than single motherhood, maternal education, and other traditional risk factors (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan 1997; McLoyd 1998; Duncan et al. 2010). Early child poverty probably exerts its influence indirectly through the conditions in the parents' workplace (such as nonstandard work hours), but also through the resources that parents can provide that create greater opportunities for their children, including books in the home, child participation in outside school activities, and child academic enrichment activities (Reardon 2011; Duncan and Murnane 2011). A number of studies have shown that low-income families earning below 200 % of the federal poverty level are much more likely to work nonstandard work hours, have jobs with few benefits, and have seasonal or unpredictable work schedules (Joshi and Bogen 2007). Nonstandard work hours have been related to higher stress levels, more marital problems, and less general satisfaction with family relationships (Presser 2003; Grosswald 2004). More and more of these families living below 200 % poverty have adults in the home with a high school degree; by contrast, possession of a high school degree 40 years ago was a gateway to the middle class (Smith and Tickamyer 2011).

This gap between life circumstances of college-educated and non-college-educated adults in rural America may be particularly harmful because it has been linked to less-effective parenting. Some of the possible negative effects on parenting are discussed by Kalil (Chap. 5; Kalil et al. 2012). She and her colleagues examined the relation between maternal education and the amount of time mothers spent in various activities with their children at different ages. They reported what they called a "developmental gradient," such that college-educated mothers shifted their time with children in response to child developmental needs. Thus, college-educated mothers spent much more time during early childhood in basic care and play with their children, in comparison with less time in these activities by the non-college-educated mothers. These college-educated mothers then continued to shift their time

allocations in accordance with child needs across childhood, such that more time was spent in early childhood teaching their children, and then helping manage children's activities at school age. This shift in time allocation was not apparent in the non-college-educated mothers' time allocation, suggesting the divergence in good parenting practices between the college and non-college-educated mothers. This gap in parenting by maternal education may be even greater in rural America because of the larger percentage of non-college-educated college adults.

Although the time parents spend with children is clearly related to parental/maternal education, there is no doubt that the time and activities that mothers and fathers engage in with children are also related to their work hours and how those work hours mesh with the developmental needs of their children. In addition, these nonstandard work hours are clearly related to greater poverty because most of these jobs are low-paying and offer few benefits. These nonstandard work hours have been implicated in the actual time and activities that parents are able to participate in with their children. Enchautegui (2013) examined diary entries recording the amount of time parents spent with their children as a function of whether they had a standard or nonstandard work schedule. She reported that mothers and fathers who worked nonstandard work schedules spent considerably less time with their children from infancy to age 18. Presser (2004) reported that parents who worked shifts spent many fewer nights having dinner with their children (Fig. 3.3), with 64 % of single working mothers missing about half the dinners with their children each week compared to only 23 % of single mothers who work during the day. This trend was similar for both mothers and fathers in dual-earner families. In addition, these nonstandard work hours have now been associated with poorer outcomes for children, including greater behavior problems for children in elementary school (Joshi and Bogen 2007).

In summary, rural America has experienced economic restructuring that has created a context that may put children's successful development at risk. Rural America has greater poverty, fewer college-educated adults, lower-paying jobs, and

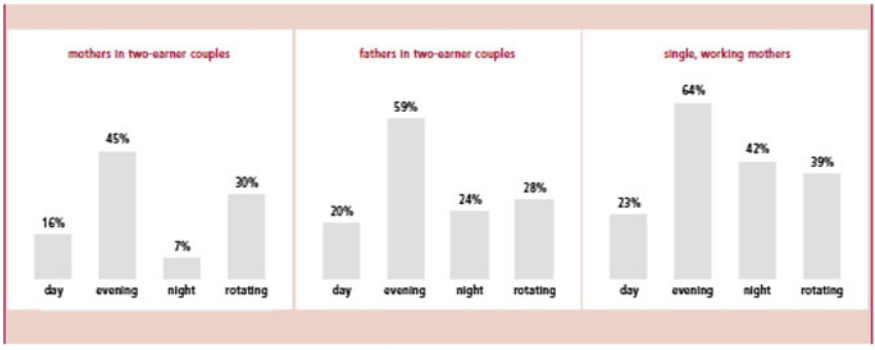

Fig. 3.3 Missing dinner: percentage of parents who ate dinner with their children fewer than 5 times in the last week, according to work shift. *Source* 1987–88 National Survey of Families and Households

lower-paying jobs that demand nonstandard work hours. This context has likely fueled the outmigration of talented young adults as well as leaving the remaining adults at risk for poorer job opportunities and a poorer family life from service sector jobs that demand nonstandard work hours. As a consequence, there is evidence that college-educated mothers spend more time and more appropriate developmental time with their children (Kalil, Chap. 5; Kalil et al. 2012). The combination of more nonstandard work hours and more women without a college degree in rural America may place their children at even greater risk for poor outcomes.

Although rural life has been negatively impacted by these economic and educational forces, it is not clear how actual family functioning and child competence might be related to these changes in mothers' interactions with their children and children's subsequent competence in important school-related skills such as language development. Of particular interest for the purpose of this commentary is to focus on how maternal education and jobs of mothers in rural America may have impacted their language interactions with their young children and their children's language competence in early childhood. Research has demonstrated that adult language input, especially maternal language input, is critically important in early childhood in relation to child competence in language. In addition, early language competence is probably the best predictor of children's later success in school (Hart and Risley 1995; Hoff 2003; Vernon-Feagans 1996). We use the Family Life Project (Vernon-Feagans et al. 2013), an ongoing longitudinal study of rural children followed since birth, as a way to explore some of these issues.

The Family Life Project in Rural America

The Family Life Project (Vernon-Feagans, Cox, and the Family Life Project Investigators, 2013) was designed to better understand the lives of children living in low-wealth rural America. The project was developed to understand the family processes and school processes that may be influenced by larger societal and contextual factors (Bronfenbrenner 1988) such as income, education, jobs, and health that play out in the context of family and school life. The aims of the project were to observe and code family life at a micro-level through careful measurement of the home, childcare, and school context in a large representative sample of rural children.

The Family Life Project chose two regions east of the Mississippi River that have large pockets of rural poverty: The Black South and Appalachia. Between 2003 and 2004, a representative sample of every baby born to a mother who resided in one of six poor rural counties was recruited into the project, making the FLP sample quite unique in the field of developmental psychology. The FLP oversampled for poverty in North Carolina and Pennsylvania and oversampled for African Americans in North Carolina. The sample initially consisted of 1292 children, with about 40 % being African American and about 80 % of the families below 200 % of the poverty threshold for their family size, using income/needs ratios.

Education and Jobs of the FLP Mothers

The FLP data on mothers parallel the national data on rural adult education. When the FLP children were 36 months of age, sixteen percent of the FLP mothers had less than a high school education; 69 % had a high school degree and/or several years of education beyond high school; and only 15 % had obtained a college degree or beyond. Only 38 % of these FLP mothers with less than a high school degree were working, while 60 % of high school graduates and 74 % of college graduates were working. Interestingly, all the mothers who were working in all three education groups were employed about 35 h a week. The less-educated mother groups (less than high school, or a high school degree but not a college degree) converged with respect to working nonstandard work hours, and diverged in nonstandard work hours compared to the college-educated mothers. Figure 3.4 shows that only 10 % of college-educated \women worked nonstandard hours while 40–45 % of the two less-educated mother groups worked nonstandard work hours.

By examining the income of families with different levels of maternal education, the results also reveal the convergence of the lowest two education groups. The income/needs ratios for the mothers in the lower-educated groups were both below 200 % poverty, and low enough that both groups were eligible for national and state income subsidies. The mean income/needs ratio of the less-than-high-school-educated mothers was 0.86 and of the high school-educated mothers was 1.50. These ratios stand in stark contrast to the income/needs ratio of 3.88 for the college-educated mothers. Again these FLP data support the greater convergence of the two lower-educated groups of mothers with respect to income. Again, these data are in contrast to 20 or 30 years ago when a high school degree was enough to obtain and keep a good job that kept the family above poverty in rural America (Smith and Tickamyer 2011). All of these trends in jobs and income may be helping to drive negative changes in family life and children's development in less-educated rural families.

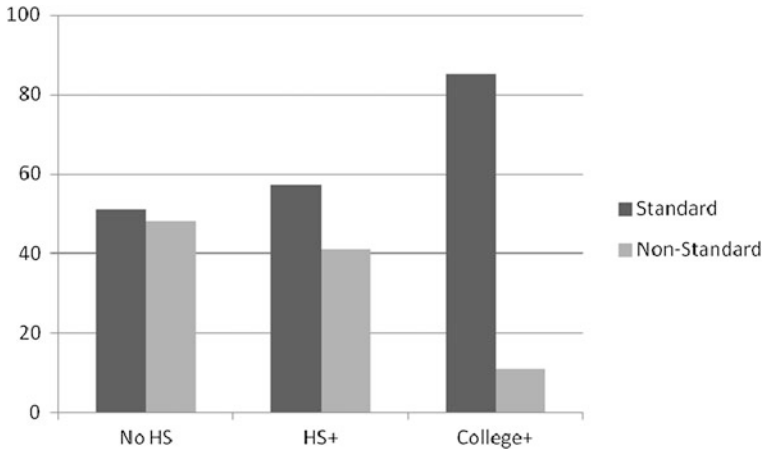

Fig. 3.4 Proportion of nonstandard work hours for women in FLP by education level

Nonstandard Work Hours, Chaos, and Child Language

The FLP captured important aspects of family life that may be related to children's current and later functioning in the context of poverty and economic restructuring. Early language development of the children in the FLP was a major focus of the Family Life Project because early language is a particularly powerful child predictor of school performance (Hart and Risley 1995; Hoff 2009). A recent paper (Odom et al. 2013) examined the relationship between nonstandard work hours and children's early language development in the African American families in the FLP sample. Even after controlling for mother education and other associated important covariates, results suggested that maternal nonstandard work hours were related to children's poorer language development at 24 and 36 months of age. Odom and colleagues also found that negative work-family spillover (the degree to which demands of the workplace reduced the mother's ability to tend to personal and family matters) partially mediated the relationship between nonstandard work hours and children's language development.

One way the FLP tried to capture the possible changes in family life due to a variety of factors has been called "household chaos." This construct has been developed over the last 20 years and was demonstrated to be a significant predictor of both parent behavior and child outcomes (Evans and Wachs 2010; Mokrova et al. 2010) Two major components of chaos have been measured in the Family Life Project and also identified by others as important: *disorganization* and *instability* (Bronfenbrenner and Evans 2000). *Disorganization* refers to high levels of noise, crowding, clutter, and lack of preparation for daily living. *Instability* refers to changes over time, with frequent moving of an entire household to a new residence; changes in mother or father figure in the family, especially changes in the mother's live-in romantic relationships; changes in parental jobs and work hours; and general changes in the people who live in the household. These aspects of chaos have been related to poverty, but not exclusively to poverty, and may be particularly important in describing homes that are disrupted by adults working nonstandard work hours. In the FLP, there have been a series of papers that demonstrate that accumulated household chaos over the first 3 years of a child's life is negatively associated with children's development, especially children's language development (Vernon-Feagans et al. 2012a, b). It was hypothesized that chaotic homes create an environment that prevents children from developing optimal language skills because of the lack of contingencies, as well as the lack of time that parents have to talk and interact with their children. Figure 3.5 reveals the means for disorganization and instability in the FLP sample by maternal education. Again, it is clear that maternal education is highly related to lower scores on indicators of household chaos, although there is not quite the convergence of the two lower-educated groups compared to the college-educated group. In conjunction with Fig. 3.5, there is evidence that both nonstandard work hours and chaos are related to maternal education. As we have demonstrated elsewhere (Vernon-Feagans et al. 2012b)

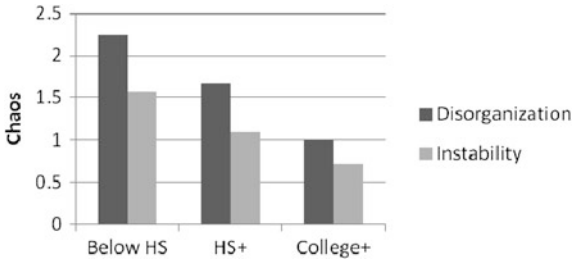

Fig. 3.5 Household Chaos by maternal education

household chaos is related to children's poorer language at 36 months of age, but here we will explore how maternal language input may be related to maternal education and later child language.

Mother Education and Language in the FLP Sample

In order to explore further the relationship between maternal education, maternal language input, and child language, we examined how mothers talked to their children during a videoed wordless picturebook task in the home. The two variables we used from mothers were a composite measure of *vocabulary* and linguistic/grammatical *complexity* of maternal talk to her child during this book sharing task. The data presented here come from coded transcripts of mother talk when the target child was 6, 15, 24, and 36 months of age. Figure 3.6 plots maternal vocabulary input by maternal education and Fig. 3.7 plots maternal complexity of talk by maternal education in the book sharing task. Both figures tell the same story. Mothers who have less than a high school degree (low education) and mothers who have a high school degree (middle education) are converging over time, with less vocabulary and complexity of talk to their child during the picturebook task from 6 to 36 months of age. On the other hand, the lower-educated groups are diverging from the mothers with at least a college degree (high education), such that college-educated mothers are talking with more vocabulary and more complexity of talk.

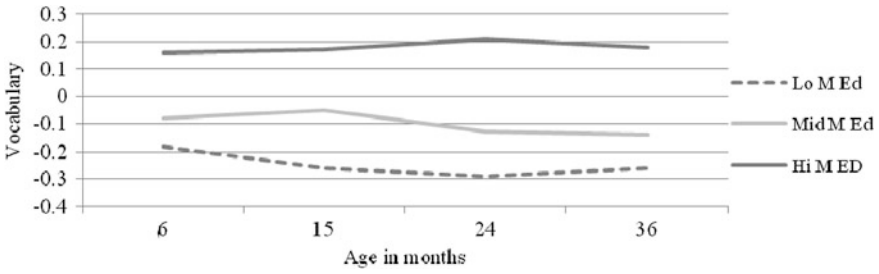

Fig. 3.6 Vocabulary input to children by maternal education level

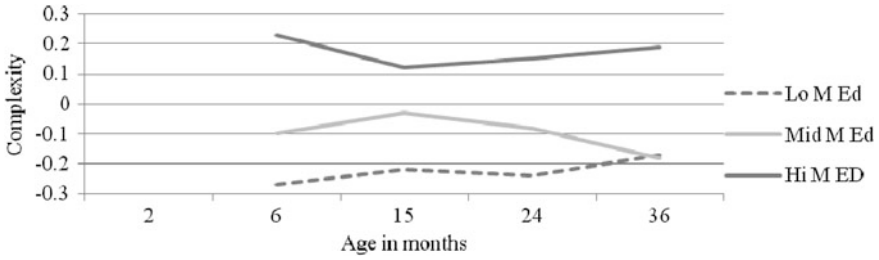

Fig. 3.7 Language complexity input to children by maternal education level

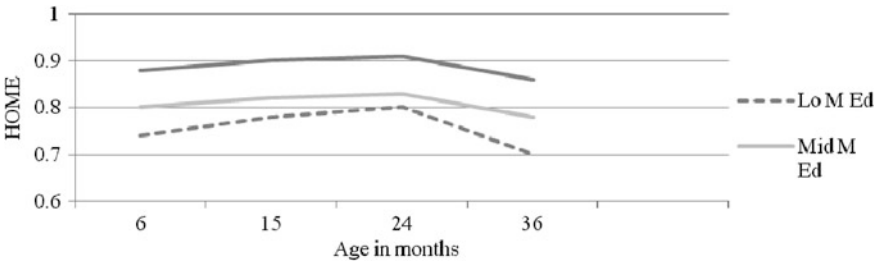

Fig. 3.8 HOME scores of families by maternal education level

In support of this finding, we also graphed the quality of the home environment in general, using the HOME scale that has been used in numerous studies (Caldwell and Bradley 1984). HOME is an observer rating of the quality of the home environment that includes ratings of the overall adult/child interaction in the home as well as available resources, such as the number of books provided for the child. Again, Fig. 3.8 suggests the same convergence and divergence, based on maternal education.

FLP Maternal Language Input and Child Language

As a way to understand whether mothers who speak with less diversity of vocabulary and less complexity make a difference for their children's language, a recent article from the FLP examined the possible influences of maternal language input and childcare language input for those children who spent some of their time in non-maternal care in or out of their home (Vernon-Feagans, Bratsch-Hines, and the Family Life Project Key Investigators, 2013). Maternal language vocabulary and complexity (the same variables used in Figs. 3.6 and 3.7) were related to child language at 36 months and at Pre-K in the spring before kindergarten. Mothers who had poorer vocabulary and less language complexity had children with the lowest language scores, and those mothers with the highest vocabulary and complexity had

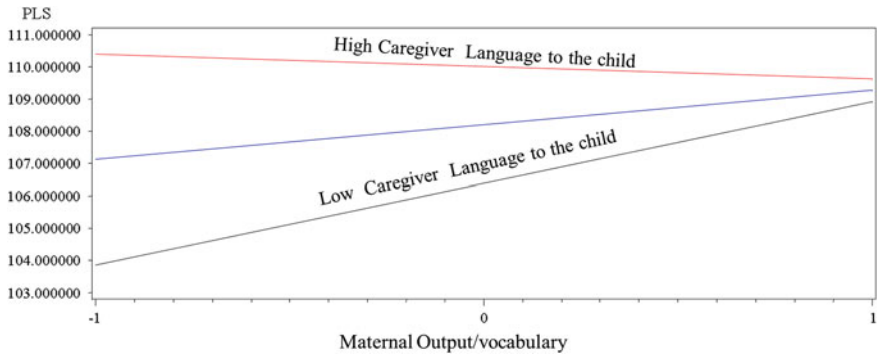

Fig. 3.9 Thirty-six month expressive language: parental output × caregiver language

children with the highest language scores, even when we controlled for a variety of income-related variables. Interestingly and more hopefully, we found that when children had mothers with low vocabulary input, but were in a childcare setting where they received high levels of caregiver/child verbal interactions, they were protected or buffered from low language/vocabulary scores (as can be seen in Figs. 3.9 and 3.10), both at 36 months and just before school entry almost 2 years later. Even when children had mothers with low levels of language input in the home, children scored the same on standardized language scores as children whose mothers had high levels of language input if the children were with childcare providers who engaged them in high levels of positive verbal talk. These findings suggest the importance of verbally stimulating childcare environments, especially for the most at risk children. Thus, one positive implication of this work is the need for the greater society to adapt to the needs of families who have lower levels of

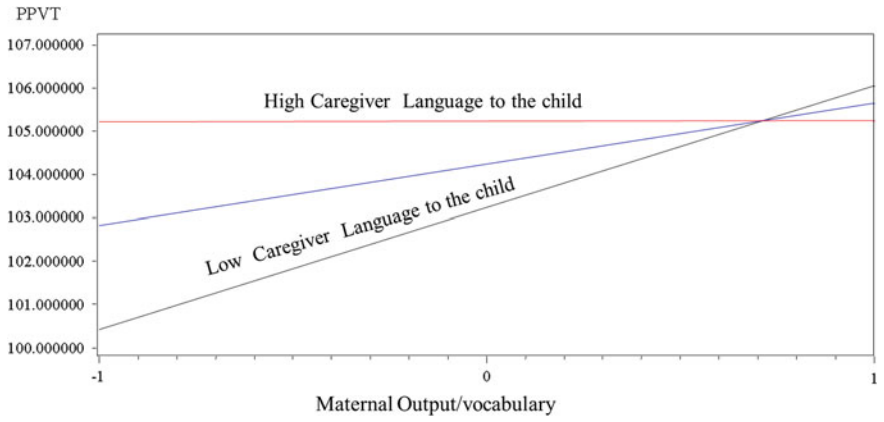

Fig. 3.10 Vocabulary at pre-K: maternal language output × caregiver language

education and who may be in jobs that require nonstandard work hours by providing childcare and schools that can compensate for lower levels of parental interactions.

Final Remarks

McLanahan and Jacobsen's important chapter laid out the case for the diverging destinies of less-educated women in comparison with college-educated women, making clear that the SDT was related to these changes. We have probed these diverging destinies by examining the lives of rural women, with an emphasis on the economic restructuring in rural America that may have fueled the downward convergence between women with less than a high school education and those with a high school education but not a college degree. The downward convergence is in contrast to increasing advantages of college-educated women in comparison with the less-educated women. What was most striking about the work lives of rural women with different education levels was the remarkable similarity between the women without a high school education and those with a high school degree, but not a four-year-college degree. The proportion of women working nonstandard work hours in these two lower-educated groups was surprisingly similar which is in contrast to the college-educated women who are much less likely to work nonstandard work hours. Not only were the two lower-educated groups of women working proportionately more nonstandard work hours, but their family incomes were also much lower in comparison with the college-educated women.

In an examination of parenting in the home, the two groups of less-educated mothers spoke to their children in similar ways by the time their children were 36 months of age, with convergence of less talk and less complex talk to their children during a wordless picturebook task. Their interactions were in contrast to greater talk and greater complexity of talk by the college-educated mothers. There is not clear evidence for a causal path to these diverging destinies in rural America, but at least part of the explanation may lie in the SDT changes coupled with the dramatic increase in nonstandard work hours that the lower two groups worked in rural America. As suggested earlier, nonstandard work hours have been related to parenting and relationship stress as well as less time to spend with children. Certainly, nonstandard work hours make it harder for families to plan activities together and to allow for a predictable schedule in the home, two aspects of family life that were related to poorer child language and to household chaos in the Family Life Project. It is important to probe the findings of families in the lower-educated groups further to document the disruption related to work as well as to poverty and SDT factors that may impact their children's development.

Finally, there needs to be more research on the lives of rural families who constitute 20 % of the population and how changes in their lives are affecting the development of their children and their opportunities for the future.

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Chapter 4
Diverging Destinies Revisited: The Threat to Child Development and Social Mobility

Timothy M. Smeeding

Abstract Constantly increasing family social and economic inequality has a large tangible cost—that of diverging destinies for children as witnessed by trends toward lower social mobility and less equal life chances for children. In a society that prides itself on equality of opportunity, this is indeed an unfortunate development. In this commentary, I begin with a simple socioeconomic dichotomy of how babies are brought into the world depending on parents' life course. I then discuss recent inequality-related trends that are producing different outcomes for families at the bottom and the top of the economic and social hierarchy, as well as what these patterns mean for intergenerational mobility (IGM). The commentary closes with some reflections on parenting, opportunity, mobility, policy, and diverging destinies.

Introduction

Sarah McLanahan and Wade Jacobsen (Chap. 1) have vividly shown why her diverging destinies hypothesis is even more important a decade after it was first proposed (McLanahan 2004). In this reaction to McLanahan and Jacobsen, I comment on the general notion of diverging destinies and how it applies to equality of opportunity and intergenerational mobility (IGM). I begin with a simple socioeconomic dichotomy of how babies are brought into the world depending on parents' life course. I then move to some recent inequality-related trends that are producing different outcomes for families that are at the bottom and the top of the economic and social hierarchy, as well as what these patterns mean for IGM. I close with some reflections on parenting, opportunity, mobility, policy, and diverging destinies.

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National Symposium on Family Issues 5, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-08308-7_4

Having a Baby—The End Posts

In social science, it is often useful to illustrate the middle ground of an issue by looking at its endpoints. If we examine both what is considered to be the best process by which to become a parent and the worst process, we can better understand the point of diverging destinies. The so-called best way to become a parent is through living the American dream. The process is the same for men and women alike: Finish your schooling, find a decent job, find a partner you can rely on, make plans for a future together including marriage as a commitment device (see Lundberg and Pollak 2013), and then have a baby. Following this process will likely mean that parents are close to the age of 30. Parents who follow this process are (in some ways by definition) older, more educated, and more likely to have a stable marriage. They have better parenting skills, smaller families, and more income, benefits, and assets to support their children. These characteristics translate into more stability and more opportunities for their children.

At the other end of the spectrum, following the worst process to become a parent, one simply moves the step of having a baby (between the ages of 16 and 22) to the top of the list, preceding all of the other steps. These parents typically have not finished schooling, do not have a steady or well-paying job, do not have a stable marriage or steady partnership, and likely never had a plan. They have less education (high school or less), are younger and less-skilled, have lower wages and fewer benefits, far less marriage experience, and more multi-partner fertility. The result is less social and economic stability and fewer resources and opportunities for their children (Smeeding et al. 2011).

In the famous words of Quinn (1987), "beware of the mean" when describing children, as the greater the dispersion, the less meaningful is the description of a child as average. There is ample evidence of this divergence in the economic, sociological, social policy, demography, child well-being, and education literatures (e.g., Duncan and Murnane 2011; Ermisch et al. 2012; Smeeding et al. 2011). The costs of diverging destinies for the next generation are many, as the chapters in this volume demonstrate. None of these costs are higher than the costs of reduced social and economic IGM, which follow from highly unequal parent endowments of both money and skills. The amount of income available to high- and low-income families with children is important in determining life opportunities. Fewer parental economic resources mean higher child poverty and vice versa for high parental economic resources. For example, income inequality is such that in the USA in 2010, a family at the 90th percentile of income had $55,000 of family-size-adjusted disposable income per year to spend on each child, in adjusted income terms compared to $9,000 per child for families at the 10th percentile of income. The difference between these amounts widened from 2000 to 2010 (Rainwater and Smeeding 2003; values from LIS key figures at http://www.lisdatacenter.org/lis-ikf-webapp/app/search-ikf-figures).

The Effects of Diverging Destinies on Social Mobility

The usual way to examine IGM is to compare the relative economic status of adults, age 35–45, to that of their families at the time they were children. Longitudinal datasets such as panel study of income dynamics (PSID) and National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) have been used by economists and policy analysts to examine this change (Winship 2011, 2013; Lee and Solon 2009). These datasets observe parents incomes and place in the income distribution in the 1960s or early 1970s and children's incomes and place in the distribution 30–40 years later. The closer the rank of children to the rank of parents, the less mobility there is in a given society. Studies using these data show a fairly small amount of overall mobility in any given comparison and no change in overall trend for overall relative mobility for children born between 1965 and 1979. However, the studies do show less relative mobility from the bottom–up or the top–down compared to the middle of the distribution in any given comparison year.

Given the age of these datasets, the major problem with this entire line of adult-to-adult research is using a cohort of 38–40-year-olds observed in 1998–2010. Adults in this cohort were born in the late 1960s or early 1970s before inequality exploded and before destinies diverged more widely in the last two decades of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Hence, the datasets cannot answer the question: How was IGM affected for youth born in the period 1980–2013 during the US inequality boom, a time when destinies diverged most broadly. Another limitation of the datasets is that about 40 million immigrants to the USA since the late 1970s are not included.

It is more reasonable to take the life cycle approach to study the influence of parental education and income on child outcomes from birth to age 30 (Smeeding 2013; Ermisch et al. 2012). While observing different cohorts at different times, these studies suggest a powerful effect of parental socioeconomic status, education, and/or income (SES) on child outcomes in health, cognitive testing, socio-behavioral realms, school achievement, and adult SES. Examination of standardized outputs finds a definite and universal pattern in that the higher the parent's SES, the higher the children's outcome, and vice versa for lower SES parents and their children. These effects were observed from birth onward and did not diminish as children aged. Moreover, the slopes of the relationships between parental SES and child outcomes were most steep in the USA. In order to grasp the implications of diverging destinies on social mobility, it makes sense to look at various outcomes that are developmentally important in younger generations and ask how they will be affected by growing gaps in parental SES, instead of starting with older generations and following their children.

Capturing Diverging Destinies

We can examine how parental SES (education or income differences) affects various levels and patterns of child development for children that are directly or indirectly predictive of later life success. In other words, we can assess how current patterns across the early- and middle-childhood life course compare to the patterns of 30 years ago in terms of what it takes to reach at minimum the middle class. I begin with the life cycle stage markers employed in the Brookings Institute's Social Genome project (http://www.brookings.edu/about/centers/ccf/social-genome-project). The project uses a dynamic micro simulation model of the life stages and attributes of children moving from birth to adulthood to measure whether or not one achieves various markers which predict attainment of the American dream of having a middle-class lifestyle (family income of at least 300 % of poverty level). (Sawhill et al. 2012; see also Kenworthy 2012; Smeeding 2013). The life cycle stage markers are:

1. Normal birth weight; born to a non-poor, married mother with at least a high school education
2. Have acceptable preschool reading and math skills and general school-appropriate behavior when formal schooling begins
3. Acquire basic learned skills: reading, math, and socioemotional abilities are at acceptable levels in middle and secondary school
4. Graduate from high school with a 2.5 GPA and not be convicted of a crime
5. Reach middle class or better: live independently, have a college degree, and/or family income above 250/300 % poverty level (slightly above the median measured by after tax and benefit income).

The question I pose is simply how well have we done in reaching these goals? Have any of the outcomes listed shown gains, suggesting progress toward equality of opportunity, or have outcomes spread further apart, suggesting diverging destinies? Let us look step by step.

Life cycle stage marker 1 states that one should be born at normal birth weight to a non-poor, married mother with at least a high school degree. In actuality, 40 % of all US births today are out of wedlock (vs. 11 % in 1970), and half of births to women under the age of 30 are out of wedlock (Hamilton et al. 2013). Marriage rates are lower than 30 years ago for all but the college educated, and rates have been falling—especially for whites in their 20s (Murray 2012; Lundberg and Pollak 2013; Cherlin 2009). Childbearing is higher for the mothers who are youngest at first births, mainly the lowest-educated mothers with a high school degree or less, and most of whom are poor or near poor. Moreover, these mothers have more children per woman than average. In contrast, well-educated parents have fewer children and later (in marriage) under much better economic circumstances (Smeeding et al. 2011). Time spent with young children is much more developmentally oriented in high-SES families than in low-SES families (Kalil et al. 2012; Phillips 2011).

In order to successfully complete stage 2, a child must have acceptable preschool reading and math skills, meaning above a given cutoff (see Sawhill et al. 2012) and have general school-appropriate behaviors when entering first grade. In reality, there are large gaps in early childhood education (ECE) and in school readiness as a function of parental education and income (Cunha and Heckman 2008; Duncan et al. 2012, 2013). These differences are most pronounced in the USA compared to other Anglo nations (Bradbury et al. 2012). Furthermore, these gaps are larger now than in past, in part because parents at the top spend more time and money on developmentally oriented goods and activities than parents at the bottom (Kaushal et al. 2011). Efforts to improve ECE for disadvantaged children are aimed at overcoming these gaps. Cross-national research in Denmark and France, where universal ECE is the norm, shows that while the differences in child outcomes between high- and low-educated parents has lessened, it is still significant (Bingley and Westergaard-Nielsen 2012; Dumas and Lefranc 2012). This finding suggests that while high-quality ECE can improve mobility from the bottom, it is not by itself a magic bullet to achieving desirable levels of IGM (Duncan and Magnuson 2013).

Once a child arrives at middle school, the success marker is to possess grade-appropriate skills in reading, math, and socioemotional abilities. Again, the evidence from Brookings itself is that 38 % of children cannot cross this bar by 5th grade (Sawhill et al. 2012). Differences in skills by SES (e.g., test scores and reading attainment of youth, by parents' incomes) have increased over the past 40 years (Reardon 2011). Moreover, there are large gaps in self-regulation and externalizing behavior by SES dating as far back as to the 1980s or earlier (Cunha and Heckman 2008). Given that parents with higher income and education levels choose better schools, and poorer parents must often choose worse schools, the achievement gap between the highest and lowest income percentiles has widened. The rise in incomes at the top of the distribution has propelled the children of the highest income parents to increase the achievement gap between those children at the 90th percentile of parental income and the middle children at the 50th percentile, as well as the 10th percentile children at the bottom of the income distribution (Reardon 2013; Duncan and Murnane 2011).

The fourth life cycle stage marker predictive of later life success is marked by a child who graduates from high school with at least a 2.5 GPA and is not convicted of a crime. If you do not count GED as a high school degree, high school graduation rates remained flat from 1980 to 2007, and only slightly increased if GED is counted. It is not until 2010 when school outcomes finally start to change for the better, and we begin to see rising graduation rates from secondary schools (Murnane 2013). In addition, crime has risen, especially for minority men, over the past 30 years with serious consequences for their lives, their dreams, and for their children (Western and Pettit 2010). Finally, SAT scores continuously increase in lock step with parental income, as measured by critical reading, writing, and especially mathematics. SAT scores of children at the top end of the distribution have a steeper slope than those at the bottom or middle (College Board 2013) reinforcing Reardon's (2013) findings.

Middle-class success is within reach at stage 5 if one lives independently post-school completion, and with a college degree. Most college attainment gains increasingly go to upper income classes. The gap in the fraction of children entering college has steadily expanded from a 19 to 29 % gap for the 1961–1964 cohort versus the 1979–1982 cohort in the lowest parental income quintile, to a 58–80 % gap in the highest income quartile (Bailey and Dynarski 2011). Similar patterns are evident for college graduation with only 9 % of the lowest quartile college attendees graduating within 6 years of entering, compared to 58 % of top income children in the most recent (1979–1982) cohort. Indeed, the children of the highest income parents are increasingly likely to graduate within 5 years of starting college, most likely to receive family support while attending college and most likely to graduate without college debt. At the same time, overall post-secondary degree attainment in the USA has been nearly flat for the last four generations especially for men (Ermisch et al. 2012).

The Brookings model suggests that if a child follows most of these steps, they have an excellent chance of reaching middle-class (family income of at least 300 % of poverty level, as defined by Brookings). Unfortunately, the overall patterns of divergence in child outcomes reviewed above predict that most undereducated and young parents do not reach this stage. By age thirty, 70 % of men with a high school degree or less in 2007 were fathers, with only 40 % of these fathers making more than $20,000 per year, and less than half living with all of their children (Smeeding et al. 2011). Along with the rapid decline in marriage for all races in their 20s, the evidence suggests that a large pool of Wilson's workless and unmarriageable men is holding back the fulfillment of the American dream for many younger families (Wilson 1996; Lundberg and Pollak 2013).

The Great Recession of 2008 has made differences in child destinies and IGM much more stark. There are increasingly widespread gaps in employment and wages by education and age. Income gains occur mainly above the level of possessing a bachelor's degree where the IGM correlation of parents' and kids' education is highest (Torche 2011). Cross-national research suggests that premiums in pay for the highest educated are largest in the USA, meaning the minority who reach college graduation and beyond do best in the US labor market compared to their lesser-educated countrymen (Blanden et al. 2013; Ermisch et al. 2012).

In summary, research finds considerable differences in destinies for younger generations linked to the economic and social divergence of their parents: less child mobility, less equality of opportunity, and less social progress. We know from McLanahan and Jacobsen (Chap. 1) as well as from others cited above that these differences are widening. Public policy may be effective in improving the destinies of the disadvantaged, but it most likely will be challenged by parent differences that are much harder to equalize, as mentioned below.

Parents: The Policy Challenge

Researchers find that the role of parents is important at each stage of the life course (Smeeding et al. 2011; Duncan and Murnane 2011; Ermisch et al. 2012). Ideally, most parents will at least say that they will do everything they can for their children, but some parents are more able in terms of both skills and money than others. The role of policy vis-á-vis parents is a difficult one, as James Fishkin's (1983) trilemma suggests. Fishkin argues that an ideal society should operate according to three widely accepted and interrelated principles:

1. *Principle of merit*: There should be widespread procedural fairness in the evaluation of qualifications and competencies for positions in society (a true meritocracy, free from nepotism, and related unfair influences on jobs and school entry, for example).
2. *Equality of life chances*: The prospects of children for eventual positions in society should not vary in any systematic and significant manner with their arbitrary native characteristics, including parental heritage, a statement about nepotism.
3. *Autonomy of the family*: Consensual relations within a given family governing the development of its children should not be coercively interfered with except to ensure for the children the essential prerequisites for adult participation in society.

In reality, these three principles are in conflict as far as most public policies are concerned. It is likely impolitic and inefficient for society to try to limit parental autonomy. It is almost impossible for society to enforce the principle of merit when the SES of parents has positive or negative influence on key life choices, as well as access to resources and opportunities. For example, promoting integrated schools with low- and high-SES children being instructed together might lead the rich to set up their own system of private and exclusive schools as in the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, in the USA, thus perpetuating inequality of life chances (see also Blanden et al. 2013).

In short, the parental role is embedded in each and every child outcome gradient, and it is highly unequal. Most parents will do everything they can to give their children better outcomes—but not everyone is born to equally talented, equally educated, or equally well off parents. Nor are all mothers and fathers equal with respect to the capacity to parent their children in healthy ways. Because of the advantages of affluence, it is in the personal interest of high-SES parents to maintain the status quo, and to even enhance their children's opportunities by making the income and education gradient steeper at each life course stage. This is where policy reaches its limits unless we develop clever ways to limit parental autonomy

Policy

Perhaps sensing the issues of hard to change parental differences and parental autonomy McLanahan and Jacobsen (Chap. 1) suggest two policy directions. The first is providing incentives for young women to postpone motherhood, with the intended outcome that children are born into more stable circumstances. Stable circumstances would mean older married parents at first birth and reduced rates of childbirth at younger ages. Indeed, recent years have found some evidence that the latter is being achieved, as teen and young 20-something birth rates have fallen (Hamilton et al. 2013). However, it is not clear whether these changes are cyclical, owing to the Great Recession or structural due to changes in behavior that reduce childbearing at younger ages. It is too soon to tell. Further, while preventing out of wedlock births to youths not ready for parenting is an important policy response to diverging destinies, we have just recently begun to make some headway (Sawhill and Venator 2014). In any case, we must treat what we have not yet learned how to prevent.

Making young men more marriageable by improving their economic prospects is a second and likewise commendable policy goal recommended by McLanahan and Jacobsen (Chap. 1). It remains to be seen what strategies can raise men's earnings and incomes at ages 24–30 if they have not yet done well in school. America's policy efforts to date have not produced demand for low and medium skill workers. Nor have policies increased much needed skills among young men who do not have them. I believe it may take the better part of a decade to reach a point where demand for workers helps raise wages and increase job quality among younger low-skill men (Hamilton et al. 2013).

Finally, since parents are important to child outcomes, one should try to make better parents, too. In this new policy realm of parental improvement, ideas and efforts so far outstrip evidence of success, with a few exceptions (King et al. 2013; but then see Haskins et al. 2009).

It seems that rising family social and economic inequality has a large tangible cost—that of diverging destinies for children as witnessed by trends toward lower social mobility and less equal life chances for children. In a society that prides itself on equality of opportunity, this is indeed bad news.

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Part II
Social Inequality, Parenting, and Child Development

Chapter 5
Inequality Begins at Home: The Role of Parenting in the Diverging Destinies of Rich and Poor Children

Ariel Kalil

Abstract Children face very different chances of getting ahead in life depending on the circumstances of their birth. Parenting and its role in the diverging destinies of rich and poor children are discussed in this chapter. Inequality begins at home. It develops from the myriad differences in the ways advantaged and disadvantaged parents interact with their children. Traditional policy interventions fail to attack the root cause of achievement gaps. To equalize the playing field, governments may need to invest in parents so parents can better invest in their children. Unfortunately, large-scale parenting interventions typically yield modest effect sizes at best and often do not even change children's skills in the long term. Understanding what motivates parents to invest in their children could have a major impact on the design of policies to reduce inequality in children's skill development. Insights from the field of behavioral economics can inform this question.

Introduction

In the USA and in many other countries, children face very different chances of getting ahead in life depending on the circumstances of their birth. Children growing up in more advantaged families have better achievement and higher attainment on average, than low-SES children. They have fewer behavior problems and are less likely to become pregnant or have a child as a teenager. They also have higher rates of college enrollment and completion. As adults, they are more likely to be employed, have higher earnings, avoid participation in welfare programs, and enjoy better health and longer lives (Duncan et al. 2010; Duncan et al. 2012; Knudsen et al. 2006). According to scholars at the Brookings Institution, 42 % of children who grew up in households in the bottom quintile of the income

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distribution ended up in the bottom quintile themselves as adults, whereas only 6 % of such children reached the top quintile of the income distribution as adults (Isaacs et al. 2008).

Gaps in educational attainment between rich and poor children open up early in life and remain largely constant through the school years (Duncan and Magnuson 2011). This suggests that schools in general do not do much to reduce (or exacerbate) the effect of family background on children's life chances. As the Coleman et al.'s report (1966) showed, family characteristics explain most of the variability in student test scores across schools. This is perhaps not surprising, given that by age 18, children will have spent only about 15 % of their time in schools.

At present, social policy for fostering the skills of children largely focuses on education intervention-improving young children's access to preschool programs and increasing the quality of their primary and secondary schools with more qualified teachers and smaller class sizes. This strategy is palatable politically because it avoids charges of "blaming the victim" and avoids a hint of intrusion into the private sphere of family life—a deeply held American Value (Heckman 2011). Model early childhood intervention programs and other school-based efforts can narrow the gap between low-income children and their middle-class counterparts (Currie 2001; Deming 2009; Chetty et al. 2011). Even as such interventions have demonstrated long-term success (albeit for the relatively few children who have participated in them), family background remains an important correlate of US children's educational achievement and attainment (Belley and Lochner 2007; Bailey and Dynarski 2011; Reardon 2011).

The importance of family background is thrown into high relief when one looks to outcomes for children in strong welfare states such as those in Scandinavia. There, high-quality basic services (like health care and child care) and educational opportunities are publicly provided and utilized by low- and high-income families alike. One might reasonably expect such a welfare model to mitigate the economic constraints imposed by childhood socioeconomic disadvantage. However, a puzzling finding is the persistent influence of family background in these countries. In Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, for example, the share of economically disadvantaged children characterized as academically "resilient"—i.e., their Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores are substantially higher than predicted given their economic background—is below the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average (OECD 2010). By way of comparison, the countries with the highest share of "academically resilient" children include Shanghai-China, Hong Kong-China, and Singapore. Further, despite generous social spending, Norwegian children's average performance on the PISA reading test (503) is comparable with those of US children (500), as is the share of students in those two countries who score below a proficient level in reading (15 and 18 %, respectively).

One explanation for the persistent (and increasing) importance of family background rests in the growing body of evidence showing that advantaged parents parent their children differently compared to their disadvantaged counterparts. For example, highly educated parents not only spend more time with their children than do less-educated parents, but also they spend that time differently. Parents'

investments of time in enriching activities are important predictors of children's success (Waldfogel and Washbrook 2011; Price 2008, 2010). As Esping-Andersen (2004) put it, "the imprint of social origins is … already firmly established before the welfare state plays any major role in our life" (p. 2).

What happens within the family plays a key role in accounting for intergenerational correlations in economic status. Family effects may take the form of money investments, time investments, or the culture of learning (e.g., number of books in the home). Traditional education policy approaches may not be able to fully compensate for lack of parental investment.

This chapter discusses parenting and its role in the diverging destinies of rich and poor children. By understanding socioeconomic differences in parenting, we gain insight into the potential limitations of traditional social policies in mitigating the role of family background in children's life chances. Despite their demonstrable benefits, such programs might not be reaching their full potential. For example, income transfers may not be sufficiently large. Or, the quality of preschool programs may not be sufficiently high. The other possibility is that such traditional policy interventions fail to attack the root cause of achievement gaps.

Inequality begins at home (Heckman 2011). It develops from the myriad differences in the ways advantaged and disadvantaged parents interact with their children. Understanding these differences can inform government intervention to support good parenting. In doing so, one must recognize that the role of the state in trying to equalize parental behavior in family life is an important matter of philosophical debate (Swift 2005). Governments are often reluctant to interfere in the private sphere of parent–child interactions, but parents are children's first teachers. To equalize the playing field, governments may need to invest in parents, so parents can better invest in their children.

To make sound policy decisions, however, it is evident that researchers and policy makers alike need to better understand what motivates parents to invest in their children. Answers to this question could have a major impact on the design of policies to reduce inequality in children's skill development. As will be discussed in a later section of this chapter, insights from the field of behavioral economics can inform this question.

Gaps in Young Children's Cognitive and Non-cognitive Skills

The gaps in educational outcomes between children raised in advantaged and disadvantaged families open up well before children enter school and in most cases do not close as children progress through school (Carneiro and Heckman 2003). At age four, children from families in the poorest income quintile score on average at the 32nd percentile of the national distribution on math, the 34th percentile in a test of literacy, and the 32nd percentile on a measure of school readiness, compared to children in the richest quintile who scored at the 69th percentile on math and

literacy and at the 63rd percentile on school readiness (Waldfogel and Washbrook 2011). Gaps in conduct problems and attention/hyperactivity are also apparent albeit less pronounced. On measures of hyperactivity, for instance, children from families in the poorest income quintile score on average at the 55th percentile of the national distribution (in this case, higher scores indicate higher levels of behavior problems) compared to children in the richest quintile who scored at the 44th percentile (Waldfogel and Washbrook 2011).

Duncan and Magnuson (2005) used the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Class (ECLS-K) to examine teacher-reported gaps in attention and engagement in first and fifth grade across SES, race/ethnicity, and gender. The results showed that children from the top income quintile are reported by teachers to be far more engaged in school (the gap is approximately two-thirds of a standard deviation) compared with their counterparts in the bottom income quintile. This gap grows slightly between first and fifth grades. The gap in engagement by income is larger than it is by race or by gender.

Changes in Children's Educational Performance Over Time

As the incomes of affluent and poor American families have diverged over the past 3 decades, so too has the educational performance of the children in these families. Reardon (2011) documents substantial growth in the income-based gap on the test scores of children born since the 1950s. Among children born around 1950, test scores of low-income (10th income percentile) children lagged behind those of their better-off (90th income percentile) peers by a little over half a standard deviation, or about 50 points on an SAT-type test. Fifty years later, this gap was twice as large. Family income is now a better predictor of children's success in school than race (Reardon 2011; Magnuson and Waldfogel 2008).

Using data from the 1979 and 1997 National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth, Bailey and Dynarski (2011) show that college graduation rates for children born into high-income families jumped 21 % points (from 33 to 54 %) between the early 1960s and the early 1980s. The corresponding increase for children born into low-income families was only 4 % points (from 5 to 9 %). A little less than half of the gap between rich and poor in college graduation rates can be explained by differences in college enrollment rates, with the rest explained by differences in students' persistence in completing their degrees. Belley and Lochner (2007) also used these data to show that high family income has become a substantially more important determinant of college attendance and college quality in recent years, particularly for those youth with the lowest skills.

The question of how children's educational performance has changed over time was explored when Duncan et al. (2013) focused on years of schooling attained. They used data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) and concentrated on the cohorts for which adolescent family income was measured between the late 1960s and late 1990s. In line with the Bailey and Dynarski's (2011) analysis

of college graduation rates and Reardon's (2011) analysis of test scores, Duncan et al. found that gaps in the completed schooling of children in the top and bottom quintiles of the family income distribution increased by about half a year (about one-quarter standard deviation) across the entire period.

Disparities in Parental Investment Across Social Class Background

What accounts for the gaps in children's skills across rich and poor children? The answer, perhaps surprisingly, is not income alone. Across all 31 cohorts in the PSID, Duncan et al. (2013) found that increases in the income gap between high- and low-income children account for about three-quarters of the increasing schooling gap. It is estimated that about half of the rising income gap in test scores can be attributed to rising income inequality (Reardon 2011).

Part of the answer may lie in parental behavior. Economically advantaged parents display more optimal parenting behaviors across a range of domains, including more authoritative (vs. authoritarian) parenting styles (Pinderhughes et al. 2000), more sensitive and responsive mother–child interactions (NICHD ECCRN 2004), greater language stimulation (Hart and Risley 1995; Phillips 2011), and greater levels of parental management and advocacy (Lareau 1989).

A famous example is the study by Hart and Risley (1995), who intensively observed the language patterns of 42 families throughout Kansas City. They recorded one full hour of every word spoken at home between parent and child in 42 families with children ages 7–36 months. Households were divided into three different types: (1) professional families; (2) working class; and (3) welfare families. In professional families, children heard an average of 2,153 words per hour, while children in working-class families heard an average of 1,251 words per hour, and children in welfare-recipient families heard an average of 616 words per hour. Extrapolated out, this means that in a year, children in professional families heard an average of 11 million words, while children in working-class families heard an average of 6 million words, and children in welfare families heard an average of 3 million words. By age four, a child from a welfare-recipient family could have heard 32 million fewer words than a classmate from a professional family.

One of the most important parenting differences between advantaged and disadvantaged parents is in how much time the parent spends with the child. Lareau's (2003) qualitative study of family life reported that middle-class parents target their time with children toward developmentally enhancing activities. In her study, middle-class families (whose jobs by her definition require college-level skills) engage in a pattern of "concerted cultivation" to actively develop children's talents and skills. By contrast, in lower-class families, Lareau identified a pattern that she calls "the accomplishment of natural growth," wherein parents attend to children's material and emotional needs but presume that their talents and skills will develop without concerted parental intervention.

Numerous quantitative studies not only show large differences in the time investments of advantaged and disadvantaged parents but also that these gaps remain large even when other differences across families, such as employment and family size, are accounted for (Guryan et al. 2008; Sayer et al. 2004). Using data from the American Time Use Survey, they reported that maternal time with children increases steeply with education for working and non-working mothers. Working mothers in the ATUS with a college education or greater spend roughly 6 h more per week in child care than working mothers with a high school degree or less. Because the education gradient for childcare time differs from the education gradients for leisure and housework (which decrease with education), Guryan and colleagues argued that parental time investments in children reflect a fundamentally distinct phenomenon. Highly educated parents (more so than less-educated parents), the authors posited, view time with children as an investment behavior with which to increase children's human capital (for either altruistic or selfish reasons) and do not view market-purchased child care as a highly effective substitute for their own time investments.

Highly educated mothers were also shown to be more efficient in their parental time investments, meaning that mothers tailor their specific activities to children's developmental stage (Kalil et al. 2012). A developmental gradient was identified showing that highly educated mothers shift the composition of their time in ways that specifically promote children's development at different developmental stages. Specifically, the education gradient in basic care and play is greatest when the youngest children are infants and toddlers (0–2 years), which is precisely when children most require parents' time on such basic activities as bathing and feeding and also precisely the age when parent–child play is most developmentally appropriate. The education gradient for parental teaching is greatest when the youngest children are preschool aged (3–5), which is precisely when time spent in learning activities (such as reading and problem solving) best prepare children for school entry. Conversely, the education gradient in parental management is greatest when the youngest children are between the ages of 6 and 13—precisely the ages when parental management is a key developmentally appropriate input.

Most of the significant results in Kalil et al. (2012) emerged in the comparison between mothers with a college education and those with only a high school education; the differences between mothers with some college and those with only a high school education were positive but were seldom statistically significant. This pattern suggests that the developmental gradient, as in the educational gradient, may be particularly pronounced among college-educated mothers.

Finally, with respect to total childcare time, the educational gradient is most apparent in households with the youngest children, a point also made by Hurst (2010) and Sacks and Stevenson (2010). College-educated mothers, more so than their less-educated counterparts, may have learned the message that parental investments in early childhood are key ingredients in children's long-run success (Carneiro and Heckman 2003).

Research on the so-called summer setback also illustrates the importance of parents and the home environment. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) was used to measure the decline in reading and

math scores over the summer among children of varying socioeconomic levels (Downey et al. 2004). The kindergarten learning rate, the summer learning rate, and the first-grade learning rate were estimated. The summer learning rate was the lowest, which the researchers argued was likely a function of different family and neighborhood experiences during the summer. These data also show that over the summer, first-grade children from the bottom of the income distribution engaged in fewer dance and music activities, team and individual sports, swimming lessons, and scouting than their higher-SES counterparts. Relatedly, low-SES children watched twice as much television each week as high-SES children (20 vs. 10 h) in the summer (Burkam et al. 2004).

Children from disadvantaged families were also found to experience larger summer learning losses than more advantaged children in a study by Chin and Phillips (2004). However, they argue that activities such as visiting museums or participating in sports lessons were not associated with summer learning. Instead, they found that the quality of the home literacy environment, including whether the home had more than fifty books, daily newspapers, or magazine subscriptions, as well as the amount that children read or were read to by parents or visited the library, was significantly related to children's summer learning losses and gains.

Changes in Parents' Behaviors Over Time

High-income parents appear to be increasingly focusing parenting on their children's cognitive development and educational success (Schaub 2010). This may indicate that high-skilled parents are responding to the increased returns of having high-skilled children (Cunha and Heckman 2008).

Time diary data were used to illustrate rising levels of time spent by parents on child care in the USA, especially for college-educated parents and in particular from the mid-1990s (Ramey and Ramey 2010). College-educated mothers increased their childcare time by over 9 h per week, whereas less-educated mothers increased their childcare time by less than half that amount. The authors attribute part of this phenomenon to an increase in the perceived return of attending a good college. Other studies concur with the Rameys' report of an increasing class divergence in parental time investments but disagree with their explanation by showing that all of the increase in childcare time between 1985 and 2003 has come from households with children ages 5 and younger (Hurst 2010; Sacks and Stevenson 2010). Specifically, whereas college-educated mothers with young children spent 18 weekly hours in child care in 1985 (compared to 16.2 h for less-educated households), the two figures in 2003 were 25.6 and 18.9, respectively (Hurst 2010). In a different study, the growing education gapin time with young children was shown to be driven by time spent in educationally enriching activities (Altintas 2012).

These increasing time investments have also been accompanied by increased parental spending targeted at children's achievement. The rich have sharply increased the resources they spend on promoting their children's development.

Spending on child-enrichment goods and services jumped for families in the top quintiles but increased much less—in both absolute and relative terms—for families in bottom income quintiles, as reflected in four large consumer expenditure surveys conducted between the early 1970s and 2005–2006 (Kornrich and Furstenberg 2013). In 1972–1973, high-income families spent about $2,700 more per year on child enrichment than did low-income families. By 2005–2006, this gap had nearly tripled, to $7,500 (Kornrich and Furstenberg 2013).

Children's participation in extracurricular activities, which typically require parental investment of time and money, also changed between 1972 and 2004 in ways that favored more advantaged youth (Putnam et al. 2012). During this time, higher-SES children were increasingly more likely to participate in clubs and team sports and to hold leadership roles in these activities compared to their lower-SES counterparts.

The Role of Parenting in Producing Disparities

Does parenting matter for children's development, or are rich parents caught up in a "perfect madness" of concerted cultivation (Warner 2005). Observational research suggests that the amount of parent-provided cognitive stimulation and emotional support in children's home environments accounts for up to half of the relationship between socioeconomic status and disparities in children's cognitive test scores (Klebanov et al. 1998; Smith et al. 1997).

In a descriptive analysis of US data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), Waldfogel and Washbrook (2011) conclude that compared with a number of other factors (i.e., mother's education, mothers' health, preschool enrollment, child health, and a set of demographics including race/ethnicity, family structure, nativity, family member disability, maternal age at birth, number of children in the household, and child gender), parenting style, in particular, mothers' sensitivity and responsiveness, is the most important factor explaining the poorer cognitive performance of low-income children relative to middle-income children. Parenting style accounted for 21 % of the gap in literacy, 19 % of the gap in mathematics, and 33 % of the gap in language. The authors also showed that the home learning environment is the second most important factor explaining income-related gaps in school readiness. It includes parents' teaching behaviors in the home as well as their provision of learning materials and literacy activities, such as books and CDs, computer access, TV watching, library visits, and classes. The home learning environment accounts for between 16 and 21 % of the gap between low- and middle-income children in cognitive school readiness. In contrast, differential enrollment in child care or preschool (other than Head Start) accounts for between 4 and 6 % of the cognitive gaps between low- and middle-income children, and differential enrollment in Head Start is associated with a 6–9 % reduction in the gap between low- and middle-income children. All told,

these findings suggest that what happens in the home is more important to children's cognitive achievement than what happens in preschool.

Interactive play between children and adults may be especially beneficial for children's verbal development (Dickinson and Tabors 2001). Moreover, more hours spent in places outside of school and home appears associated with higher test scores compared to demographically similar children who watch more television (Hofferth and Sandberg 2001). Estimates suggest that high-income children spent nearly 1,300 more hours in places other than home or school between birth and age six than their low-income counterparts (Phillips 2011).

Only a handful of studies have specifically examined how parental time with children relates to children's cognitive test scores using large-scale time diary surveys. The studies largely support the conclusion that simply increasing the quantity of time that parents spend with their children is not likely to improve their child's achievement. Instead, the evidence seems to suggest that the returns of time investments depend on the amount of cognitive stimulation parents provide during that time (Booth et al. 2002; Hsin 2009; Huston and Aronson 2005; Price 2010). Most of these studies use standard ordinary least squares (OLS) estimation models. When Villena-Rodán and Ríos-Aguilar (2011) use various instruments for parent's time with their children (local labor market conditions, estimated childcare price, and overtime hours), they find that total parental time has a small positive effect on children's cognitive test scores and that the effect is greater for younger children. However, they also find that maternal educational time with a child has a direct causal effect on their children's math scores that is eight times the direct causal effect of the overall amount of maternal time with the child (Villena-Rodán and Ríos-Aguilar 2011).

Using an instrumental variables model, Price (2010) found that an additional year of daily mother–child reading would increase children's reading test score by 41 % of a standard deviation. Alternatively, if the mother increased the frequency of reading to her child by 1 day per week during the first 10 years of the child's life, the child's reading test scores increased by about half of a standard deviation. Economically advantaged parents' increasing engagement in cognitively stimulating activities seems to reflect this understanding.

Can Parenting Interventions Change Behavior?

Gaps in children's skills could be narrowed if less-advantaged parents adopted the parenting practices of their more advantaged peers. Many parenting interventions aim to do just that. Yet, large-scale parenting interventions yield modest effect sizes at best and rarely result in any long-term change in children's cognitive skills (Furstenberg 2011). An important challenge facing such programs is the very low academic skills of economically disadvantaged parents. Parents' low academic skills may make it difficult for them to support their children's literacy and numeracy. For example, parents with low literacy skills may find it challenging to

increase the time they spend reading books with their children. The U.S. Department of Education (2007) reported that 50 % of the US adult population who did not graduate from high school has "below basic" prose literacy skills, meaning that they can perform no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills. In contrast, only 13 % of high school graduates and only 3 % of college graduates are at that same level of prose literacy skills. Quantitative literacy (i.e., numeracy) is even more compromised in the US population: 64 % of the US adult population who did not graduate from high school has "below basic" quantitative literacy skills, whereas 24 % of high school graduates and 4 % of college graduates, respectively, meet this definition.

Very low academic skills of economically disadvantaged parents present a challenge to parenting interventions because parents' literacy is highly related to the literacy environment their children experience: 19 % of parents with "below basic" prose literacy skills did not try to teach their preschool age children the letters of the alphabet during the previous month; 41 % of this group did not read to their children (under age 8) during the previous week; 11 % never talked to their school-age children about things they studied in school; and 25 % never worked with their school-age children on homework. Nineteen percent of this group reported having no reading materials in the home, and 15 % were not involved in any way at their children's school (U.S. Department of Education 2007). These figures are substantially higher than those for parents deemed proficient in prose literacy skills. Exacerbating the low literacy environment in the homes of economically disadvantaged children, adults with lower levels of education also spend far more time watching television and far less time reading for pleasure compared to their higher-educated counterparts (U.S. Department of Labor 2011).

Another challenge facing parenting interventions is the high rates of non-participation and low rates of engagement among those who participate at all. Interventions to improve parenting generally fall into those with a home-visiting component and those with no home-visiting component. Home visiting is believed to provide advantages over other programs such as opportunities to work with families directly in their own environment, to individualize services for families, and to reach families with transportation challenges (Powell 1993). Major early childhood interventions with a home-visiting parenting component include Early Head Start, Even Start, HIPPY, and the Nurse–Family Partnership.

The typical Early Head Start program achieved only modest impacts on parenting behavior with effect sizes in the range of 0.10–0.22 (Love et al. 2005). More disappointing were the consistently weak results from the US Department of Education's Even Start program, which began in 1989. Even Start provided participating families with an integrated program of early childhood education, adult literacy or basic skills training, parenting education, and joint parent–child literacy activities. The underlying philosophy of this program is that families need to receive all types of services in order to bring about lasting improvement in children's school success (U.S. Department of Education 2003). The program, which cost approximately $10,366 (in 2005 dollars) perfamily during the 2000–2001 program year, produced no meaningful effects on a range of child cognitive and

behavioral outcomes, nor on parental behavior or literacy, based on a randomized trial of 463 families in 18 program sites (Ricciuti et al. 2004).

Why are the impacts so modest? An important problem with many of these interventions is a lack of parental engagement. In fact, in some home-visiting programs, more than half of enrolled families drop out early (Wagner and Clayton 1999) with attrition rates generally ranging from 35 to 50 % (Gomby et al. 1993). Lack of participation and low intensity of participation have also been a problem in Early Head Start. For example, almost half the families left the home-based Early Head Start programs before their child was 30 months old (the program was designed to last until the child was 36 months old), and more than a third dropped out before they had been enrolled for 18 of the 36 months (Roggman et al. 2008). According to parental reports in their exit interviews, only 40 % stayed enrolled in Early Head Start home-based programs until graduation or transition. When the families who moved away, as reported by either staff or the parents, were not included as dropouts, 28 % remained enrolled for less than 18 months and only 55 % remained enrolled at least until the child was 30 months old.

Similar problems were reported in the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), a 2-year home-based early education intervention program intended to help parents with limited formal education prepare their preschool children for formal schooling. HIPPY has operated in the USA since 1984 and has sites in more than half the states. HIPPY was developed to enhance the home literacy environment, the quality of parent–child verbal interaction, and parents' ability to help their children learn through approximately 30 annual biweekly home-visiting sessions and supplementary out of home group sessions for parents. One randomized trial of 69 HIPPY participants revealed significant increases in children's test scores, but these results could not be replicated in a randomized trial of similar families who entered the program the following year (Baker et al. 1998). Interviews with parents and home visitors suggest that many parents failed to do the recommended activities with their children, and parents reported relatively low levels of involvement with means ranging from 2.2 to 2.9 on a scale of one (low involvement) to five (regular and enthusiastic involvement) (Baker et al. 1998).

Even the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program, which is touted as the leading family intervention for low-income children, produced modest improvements in parenting behavior. Specifically, when children were about 3 years old, there were only small differences between those who received the intervention and those in the control group on measures of parent's stimulation of the child's language skills and parents' provision of toys, games, and reading materials (Olds et al. 1994).

Thus, in addition to the observation that advantaged parents invest substantially more time in their children than disadvantaged parents, it is evident that many disadvantaged parents do not take up programs offered to them that are designed to help them increase and improve their investments in their children. Most of these programs go to extraordinary lengths to encourage parents' participation: Meetings are held at putatively convenient times; free transportation, child care, food, and the like are provided. Yet many parents enrolled in the intervention never show up or

participate very little. Although this puzzle has long-vexed researchers and program administrators, the standard model for parenting interventions has changed little over time.

What Motivates Parents to Invest in Their Children?

There are many potential explanations for the generally weak benefits of programs that try to change parenting behaviors. One problem could be that the duration of the treatment is not long enough to produce sustained changes in entrenched parenting practices, or that the treatment targets parenting practices that do not have large independent effects on child outcomes. However, attrition and lack of persistence in the program is likely to be an important explanation for the weak results. It would be tempting to conclude from the results of US parenting intervention programs that policy makers are unable to empower parents with the necessary tools for optimal engagement with their children. Perhaps, though, it is more accurate to conclude that policy makers do not know how to motivate parents to do the things the programs are intended to encourage.

As such, we need to better understand parental motivation to participate in programs to which they are invited to participate. There is much conventional wisdom that attributes lack of participation and engagement to parents' stress and complicated lives, but there is little empirical data to support these assumptions (Wagner et al. 2002). Parenting interventions are primarily based on developmental theories about how parents influence children through biological and psychological mechanisms. The interventions are almost never based on knowledge about what motivates parents to change their behavior. Acquiring this knowledge could have a major impact on the design of policies to reduce inequality in children's skill development.

What could explain the low levels of parent participation and engagement in parenting interventions? First, most programs that have tried to increase the time parents spend with their children are based on an "information model" that assumes that disadvantaged parents are less likely to engage with their children because either they do not know how important it is or they do not know how to do it. However, we know from many experiences that information alone is not always sufficient to motivate people to change their behavior.

Most home-visiting programs follow the informational model design of the Nurse–Family Partnership and other health-oriented interventions in which an "expert" or other authoritative person provides guidance about what behaviors are helpful. The NFP has been shown to successfully improve many health outcomes, but it has had much less success at changing parenting behaviors. One reason for limited impacts might be that for health advice, parents listen to experts but that for parenting advice, they are more inclined to listen to peers and family members. It is common to seek advice on health care from professionals, and the high cost of visiting the doctor confirms its importance. Parents seldom turn to professionals

though for parenting advice. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. Almost two-thirds of parents in one survey *disagreed* that, "All parents need professional advice and guidance to help them to bring up their children." On the other hand, 86 % agreed that, "Family and friends are the most appropriate source of support for parents" (Edwards and Gillies 2004).

Moreover, there is a strong consensus about most health practices, and the same healthcare advice applies to almost everyone (e.g., when to get prenatal care, what vitamins to take, when children should get various immunizations, and so on). Healthcare advice is regulated and often paid for by government. In contrast, it is widely believed by parents that each child is unique with unique needs and that only the parent can understand her child's needs. Not only is parenting advice not regulated or paid for by government, but also there is a general social prohibition against "interfering in the family." In addition, there is much less consensus on how to parent children than on how to meet a child's healthcare needs. These beliefs can pose challenges to the success of large-scale parenting interventions.

Participants in parenting interventions may also differ in their willingness to adjust their views on parenting in light of new contradictory information. As an example of how the provision of information affects behavior change differently for those with different levels of education, Aizer and Stroud (2010) found that economically disadvantaged parents were much slower than their advantaged peers to curb their smoking, following the release of the Surgeon General's Report of 1960 outlining the health hazards of prenatal smoking. Highly educated parents may be more willing to adjust their views because schooling makes people open to new ideas. In addition, the chance of exposure to new information may vary by parental advantage if, for example, disadvantaged parents are more isolated.

Research in behavioral science offers insights into the difficulty of behavior change. For example, a key tenet from behavioral economics is that people are ineffective at computation when making decisions, especially those decisions that involve trade-offs between costs and benefits occurring at different times (i.e., intertemporal choices). Undue weight is placed on recent events and too little weight on far-off ones (i.e., present bias). From a behavioral economics perspective, the lack of a behavioral response to information arises from discounting the future. It is well known that future outcomes are undervalued (discounted) relative to immediate outcomes. This means that it is hard for people to give up things they enjoy today for the (undervalued) future (Frederick et al. 2002). In the context of parenting, it may be hard to give up leisure (or work) today in order to invest time and effort for a distant return in children's human capital. However, other research has shown that certainty plays a role in generating present bias (Andreoni and Sprenger 2012). In other words, for low-income parents, a tendency to discount the future may arise from uncertainty or even hopelessness about whether the time and effort they spend on their children will help their child succeed.

Another way to think about the challenges of behavior is that it is hard to change habits that have been developed and reinforced over time. Parenting behaviors are correlated across generations and shaped by the beliefs and preferences of influential relatives and neighbors in our social networks (Duncan et al. 2005).

Successful actions in a parenting program, therefore, can mean "unlearning" a set of parenting practices that may be deeply rooted in one's culture and community (Wagner et al. 2002).

Cognitive behavioral science offers a complementary perspective on parent engagement by highlighting the problem of "cognitive scarcity" among low-income parents stemming from their past and current exposure to "toxic stress" (Mani et al. 2013). One potentially important source of income-based differences in parenting is the repercussions of the financial strain typically experienced by low-income parents on their decision making. The daily stressors of low-income parents' lives place cognitive and emotional demands on parents' attention and self-control in the present. Parents' focus and energy needed to meet the demands of today leaves little room to follow through on decisions that can affect the future of their children (Mani et al. 2013; Mullainathan and Shafir 2013; Shah et al. 2012). Accordingly, the possibilities for purposeful, goal-directed parenting are greatly diminished. These studies provide important insights into the contexts of poverty that give rise to the behavioral response.

Interventions designed to promote health and financial behavior change offer compelling experimental evidence that may be useful in designing interventions to change parental behavior. In these arenas, a variety of programs for which the design is based on principles from behavioral science have proven effective for, among other outcomes, weight loss, smoking cessation, financial savings, and health behavior (see Ashraf et al. 2006; Charness and Gneezi 2009; Kamenica 2012; Milkman et al. 2011; Stockwell et al. 2012). Elements common to many of these interventions include commitment devices, which work by formalizing a pledge to do something or achieve an objective; incentives, which work by offering financial or non-financial rewards or recognition for changing behavior; and planning prompts, which provide reminders designed to overcome problems of forgetfulness and procrastination.

For example, individuals who write down (commit) how many fewer cigarettes they will smoke actually reduce the number more than those who just plan to cut down. Commitment devices can be even more effective when people make a commitment not to themselves but to others (e.g., a support group or a trusted friend or relative). Research has found that commitment devices can change health and finance behavior to a meaningful degree (Ashraf et al. 2006; Thaler and Benartzi 2004).

Forgetfulness and procrastination frequently prevent individuals from engaging in beneficial behaviors. Planning prompts are designed to overcome these problems. Parents may know that spending educational time with their children is a good idea and they may want to spend more time, but they need assistance in implementing these good intentions. Research in public health has shown that text message reminders to low-income, urban parents helped to increase the rate of flu vaccinations among their children (Stockwell et al. 2012). Simple techniques like designating a time and place for a new behavior can also increase the likelihood of engaging in the new behavior. Having individuals write down the date and time of a planned action has increased both voter turnout (Nickerson and Rogers 2010) and

vaccination rates for influenza (Milkman et al. 2011). Planning prompts encourage people to generate solutions to practical challenges that often get in the way of their goals. For example, prompted people will set a time and date for the activity and they may also block off time on their calendar or arrange for necessary coverage for other tasks at home, while they will be unavailable. By creating specific, actionable plans, parents can make their future seem nearer and their parenting investments more relevant.

Conclusion

As a nation, we have made little progress toward narrowing the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children. Disadvantaged children arrive at school with significant skills' deficits and they rarely catch up to their more advantaged peers. Preschool is often viewed as a way of creating greater opportunity for such children, but preschool has been shown to be much less important than parenting practices and in particular parents' engagement with children in educational activities. However, interventions that have tried to change parenting have had limited success in large part because parents fail to participate in such programs and when they do they participate with little enthusiasm or follow through, despite the fact that just like advantaged parents, disadvantaged parents want to help their children succeed. The Nobel Laureate James Heckman, himself a champion of early childhood academic intervention, has written "The true measure of child poverty is parenting, and an effective skills policy bolsters the parenting resources of the disadvantaged" (Heckman 2011).

A discussion of parenting helps us focus on the mechanisms that account for the intergenerational persistence of economic status and may help to decide, as a society, the state's role in blocking or preventing these mechanisms. Few people believe that there should be complete independence between parents' and children's economic success. An important philosophical and practical question is whether the state should play a role in mitigating circumstances whereby disadvantaged children are unable to realize their potential, not simply because their parents lack the economic means but also because their parents lack the abilities, mental health, or knowledge to help them maximize their chances for success (Swift 2005).

Three interrelated goals can help to guide our thinking on this issue. First, from an empirical perspective, the relative importance of different mechanisms in generating persistence across generations in economic status must be better understood. Clearly, family income alone is not the only dimension of family background that matters. Parents' active involvement and time investment in enriching activities are key ingredients in children's skill development. Second, from a philosophical perspective, the lines between freedom of familial association and state intervention in the pursuit of equality of opportunity must continue to be debated. Third, from a policy perspective, the plausibility and practicability of different modes of state intervention must be assessed. Research in behavioral science offers fresh insights

to consider in the development of new programs and policies to support parents' investments in their children.

Public sector investments have the potential to affect the long-run influence of family background in the more private spheres of family preferences and behavior. For example, in the case of Head Start, early childhood educational intervention and improved parental behavior are complements (Gelber and Isen 2011). As a society, we should consider a variety of strategies to shore up parenting skills with the same degree of effort that has been mounted to increase public supports to disadvantage children via channels that operate largely outside of their families.

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Chapter 6
Subjective Rationality, Parenting Styles, and Investments in Children

Flávio Cunha

Abstract I argue that a model in which parents act with subjective rationality is consistent with the evidence on parenting styles, investments, and child development described by Kalil (Chap. 5). By rationality, I mean that investment in children and parenting style choices can be explained by a model of optimization under constraints. By subjective, I mean that parents rely on their own assessments about the constraints in order to make choices. Data that motivate these assumptions and confirm the implications of the model are presented. The model generates new insights about policies to foster the development of children's human capital.

Introduction

A large empirical literature that establishes the importance of parenting styles and familial investments in the determination of a child's human capital is summarized by Kalil in the first part of Chap. 5. In the second part of the chapter, Kalil asks if the environment that children experience at home can be improved through parenting education programs. With few exceptions—namely the Nurse-Family Partnership (Olds et al. 2002) and the Jamaican Nutrition and Cognitive Stimulation Program (Gertler et al. 2013)—such interventions have a poor track record in improving child developmental outcomes. The poor track record most likely results from high attrition rates, and the fact that many parents who do not drop out fail to adhere to the program prescriptions. In the last part of her chapter, Kalil suggests that the high attrition and low adherence rates may be due to the design of the interventions which does not take into account behavioral constraints faced by parents that lead them to choose less effective parenting styles and low levels of investments in children.

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The traditional approach in economics is to explain differences in investments through differences in costs or benefits (e.g., Becker and Tomes 1986). However, it is important to recognize that, from the point of view of the parents, early investments in the human capital of children have uncertain benefits that are only realized many years after the investment decisions have been made. Indeed, new research shows that disadvantaged parents may underestimate the returns to investment in children (Cunha et al. 2013). Interventions that improve parental beliefs about the returns to investment generate changes in investments and improvements in child developmental outcomes (e.g., Suskind and Leffel 2013; Fitzsimons et al. 2012).

In this chapter, I articulate a "subjective rationality" model of choice of parenting styles and investments in children. By rationality, I mean that parents have a clear objective that they want to optimize. By subjective, I mean that parents lack the information they need and instead rely on personal assessments in order to make choices. In the next section, I briefly summarize a rich body of evidence from the fields of anthropology, sociology, and psychology that supports the assumptions of subjective rationality around which I build the model.

Why Subjective Rationality?

A large literature in anthropology, sociology, and psychology presents evidence that parents are subjectively rational in their choice of parenting styles and investments in children. That is, parents choose a parenting style that is optimal given their subjective assessment of the constraints under which they operate.

A major insight by anthropologists is that it is possible to learn a lot about a people's culture by studying the way that parents rear their children.[1] Consider, for example, the San, a group of very mobile hunters and gatherers who inhabit the Kalahari Desert in Africa. San parents believe that motor skills, such as sitting, standing, and walking, must be taught, and children should be encouraged to practice these skills (Konner 1977). As a result, San parents invest time and effort in making sure that their babies develop appropriate motor skills early on. As a consequence of this training, San children perform better in motor-coordination tests because their physical development is more advanced than their Western peers (Konner 1973). A possible interpretation of this finding is that San children are genetically predisposed to learn motor skills from an early age. However, experimental evidence shows that it is possible to accelerate motor development in typical Western children by providing them with a regimen of physical exercises similar to the ones San children are exposed to from an early age (Zelazo et al. 1972).

In contrast, consider the Ache Indians who live in Paraguayan forests in which children can fall prey to jaguars, poisonous snakes, or other dangers. In such an

[1] A helpful survey of the literature I present in the next two paragraphs is provided by Small (1999).

environment, early mobility could endanger a child's survival. Indeed, Ache parents act to postpone motor development: Their babies ride in slings early on and are carried piggyback by fathers at later ages. Research shows that Ache children walk over a year later when compared to the San children (Kaplan and Dove 1987; Hill and Hurtado 1996).

Since the early twentieth century, sociologists have been interested in how parents of different socioeconomic status (SES) raise their children. In the USA, Lynd and Lynd (1929, 1937) observed that working-class mothers ranked "strict obedience" as their most important goal more frequently than higher-SES mothers did. Their findings have been replicated in more recent studies and in other contexts as well (e.g., Alwin 1984; Harwood 1992; Luster et al. 1989; Pearlin and Kohn 1966; Tudge et al. 2000; Wright and Wright 1976). The data on language interaction partially support this view (Hart and Risley 1995). Low-SES parents tend to use more directives in their speech, while high-SES parents are more likely to use reasoning. Kohn (1963) argues that the stronger preferences toward socioemotional skills by lower-SES mothers reflect those mothers' forecasts for their children choosing occupations in which obedience and conformity have relatively higher returns.

There is evidence that parents differ in their information about the process of child development. For example, a large literature in child development shows that the lower the parents' SES, the lower their expectation about cognitive development (e.g., Epstein 1979; Hess et al. 1980; Ninio 1988; Ninio and Rinott 1988; Mansbach and Greenbaum 1999). More educated mothers embrace important information sooner than less educated ones. The smoking habits of educated and uneducated pregnant women were tracked before and after the release of the 1964 Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health (Aizer and Stroud 2010). Before the release of the report, educated and uneducated pregnant women smoked at roughly the same rates. After the report, the smoking habits of educated women decreased immediately, and suddenly, a ten-percentage-point gap in smoking arose between educated and uneducated pregnant women.

Differences in parental information about the importance of the language environment that children experience may explain the finding of the path-breaking study by Hart and Risley (1995). These authors documented that the children of welfare parents heard about 600 words per hour, while the children of professional parents heard almost twice as many words in the same amount of time. Not surprisingly, the children of professional parents exhibited superior language development throughout the period of the study. Results by Hart and Risley were recently reproduced by Rowe (2008), whose aim was to understand why some parents spoke so little to their children. According to Rowe's data, poor and uneducated women were simply unaware that it was important to talk to their babies. This is persuasive evidence that parents may not know the importance of investments and parenting styles in fostering their child's human capital development.

In essence, the evidence briefly summarized above supports the assumption that parents are rational: In settings where early mobility is desired, parents act to accelerate motor development, and the opposite happens when early mobility is a

disadvantage for survival. Parental expectations about the child's future occupations partly determine the types of skills that parents choose to foster in their children. At the same time, not all parents have up-to-date information about the process by which the child's human capital accumulation can be fostered. Parents make rational choices based on subjective assessments of the constraints they face. In the next section, I develop a model of parenting styles and investments in children in which parents are subjectively rational.

The Model

The model has few components. First, a child's human capital is determined by the interaction between inputs that parents directly determine (which I call investments) and inputs that parents have little control over (which I call institutions). Investments, for example, consist of the amount and the quality of interaction between parent and child. Institutions are represented, for example, by the quality of the schools in the neighborhood where the family resides.

Second, a parenting style is a way to combine investments with institutions. Inspired by the research by Lareau (2003), I assume that parents can choose between two types of parenting styles. The "concerted cultivation" parenting style is one in which the parent actively engages with institutions for the benefit of her child's human capital development. In contrast, the "natural growth" parenting style is the one in which parents take a more passive role. For each of these parenting styles, there is an equation that specifies how investments and institutions are combined to produce the child's human capital. This equation is called the technology of human capital formation.

Third, the parent chooses investments and a parenting style that will maximize the parent's preferences subject to three constraints: (1) the budget constraint; (2) the technology of human capital formation; and (3) the parental information constraint. In what follows, I provide a mathematical description of the model.

Parenting Styles and Investments

Let $\boldsymbol{h}_i$ denote the child's human capital. Let x_i denote investment in the child's human capital. Let e_i denote the institutions that affect the child's human capital but are not directly controlled by the parents.

I distinguish investments from parenting styles. A parenting style p_i is a technology of human capital formation. One technology, which I refer to as concerted cultivation, is very efficient in combining institutions and investments into the child's human capital. The other, which I call natural growth, is less efficient in doing so.

$$h_i = \begin{cases} e_i^{\alpha} x_i^{\beta} & \text{if} \quad p_i = \text{Concerted Cultivation} \\ e_i^{\gamma} x_i^{\delta} & \text{if} \quad p_i = \text{Natural Growth} \end{cases} \tag{6.1}$$

Before I proceed, it is useful to describe the meaning of the parameters in Eq. (6.1). The parameters β and δ determine the responsiveness of human capital to investments under concerted cultivation and natural growth, respectively. The interpretation of these parameters is straightforward. Suppose that the parent increases investments x_i by 100 % (say, from 1 to 2 h/day). Then, $\boldsymbol{h}_i$ will increase by β percent if the parent chooses the concerted cultivation approach and δ percent if the parent chooses natural growth. Similar interpretations apply to the parameters α and γ.

In this model, parenting styles are technologies of skill formation. As illustrated by Lareau (2003), parents who follow the concerted cultivation approach are present in their child's education: They make sure that the child is doing homework, and they exert a major monitoring effort in order to do so; they also make sure that the teachers and school principals understand and work around any limitations the child has; they actively search for information about the best teachers in the school, and they do not hesitate to contact the school if they believe their child is not receiving the necessary attention. In the context of Eq. (6.1), these observations imply that $\alpha > \gamma$

The research by Kalil et al. (2012) shows that high-SES parents not only spend more time with their children, but they are also more likely to dedicate time to activities that best suit their children's developmental needs. In other words, the high-SES parents—the ones that, according to Lareau (2003), are more prone to adopt a concerted cultivation approach—invest in skills when these skills undergo sensitive periods of development. Thus, a mathematical interpretation of the findings by Kalil et al. (2012) is that $\beta > \delta$.

Preferences, Budget Constraint

The parent's utility function has three arguments. First, the parent cares about the goods and services that satisfy the basic needs of the family (e.g., housing, food, and heating). I refer to such expenditures as household consumption, and they are represented by c_i. Second, the parent cares about the child's human capital $\boldsymbol{h}_i$. Third, the parent cares about the parenting style. In particular, following Kalil's (Chap. 5) suggestion, there is a behavioral cost of adopting the concerted cultivation parenting style. For simplicity, I denote by η_i this utility cost and I assume that it is normally distributed with mean μ_η and variance σ_η^2. The utility function is as follows:

$$U(c_i, h_i, p_i) = \ln c_i + \theta_i \ln h_i - \eta_i 1(p_i = \text{Concerted Cultivation}) \tag{6.2}$$

The parameter θ_i describes how the parent values the child's human capital relative to current household consumption. Heterogeneity in θ_i arises because of differences in altruism toward the child or in future discounting. Clearly, parents who are more altruistic and/or have lower discount rates value the child's human capital more and, thus, are more likely to choose parenting styles and investments that produce high stocks of the child's human capital.

Let y_i and π denote, respectively, the parent's income and the relative price of the investment in the child's human capital. The budget constraint is as follows:

$$c_i + \pi x_i = y_i. \tag{6.3}$$

Parent's Information Set

At the time that the parent is choosing investments and parenting style, I assume that the parent knows his valuation of the child's human capital θ_i, the behavioral cost η_i, the price of investment π, and the income y_i.

In this model, the benefits of investments and parenting styles are determined by the parameters α, β, γ and δ. If we observe investments, institutions, parenting styles, and the child's human capital, it is possible (although challenging) to estimate the values of these parameters (e.g., Cunha et al. 2010). In the model I propose in this chapter, I assume that parents do not know the estimated value of these parameters. Instead, I assume that parents have their own subjective expectations about the value of these parameters. I denote by $\mu_{\alpha,i}$, $\mu_{\beta,i}$, $\mu_{\gamma,i}$, and $\mu_{\delta,i}$, respectively, parent i's subjective expectation of α, β, γ and δ. Note that the parent's subjective expectations can be different from the value of the parameters estimated by social scientists.

Thus, parent i's information set is represented by $\Omega_i = (\mu_{\alpha,i}, \mu_{\beta,i}, \mu_{\gamma,i}, \mu_{\delta,i}, \theta_i, \eta_i, y_i, \pi)$. The parent's problem is to choose a parenting style p_i and to decide how to allocate income y_i between consumption c_i and investment x_i to maximize the parent's expected utility conditional on the information set Ω_i. In what follows, I describe the solution of this problem.

Solution of the Model

To solve the model, I break up the problem in two stages. In the first stage, the parent chooses a parenting style. In the second stage, the parent chooses the investment conditional on the parenting style chosen in the first stage. Once the problem is broken up in this fashion, I solve the problem by backward induction. That is, I start by deriving the optimal investment for each parenting style. Then, I derive the optimal parenting style in the first stage.

So, starting from the second stage, it is possible to show that optimal investments for a parent who chooses concerted cultivation (CC) in the first stage are given by:

$$x_i^{\mathrm{CC}} = \left(\frac{\theta_i \mu_{\beta,i}}{1 + \theta_i \mu_{\beta,i}}\right)\frac{y_i}{\pi} \quad \text{if } p_i = \text{Concerted Cultivation} \tag{6.4a}$$

Alternatively, if the parent chooses the natural growth (NG) approach in the first stage, then the optimal investments in the second stage are given by:

$$x_i^{\mathrm{NG}} = \left(\frac{\theta_i \mu_{\delta,i}}{1 + \theta_i \mu_{\delta,i}}\right)\frac{y_i}{\pi} \quad \text{if } p_i = \text{Natural Growth} \tag{6.4b}$$

The empirical literature shows that high-SES parents tend to invest more in their children. According to Eqs. (6.4a) and (6.4b), this can happen for different reasons. First, high-SES parents have higher income. Second, if we compare parents who have chosen the same parenting style, the gap between high- and low-SES parents could be explained by differences in expectations about the parameters β and δ. Third, the gaps in investments could also be explained by differences in parenting styles if the expectations about β of the high-SES parents who choose the concerted cultivation approach are higher than the expectations about δ of the low-SES parents who choose the natural growth approach.

As I show below, the parents who choose the concerted cultivation approach are a selected sample of parents. In particular, they tend to have higher income and access to higher-quality institutions. Under the assumption that $\eta_i \sim N\left(\mu_\eta, \sigma_\eta^2\right)$, the probability that parent i chooses concerted concerted cultivation which I denote by $\Pr(p_i = \mathrm{CC}|\Omega_i)$, is:

$$\Pr(p_i = \mathrm{CC}|\Omega_i) = \Phi\left(\frac{k_i - \mu_\eta + \theta_i\left(\mu_{\beta,i} - \mu_{\delta,i}\right)\ln\left(\frac{y_i}{\pi}\right) + \theta_i\left(\mu_{\alpha,i} - \mu_{\gamma,i}\right)\ln e_i}{\sigma_\eta}\right) \tag{6.4c}$$

The model states that the following four factors determine the choice of parenting observed in the data. The first factor is the behavioral cost associated with the concerted cultivation parenting style. The model implies that the higher the behavioral cost, which is denoted by μ_η, the less likely that parents are going to choose concerted cultivation. It is this implication of the model that Kalil (Chap. 5) suggests may have large influences on how parents behave. It is important to implement empirical research that verifies the model's implication.

The second factor that affects the choice of parenting style is family resources. In the empirical literature, the higher the parental income, the more likely that the parent chooses the concerted cultivation approach. A sufficient condition for the model to generate this implication is that $\mu_{\beta,i} > \mu_{\delta,i}$. In this case, the relationship

between family resources and parenting style arises because investments are an increasing function of family income. The higher the parental income is, the higher the difference between the child's human capital under concerted cultivation and natural growth. In other words, the higher the family income, the higher the benefit of choosing the concerted cultivation parenting style.

The third factor that determines the choice of parenting style is the quality of the institutions. The findings by Lareau (2003) show that middle-class parents have access to institutions with higher quality and are also more likely to take a more active role in their child's school activities. These actions are indicative of parents who choose the concerted cultivation parenting style. A sufficient condition for the model to generate this prediction is that $\left(\mu_{\alpha,i} > \mu_{\gamma,i}\right) > 0$. Under this condition, the implication that parenting styles are affected by the quality of institutions is similar to the relationship between parenting style and income. When the quality of the institutions is higher, the benefit of choosing concerted cultivation over natural growth is larger.

Interestingly, there is evidence that low-SES parents respond to exogenous changes in the quality of the institutions. Bergman (2013) studied whether changes in the frequency and mode of communication to parents could change parental involvement in the child's education. In order to do so, Bergman randomly assigned parents to a treatment or control group. Parents in the control group received the default amount of information the school provided. Parents in the treatment group received not only the default information but also text messages about their child's missing assignments, grades, and upcoming exams. As Bergman (2013) shows, this experiment changed parental relationships with the school. Parents in the treatment group were 85 % more likely to initiate contact with the school than parents in the control group. Parents in the treatment group also increased their attendance at conferences with teachers. These are actions usually taken by parents who follow the concerted cultivation approach. The children of parents in the treatment group were more likely to submit their work on time, to improve their work habits, and to cooperate in school. Consequently, there was improvement in the child's human capital formation: The students of parents in the treatment group had higher GPA scores and higher scores on state standardized tests.

The fourth factor in the choice of parenting style is the expectation that parents have about the benefits of concerted cultivation (measured by $\mu_{\alpha,i}$ and $\mu_{\beta,i}$) versus natural growth (measured by $\mu_{\gamma,i}$ and $\mu_{\delta,i}$). In particular, the larger the differences $\mu_{\beta,i} - \mu_{\delta,i}$ or $\mu_{\alpha,i} - \mu_{\gamma,i}$, the more likely it is that parents will adopt the concerted cultivation style. As described above, Rowe (2008) shows that low-SES parents may talk little to their children because they are unaware of the role of child-directed speech for the child's language development. A small-scale intervention to improve parental knowledge about the importance of talking to young children was conducted by Suskind and Leffel (2013). The intervention, known as the Thirty Million Words Project, is based on three components. The first component is communicating to parents the scientific evidence on how the early language

environment experienced by children affects children's brain development. The second component is providing parents with suggestions on how to easily and very cheaply improve the language environment at home. The third component is supplying parents with information about the quality of the language environment at their home and encouraging them to reach for higher levels of hourly word counts and daily conversational turns. As a result of the intervention, the parents in the treatment group increased the amount of conversation turns per hour by around 50 % and the children's language development (measured in number of vocalizations per hour) also increased by 50 %.

In the context of poor countries, researchers often equate parental investments to feeding practices that young children experience on a day-to-day basis. Indeed, this is an important topic of study because it is known that early malnourishment has detrimental consequences for longer-term outcomes such as schooling, adult health, and productivity (Glewwe et al. 2001; Maluccio et al. 2009). Consider, for example, Malawi, an African country where 48 % of children younger than five are stunted and 22 % of them are underweight. It is very likely that poor feeding practices are partly responsible for these extreme indicators. For example, over half of all infants below 6 months of age are given food and/or unsterilized water (Malawi Demographic and Health Survey 2004), which is contrary to World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations.

The question of whether the provision of information about the impact of these poor feeding practices on child development leads Malawi parents to become more careful with the food they give their children was examined by Fitzsimons et al. (2012). In the context of the model above, this is essentially informing parents about values of β and δ. A randomized counseling intervention was used to impart information and advice on infant feeding to mothers of young children. Counseling visits not only encouraged exclusive breastfeeding up to the age of 6 months, but also provided information about weaning, locally available nutritious foods, the importance of a varied diet (particularly, the inclusion of protein and micronutrient-rich foods such as eggs) and instructions on how to prepare foods so as to conserve nutrients and ease digestion. Three years after the beginning of the intervention, it was found that mothers in treated localities exhibited superior knowledge about infant feeding best practices. Children in treatment localities experienced a more varied diet, richer in protein. By age 3 years, the children in the treatment group were 20 % of a standard deviation (for age) taller than the children in the control group.

The findings from the Thirty Million Words Project (Suskind and Leffel 2013) and the nutrition counseling intervention by Fitzsimons et al. (2012) are persuasive evidence that beliefs have a causal effect on child development. In contrast, the home visitation programs summarized by Kalil (Chap. 5) have poor performance in increasing investments in children. Kalil's suggestion is that there are high behavioral costs of adopting the parenting practices promoted by the home visitation programs in the USA. Another possible interpretation, suggested by the findings from the studies discussed above, is that the interventions did not succeed because they failed to change parental beliefs. An important design in the Thirty

Million Words Project is that the parent was provided feedback about the child's vocalizations in response to an increase in parental child-directed speech. The feedback may have been key to changing parents' beliefs about the importance of the home language environment for the child's language development. In the Malawi experiment, Fitzsimmons et al. (2012) showed that the intervention generated interest in child nutrition within the village, beyond just households directly affected, making child health- and nutrition-related issues more salient in these communities. This finding suggests that parents not only updated their beliefs, but they also communicated their updated beliefs to other parents who were not directly treated.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented a model in which parents are subjectively rational. Although parents act to maximize a well-defined objective function, they lack information about the constraints that link parenting style and investments to child development. Following Kalil's (Chap. 5) suggestion, parents are also subject to behavioral costs. Such a model is consistent with the empirical literature that links parenting styles, investments in children, and child development. Empirical implications of the model have been validated in recent experiments that provide parents with important information to foster child development. These findings provide useful guidance for the design of new policies that can close the human capital gap that opens up long before children reach school.

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Chapter 7
Inequality Begins Outside the Home: Putting Parental Educational Investments into Context

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Abstract The highly concerning phenomenon of a widening income–education gap in the USA is addressed by Kalil (Chap. 5). We offer a contextual developmental perspective on the effects of poverty on families, parents, and children. There is little doubt that parenting matters for children's health and development. However, we argue that analysis of how parenting matters to children's educational outcomes, and why parenting differs between economic and educational strata, is best conducted once parenting is put into context. In support of this argument, we briefly address three topics. First, we present strong evidence that parenting is a mediating factor in explaining children's diverging academic destinies. Second, we compare a behavioral economics perspective on parental educational investments in more and less advantaged households to developmentally informed theory and research on the topic. Finally, we consider the utility of a behavioral economics solution to the problem of educational disparities in this country.

Parenting as a Mediator

Views of parenting as the root cause of the pronounced achievement gap in the USA are based on the supposition that poor-quality parenting is a personal characteristic of poor parents rather than a by-product of living in a certain context that places unique demands on one's parenting. The substantial body of research showing that parenting mediates the relationship between economic disadvantage and child outcomes suggests that there is something about living with poverty that affects one's parenting behaviors. The role of parenting as a mediator between

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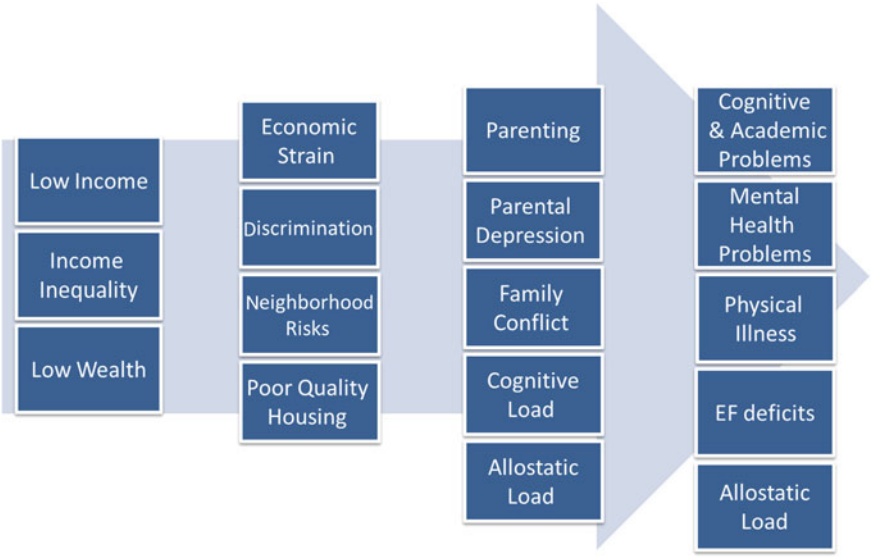

Fig. 7.1 Conceptual model of the effects of poverty and inequality on children's developmental outcomes

parental SES and child educational outcomes is also evident in the research literature on parental educational investments (Henry et al. 2011).

A corpus of work by scholars from various disciplines who have grappled with the question of how poverty and low family income take a toll on children's health, well-being, and life chances (e.g., Evans 2004) is summarized in Fig. 7.1. There is a well-documented cascade of direct and indirect effects of the context generated by poverty on child functioning—both via effects on parents and via direct effects on children's executive functioning, physical illness, mental health, and cognitive problems (Yoshikawa et al. 2012). Research has demonstrated robust effects of economic hardship on child depression, antisocial behavior, and academic outcomes resulting from a cascade of effects, including economic strain, its effects on marital conflict and parental depression, and ultimately through the mediator of harsh and inconsistent parenting (e.g., Conger and Donnellan 2007; Conger and Elder 1994). Our own research has illuminated direct effects of economic strain and family conflict on children's mental and physical health outcomes as well as indirect effects through compromised parenting (e.g., Wadsworth and Compas 2002; Wadsworth et al. 2008).

Direct effects of cumulative poverty-related risks on children's and adults' allostatic load (a compilation of unhealthy biomarkers; Evans and English 2002), and of social class discrimination on physical health outcomes (e.g., Fuller-Rowell et al. 2012) have been shown. In addition, mediated effects via parenting, including cognitive stimulation, have been demonstrated (e.g., Evans and Kim 2007, 2010; Evans and Schamberg 2009). Similarly, Blair and Raver's work has documented

direct effects of poverty on children's executive functioning (EF) and indirect effects on child EF via parenting (e.g., Blair 2010; Blair Granger et al. 2011; Blair et al. 2011; Raver et al. 2013). It is also worth mentioning that children's functioning in one domain (such as socioemotional health) affects their own functioning in other domains (such as academics).

It is clear from this model that parenting matters. It is also clear that parenting is one of many mechanisms by which poverty confers risk. This tremendous body of evidence also links proximal parent and family variables to more distal aspects of the environment, including the context of stress and strain created by poverty (McLoyd 1990), living with racial and social class discrimination (Evans et al. 2012), facing numerous threats to the safety and well-being of one's children in the larger neighborhood context (Ceballo et al. 2012), and the day-to-day toxic effects of living in dilapidated, inadequate, and unhealthy housing (Evans and English 2002). The models also generally link these distal factors directly to economic conditions of the family and larger society. Given these various constraints and processes operating in the lives of disadvantaged families, including parents' own lack of education, as well as mental health issues, it is not terribly surprising that poor parents' educational investment strategies look different from those of more educated and affluent parents.

This very substantial body of empirical work renders single-variable explanations of complex phenomena such as the income–education gap untenable: studying one domain of parenting behavior, out of 176 contexts, and using results to infer that poor parents are not invested in their children's educational futures is not warranted. Making a compelling case for the importance of parenting in diverging academic destinies of children growing up in advantaged and disadvantaged homes does not require that parenting be placed at the causal end of the model. Parenting obviously matters, but in an empirically validated conceptual model of the effects of poverty and economic inequality on children's developmental outcomes, it is clearly a mechanism of poverty's pernicious effects, not the root cause.

Parental Educational Investments and the Socioeconomic Context of Parenting

The influential distinction by Lareau (2003) between "concerted cultivation" and "the accomplishment of natural growth" provides a theoretical rationale to explain why more advantaged parents exhibit the former pattern of investment in their children and less advantaged parents endorse the latter strategy. Lareau's theory explains class-specific parenting strategies as being grounded in different clusters of "dispositions, preferences and perceptions of opportunity" (Bodovski and Farkas 2008, p. 916) that are largely shaped by social class and education. According to Lareau, understanding why parents invest in their children as they do requires that specific parenting behaviors be considered in the context of "cultural logics" of child rearing. As Cheadle and Amato (2011) explain, "it is not specific parenting

behaviors that have consequences for children. Instead, it is the organization of these behaviors into logically coherent configurations of beliefs and practices that facilitate children's attainment" (p. 682). Unfortunately, Lareau's theory fails to consider that class distinctions in parenting may stem from unequal access to the resources required of concerted cultivation rather than parents' commitment to one of the two opposing cultural logics (cf., Cheadle and Amato 2011). While both more and less advantaged parents are motivated to invest in their children's educational development, lower-income parents' lack of financial resources, work flexibility, and human, social, and cultural capital hamper their ability to engage in concerted cultivation (Chin and Phillips 2004).

The role of parenting in diverging educational destinies among children in the United States has been tested in recent quantitative studies that have operationalized Lareau's concept of concerted cultivation (e.g., Bodovski and Farkas 2008; Cheadle 2009; Cheadle and Amato 2011; Greenman et al. 2011; Martin 2012). Such studies tend to investigate parenting practices as a mediator of the effects of social class and education on children's educational achievement. These studies offer quantitative evidence that advantaged parents are more likely to use concerted cultivation than less advantaged parents and that this type of parenting is associated with higher educational achievement and higher income. However, these studies do not provide evidence supporting that a lack of motivation among disadvantaged parents is the reason that poor parents engage less in concerted cultivation. A more parsimonious and empirically supported explanation lies in the effects of economic disadvantage on parents, as shown in Fig. 7.1.

A behavioral economics perspective on *why* and *how* parents "invest" differently across economic/educational lines is a contextual, as it does not consider how the context caused by economic affluence or lack thereof, shapes parenting. In the context of poverty, a different approach to parenting may be a wise investment. So, compared to advantaged parents, why might disadvantaged parents be harsher, more punitive, less consistent, more focused on teaching obedience, and parent in ways that reflect the cultural logic of the accomplishment of natural growth (Lareau 2003)? Research suggests that providing for their children's physical needs and personal safety are more pressing parenting concerns and that working multiple jobs, scrambling to put food on the table, and managing an inadequate household budget take priority. Raising children in economically deprived conditions erodes parents' time and ability to engage in concerted cultivation of their children even when they are motivated to do so.

The most recent report by the USDA, for example, showed that 20 % of households with children are characterized as food insecure, meaning that the members of those households are unable to consistently access an adequate amount of nutritious food necessary for a healthy life (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2011). Similarly, poor families are more likely to live in dangerous neighborhoods where effective parenting strategies include strict and intensive monitoring of children's activities, social networks, and whereabouts, as well as actively limiting children's contact with others in the neighborhoods—such lifesaving parenting strategies are time-consuming (Ceballo et al. 2012). Finally, recent experimental research has

demonstrated that "poverty-related concerns consume mental resources, leaving less for other tasks" (Mani et al. 2013, p. 976), especially cognitively demanding tasks such as parenting and concerted cultivation. As Evans' work on cumulative risk reminds us, these difficult aspects of the parenting context do not operate in isolation (Evans et al. 2008; Evans et al. 2007). A poor parent is often dealing with all of these and more simultaneously, and these competing demands take their toll on parents.

Lessons from Prevention Science: Child and Parent Interventions

To understand how a broader contextually and developmentally informed approach maps onto what prevention science would recommend, we quickly review some of the fundamental and founding principles of the science. Prevention programs need to address fundamental causal processes, attack multiple domains when possible, build on solid developmental research, try to eliminate or reduce children's exposure to toxic causal agents, and strengthen the host, in this case the children (Coie et al. 1993).

As our brief review highlights, we *do* know quite a lot about why poor parents "invest" in their children in a way that is different from more affluent parents. Research also demonstrates how those different parenting "investments" encourage different educational (and other) outcomes for more and less affluent children. What is less clear is whether it is possible or even advisable to encourage poor parents to focus on concerted cultivation like their more affluent/educated counterparts. There is evidence showing that such an approach can in fact increase parental stress and further damage family functioning (Ceballo et al. 2012).

A behavioral economics model of motivation and self-control could certainly be applied to help parents engage more fully in existing parent-focused intervention programs. Research on why parents drop out or do not enroll in parenting programs, however, does not support the idea that motivation and self-control problems are the source of poor uptake of parenting interventions. Rather, evidence documents that the very contextual constraints identified in our model are linked to participation. For example, outcome research conducted with the Incredible Years Intervention and Parent–Child Interaction Therapy identified the following reasons for attrition from interventions: logistical problems (transportation, child care, work schedules), treatment effects too slow, dislike of treatment approach or techniques, parental depression, and parenting stress (e.g., Boggs et al. 2004; Nock and Ferriter 2005; Nock et al. 2007).

The work that we (and many others) have conducted hits several of the core prevention science principles reviewed above (e.g., Raviv and Wadsworth 2010). For example, our family-strengthening interventions build directly on Conger and Elder's (1994) Family Stress Model to target several proximal risks created and

exacerbated by poverty. We focus on reducing exposure to parental depression, family conflict, and problematic parenting, by first and foremost targeting stress, which plays a critical role in so many of the models (e.g., Rienks et al. 2011).

Similarly, in our FRAME intervention, we directly target skills that will support parents' ability to function in multiple realms. Stress, stress management, coping skills, and social/community support are directly targeted. We teach skills to reduce conflict in intimate relationships so that relationships can serve as more of a source of strength than a source of stress. We also emphasize principles of child-centered parenting and the importance of seeking out parenting support. So far, we have had very little attrition from the intervention and follow-up research (retention rate > 93 %), and we have found positive effects in a randomized control trial on several core parental skills and outcomes (e.g., Rienks et al. 2011; Wadsworth et al. 2011)—skills and outcomes that predict better subsequent child outcomes (Wadsworth et al. 2013).

Where does this leave us? First, in line with prevention science principles, we need a multi-pronged approach that targets multiple outcomes. Sadly, there is no "magic bullet," so the challenge lies in learning how to "strategically target multiple interventions on multiple risk factors and mediating mechanisms and how to effectively coordinate these multiple strategies for optimal effect" (Yoshikawa et al. 2012, p. 281). Academic achievement does not develop in isolation, nor is it the only important child outcome. Second, we cannot just focus on parents. We have good interventions for children that work. The need for early childhood education (ECE) is as high as it has ever been. ECE works, especially when it is implemented as designed—usually with college-educated, highly skilled teachers in the classroom (Duncan and Magnuson 2013). When we water down these interventions, we water down the effects. So, our recommendation regarding ECE is keep it, make it universal, and ensure the quality is high. Third, promoting children's prosocial behavior is critical. In other words, we should not focus exclusively on a single domain such as cognitive/academic development (Biglan et al. 2012). We should also consider interventions that build prosocial skills and skills for coping with the tremendous burden of stress poor children face.

Finally, the prevention science approach suggests we need to intervene at multiple levels, target multiple domains, and of course, take context into account. Poor parents love their children and want the best for them; they value education and know it is important for their children (Ceballo et al. 2012). We argue that an intervention policy that takes parental behavior out of context oversimplifies a very complex, systemic problem. It is quite possible that such an approach could actually add more stress to parents' plates, introduce more chaos, and ultimately place poor children at increased risk. Hence, interventions must be based on the best available scientific evidence and recognize the cascade of direct and indirect effects of the context generated by poverty on child functioning.

Conclusion

Developmentalists can contribute to behavioral economics by "highlighting assumptions that seem particularly implausible in light of what developmental science reveals about children and their families," argued economist Michael Foster (2002, p. 1912). Such was our intent in this chapter. Our efforts in this chapter have therefore been to highlight the very rich developmental research on poverty and family functioning that renders single-variable explanations of the complex social phenomenon of family life implausible.

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Chapter 8
Stressful Life Experiences and Contexts: The Effects on Parents and Parenting

Narayan Sastry

Abstract Evidence that there are major gaps in educational outcomes between children from rich and poor families and that these gaps have increased over time is briefly reviewed in this chapter. These trends are associated both with increased income inequality and with greater residential segregation by income. Drawing on findings from recent research, I suggest that living in poverty and residing in an impoverished neighborhood places substantial psychological stress on parents, which in turns undermines their ability to draw on appropriate parenting skills and behaviors in order to promote better outcomes for their children. I conclude by suggesting that ameliorating psychological stress among parents may be effective in promoting better parenting and enhancing the effectiveness of parenting interventions.

Introduction

Differences between rich and poor families in parenting practices and in investments in their children are described by Kalil (Chap. 5), and she argues that these differences may be a crucial factor in explaining the diverging destinies of children. There is a major gap between children from rich and poor families in many measures of learning achievement and attainment, as well as in other indicators of development and well-being. The focus for Kalil is on the role of differences in parental investments in their children as a crucial factor in explaining this situation. Parental investments take the form of allocations of money and time and the creation of a leaning environment at home. Parental investments are likely to be more effective than income transfers and than school-based programs and interventions, argues Kalil. The implications drawn from her review are that improving parents' skills and parenting behaviors may be the basis for a more effective way to improve children's outcomes among poor families. However, interventions designed to

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improve skills and behaviors among parents have not been particularly effective to date. Not only are the effect sizes of these interventions small, but they also suffer from high attrition reflecting low levels of engagement and involvement by parents. Kalil's conclusion is that novel attempts to better motivate parents to invest in their children, based on new insights from the field of behavioral economics, may help to overcome the implementation problems experienced by parenting interventions.

In this chapter, my aim is to make two separate critiques regarding the possible role of parenting in shaping the diverging destinies of rich and poor children. First, I will provide evidence that while there is indeed strong evidence of major gaps in outcomes between children from rich and poor families, and that these gaps have increased over time, I argue that the most salient accompanying trends are those associated with increased income inequality and greater residential segregation by income. Furthermore, both increased income inequality and greater residential segregation by income increase the likelihood of children living below the poverty line and residing in neighborhoods characterized by concentrated disadvantage. Second, I draw on findings from recent research to suggest that living in poverty and residing in an impoverished neighborhood places substantial psychological stress on parents, which in turns undermines their ability to draw on appropriate parenting skills and behaviors in order to promote better outcomes for their children. In the final section, I tie these two arguments together and suggest that ameliorating high, ongoing stressful life circumstances among poor parents may be effective in promoting better parenting and enhancing the effectiveness of parenting interventions.

Family Economic Inequality and Neighborhood Segregation by Income

Several recent studies have documented the rising disparity over time by family income in children's educational outcomes. The rising gap by family income in children's academic achievement over the past 25 years or more was described by Reardon (2011), while Bailey and Dynarski (2011) showed that educational attainment for children from rich and poor families has also diverged over a similar period. These rising disparities have occurred in a social and economic context characterized byrising familyincome inequality (Atkinson et al. 2011; Piketty and Saez 2003) and increasing residential segregation by income (Massey and Denton 1993; Bischoff and Reardon 2013). Many trends associated with rising income and residential inequality are quite striking—for instance, from 1970 to 2010, the percentage of families living in either poor or affluent neighborhoods doubled, from 15 to 33 % (Bischoff and Reardon 2013). Of particular salience and importance are increases in the prevalence of poverty in families with children as well as the high likelihood of children being raised in neighborhoods characterized by concentrated disadvantage. A focus on the poorest families and those living in the most

disadvantaged neighborhoods is important because such experiences are likely to be directly detrimental to children's outcomes and are also associated with adverse effects on parenting quality and children's outcomes.

In 2008, more than one out of every six children in the United States was living in a family with income below the poverty line (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2009). The consequence of experiencing family poverty during childhood on academic achievement and attainment has uncovered strong evidence of correlational associations (Mayer 1997).There is further evidence of potential causal effects that are identified through, for example, variation in the receipt of additional income through the Earned Income Tax Credit (e.g., Dahl and Lochner 2012) or welfare and antipoverty experiments (e.g., Duncan et al. 2011). One particularly important change associated with family poverty in the United States is the greater likelihood that children living in these families are being raised by single mothers with low levels of educational attainment and employment (see McLanahan 2004; McLanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1; Haskins, Chap. 13). There are many other relevant factors associated with family poverty that can have detrimental effects on children's outcomes—including food insecurity, poor health, and exposure to violence.

Although there is substantial academic debate about the causal effects of growing up in a poor neighborhood, recent reviews of the literature (Burdick-Will et al. 2011; Sastry 2012) have concluded that there are indeed negative consequences for children of exposure to concentrated disadvantage neighborhoods. Using new methods of causal inference with observational data, a small body of evidence has identified detrimental effects of neighborhood concentrated disadvantage on children's educational achievement and attainment (e.g., Sampson et al. 2008; Wodtke et al. 2011). Even more skeptical assessments for the presence of neighborhood effects on children of families in the Moving to Opportunity program (e.g., Sanbonmatsu et al. 2006; Leventhal et al. 2005) have been tempered. Newer work has reexamined some of the earlier results that found an absence of positive effects from the program (e.g., Burdick-Will et al. 2011).

Thus, there appear to be fairly clear detrimental effects on children's acquisition of academic skills from growing up below the poverty line or in a concentrated disadvantage neighborhood. What is less clear is exactly how the effects of family income and neighborhood disadvantage operate to affect children's learning, as well as what are the other noneconomic pathways that account for the rising schooling gap by income. Identifying the potential pathways is important to helping researchers and policymakers understand the possible causes of the growing gap in academic achievement and attainment. This information can be particularly beneficial for the development of programs and interventions to improve outcomes among children from disadvantaged families and neighborhoods. Among the potential pathways, Kalil (Chap. 5) makes a convincing case that parenting behaviors are likely to be an important factor in accounting for the gap in children's educational outcomes between rich and poor families.

Given this focus on the potential role of parenting behaviors in accounting for diverging destinies of rich and poor children, one important challenge is trying to understand how changes in parenting behavior over time tie into the increasing gap

in educational outcomes by economic status. The problem is that appropriate data for describing and investigating trends in parenting behavior are not available. In particular, there are few data sources and studies from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s that include comparable measures of parenting behavior and other key inputs into the home production of children's learning and skills. A specific shortcoming is the lack of availability of large-scale, nationally representative studies on this topic. Thus, we know little about the home learning environments in these earlier periods, including identified factors such as parenting styles, the nature of mother–child interactions, language stimulation, availability of learning resources in the home, and parental management and advocacy. Rather, the best available evidence for changes in parenting behaviors over the past 30–50 years comes from selected narrower domains of parenting such as time use, family expenditures, and extracurricular activities. Unfortunately, these domains capture only a small slice of parenting behavior. Hence, it is very unlikely that scholars will be able to convincingly determine how much of the growing gap in children's educational outcomes by economic status is actually accounted for by changes in parenting behaviors. In the future, data collected in multiple rounds of studies such as the Child Development Supplement to the Panel Study of Income Dynamics should be able to shed light on some of the broad trends in parenting behavior over longer periods.

The Relationship Between Family and Neighborhood Poverty and Psychological Stress

Psychological stress may play a key role in three related aspects of the relationship among family poverty, neighborhood disadvantage, parenting behaviors, and children's outcomes. First, psychological stress for both parents and children may be an important consequence of experiencing family poverty and life in a disadvantaged neighborhood. Second, there may be key interactions between parents' psychological stress and their parenting behaviors. Third, psychological stress may be a relevant factor that underlies the poor performance of parenting interventions, through its effect on attrition and low engagement.

Psychological stress may be closely tied to reductions in cognitive functioning that have been observed among the poor. Two different research designs—one a laboratory-based experiment and the other a natural experiment—demonstrated that the experience of poverty directly impedes cognitive functioning (Mani et al. 2013). One potential mechanism for this effect is through the experience of stress. This direct link between poverty, on the one hand, and impeded cognitive function and psychological stress, on the other hand, aligns well with findings from the psychology literature showing links between family poverty status and parental depression as well as acute and chronic stress (McLoyd 1990). Furthermore, poor parents who are exposed to psychological stressors often react by using harsh, inconsistent parenting styles with their children, while those who are depressed tend to ignore children's dependency

needs (McLoyd 1990). Recent research in economics has also been able to causally link changes in income among poor families (through policy changes in the Earned Income Tax Credit) to indicators of mothers' psychological health as well as manifestation of psychological stress such as higher blood pressure and inflammation (Evans and Garthwaite 2010). Finally, experimental evidence from the Moving to Opportunity Study indicates that a move from a high-poverty to a lower-poverty neighborhood leads to improvements in mental health and subjective well-being (Ludwig et al. 2012), suggesting a causal link between exposure to a concentrated disadvantage neighborhood and psychological stress.

Disadvantaged neighborhoods and life below the poverty line are often associated with greater exposure to crime and violence that may lead to chronic and acute psychological stress among both parents and children. Parents' reactions to neighborhood violence may directly lead them to limit their children's activities and interactions outside the home, but neighborhood violence may also be associated with increases in psychological stress that have negative effects on parenting behaviors and family dynamics. Previous research has found, for example, that parents in disadvantaged and high-violence neighborhoods are more likely to exhibit punitive, authoritarian, and coercive parenting styles and to use corporal punishment (McLoyd 1990; Sampson and Laub 1994), as well as to withdraw emotionally from their children (Klebanov et al. 1994). In a study of the effects of neighborhood violence on black children's cognitive development, Sharkey (2010) found that exposure to violence led to statistically and substantively significant negative effects on children's reading and mathematics skills. He hypothesized that these effects operate through the stress, fear, and trauma arising from violent events that are experienced by the child and by others in the child's family and neighborhood.

The results reviewed here suggest that family poverty and exposure to disadvantaged neighborhoods are likely to have deleterious effects on psychological stress and on parenting behaviors. There is no direct evidence that improvements in parents' psychological stress, cognitive functioning, mental health, and positive affect might improve the performance of parenting interventions. However, the nature of the problems that have emerged with parenting interventions—such as high attrition and low involvement and engagement—suggests that reductions in stress and associated psychological factors among parents provide a promising way to enhance the effectiveness of these interventions.

Discussion

The diverging destinies for children from rich and poor families in terms of their academic achievement and attainment should be, and is, a major cause for concern among researchers and policymakers in the United States. However, finding practical and appropriate policies and interventions to reduce these disparities is an enormous challenge. The growing inequality in family income and stratification by

neighborhood disadvantage has emerged over many decades, and in the absence of any immediate national policies to reverse the underlying factors causing these trends, they are unlikely to be decisively reversed any time soon. This situation makes it especially important to think creatively about the types of interventions and programs that might be effective in reducing socioeconomic differences in children's educational achievement and attainment.

However, it is difficult to significantly improve basic learning skills for children in poor families. Nevertheless, parenting interventions represent one promising way to improve children's academic outcomes, but face large challenges to their success through the low participation rates and high dropout rates that have occurred in interventions that have been conducted to date. Increasing participation, reducing dropouts, and generating greater enthusiasm among parents for the programs may be difficult to achieve given the context surrounding poor families and the many obstacles they encounter in their daily lives due to their circumstances and exposures. The apparent lack of motivation of poor parents to invest in their children's skills is not likely exclusively related to information deficits—which might be overcome by teaching parents about the importance of engagement with children and how to do so most effectively. Rather, poor outcomes of parenting interventions are also likely due to the context and constraints facing parents and families on a day-to-day basis which are manifested as impediments to cognitive functioning and as psychological stress. Having parenting interventions concurrently address—or, at a minimum, show awareness to—these major limiting factors will likely improve their chance of success.

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Part III
Social Inequality and the Transition to Adulthood

Chapter 9
Diverse Pathways: Rethinking the Transition to Adulthood

Ingrid Schoon

Abstract Social change has affected all young people—but not all in the same way. While the transition to adulthood has generally been extended, not all young people are delaying the step into paid employment, independent living, and family formation, especially those from less privileged family background. Existing templates for the transition to adulthood are, however, dominated by the assumption of a standard trajectory generally involving pathways through post-compulsory education, without taking into account the resources available to young people nor the complexities and variations of the demands they have to negotiate in making the transition to independent adulthood. Current transition research examining variability in transitions focuses on a dichotomy of experience, as for example, the polarization into slow versus fast transitions (Jones in *The youth divide: Diverging paths to adulthood*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York, 2002) and cumulative disadvantage which leads to increasingly diverging achievements (Kerckhoff in *Diverging pathways: Social structure and career deflections*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993; McLanahan in *Demography* 41(4):607–627, 2004). I argue that focusing on a dichotomy of experience fails to take into account variations in transition experiences, especially regarding intermediate groups who fall between the lines of this dualism. Moving toward a more flexible and dynamic understanding of transition experiences —a diverse pathways view—offers a more comprehensive conceptualization of variations in pathways leading to successful adaptations in the transition to adulthood.

Diverse Pathways: Rethinking the Transition to Adulthood

The transition to adulthood is a demographically dense period, involving multiple and inter-related social role changes across the *big five* role transitions, including completion of full-time education, entry into paid employment, leaving the parental

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home, and the step into partnership and parenthood (Settersten 2007). Each of these role transitions brings with it new challenges and opportunities, and completing most, if not all of these role transitions is often considered to be the marker for reaching independent adulthood (Buchmann and Kriesi 2011; Shanahan 2000). The transition to adulthood is set in a changing sociocultural context and there can be variations in the timing, sequencing, and patterning of transitions based on gender, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, culture, and historical period (Elder and Shanahan 2006; Schoon and Silbereisen 2009; Settersten et al. 2005).

Across most Western societies, the transition to independent adulthood has been considerably prolonged for younger cohorts, especially regarding extended education participation and delayed family formation. Since the 1960s, the average age of primary employment, marriage, and family formation has been pushed back from the early to the late twenties or even into the early thirties (Buchmann and Kriesi 2011; Settersten et al. 2005; Shanahan 2000). Although social change has affected all young people, it has not affected all in the same way. The preparation for adulthood has been elongated especially for those who can afford to invest in their education, i.e., those from relatively privileged background. A distinction has opened up between those who take a slower route to adulthood involving longer education and delayed assumption of adult roles and those who follow the traditional fast track transition leaving school at minimum age, followed by early entry to the labor market and family formation, leading to a polarization between fast and slow track transitions (Bynner et al. 2002; Jones 2002; Ross et al. 2009; Schoon et al. 2009). This polarization is also reflected in the differentiation between optimal and problematic pathways, involving the cumulation of advantages versus disadvantages associated with one's social position over time and growing disparities in resources (Kerckhoff 1993; McLanahan 2004). In this chapter, I argue that in addition to focusing on the polarization of life chances, one also has to consider the experiences of those who fall between this dualism, especially as those at the top are raising ahead and even middle-class families are losing out. Gaining a better understanding of how some young people, especially those with relatively few resources, manage to navigate social, educational, and career transitions is crucial for breaking cycles of disadvantage.

It has been argued that transitions have become more de-standardized and diversified, although the question of how exactly to assess and explain the observed diversity remains unresolved (Brückner and Mayer 2005; Buchmann and Kriesi 2011; Shanahan 2000). Current discussions are concentrated on the notion of a new normative stage of emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000), or the convergence toward a new ideal-typical pattern of a late, protracted, and complex transition to adulthood (Billari and Liefbroer 2010). Recognizing differences in transition patterns that reflect long-standing social class cultures as well as differential economic resources, some authors have raised the issue of a dichotomy of experience, such as the polarization into fast versus slow transitions (Bynner et al. 2002; Jones 2002; Ross et al. 2009) or the differentiation between optimal and problematic pathways associated with increasing disparity in opportunity (Kerckhoff 1993; McLanahan 2004). In this chapter, I argue that although the transition to adulthood has become

more polarized, attention should also be paid to the documentation and analysis of transitions that fall outside these dualistic categorizations. Between those on an 'optimal protracted' track and those on a precarious trajectory, there is a large group of young people trying to make the best with scarce resources. To consider heterogeneity in experiences can provide crucial insights into the varying circumstances and needs of young people and provide better leverage for promoting successful transitions to independent adulthood.

I first define the transition to adulthood in a developmental–contextual life course approach. I then discuss approaches and models taking into account multiple role transitions simultaneously. Third, I describe persisting social and gender inequalities and how they shape variations in transition experiences. Fourth, I discuss norms and expectations regarding the timing and sequencing of transitions and reflect on the case of young people who defy existing institutionalized templates. Fifth, the notion of successful transitions to adulthood is examined, and finally, suggestions for reframing transition templates are made, arguing for a more flexible, dynamic, and multilevel conceptualization of transition experiences, i.e., a diverse pathways view.

A Life Course Perspective

In order to explain differences and variation in transitions to adulthood, it is necessary to examine multiple factors and how they interact in a changing sociohistorical context. A comprehensive framework for conceptualizing the interactions between individual and context is provided through a life course approach, where the interplay between social structure and individual characteristics is a central feature (Elder 1985, 1998). In life course theory, the transition to adulthood is considered as a status passage in the institutionalized life course. It is argued that transition experiences and pathways through life have to be understood as developmental processes extending over time and that they are embedded within a larger sociohistorical and cultural context and are shaped by complex interdependent relationships, including structural constraints, and individual agency processes (Elder 1985, 1998).

The life course can be understood as a series of role transitions that denote changes in status or social roles, such as leaving school and entering full-time employment. Each role and status change can be understood as a turning point with significant social, emotional, and economic implications. Transitions are, however, not single, isolated events, but often overlap and occur simultaneously. For example, young people might be in higher education and at the same time are engaged in paid employment, have a partner, and may also have children. The combination of multiple social roles at a given time point has been conceptualized by the notion of role or status configurations to describe patterns of discrete social roles that individuals occupy (Macmillan and Eliason 2003).

Status transitions are based on complex interdependent relationships, including links to one's family of origin as well as wider social networks, and are always situated within a larger sociohistorical and cultural context (Elder 1985). Structural characteristics such as socioeconomic status at birth and parental education have been linked to variations in educational and occupational opportunities, as well as to the timing of partnership and family formation (Blossfeld et al. 2005; Corcoran 1995; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Fussell and Furstenberg 2005; Ross et al. 2009). Status or role configurations at a given point in time can be understood as the result of social background, previous transition histories, individual agency, and contextual factors. Individual experiences and agency interact with the wider sociohistorical context to shape the occurrence, timing, and order by which individuals assume configurations of social roles.

Multiple Role Combinations

Transitions such as leaving school, entry into the labor market, and timing of first birth are not discrete, clearly bounded events—but are interdependent, often requiring compromises regarding the coordination of work- and family-related roles (Elder and Shanahan 2006). Most studies examining the timing and sequencing of transitions, however, have concentrated on only one type of transition at a time, such as the transition from education into employment, or the transition into parenthood (Rindfuss 1991; Shanahan 2000). Typically, these studies have used event-history models to examine the timing of and the precursors to these transition markers (Berrington 2003; Bynner et al. 2002; Cohen et al. 2003). The interdependence of transition states cannot be meaningfully captured by focusing on only one transition marker and suggests the need for empirical methods that account for the multidimensional associations between variables.

Conceptualizing the transition to adulthood as a holistic trajectory, involving the combination of multiple social roles, a number of studies have demonstrated the usefulness of latent class analysis to identify patterns of social role configurations in young adults (Amato et al. 2008; Macmillan and Copher 2005; Osgood et al. 2005; Ross et al. 2009; Sandefur et al. 2005; Schulenberg and Schoon 2012). For example, comparing patterns of role combinations among 25- to 27-year-olds in the UK (using data from two British Birth Cohorts born in 1958 and 1970), the USA (based on evidence from Monitoring the Future), and Finland (evidence from the Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study and the Northern Finland Birth Cohort), a number of distinct profiles could be identified which can be summarized as those who by age 27 are *highly educated with no children*, *work-orientated without children, traditional families, fragile transitions*, and *slow starters* (Maggs et al. 2012; Räikkönen et al. 2012; Salmela-Aro et al. 2012; Schoon et al. 2012; Schulenberg and Schoon 2012).

In each country, a group of *highly educated* young people could be identified with relative high academic attainment, no children, full-time employment, often single or cohabiting, living independently from their parents. Another group,

work-orientated without children, is comprised of young people with medium-level qualifications, mostly working full-time, with no children. In each country, this group comprised most of the cohort members. Young people with medium- to low-level qualifications, who have made the step into family formation, parenthood, independent living, and full-time employment by age 27, were categorized as *traditional families*. In the UK context, those identified as *work-oriented without children* and *traditional families* also had succeeded in making the step onto the housing ladder and had bought their own home. *Slow starters* were identified as those with medium to low levels of educational attainment, who were single with no children, employed, and living with their parents (except in the case of Finland, where independent living of young people is supported by the state). In addition, a group of *fragile families* were identified in the UK samples (comprising about 12 % in each age cohort), characterized by low educational attainment, early parenthood status (often with 3 children or more), relative low levels of employment, and living in rented accommodations. These patterns correspond well to those identified by Osgood et al. (2005) using the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions (MSALT), by Sandefur et al. (2005) using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) and the High School and Beyond Study, as well as by Amato et al. (2008) using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). All of these studies highlight the heterogeneity and variations in the timing and sequencing of role combinations in young adulthood.

Cross-study comparisons in general, and international comparisons in particular, are essential for theory advancement in our understanding of the transition to adulthood. Such studies assist in matters of generalizability as well as in considering how country-level culture and expectations play out in terms of developmental opportunities and constraints (Jensen 2011). However, in interpreting the findings, one has to be aware of a principal limitation of latent class analysis, which lies in the temptation to attach too much meaning to a latent class or the label assigned to it (Sandefur et al. 2005). One has to remain cautious in interpreting the group allocations, especially in regard to reifying labels assigned to the classes for easier interpretations. The models thus provide only a summary of the many ways in which role configurations may occur in society at a particular time. Furthermore, role combinations can change over time, and those identified as *work-oriented without children* at one point in time can change to a pattern of *traditional families,* for example, if they become parents.

Taking into account these limitations, the similarities in findings across different cultural contexts are, however, remarkable. Given the different institutional contexts (i.e., welfare regimes) and the fact that country differences in transition experiences are largest around age 25 and relatively small before age 20 and after age 35 (Cook and Furstenberg 2002), the findings suggest some generalizability of distinct patterns in the transition to adulthood. The findings thus call into question the assumption of universality in the timing and sequencing of development or a mere polarization of experiences, pointing toward the need for a more differentiated view of the transition to adulthood.

Why would social roles tend to cluster in cohesive patterns? First, at a particular point in time, the successful pursuit of specific roles may be mutually enabling or constraining. For example, the income earned through longer-term full-time employment facilitates the move to residential independence and home ownership. Being in a stable romantic partnership may instill a desire or practical support to become a parent. On the contrary, becoming a parent may make employment more difficult, especially among women, though a source of income would facilitate the pursuit of both these roles. Furthermore, over time, as Bynner (2005) argued, prior achievements and already-adopted roles may restrict the pursuit of new role adoptions and achievements. For example, leaving school early with only low-level qualifications might make it more difficult for the young person to return to full-time education and earn a degree, due to limited financial, academic, and other resources. In this way, between-person (or between-class) heterogeneity may increase over time. At the same time, heterogeneity in experiences may reflect selection based on prior individual-level characteristics.

Persisting Inequalities

In addition to macro-level variations and economic cycles, heterogeneity in transition experiences has also been linked to individual-level factors (e.g., social origin, gender, and ethnicity). Some have interpreted changes in transitions as a widening of life chances and opportunities, characterized by changing social practices and the breakdown of many class- and gender-based constraints shaping demographic events, such as employment and family formation (Lesthaeghe 1995). The decline of traditional, predictable trajectories of transitions to work and family life were viewed as evidence of individualization, suggesting that individual biographies have become more removed from traditional life scripts and more dependent on individual decision making and choice (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Others have questioned the importance of individual decision making and have interpreted the changes in life course transitions as difficult and sometimes involuntary adaptations to external constraints (Buchmann 1989), or bounded agency (Shanahan 2000). There is persisting evidence of unequal access to educational and career opportunities and an increasing polarization of life chances (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Jones 2002; Kerckhoff 1993). This polarization of life chances is also addressed in the diverging destinies thesis (McLanahan 2004) arguing that women with the most socioeconomic resources are delaying childrearing and increasingly participate in employment, while women with the fewest resources experience high levels of divorce and non-marital childbearing. Social inequalities are manifest in all of the five role transitions that mark the assumption of adult roles.

Completing Education and Entry into Paid Employment

While participation in higher education has generally increased in later born cohorts, there is a persistent gap between those from the most and least privileged groups. Young men and women from relative disadvantaged background are generally more likely to leave school early than their more privileged peers, even those with good abilities and high motivation (Breen and Goldthorpe 2001; Bynner and Joshi 2002; Schoon 2008, 2010; Shavit and Müller 1998). In the UK, for example, there is evidence to suggest that privileged young people with low academic ability have benefited most from the expansion of higher education, not the most able (Galindo-Rueda and Vignoles 2005; Schoon 2008). Furthermore, while young people from low SES families are increasingly staying on in education, they continue to be overrepresented among early labor market entrants (Furlong and Cartmel 1997) and not in education, employment, or training (NEET) populations (Crawford et al. 2011).

Another aspect to be considered is that those from middle social status groups appear to become more similar to the least privileged in their transition experiences. Looking at evidence from three British age cohorts born in 1958, 1970, and 1989/1890,[1] in particular regarding education participation among males and females at age 18 by parental social status[2] (Figs. 9.1 and 9.2), illustrates this trend. The same is true for the findings reported by McLanahan and Jacobsen (Chap. 1) regarding employment and education participation of those with high-level versus middle-level or low-level qualifications across different cultural contexts. It seems that the children of 'middle-class' parents, the large group of families that are neither wealthy nor poor and who form the backbone in most advanced societies, are not participating in the available education opportunities to the same extent as their more privileged peers (see also Parker 2013; Sullivan et al. 2000). The term 'middle-class' used in this chapter does not claim to capture any fixed notion of class, but literally refers to the middle strata in terms of social status. I do not want to lament the plight of those in the 'squeezed middle' but illustrate that recent global trends are affecting young people from different social strata differently and that one should pay attention to distributional trends that may be masked by aggregate statistics.

[1] The findings are based on the 1958 National Child Development Study, the 1970 British Birth Cohort Study, and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) born in 1989/1990. Own calculations.

[2] Social status is operationalized by parental occupational status, as measured by the Registrar General Social Classification (RGSC). The RGSC is defined according to job status and the associated education, prestige (OPCS and Surveys 1980), or lifestyle (Marsh 1986). It is coded on a six-point scale: I—professional; II—managerial and technical; IIINM—skilled non-manual; IIIM—skilled manual; IV—partly skilled; and V—unskilled. For ease of interpretation, these have been grouped as professional/managerial (I and II), skilled (IIINM and IIIM), and partly/unskilled (IV and V). The measure is defined by fathers or mothers occupational status, whichever is higher (if there is no father in the household, the RGSC of the mother was used).

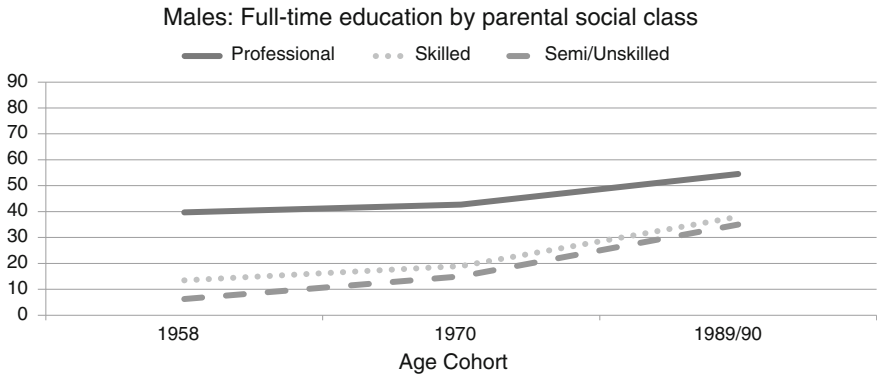

Fig. 9.1 In full-time education at age 18 by parental social class (Males)

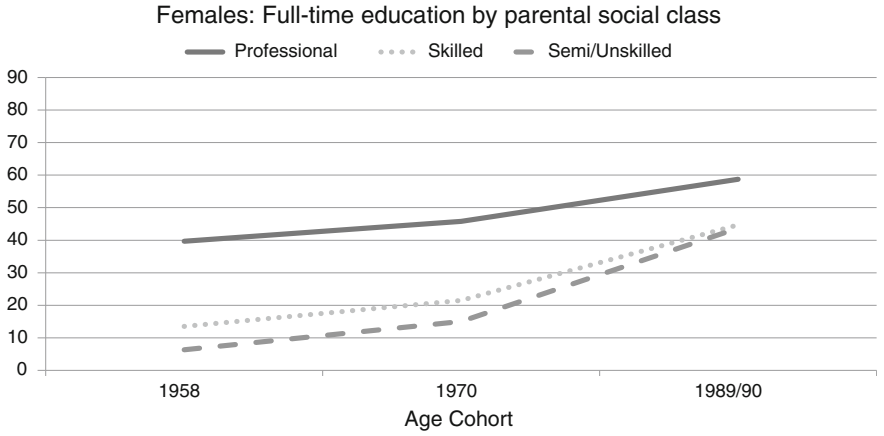

Fig. 9.2 In full-time education at age 18 by parental social class (Females)

There is no doubt that the most recent recession, like those previously, has not improved the situation for young people, as they were hit especially hard (Ashton and Bynner 2011; Scarpetta et al. 2010). According to a report of the International Labour Organization (ILO 2013), the number of unemployed young people in developed countries has grown by almost a quarter since 2008. In 2012, the jobless rate among 16- to 24-year-olds was 18 % and is predicted to fall not below 17 % before 2016. In Greece and Spain, more than half the economically active youth population is unemployed. Global youth unemployment is set to continue growing over the next 5 years, putting a generation at risk of lasting damage to their earnings potential and job prospects throughout their lives.

Using evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), a nationally representative study of an age cohort born in 1989/1990

followed in their transition through secondary school and into adulthood, Crawford et al. (2011) highlight the increased probability of poor labor market outcomes for young people who are NEET in the years immediately following compulsory schooling, particularly those who are persistently NEET between the ages of 16 and 18/19. More generally, Bell and Blanchflower (2009) find evidence that spells of unemployment, while young have social as well as economic costs, carrying scarring effects for a number of outcomes, including happiness, job satisfaction, and health.

Partnership and Family Formation

Making the step into a committed partnership (cohabitation or marriage) and, in particular, parenthood has been generally delayed (Billari and Liefbroer 2010; Klijzing and Corijn 2002; Iacovou 2002; Sobotka and Toulemon 2008). There has been a postponement of first union formation and parenthood and a rising popularity of unmarried cohabitation. Regarding social inequalities, McLanahan and Jacobsen (Chap. 1) have shown that between 1980 and 2010, the average age of mothers in the USA has increased, especially among the most educated. Likewise, in many European countries, cohabitation and out-of-wedlock birth are more prevalent among economically disadvantaged groups (Kiernan 2004; Sobotka and Toulemon 2008) and low education is associated with earlier parenthood (Bynner 2005; Furstenberg 2008; Kneale and Joshi 2008), increasing the risk of future unemployment and poverty.

Despite the rather uniform trend of postponement, cross-national differences in the timing of union formation and first birth have remained large and fairly stable over time (Frejka and Sardon 2006; Iacovou 2002; Sobotka and Toulemon 2008). For example, in Scandinavia, unions are formed earliest and are mostly consensual, but transformation into marriage happens either late or not at all. First unions are formed latest in Southern Europe where the prevalence of marriage is still high. In Eastern Europe, the postponement of marriage set in only after 1990, and the mean age of union formation is thus still comparatively low (Sobotka and Toulemon 2008). Likewise, the timing (and prevalence) of parenthood appears to be shaped by variations in country's social policies (see McLanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1). Studies examining racial and ethnic differences in transition experiences suggest that differences in choices regarding education and work largely disappear when controlling for parental education and income, family structure and individual aptitudes (Ahituv et al. 2000; Osgood et al. 2005). There is evidence though, to suggest differences regarding income and employment rates (Corcoran and Matsudaira 2005), patterns of family formation, and parenthood (Sandefur et al. 2005; Maggs et al. 2012). Thus, there is a need to examine interactions between race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic resources in more detail.

Independent Living

Accessing affordable and appropriate housing represents another important issue for young people. In modern society, residential independence does not just satisfy a primary need such as eating or drinking, it also encompasses more complex cultural, social, and economic needs, and underpins individual well-being (Maslow 1954). Moving into one's own home indicates independence from the family of origin, reflects aspects such as personal autonomy and responsibility, and is often the start to form one's own family and economic independence.

Today, there is a mismatch between young people's income and housing costs, and since the 1980s, the length of time for which young people remain in the parental home has been extended across most developed countries—although there are variations across countries (Aassve et al. 2013; Iacovou 2002). The delay in leaving home has been explained in terms of economic and macrostructural grounds, such as economic uncertainty, the housing market, or the disappearance of a stable job market (De Jong et al. 1991). Generally, young people from less privileged backgrounds find it more difficult to make the move into independent living, and numerous studies have demonstrated that the age at which young people decide to leave the parental home varies as a function of social origin, income, and occupational status (Billari 2001; Kurz and Blossfeld 2004). Further explanations of delayed home leaving refer to extended education participation—especially since it is associated with delayed entry into paid employment (Mayer and Schwarz 1989), as well as the difficulty young unemployed adults experience in accessing housing (Bendit 1999). These explanations illustrate the interdependence of different transitions that the timing and sequencing of one transition influences the assumption of other social roles.

Another concern is homelessness among young people, which although it is difficult to determine, appears to affect a non-neglectable number of young people. In the USA, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in the Department of Justice reported in 2002 that there are an estimated 1,682,900 homeless and runaway youth. This number is equally divided among males and females, and the majority of them are between the ages of 15 and 17 (Hammer et al. 2002). In the UK, at least 75,000 16- to 24-year-olds experienced homelessness in 2006–2007 (Quilgars et al. 2008). Using administrative data collected routinely by the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) involving over 26,000 students, Ann Masten and colleagues (Masten 2012; Herbers et al. 2012) found that between 2005 and 2010, 14 % of third- through eighth-grade students were identified as homeless, and 57 % of students received free school meals. The chances of these young people finding decent housing or making it on the property ladder are minimal, as are their chances to participate in higher education or finding stable employment.

Cross-Cultural Variations in Role Combinations

As already indicated, the role of individual-level factors in shaping the transition to adulthood can vary across countries characterized by different institutional settings and welfare regimes. For example, in Scandinavian countries, gender and social class inequalities regarding access to paid employment are relatively low (Iannelli and Smyth 2008), and the influence of women's education transition on the transition to motherhood is weaker than in other European countries (Billary and Philipov 2004). Furthermore, across countries, there are clear differences in educational opportunities and independence expectations, in particular regarding public funding of post-secondary education or training, and support for the move to independent living among young people. (For example, in Finland, post-secondary students are entitled to independent housing and social security support). Nonetheless, there is also evidence of comparable patterns.

The comparative studies mentioned above examining role combination of 25- to 27-year-olds in the USA, the UK, and Finland also assessed variations by social origin, gender, and ethnicity as well as previous academic attainment and education aspirations. In all three countries and across all age cohorts, the *highly educated group* of young people was the most advantaged regarding socio-demographic family background (i.e., parental education and social status). Members of this group also had high education aspirations and the highest examination scores. *Work-orientated without children* was most prevalent among young people from moderate to higher level family SES background with moderate education aspirations and medium examination scores. Individuals who were identified to be in *traditional families* by age 27 were more likely females, those from moderate family social background (skilled occupation, low to medium parental education), moderate education aspirations, and low examination scores. *Slow starters* were more likely males from moderate family background (skilled occupation, medium-level parental education) with moderate education aspirations and relative low school performance. *Fragile families* by age 27 were more prevalent among females and the most disadvantaged (i.e., low social status and low levels of parental education), who also had the lowest examination scores of all groups. These findings suggest that role combinations and the associated pathways to adulthood are both a consequence and potential reproducer of social inequalities and reflect the strategies of young people who make the transition to adulthood with limited social and economic resources. Pathways involving higher levels of education require socioeconomic resources as well as human capital, while more precarious pathways, such as being in a fragile family, are associated with lower levels of resources and human capital. Following the Mathew principle, it can be assumed that the highly educated will in turn cumulate future advantages, while those on more precarious tracks will cumulate further disadvantages. There is, however, less certainty regarding the consequences of the in-between transition patterns, i.e., for those in employment who delay parenthood, the *slow starters*, or the *traditional families*.

Timing and Sequencing of Transitions Matters

Life course theory emphasizes the importance of timing and sequencing of events in determining their meaning and implications (Elder 1998). It recognizes that transitions can have different meanings, antecedents, and consequences depending on when they occur in the life course and how they fit into larger sequences or trajectories. Furthermore, there can be turning points which involve a substantial change in the direction of one's life, reflecting the temporal nature and potential plasticity of human lives. To gain a better understanding of how young people navigate the transition to adulthood, it is thus necessary to examine the order and timing in which they assume multiple social roles and how individuals construct different types of life courses with the opportunities and constraints of the wider sociohistorical context.

In every society, age is used as a means of placing individuals in a template defining and regulating possible transitions. There are cultural norms and expectations about the timing of transitions: the right time to leave school, to get a job, to find a partner, and to start a family (Buchmann 1989; Buchmann and Kriesi 2011; Marini 1984), although these norms can vary by cultural context. Normative or 'on-time transitions' are 'culturally prepared' by socialization and institutional arrangements and are understood to be psychologically salutary. Those who are 'off-time,' i.e., too early or too late, are thought to be the target of negative social sanctions and to experience psychological strain (Heckhausen 1999; Salmela-Aro 2009).

Early transitions (such as early school leaving or parenthood) have shown to be associated with problems in establishing oneself in the labor market or making the transition to independent living, which in turn are associated with lower levels of life satisfaction, health, and well-being. On the other hand, it has been argued that early transitions can be beneficial for certain individuals (Booth et al. 2008). For example, the effects of early parenthood on well-being depend on marital status as well as other circumstances in life (Keeton et al. 2008; Nomaguchi and Milkie 2003; Woo and Raley 2005). A considerable number of young people are able to turn round an initially problematic transition, such as early school leaving (Schoon and Duckworth 2010) or early parenthood (Furstenberg 2003; Schoon and Polek 2011), avoid financial dependence, and lead a happy and satisfied life.

In turn, following the slow route to adulthood, involving prolonged participation in education does not necessarily predict success. For example, in the USA, the standard pathway of gaining a bachelor's degree, i.e., entry into college immediately after completion of high school, full-time attendance at a four-year post-secondary institution, and continuous enrollment until graduation, has become the exception rather than the rule (Milesi 2010). Although 70 % of high school graduates go to college within 2 years of graduation, in 2006, only about 4 in 10 Americans had obtained either an associate's or bachelor degree by their mid-twenties (Symonds et al. 2011). Furthermore, there has been a considerable increase in the total amount of time it takes students to complete their degrees due to a

delayed entrance into college, part-time enrollment, or interruption of enrollment (Goldrick-Rab 2006), often due to competing role demands combining education and work- and/or family-related commitments. Deviation from the standard pathway, in turn, is detrimental for student's post-secondary degree completion, suggesting that the type, the timing, and sequence at which transitions occur matter (Milesi 2010).

What Is a Successful Transition?

Transition events can demarcate turning points that are associated with change for the better or worse. According to 'developmental match/mismatch models' (Eccles et al. 1997; Schulenberg and Maggs 2002), transitions that provide a progressive increase in developmentally appropriate challenges through which young people can experience competence enable the individual to successfully master the transition. If, however, the demands of the developmental transitions are not matched to the capabilities of the individual or if they amplify previous difficulties, then there can be a negative effect on mental health and well-being. A number of recent studies across different countries found that there is not one normative way to negotiate a successful transition to adulthood. There is heterogeneity in transition experiences: Early transitions do not necessarily have a negative outcome, and protracted pathways to adulthood are not necessarily optimal.

What configuration of social roles and associated transition pathway could best be described as successful? Successful transitions to adulthood can be characterized by the real or perceived achievements individuals have attained. The distinction between real versus perceived achievements reflects a distinction between more objective and subjective indicators of success. Salary, income, and occupational position are widely used indicators of objective (or extrinsic) career success (Ng et al. 2005). Focusing on financial or career achievement, however, reflects only a narrow view of success and does not take into account achievements regarding independent living or home ownership, or establishing a committed relationship and becoming a parent. Moreover, it does not reflect on subjective (or intrinsic) evaluations of one's life. To gain a more rounded understanding of successful transitions, it is therefore necessary to assess both objective indicators such as income or social status, as well as subjective markers of success, such as life satisfaction and well-being.

A common-sense belief about transitions is that multiple simultaneous transitions result in reduced health and well-being (Coleman 1989; Schulenberg and Maggs 2002). Yet, this is not what was found in the four studies mentioned above, using a latent structure analytic strategy. For most, by the mid-20s, educational pursuits and exit from the parental home are complete. Yet, there is still considerable heterogeneity in experiences that reflect the pace of one's progression along adult social role transitions, experiences, and responsibilities. The findings suggest that those who by age 27 successfully negotiated multiple transitions end up looking better than their

age-mates who focused on fewer role transitions (except for the fragile families) in terms of health and well-being (Maggs et al. 2012; Räikkönen et al. 2012; Salmela-Aro et al. 2012; Schoon et al. 2012). Similar findings have been reported by other studies conducted in the USA (e.g., Moen et al. 1992; Schulenberg et al. 2004) and the UK (Sacker and Cable 2010), suggesting that scholars should question some widely held assumptions regarding the links between early role transitions and subsequent well-being (Amato and Kane 2011).

There is more than just one pattern of role configurations corresponding to high life satisfaction and well-being, suggesting that there is more than one optimal pathway to independent adulthood. For example, in the UK context, 26-year-olds who were delaying commitment to adult roles, who were focusing on only two transitions, i.e., education and work, without establishing a committed relationship or their own home, expressed reduced levels of life satisfaction and higher levels of drinking (Schoon et al. 2012; see also Amato and Kane 2011). In the US context, lower life satisfaction among 26-year-olds was associated with the lack of residential independence, but the specific mechanisms underlying such an association require further elaboration (Maggs et al. 2012). There was little evidence to support the assumption that a moratorium period, or delayed transitions, is necessarily associated with increased levels of well-being. Too few, or too many, unsupported transitions (as in the case of the *fragile families*) are not beneficial for well-being. Engaging in developmentally appropriate transitions, even if they might be perceived as risky (as in the case of early parenthood), can open up opportunities for young people to experience competence and accomplishment, as illustrated in the case of *traditional families* (Schoon et al. 2012). The timetable for when to achieve certain transition markers appears to be variable and depends on the resources available to the individual. Family background, gender, individual capabilities, and preferences play an important role in shaping transition behaviors, and depending on their circumstances, young people have to develop different strategies for successfully balancing demands and resources.

Reframing Transition Templates

In recent decades, the transition to adulthood has lengthened (Buchmann and Kriesi 2011; Shanahan 2000; Settersten 2007), marked by more heterogeneity in the timing and content of social role changes. Despite these changes and challenges, there appear to be a number of distinct and conceptually meaningful patterns which are remarkably similar across different cultural contexts. Furthermore, there is more than one optimal pathway associated with the successful negotiation of the transition to adulthood, suggesting different strategies in the pacing and sequencing of transitions.

The heterogeneity of pathways stands in contrast to current debates focusing on a new norm and ideal-type pathway. Acknowledging the complexity of transition experiences, it is important to highlight the increasing polarization of experiences,

as well as the existence of diverse routes to independent adulthood requiring different strategies to navigate multiple role transitions. Current policy thinking is dominated by the assumption of a linear career path moving from full-time education (generally implying the completion of a University degree) to full-time employment. The findings presented here suggest the need for the revision of currently dominant templates and the introduction of new, more flexible, and diversified life course models, taking into account the experiences of different subgroups of the population, their need for career path flexibility including combining different social roles, and opportunities for achieving a tolerable living standard.

What is needed is the creation of viable alternative pathways to an academic career. Even in countries with high participation rates in higher education such as the USA, only about 40 % of young people have obtained either an associate's or bachelor's degree by their mid-twenties (Symonds et al. 2011). Although young people are under increasing pressure to complete higher levels of academic qualifications in order to compete in the current knowledge economies, a large percentage do not attend a university. This group has been identified as the forgotten half (Halperin 1988, 2010), who have fallen off the radar of policy makers. Following the recent global recession, there are now increasing concerns regarding how to prepare young people to lead productive and prosperous lives. There are questions regarding the value of a degree, prolonged education periods without income, and rising student debt, and recognition that the fastest job growth is likely among occupations that require an associate's degree or a post-secondary vocational award (Symonds et al. 2011). Indeed, in the USA, 27 % of people with post-secondary licenses or certificates—credentials short of an associate's degree—are reported to earn more than the average bachelor's degree recipient (Holzer and Lerman 2009).

Leaving education relatively early with a good post-secondary qualification and engaging in continuous full-time employment is not a minority pattern in youth transitions, neither is it necessarily a bad strategy if there are jobs available that pay a decent salary. Income earned through longer-term full-time employment enables financial independence, the move into one's own home, and supporting one's own family at an earlier pace than among those who continue in higher education. What is required is the creation and provision of pathways to prosperity among future workers at every education level (Symonds et al. 2011). Regardless of formal training requirements, however, workers of the future will be expected to learn new skills throughout their labor market career, not just at the beginning. This might also imply shifting to new lines of work when old ones have become obsolete. It is thus important to introduce options for career flexibility, for life-long learning, and the introduction of a more uniform national academic currency enabling movement between different educational tracks and systems. Pathways to successful transitions should enable the combination of education, work, and family commitments along a flexible timetable.

Improving Economic Prospects and Support for Young People

Furthermore, there is a need to improve the economic prospects of young people without an academic degree and to pay a living wage for those in full-time employment. As described by McLanahan and Jacobsen (Chap. 1), wages for low-skilled men have declined since the 1970s—a trend that needs to be reversed. Since the 1970s, economic growth has continued. Yet, the incomes of the poorest fifth have increased by just 16 %, while incomes of the richest fifth have soared by 95 % (Mishel and Shierholz 2013). In addition, the incomes of middle-class families have not kept up with economic growth. For young people, the situation looks worse, as they have seen their wages stagnate, even for some years prior to the recession. In the UK, those aged 16–29 not only experienced stagnation—they saw a decrease in wages since 2003 (Hurrell 2012). Young people in the USA are not faring any better. Findings reported by Mishel (2012) suggest that male high school graduates saw a 25 % fall in hourly wages between 1979 and 2011; even male college graduates secured only a five percent rise over this whole period (women performed significantly better, though starting from lower wage levels). Furthermore, not all graduates are able to work in the occupations for which they have trained. In the UK, the proportion of recent graduates working in jobs for which a higher educational background is not usually required was 47 % in 2013, up sharply from 39 % before the financial crisis struck (Office for National Statistics 2013).

Another issue to be considered is that in the absence of institutionalized support structures for young people, parents are expected to pick up and accept the financial responsibility for their children, paying for their continued education or prolonged transitions (Andres and Wyn 2010; Settersten and Ray 2010), although there is no legislation increasing the age limit for parental responsibility (Jones 2009). There have been legal battles over parental responsibility in different European countries, and parents and adult children will likely continue to seek clarification through litigation (Jones 2005). For now, this leaves a gap in the social protection arrangements for those unable to draw on parental support and a situation where parents have to decide whether to support their children's access to further education or a prolonged dependence because they control the financial resources. This lack of support also comes into play regarding the weak position of young people entering the housing market and difficulties in finding accommodation at a reasonable rent.

Many young people have to make the transition to adulthood with only minimal or no assistance or support, especially those who are not on an academic track. While the route to a college education has been described as a well signposted motorway (which is supported through state subsidies), the route into work for 16- to 20-year-olds is more like 'an unmarked field of landmines' (ACEVO 2012). Young people need information and guidance about how to navigate their way into the world of work, and clear, high-quality progression routes should be available—in particular for those who do not obtain a college degree. Leaving young people without the support they need to forge their pathways to independence and

prosperity will have implications for generations to come. Since young people of today are the parents of tomorrow's children and also have to feed the pensions of the older generation, their welfare and pathways to independence should be a major concern to policy makers and governments.

Conclusion

Young people have to carve their pathways to adulthood based on the resources and opportunities that are available to them. Not all young people can pursue an academic career, and access to educational opportunities remains shaped by social background. The findings presented here question the assumption of universality in the timing and sequencing of the transitions to adulthood as well as the link between early role transitions and subsequent well-being. There is more than one optimal pathway to a happy and satisfying live. Moving toward a more flexible and dynamic understanding of youth transitions and the recognition and support of diverse pathways implies the preparation of viable alternative routes to success, moving beyond the dual option of college degree or nothing.

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Chapter 10
The Transition to Adulthood Matters

Jeremy Staff, Nayan Ramirez and Mike Vuolo

Abstract Three ways that researchers can continue to move forward in the study of the transition to adulthood are offered by Schoon (Chap. 9): (1) address the considerable and increasing heterogeneity in the timing and sequencing of social role attainments; (2) attend to the influence of socioeconomic background, childhood, and adolescent behaviors and orientations that influence social role attainment heterogeneity; and (3) consider indicators of adulthood in addition to the Big 5 markers (i.e., school completion, work acquisition, residential independence, union formation, and parenthood) that signify more or less successful transitions, such as life satisfaction and positive well-being. We describe how researchers can use multilevel latent class models to analyze the heterogeneity of adult role attainment across time. These models can help look at how the timing and sequencing of role attainment has changed, especially as roles such as school completion and parenting are occurring progressively later in life. Multilevel models can include childhood orientations, behaviors, and backgrounds, as well as other markers of successful transitioning, to help further explain the heterogeneity in life course experiences for different groups at different ages.

The Transition to Adulthood Matters

It is clear that the transition to adulthood matters to scholars in diverse disciplines. For instance, the transition to adulthood is a "demographically dense" period of the life course, with relatively high rates of union formation, parenthood, and residential mobility (Rindfuss 1991). Scholars of social stratification have for decades

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emphasized the importance of school achievements and orientations that occur during this transition period as mediators of socioeconomic origins and destinations (Sewell and Hauser 1975). Social scientists have also long shown how problem behaviors peak and then rapidly decline during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood (Quetelet 1984). Moreover, researchers frequently study the timing of a number of important "firsts" that occur during this period, such as first jobs, first time residing away from parent(s), first arrest, first sex, first marriage or cohabitation, and first births. In fact, so much research has been done on this topic that a Google Scholar search for the phrase "transition to adulthood" yielded close to 18,000 results just in the past 10 years.

A clear and compelling blueprint for moving forward in the study of the transition to adulthood is offered by Schoon (Chap. 9). Her recommendations include: (1) paying greater attention to the ordering and sequencing of school, work, and family role attainments as this transition period both lengthens and diversifies, (2) addressing the influence of childhood and adolescent achievements, backgrounds, and orientations that shape the character of subsequent transitions, and (3) broadening the markers of transition beyond the Big 5 (i.e., completing school, acquiring a job, leaving home, getting married, and having a child) and consider whether transitions that appear problematic constitute success in other ways.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how multilevel latent class models can be used with available longitudinal datasets to address many of the recommendations posed by Schoon (Chap. 9).

The *Way* Young People Transition to Adulthood Matters

As mentioned previously, a number of scholars would say that the transition to adulthood matters. It is the *way* that young people transition to adulthood that matters, argues Schoon (Chap. 9). That is, she argues for researchers to pay attention to the ordering of social roles during this period. There are a number of ways to reach adulthood, typically meaning a young person attains some or all of the Big 5 markers of adulthood. According to Schoon, researchers should attend to patterns of co-occurrence of these multiple social roles and to the diversity in how these social roles are attained.

Capturing diversity in role attainments is easier said than done. First, it requires longitudinal data so researchers can assess role changes among the respondents over time. Ideally, respondents would be followed from early adolescence to adulthood in order to capture both early, "on-time," and delayed transitions. It would be helpful if the data had a life history calendar so researchers do not miss role changes that occur during years when respondents are not completing surveys. It would also be ideal to make use of longitudinal datasets that are based on nationally representative samples. Longitudinal datasets based on community samples might not capture the full complexity of role attainments as well as diversity in role attainments by population subgroups.

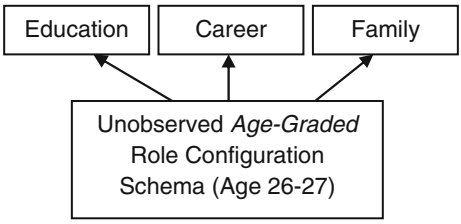

Fig. 10.1 Conceptual illustration of single-level latent class models

Second, as Schoon points out, researchers need to use special methods to model the ordering and sequencing of social roles. Latent class methods, in particular, have been used by a number of scholars to show probabilistic combinations of social roles at a given age. These methods provide estimates of how certain roles fit together in a dataset. Figure 10.1 provides a simple illustration of how education, career, and family roles represent latent classes, or unobserved role configuration schemas at ages 26–27. Several examples of research using this single-level latent class methodology are provided by Schoon (Chap. 9), highlighting similar configurations of roles at ages 25–27 in England, Finland, and the USA (Maggs et al. 2012; Osgood et al. 2005; Salmela-Aro et al. 2012; Schoon et al. 2012). These studies document several probabilistic profiles of role attainments in young adulthood, such as a *fragile family* latent profile (young parents with low educational qualifications) and a *slow starter* profile (respondents who have high educational qualifications and reside with their parents in young adulthood).

Latent class models serve as a useful tool for assessing combinations of social role attainments at a given age. Importantly, heterogeneity in social role attainment is likely to increase during the demographically dense young adult years and then decline as adults settle into various roles. Thus, the profiles in single-level latent class models may easily fluctuate depending on the age roles are measured as well as the roles included in the model. The heterogeneous latent classes highlighted by Schoon (Chap. 9) are limited in that they capture social role attainment by a relatively early age (approximately ages 26–27), assess a relatively small set of social roles (parenthood, marriage, education), and do not consider earlier role configurations or movement over time among roles. Moreover, by capturing only a snapshot of role configurations at a given age, these methods do not illustrate the *way* young people transition to adulthood.

Latent class models can also be used with longitudinal data to examine changes in role configurations over time. In particular, multilevel latent class models can be used to understand how successive combinations of social roles and behaviors come together in distinct configurations over time. These models create a set of latent variables capturing the within-age configuration schema (that is, the combinations of statuses or behaviors at each age) and a set of latent variables capturing the across-age life path schema (that is, the patterns of movement between such configurations over time). Unlike most studies of latent profiles with cross-sectional

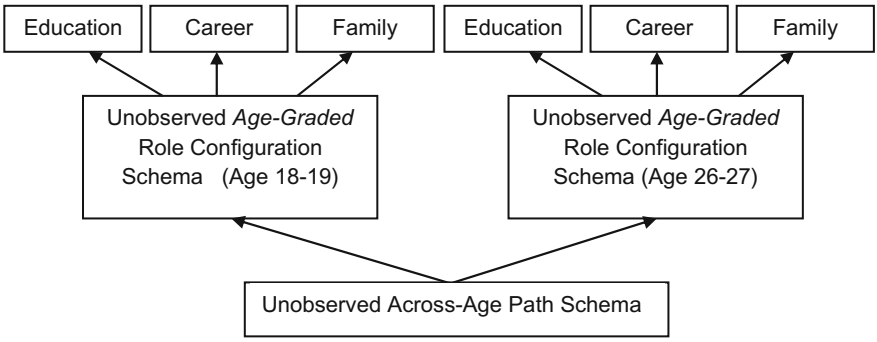

Fig. 10.2 Conceptual illustration of multilevel latent class models

data, using multilevel latent class models with longitudinal data has the advantage of addressing the timing and sequencing of role attainment. Importantly, this sequencing includes the ability to revert back to an earlier status, such as resulting from divorce, job loss, or moving back in with parents. Furthermore, the models have the advantage of including a missing category for each variable at each time, allowing for the inclusion of all original respondents at every survey wave in longitudinal studies.

A conceptual illustration of multilevel latent class models is provided in Fig. 10.2. In this example, measures of education, family, and work roles are observed in the dataset at two points in time: ages 18–19 and 26–27. The boxes in the middle represent unobserved combinations of roles at each age, and the box at the bottom indicates patterns of movement in these age-specific latent configurations over time.

Statistically, the model takes a joint probability and equates it to a series of more easily modeled conditional probabilities (see Macmillan and Eliason 2003). The joint probability that we wish to model is that of the observed roles, the latent schema at each age, and the latent configurations of those schemas over time. That joint probability is equal to the product of three values. The first value is the product of the conditional probability of the observed roles given the latent age-specific schema, similar to a typical single-level latent class model except with the inclusion of an effect for time. These values tell us the probabilities of the various observed roles within the age-graded schema over time. The second value is the product of the conditional probability of the latent age-graded schema given the latent across-age pathways. These values indicate the probability that each age-graded schema falls into a latent pathway over time. The third value is the probability of falling into one of the latent pathways across all times, describing their likelihood in the population.

These non-parametric models can be estimated in several statistical platforms (e.g., Latent Gold, Mplus) via typical maximum-likelihood methods. For each latent pathway, a researcher can assess how the sequencing and ordering of roles change

with age. Using a variety of fit statistics, the reader can assess the number of unique pathways in the dataset, as well as estimates of expected distribution of respondents in each pathway.

We have used this method in two recent papers. In the first paper, Vuolo et al. (2012) used Latent Gold (Vermunt 2003; Vermunt and Magidson 2005) to create agentic pathways based on fluctuations in educational aspirations, career certainty, and job search strategies from adolescence to adulthood. Using longitudinal data from the Youth Development Study (Mortimer 2003), we found that young adults were most likely to be employed and work in jobs with high wages during the Great Recession if they were *strivers* (that is, they demonstrated high aspirations, career certainty, and active job search strategies) during the transition to adulthood.

In the second paper, Vuolo et al. (2014) used multilevel latent class models to examine how youth transition from school into careers, again using longitudinal data from the Youth Development Study. The analyses revealed four unique school-to-work (STW) pathways from ages 18 to 31. These latent pathways, adapted from Vuolo et al. (2014), are shown in Fig. 10.3. The lines in each pathway show the probability of degree (i.e., high school degree or less, some college, associates or vocational/technical degree, or BA/BS degree or higher) and career attainment from ages 18 to 31. To ease interpretation, not all of the categories of career attainment are shown. Respondents in Pathway 1 initially have a very high probability of college attendance that drops suddenly after age 21. This drop corresponds with an increase in the probability of BA/BS degree attainment, as well as an increase in the probability of obtaining a career job. The probability of attaining a career job from ages 18 to 31 is similar for respondents in Pathway 2. What distinguishes Pathway 2 from Pathway 1 is that respondents in the former

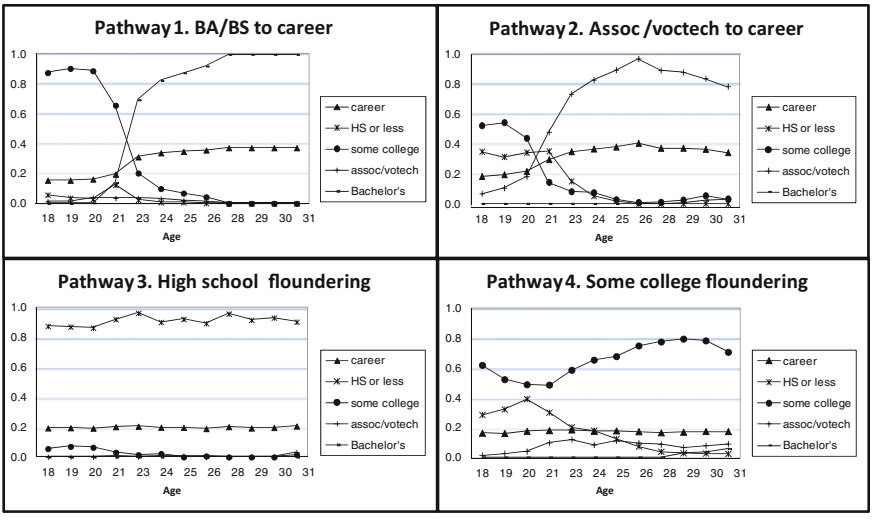

Fig. 10.3 Latent school-to-work pathways from ages 18 to 31. Adapted from Vuolo et al. (2014)

have a high probability of receiving an associates or vocational technical degree instead of a BA/BS degree. The remaining pathways result in a consistently low probability of obtaining a career job. Respondents in Pathway 3 have a high probability of not pursing postsecondary education, whereas respondents in Pathway 4 have a high probability of attending but not finishing a college degree.

Looking at heterogeneity in the life course has advantages, particularly when using multilevel latent class analysis. First, the analysis sharpens comparisons among groups. For instance, in the previous example, we find that there are two ways that young people can attain a career job through postsecondary education (via a Bachelor's or Associate's/Vocational degree), as well as two ways that they can flounder. These latent class profiles can be used to assess whether one particular role sequence is worse than the other. Perhaps respondents in Pathway 4 (i.e., those with some college who flounder) may be worse off financially due to high school loan debt than those with a high school education who flounder (i.e., Pathway 3). Second, by establishing multiple combinations or groups, some with and without certain roles, we can assess whether certain roles are more important than others. To return to the previous example, respondents in Pathways 1 and 2 both had relatively high probabilities of finding a career job, but if life satisfaction or positive well-being is higher in Pathway 1 than Pathway 2, then perhaps educational degree attainment is likely the main culprit driving these disparities instead of career attainment.

The Way Young People *Nowadays* Transition to Adulthood Matters

The way young people transition to adulthood matters, and it is changing, as Schoon (Chap. 9) points out. As mentioned previously, the markers by which we define adulthood are happening later (such as finishing school, getting a job, forming a family). For instance, in 2011, the National Center for Health Statistics reported the average age of first birth at 25.6 years, with non-Hispanic white women having a mean greater than twenty-six (26.4) compared to non-Hispanic black women who had the lowest average age at 23.4 years (Martin et al. 2013). Further, the National Center for Education Statistics reports an increasing percentage of students over the age of 25 in higher education and that this percentage has recently increased at a higher rate than the percentage of students 24 and under. They also suggest that the rate of enrollment for students 25 and over will increase by 20 % by 2020 (Snyder and Dillow 2012). These recent trends in age of motherhood and educational attainment indicate that certain adult roles may not occur on a typical timeline, young people may be prolonging such transitions, or young people are exiting and entering various roles over time. These trends further indicate the need to look at role attainment longitudinally.

Increasingly, the transition to young adulthood is not just about the Big 5 markers. Young people may be raising a child in cohabitation instead of marriage,

or they may be working two part-time jobs instead of one full-time job. In addition to these alternative markers of adulthood, Schoon (Chap. 9) proposes the need to consider subjective markers when assessing more or less successful transitions, such as satisfaction or well-being. Traditionally, unsuccessful pathways are marked by a particular timing, sequence, or combination of roles. For instance, role transitions than occur too early (e.g., leaving secondary school) or too late (e.g., remaining in the parental home) can be considered problematic. Transitions that occur out of sequence can also be a cause for concern (e.g., returning to school after a period of full-time work; having a child out of wedlock), as can particular combinations of roles (e.g., having a child without work, romantic partner, or educational degree). The argument here is that some role combinations can seem problematic when in fact they are associated with positive adjustment.

Another way to move beyond measuring success in adulthood as a certain constellation of role attainments or resources is by assessing measures of adult problem behaviors. Are they committing crime, drinking heavily, or showing poor mental health? Given the especially high rate of incarceration and criminal justice supervision in the USA, success could mean staying out of trouble. For example, Pettit and Western (2004) found that Black men are seven times more likely to have a prison record over some other life events (e.g., military or higher education). Other research using single-level latent class models has focused on the transition away from delinquency as a marker of adult transitioning (Massoglia and Uggen 2010). Thus, desistance and avoiding incarceration could be used as a marker of a successful transition to young adulthood, while also adding to the heterogeneity in experiences by different groups at different ages.

Multilevel latent class models can include alternative measures of adulthood. For instance, time-varying measures of cohabitation and part-time work can be included along with the typical Big 5 markers of adulthood. Measures of incarceration, probation, parole, and avoiding crime could be included in the creation of latent pathways. Multilevel latent class models can also be used to assess whether the pathways to adulthood matter for subjective outcomes, such as life satisfaction and well-being.

The Way Young People Nowadays Transition to Adulthood Matters *for Adult and Child Outcomes Above and Beyond Selection*

If we assume that the way young people nowadays transition to adulthood matters, how much does it matter for adult and child outcomes above and beyond selection? How much does it matter after you account for social background factors as well as childhood experiences and orientations? As Schoon and Silbereisen (2009) note, decades of research have shown that the path from school to work to family is influenced by family socioeconomic (SES) background, race/ethnicity, gender, and school achievements. Heterogeneity in these pathways to adulthood can be explained by socio-demographic background, as well as other factors measured in

childhood. SES origins set the stage for more or less successful educational attainments and career outcomes in the process of occupational attainment.

One way to address these selection issues is to look at how childhood orientations, behaviors, and family backgrounds influence pathways to adulthood. Using a modal assignment rule for each respondent in the sample, the latent variables (or latent life paths) can be used in regression models as outcome or predictor variables. A study of how social background, as well as childhood behaviors and attitudes, shaped the four unique School to Work (STW) pathways from ages 18 to 31 by Vuolo et al. (2014) was discussed previously. High academic orientations, high socioeconomic background, and steady investment in paid work during high school help adolescents to avoid subsequent floundering during the STW transition.

Preexisting background factors, measured before the pathways, have a strong influence on the sort of pathway followed into adulthood. Research has demonstrated that adult outcomes related to well-being, including health status, depression symptoms, and self-esteem, resulted from individuals' well-being in adolescence before pathways occurred (Amato and Kane 2011). Other factors including parental education, socioeconomic status, family disruption, academic performance, and adolescent parenthood have been shown to influence which pathways individuals followed, and this selection differed between gender and racial and ethnic groups (Oesterle et al. 2010; Macmillan and Copher 2005). Thus, longitudinal data looking at individuals' background characteristics, including social, structural, and behavioral factors, are important to analyze in order to determine the actual effects of different pathways.

Of course, identifying the precursors of pathways to adulthood does not control for all selection influences, especially when one is interested in the consequences of pathways. In a regression model, one could include measures of childhood factors and latent class assignment when predicting outcomes. (Again, latent classes are typically assigned modally.) More often, quasi-experimental designs, such as fixed-effects models (with or without instrument variables) or propensity score methods, control more rigorously for selection influences. Fixed-effects models, which address how within-individual changes in predictor variables correspond with within-individual changes in outcomes, typically do not work well with multilevel latent class models (where each respondent is assigned a latent profile over the whole period), although the age-specific schema provide researchers with one potential outlet to combine the two methods. To compensate for this, propensity scores can be used to "balance" respondents who followed different latent profiles, especially if the dataset includes a number of childhood and adolescent control measures.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how multilevel latent class models can be used to address many of Schoon's (Chap. 9) suggestions to push forward our study of the transition to adulthood. Multilevel latent class models can capture variation in the

way young people are transitioning to adulthood. As we have illustrated here, research is beginning to use these models to show how family structure, socioeconomic background, and childhood orientations and behaviors strongly influence the pathways young people follow in young adulthood. Research must now consider whether the way young people nowadays are transitioning to adulthood matters for adult adjustment and attainment, as well as intergenerational associations between the pathways followed by parents and the adjustment and attainment of their children.

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Chapter 11
The Family Foundation: What Do Class and Family Structure Have to Do with the Transition to Adulthood?

W. Bradford Wilcox and Charles E. Stokes

Abstract Young adults face an increasingly complex and often difficult landscape as they transition to adulthood, especially because the market provides fewer opportunities for them to find stable work that provides a straightforward path into the middle class. The transition to adulthood is particularly daunting for less-privileged young adults, who have fewer resources to navigate the new landscape. This chapter investigates the association between adolescent family structure and the transition to adulthood among young adults, especially less-privileged young adults. Considerable evidence demonstrates that young men and women from biological married families are more likely to graduate from college and avoid a nonmarital birth than their peers from non-intact families, but less evidence shows that family structure matters for young adult employment and income. The link between family structure and young adult outcomes seems to be particularly strong for young adults from moderately educated homes (where their mother has a high school degree but not a bachelor's degree).

"I was told that the Privileged and the People formed Two Nations, governed by different laws, influenced by different manners, with no thoughts or sympathies in common; with an innate inability of mutual comprehension." So wrote the noted British politician and social critic Benjamin Disraeli (1845) in his mid-nineteenth century novel, *Sybil*, which chronicled the negative effects that the industrial revolution was having on the social fabric and civic life of his beloved England, and especially on the economic and social welfare of the English poor.

Penn State's 2014 Symposium on Family Issues raised similar concerns about diverging destinies in family life, both here in the United States and throughout much of the West, that now confront us in the wake of the economic and family revolutions of the last half century (McLanahan 2004; Wilcox 2010). Moreover,

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National Symposium on Family Issues 5, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-08308-7_11

this book is designed to foster a spirit of mutual comprehension that will help us to bridge the growing class divide in family life in the West between better-educated and more affluent families versus less-educated and less-privileged families (McLanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1).

In this spirit, Ingrid Schoon's review of the relevant research on the transition to adulthood (Chap. 9) focuses specifically on the diverging pathways that have emerged in recent years among young people making the transition to adulthood. She does an excellent job of summarizing the divergent character of the big five transitions for young adults from different backgrounds throughout the West, of reflecting on the increased complexity in the "timing, sequencing, and patterning of transitions" based on gender and socioeconomic background, of chronicling variations in this story by region, and of otherwise summarizing the relevant literature on the transition to adulthood. As shall soon be evident, she also rightly challenges some conventional wisdom about the transition to adulthood. For all these reasons, Schoon's review makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the ways in which the diverging destinies theme is playing out in the transition to adulthood in Europe and the USA.

Three Important Contributions

Four themes presented by Schoon (Chap. 9) are particularly worth reflecting upon: (1) the downsides of postponing transitions to adulthood; (2) the divergent impact of increased choice and complexity in the transition to adulthood; (3) the hollowing out of the middle in the transition to adulthood; and (4) the need for non-market institutions to help young adults navigate the transition to adulthood. This chapter focuses on how one non-market institution, the family, may help young men and women transition successfully into adulthood, especially those from less-privileged homes.

One of the contributions that Schoon makes to our understanding of the transition to adulthood is her observation that postponing transitions is not always associated with beneficial outcomes for young adults. For instance, much of the recent literature on young adults contends that delaying family formation—be it marriage or parenthood—is good for adults today (McLanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1; Settersten and Ray 2010). Delays are supposed to allow young adults more opportunities to shore up the economic and psychological foundations of their lives before they assume major adult responsibilities. However, this literature overlooks the possibility that assuming these responsibilities can actually be good for young women and men. When it comes to marriage, for example, although twenty-something marriage is associated with a higher divorce risk, it is also associated with better psychological health for young adults and, for men, with greater work effort and higher income (Hymowitz et al. 2013; Ahituv and Lerman 2007). Schoon, then, is right to remind us that accelerated transitions may be better for young adults when it comes to some outcomes. In other words, a strategy of delay does not always redound to the benefit of young adults.

As Schoon (Chap. 9) also notes, there is less standardization in the "timing, sequencing, and patterning of transitions" to adulthood in the West than there used to be. Shifts in education, the economy, and the culture have made the transition to adulthood both more complex, with more paths facing young adults, and more determined by individual choices rather than by clearly patterned scripts. This complexity may present unique difficulties for less-privileged young adults. That is partly because they have less access to the resources, such as a high family income, that make the best paths—e.g., college—realistic goals (Edin and Kefalas 2005). They also have fewer resources to buffer against any wrong turns they take on the path toward adulthood. Finally, less-privileged young adults are more likely to adopt short-term behavioral strategies—e.g., unprotected sex—that undercut their odds of enjoying the best paths into adulthood—e.g., marriage before parenthood (Wax 2011; Wilcox 2010). For all these reasons, the increasingly complex and de-institutionalized character of the transition to adulthood may well be one more force reinforcing the diverging destinies facing young adults from privileged versus less-privileged backgrounds.

The transition experiences of young adults from middle social status groups increasingly resemble those from the least privileged groups (Schoon, Chap. 9). Data from 1958 to 1990 regarding employment and educational participation among British young adults indicate that, over time, the middle group's educational and employment experiences in young adulthood increasingly resemble those of the least privileged rather than those of the most privileged. Her observations apply equally well to young adults in the contemporary USA, as Table 11.1 indicates, and to US families more generally (McLanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1). The trends are significant because they suggest that young adults from middle strata—"who form the backbone in most advanced societies" (Schoon, Chap. 9)—will be less likely to be integrated as adults into the core institutions of Western society such as work, marriage, and civil society (Wilcox 2010). This is a sobering portent both for these young men and women as well as for Western societies that have long depended on substantial middle-class participation in these core institutions to sustain their economic, civic, and political health.

Table 11.1 Descriptive statistics for transitions and outcomes among young adults aged 24–32, by maternal education

	Mother did not graduate HS	Mother graduated HS only	Mother graduated college
College graduate at W4	11 %	26 %	60 %
Non-marital birth by W4	42 %	33 %	17 %
Employed 35+ h at W4	63 %	70 %	74 %
Average income (ft employed only) at W4	$ 32,398.39	$ 39,325.19	$ 49,480.13

Source National survey of adolescent health, Waves 1 (1994–1995) and 4 (2008–2009)

The Significance of Family Structure

The transition to adulthood is more challenging today for young adults than it used to be, largely because young adults face more choices, more complexity, and fewer jobs that will provide them with secure, long-term employment and a ladder into a comfortable middle-class lifestyle (Hacker 2006; Schoon, Chap. 9). This transitional period in the life course seems to be particularly challenging for young adults from less-privileged backgrounds (Silva 2013). Given the increasingly challenging character of the transition to adulthood, Schoon correctly contends that young adults—especially less-privileged young men and women—are likely to have more success in navigating the transition to adulthood when they have support from non-market institutions. One such institution is the family.

We focus here on the impact that family structure has on the transition to adulthood. Research indicates that children are more likely to flourish when they are raised in intact, married homes compared to alternative family structures (e.g., Amato 2005). The literature also suggests that successful transitions to adulthood are rooted, in part, in young adults' experience of family life as children (Amato and Kane 2011). For instance, Amato and Kane (2011, p. 293) found that the "most important factors that predispose young women to experience high or low levels of psychosocial adjustment are present in their families of origin and in their experiences during childhood and adolescence."

Accordingly, we investigate here the possibility that young adults who hail from intact, married families are more likely to transition successfully into adulthood than their peers from non-intact families. Because less-privileged adults may find the transition to adulthood more difficult, we also explore the ways in which links between family structure and the transition to adulthood vary by the education of young adults' mothers, which we treat as a proxy for class. In general, our assumption is that intact, married families are able to provide their children with more consistent attention and monitoring, more affection, more financial support, and more stability (Amato 2005; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994), all of which should improve young adults' odds of making a successful transition to adulthood. Finally, we think that the extra support the intact family provides to children will be more consistently valuable for less-privileged young adults, that is, for young men and women from homes where their mother does not hold a college degree.

Data

We investigate the associations between family structure, young adult outcomes, and class with data from Waves I and IV of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). Wave I of Add Health was collected in 1994 and 1995 and included interviews with 20,745 American adolescents who were in grades 7 through 12. In 2007 and 2008, Wave IV of Add Health was conducted

with respondents from the original sample who were then between the ages of 24 and 32. About 80 % of the original Wave I sample was interviewed for Wave IV. The results presented here are based on weighted data to ensure they are representative of the American population of young adults as a whole. For more information about Add Health, please see www.cpc.unc.edu/addhealth.

We distinguish between four family types in our analyses:

1. Adolescents who lived with both biological married parents at Wave I
2. Adolescents who lived in a single-parent home at Wave I
3. Adolescents who lived in a stepfamily home at Wave I
4. Adolescents who lived in some other family structure—e.g., with their grandparents or foster parents—at Wave I

At Wave I, half (50 %) of adolescents lived with two biological married parents. Twenty two percent lived in a single-parent family, and 13 % lived in a stepfamily. An additional 15 % lived in another type of family structure. These figures suggest that most young adults came from an intact, married home, but they also indicate that many young adults experienced alternative family structures by the time they reached adolescence. Finally, the research indicates that intact, married families are most prevalent among teens with college-educated mothers and least prevalent among teens with mothers who are high school dropouts (Wilcox 2010).

Using the Add Health data, we are able to compare these families on four important outcomes associated with the transition to adulthood: college graduation, a non-marital birth, full-time employment as a young adult (35+ h), and young adults' income (for those employed 35+ h). Research suggests that young adults who graduate from college, avoid a non-marital birth, find full-time employment, or enjoy a decent income in their twenties and early thirties are more likely to enjoy economic and familial success later in life (Haskins and Sawhill 2009; Murphy and Welch 1989; Nock 1998). In other words, these four indicators are suggestive of how well or poorly young adults are making the transition to adulthood.

Results

The following results illustrate the associations between our four family types and these four outcomes across three different types of maternal education: Young adults whose mothers were college-educated, young adults whose mothers were high school-educated (including those who had some college education but no bachelor's degree), and young adults whose mothers were high school dropouts. Where those associations are statistically significant after adjusting for race, ethnicity, young adult age, adolescent household income (Wave I), and sex, we label them in Fig. 11.1 through Fig. 11.4.

Table 11.1 shows that these outcomes typically vary a great deal for young men and women who come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, measured here by the education of their mothers. Young adults from college-educate homes are

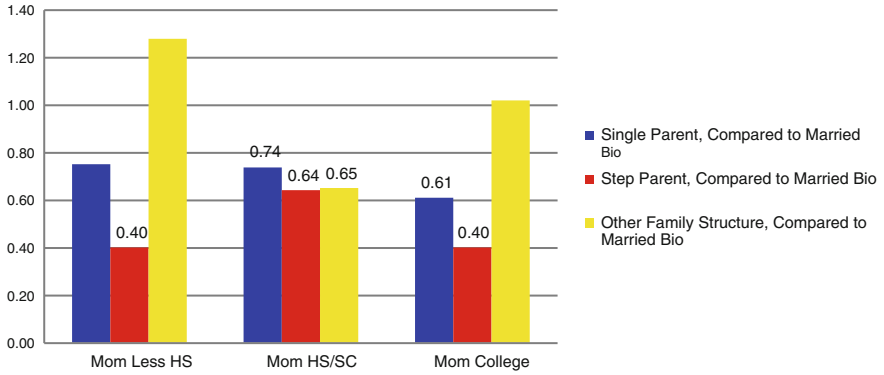

Fig. 11.1 Adolescent family structure, maternal education, and young adult odds of college graduation (*source* Add Health, Waves I and IV, 1994–2008). *Note* odds ratios are only reported for results that are statistically significantly ($p < 0.05$) different from young adults who were raised in a biological, married family, after controlling for teen household income, race, ethnicity, and age

more likely to have graduated from college themselves, less likely to have had a child outside of marriage, more likely to be working full-time, and more likely to be earning more income (if employed full-time), compared to their peers from less-educated homes. More generally, Table 11.1 suggests a fairly linear relationship between the education of young adults' mothers and their odds of enjoying a more successful transition to adulthood.

Figure 11.1 shows that young adults from single- and step-parent families are generally less likely to graduate from college, compared to their peers from married biological families. In fact, in moderately educated homes (where their mother had a high school degree or some college) and in college-educated homes, young adults from such families have between 26 and 60 % lower odds of having graduated from college, compared to their peers from married biological families, even after controlling for race, ethnicity, age, sex, and their adolescent household income. As Fig. 11.1 indicates, the association between family structure and college graduation is most consistent for young men and women from moderately educated homes. These findings are consistent with previous work showing links between family structure and children's educational attainment (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

Looking now at non-marital childbearing, Fig. 11.2 reveals that young adults are generally more likely to have a birth outside of wedlock, especially those from the moderately educated households. This is true for young men and women from stepfamilies across all educational categories. It is also true for young adults from all types of non-intact families who come from the moderately educated category. In fact, among the moderately educated group, young men and women from non-intact families have at least three times greater odds of having children outside of wedlock, compared to their peers from married biological families. These results

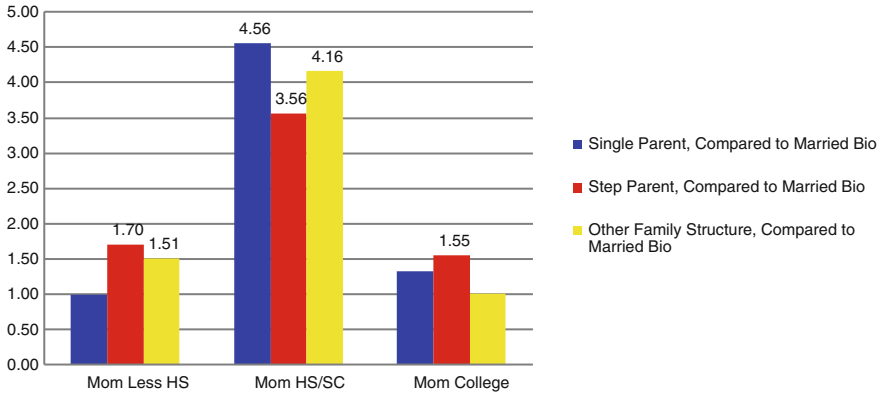

Fig. 11.2 Adolescent family structure, maternal education, and young adult odds of non-marital birth (*source* Add Health). *Note* odds ratios are only reported for results that are statistically significantly ($p < 0.05$) different from young adults who were raised in a biological, married family, after controlling for teen household income, race, ethnicity, and age

are also consistent with a large body of research on non-marital childbearing (e.g., Wu and Wolfe 2001).

Figure 11.3 indicates that young adults from some single- and step-families are less likely to be working full-time (35+ h per week) as young adults (aged 24–32). However, for this outcome, the association between family structure and young adult employment is less consistently significant than it is for the first two outcomes analyzed for this chapter. Ancillary analyses indicate that these associations are rendered statistically insignificant when controls for college education and pre-marital childbearing are added to the model, which suggests that any family structure effects may be mediated by educational and family formation mechanisms.

A similar pattern of results is apparent in Fig. 11.4. Only two non-intact family structures here are statistically significant, after controls for race, ethnicity, age, sex, and adolescent household income are included. Specifically, young adults from stepfamilies with college-educated or high school-educated mothers earn less money than their peers from married biological families. Once again, ancillary analyses indicate that these associations are rendered statistically insignificant when controls for college education and premarital childbearing are added to the model, which suggests that these family structure effects may be mediated by educational and family formation mechanisms.

It is important to note that the employment and income patterns detailed in Figs. 11.3 and 11.4 are based on a period of the life course, the late twenties and early thirties, when many young adults are seeking additional education, still determining their job path, or starting families (Schoon, Chap. 9). The fact that many young adults have not solidified their employment at this stage of the life course may explain why family structure is less consistently associated with these two outcomes than it is with the first two outcomes. Future research will have to

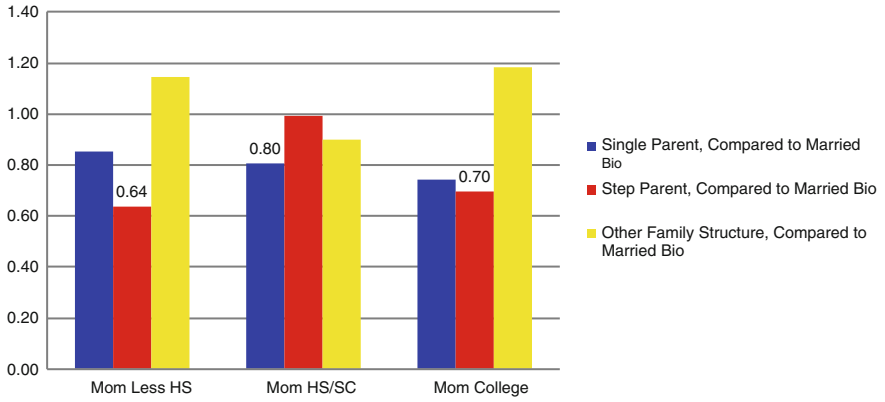

Fig. 11.3 Adolescent family structure, maternal education, and young adult odds of working 35+ h (*source* Add Health). *Note* odds ratios are only reported for results that are statistically significantly ($p < 0.05$) different from young adults who were raised in a biological, married family, after controlling for teen household income, race, ethnicity, and age

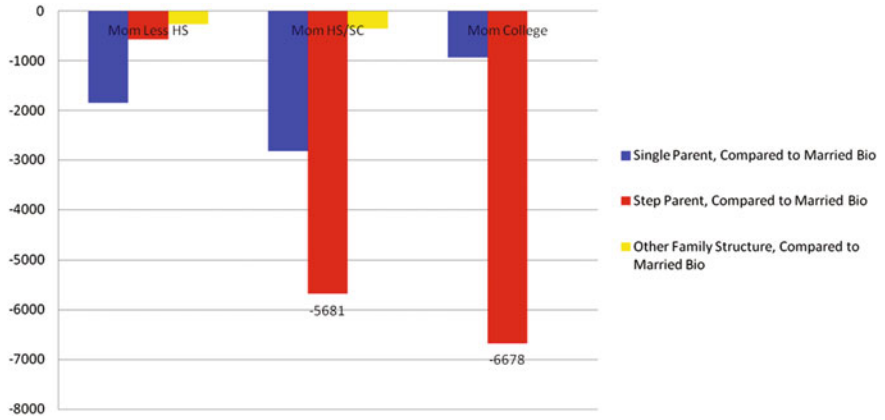

Fig. 11.4 Adolescent family structure, maternal education, and young adult income (working 35+ h) (*source* Add Health). *Note* odds ratios are only reported for results that are statistically significantly ($p < 0.05$) different from young adults who were raised in a biological, married family, after controlling for teen household income, race, ethnicity, and age

determine whether family structure is linked to the employment and income patterns of men and women in midlife. Indeed, one new study suggests that adults from single-mother families have lower family incomes in midlife than do their peers from intact married families and that this link is largely mediated by their childhood income (Lopoo and DeLeire 2014). Specifically, the lower income

experienced by single mothers, which may be the cause or consequence of their single status, appears to have disadvantaged their children later in life—including with respect to their family income in midlife.

Conclusions

Young adults face an increasingly complex and often difficult landscape as they transition to adulthood, especially because the market provides fewer opportunities for them to find stable work that provides a straightforward path into the middle class. The transition toward adulthood is particularly daunting from less-privileged homes, insofar as they tend to receive less parental attention, have access to less family income and assets, fewer educational opportunities as children, and are exposed to higher levels of neighborhood disadvantage (Kalil, Chap. 5; Massey et al. 2013; Silva 2013). Indeed, this chapter shows that young men and women from less-privileged homes experience less success when it comes to completing a college degree, avoiding a non-marital pregnancy, holding a full-time job, and earning a good income. For all these reasons, young adults—especially those from less-educated homes—may be more likely to successfully navigate the path toward adulthood when they have the benefit of the extra attention, stability, and financial support associated with being reared in a married biological family.

We find some evidence in support of the thesis that family structure matters in helping young adults successfully navigate the transition to adulthood, especially when it comes to education and family formation. This chapter finds that young adults from non-intact families are generally less likely to graduate from college and more likely to have children outside of marriage, compared to their peers who grew up in married biological families as adolescents. However, the associations we document here between family structure, full-time employment, and income among young adults are less consistent; that is, we do not find strong, consistent family structure patterns in full-time employment and income among young adults, after controlling for sex, race, ethnicity, age, and adolescent family income. Additional research will have to determine whether these relationships are more consistent for adults in midlife who may be more established in their work by the time they reach their mid- to late thirties or forties.

This chapter also suggests that married biological families may be more valuable to less-privileged young adults, in particular, to young adults from moderately educated homes. In the Add Health data, family structure is most consistently associated with successful transitions to adulthood among young adults from moderately educated homes. For instance, young men and women whose mothers had a high school degree but not a bachelor's degree were most likely to graduate from college and steer clear of a non-marital pregnancy when they grew up in a married biological family. This is noteworthy both because this middle demographic has seen its fortunes decline in recent years (Schoon, Chap. 9) and because it is the largest demographic in the population at large in the USA (Wilcox 2010).

The results here from individual-level data are also consistent with a new community-level study of economic mobility, which suggests that metropolitan regions with a high percentage of two-parent families are more likely to promote economic mobility over the life course for disadvantaged children, compared to regions with a high percentage of single-parent families, where such children are less likely to move up the economic ladder as adults (Chetty et al. 2013). More research is needed to determine whether married biological families do indeed boost the odds that young men and women from disadvantaged homes manage to make it as adults.

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Chapter 12
Different Social Class Dimensions Play Different Roles in the Transition to Adulthood

Matthew A. Diemer

Abstract Rightfully pushing us to go beyond duality in conceptualizing the transition to adulthood as optimal or suboptimal, Schoon (Chap. 9) artfully considers the interweaving of social forces such as gender, race, ethnicity, and social class with the transition to adulthood. Given the complex interpenetrations of the transition to adulthood and social class, this chapter argues that carefully aligning dimensions of social class with distinct domains within the transition to adulthood may help us unravel the complexities and move beyond dualistic notions (e.g., optimal versus suboptimal, fast versus slow). Because the postsecondary transition (PST) is illustrative of how social class shapes the transition to adulthood, the PST is explored in depth here. The chapter concludes with recommendations for carefully aligning distinct measures of social class with distinct domains of the transition to adulthood, in order to advance scholarly understanding and policy instruments to foster successful transitions.

Recent scholarship has clarified some of the complexities of the transition to adulthood, such as the need to move beyond dualistic notions of transitions (e.g., slow versus fast, optimal versus suboptimal), to consider the interrelations among the multiple transitions young people make (e.g., into full-time employment, marriage, fertility, homeownership, postsecondary education), as well as how gender, race, ethnicity, and social class shape these transitions (Schoon, Chap. 9; Settersten and Ray 2010). The social and economic resources provided by social class—defined here as a person or group's position within a social–economic–-cultural hierarchy (Diemer et al. 2013)—play a vital role in preparing young people to make these transitions, in the success of the transitions themselves, and in the capacity to negotiate multiple transitions simultaneously. That is, the notion of the

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'Matthew Effect'—that the advantaged continue to accumulate advantage over time—also applies in the transition to adulthood.

Despite its salience, the complexities of social class have not been fully examined in the transition to adulthood scholarship. *That is, distinct domains of social class* (e.g., *parental income versus parental education*) *may play distinct roles in differentially shaping the transition to adulthood* (e.g., *purchasing a first home versus persisting at a 4-year postsecondary institution*). This chapter aims to illustrate (a) key distinctions among the components of social class, as the distinctiveness is often overlooked by scholars, as well as (b) how these distinct dimensions of social class may be more or less important in a given domain of the transition to adulthood. Before addressing the interrelationships among social class and the transition to adulthood, modal ways of conceptualizing and measuring social class are first offered.

How Is Social Class Measured Among Young People?

The social class of young people, including those making the transition to adulthood, is generally measured by indices of their parent's education, occupational status, income and wealth. The reasons for this are that youth generally have not firmly established themselves in the labor market, completed their education, and/or begun the process of accruing wealth, which make measures of their parent's social class more indicative of youths' access to social/economic resources and social position (Diemer et al. 2013). Although there is some overlap among these indices of social class, they are not interchangeable—and further, they measure distinct aspects of social and economic resources (Roosa et al. 2005). (For more comprehensive treatments of how to conceptualize and measure social class in social science and educational research, see Diemer et al. 2013; Magnuson and Duncan 2006; Roosa et al. 2005). It is critical to emphasize that different social class indices measure different dimensions of access to social/economic resources—so much so that sensitivity analyses often yield different estimates of the relations among variables of interest when different indicators of social class are used in analyses (Diemer et al. 2013; Magnuson and Duncan 2006). For example, in a study of youths' PST, different estimates among key study variables would likely be obtained if parental educational attainment is used to measure youths' social class versus if parental income is used to measure youths' social class—in that the former primarily contributes social capital and college 'know how' while the latter primarily contributes economic resources to finance the PST (Diemer and Li 2012).

Intersections of Social Class and the Transition to Adulthood

Social class—or rather, the economic and social resources provided by social class—plays a vital role in 'smooth' transitions to adulthood. Two traditional indicators of social class—educational attainment and occupational prestige—also represent

two of what Schoon (Chap. 9) labels the 'Big Five' transitions to adulthood, underscoring the connection between social class and the transition to adulthood. Relatedly, emerging adults emphasize the subjective experience of *self-sufficiency* as a key marker of adulthood, rather than objective indicators of having reached adulthood (e.g., first full-time job, residential independence; see Arnett 2000), which illustrates the role of social and economic resources in the transition to adulthood.

Social class plays a particularly important role in the PST, as emphasized by the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education (Nichols 2011): 'If all Americans attained bachelor's degrees by age 24 at the same rate as individuals from the top half of the income distribution (i.e., 58.8 %), the United States would currently have the highest share of bachelor's degree recipients in the world' (p. 2). Indeed, poor and working class youth enroll in postsecondary institutions less frequently, drop out more often, are less likely to return after having dropped out, are less likely to attain degrees, and are more likely to attain 2-year degree (in comparison with 4-year degree) than their more affluent peers (Diemer and Li 2012). Further, differences in high school academic achievement explain only one-third of degree attainment disparities between youth at the lower and upper rungs of the social class ladder (Bowen et al. 2009)—suggesting that social class gaps in postsecondary outcomes cannot be explained away by social class gaps in academic preparation for postsecondary education (as measured by academic achievement in high school).

The specific mechanisms by which social class may affect the PST have also begun to be clarified. For example, parents' income and wealth likely affect youths' views regarding the perceived affordability of college and directly shape parents' capacity to finance their children's college attendance, which likely bolster youths' transition into, persistence at, and completion of their postsecondary education (Diemer and Li 2012). Parents who have completed college (i.e., educational attainment, a common measure of social class) have more access to the college-related social capital (conceptualized here as access to socially valued information) that engenders success in the PST (Roderick et al. 2011). For example, more educated parents (and their extended families) may be able to better advise youth regarding success in college applications, how to persevere despite difficulties, and how to negotiate the bureaucratic complexities of the postsecondary setting (Perna 2006). Similarly, highly educated parents (and/or extended family members) serve as role models of successful PSTs, and these educated role models are more likely to be present in more economically advantaged communities (Ishitani 2006). Parental income and wealth may also provide the sense of belonging, as well as cultural capital, that help more affluent youth feel a sense of congruence and 'fit' in the postsecondary setting that are central in dominant retention theories (Aronson 2008). Finally, it is abundantly clear that social class matters in providing youth with access to schools that provide the academic rigor and press (Sirin 2005), as well as effective college attendance guidance and support (Roderick et al. 2011) facilitative of successful PSTs. In sum, social class serves to help young people

move through checkpoints to the finish line of degree completion in the PST (Bowen et al. 2009).

Although the PST is particularly illustrative of social class, parental occupational prestige (a commonly used indicator of social class) plays a similar role in the transition into full-time employment, in that parents with more prestigious occupations are better able to provide internships and part-time work experiences (Blustein et al. 2002) that are facilitative of their children's employment transition. Similarly, parental income and wealth may be brought to bear in youths' transition into independent residence—such as in providing assistance with down payments on a home or security deposits for an apartment (Elliott et al. 2011). In short, social class affects the transition to adulthood in multiple ways, inclusive of and beyond the examples listed here.

Implications of Social Class for Advancing Knowledge of the Transition to Adulthood

The preceding examples drive home the overarching point of this chapter—*that distinct dimensions of social class may differently shape distinct domains of the transition to adulthood*. We still have much intellectual work to do in moving beyond duality in conceptualizing the transition to adulthood, as Schoon (Chap. 9) illustrates. For example, research regarding 'slow versus fast' transitions may be plagued by inattention to the distinct contributions that distinct social class components make to a given transition. That is, studies of the transition into independent housing may rely on or control for parental educational attainment (a common index of social class). Yet, parental education is a much less direct measure of the economic resources parents contribute to their children's transition into independent housing than parental income or parental wealth. Using parental education is a conceptual imprecision that would likely yield imprecise estimates of how social class matters in this domain of the transition to adulthood and fails to capture the full complexity of how social class shapes the speed and success of different domains in the transition. Controlling for parental education is a weak control for social class in this same example, perhaps inflating estimates of other predictors that likely share variance with more relevant social class measures, such as parental income or wealth. Further, using a less relevant index of social class may falsely give the impression that a particular social class measure does not contribute to the speed or success of a given domain within the 'Big Five.'

Rather, scholars should carefully consider the mechanisms or processes at play in the transition to adulthood domain(s) of interest, think carefully about how social class may shape or hinder transitions within a given domain(s), and carefully select the appropriate social class measure most relevant for that domain. For example, studies of transitions into full-time employment may be best served using measures of parental occupational prestige and/or parental occupational income, as these

dimensions of social class may most readily be brought to bear in fostering (or, constraining) youths' transitions into full-time employment. In this example, parents with more prestigious and/or higher-paying occupations would likely be able to (a) provide guidance on their children's transition into full-time employment, based on their labor market successes, and (b) provide their children with relevant part-time work, internships, and summer work experiences that relate to their child's future occupational goals (Blustein et al. 2002). Similarly, studies focusing on the transition into independent living should consider using measures of income and/or wealth, as fungible economic resources more readily and directly shape the transition into independent living (e.g., assistance with down payment on a home or security deposit for an apartment) than parental educational attainment.

By carefully linking social class measures to the mechanisms at play in a given transition domain, scholars may better advance our knowledge of effective transitions, the specific mechanisms by which successful transitions are achieved, how distinct dimensions of social class matter more (or less) for a given domain, and advance scholarly understanding beyond dualistic notions of the transition to adulthood. Thus, a more sophisticated approach to social class may also yield better indications of the most relevant policy levers in the transition to adulthood. For example, it may be that Child Development Accounts—savings accounts established at birth, often with public matching funds, that grow tax-deferred and can be used at adulthood for postsecondary education or home purchase—are found to matter more in the PST than other indices of social class (Elliott et al. 2011). Child Development Accounts may be a powerful policy instrument by which to help foster successful transitions. Or, it may be that social capital regarding college-going, such as information about how to apply to college, how long college takes, how to finance college, how to succeed in the postsecondary environment, etc. (measured by indices of parental educational attainment) is what matters most. This would suggest that policies aimed at demystifying the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) (Bettinger et al. 2009) or technological innovations that diffuse social capital via Facebook and other forms of social media may be the most powerful policy instrument to foster successful PSTs.

Summary and Conclusion

In sum, social class may hold untapped potential in unraveling the complexities of the transition to adulthood. To realize this potential, scholars must move beyond using aggregated social class measures, relying upon parental education as a catchall approach to measuring social class, and simply controlling for social class. Instead, a more critical and careful approach to thinking about and measuring social class may bear fruit. By carefully conceptualizing, measuring, and aligning social class measures with distinct domains in the transition to adulthood, we may

advance greater understanding of how social class shapes the transition, obtain greater precision in understanding the transition's complexity (e.g., beyond 'slow vs. fast' transitions), and suggest policies to foster effective transitions for a broader swath of young people.

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Part IV
Program and Policy Responses to Growing Family Inequality

Chapter 13
No Way Out: Dealing with the Consequences of Changes in Family Composition

Ron Haskins

Abstract A review of four decades of trend data from the decennial census shows that marriage rates have declined and nonmarital birth rates have increased. As a result, the share of children living in female-headed families has increased greatly. Research shows that children in female-headed families are more likely to live in poverty, have suboptimal development and have behavioral problems than children reared by their married parents. Because the trend data provide little reason to think any of the trends in family composition will change in the near future, the chapter reviews evidence on policies that might reduce the growth of female-headed families and the policies that can support single-parent families and their children. The review shows that interventions to reduce the growth of female-headed families are mostly ineffective. It follows that reforms to better support female-headed families and their children, many of which are proposed, are of vital national interest.

Over the past four decades, America has experienced a series of important changes in its income distribution, work and wage rates, and patterns of family composition. My goal in this chapter is to focus on the changes in family composition, touching on the other changes only to the extent that doing so will illuminate changes in family composition. After a straightforward description of the major changes in family composition, poverty, and inequality, I turn to a somewhat less straightforward examination of the causes and consequences of these changes. The evidence leads me to conclude that the most important cost of family composition changes is the well-documented impact on children's poverty rates, development, and behavior. More specifically, children living in female-headed families suffer from a number of problems in their development and behavior; these insults, in turn, contribute to increased poverty rates and other problems when the children grow up as well as reduced intergenerational mobility. I then turn to an analysis of the appropriate response by government to the costs imposed by the impact of lone parenting on poverty and child development. I conclude that it is unlikely that the

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trends in family composition will be reversed anytime soon, meaning that the elevated poverty rates and depressed intergenerational economic mobility will persist and perhaps grow. If this conclusion is true, government policy should continue its present course of pursuing two goals—to increase the share of children living with their married parents, a worthy but difficult goal to attain, and to contribute to the financial security of female-headed families. We know enough to more effectively pursue both goals than we do now, but finding money to expand social programs and children's programs—especially if we continue to dramatically increase spending on the elderly every year—will be a problem far into the future.

Trends in Family Composition

Trends in Marriage Rates

Changes in family composition, based on the five decennial census surveys between 1970 and 2010 have recently been examined (Cancian and Haskins 2013; the 2010 Census data are from the American Community Survey). Here, I summarize the major findings as background for the analysis to follow. First, as shown in Fig. 13.1a, b, marriage rates for all ages and all racial/ethnic groups have been in continuous decline since 1970. The rate of decline has been inversely proportional to age so that the youngest age groups have shown the biggest declines; the average decline across all age groups 15–44 was 34 %, with a range of 23 % for 40–44-year-olds to 74 % for 20–24-year-olds. These data show that many women are waiting longer to marry. More important, the fact that the rate has dropped by a quarter for 40–44-year-olds implies that fewer women will ever marry.

Within this broad picture of declining marriage rates, several patterns are especially notable. The Hispanic marriage rate (62.2 % in 2010) is similar to the rate for whites (68.1 %), averaging about 7 % points below whites in most years and displaying a similar rate of decline between 1970 and 2010 (Fig. 13.1b). By contrast, the marriage rate for blacks (60.9 %) was substantially below that for Hispanics (79.5 %) and whites (85.1 %) in 1970 at the outset of the four-decade period but nonetheless declined more between 1970 and 2010 (39.6 %) than the decline for either whites (20.0 %) or Hispanics (21.8 %). Black women finished the period with an astounding marriage rate of 36.8 %. Another notable pattern is that marriage rates stopped declining for college-educated women around 1990 and have been more or less flat for two decades (Fig. 13.1c). Marriage rates for high school graduates also stabilized, but only for the 2000s.

Trends in Nonmarital Births

If marriage rates decline, in part because people get married at later ages, nonmarital birth rates are likely to rise whether for no other reason than both males and females

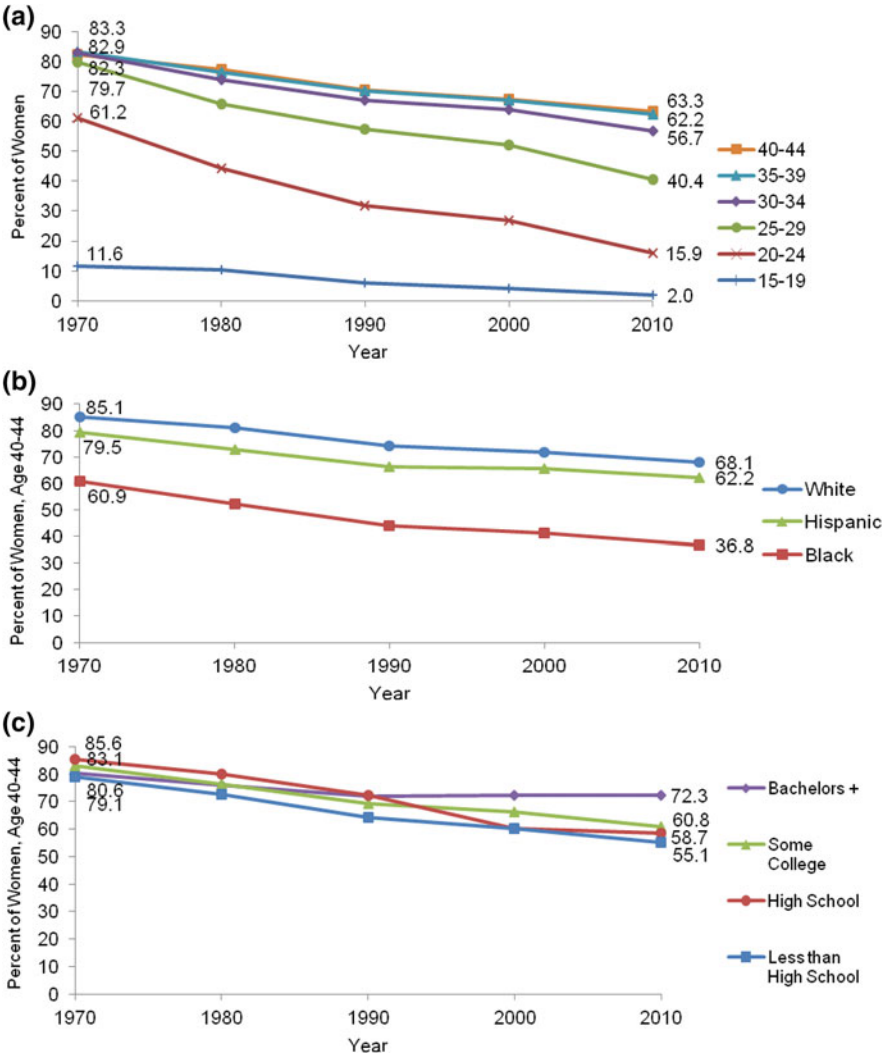

Fig. 13.1 **a** Women's marriage rates by age. **b** Women's marriage rates by race/ethnicity at age 40–44. **c** Women's marriage rates by education at age 40–44. *Source* Author's calculations from the decennial census (US Bureau of the Census 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000) and the American Community Survey (US Bureau of the Census 2010)

are spending more years outside marriage, during which time we know they do not stop having sex. Data from the National Survey of Family Growth show that 82 % of women age 20–24 and 90 % of women age 25–29 reported having sex in the past year (Chandra et al. 2011). As shown in Fig. 13.2a, b, the percentage of births to unmarried mothers has increased over the four-decade period for all racial/ethnic groups and all education groups of women. Regarding race/ethnicity (Fig. 13.2a),

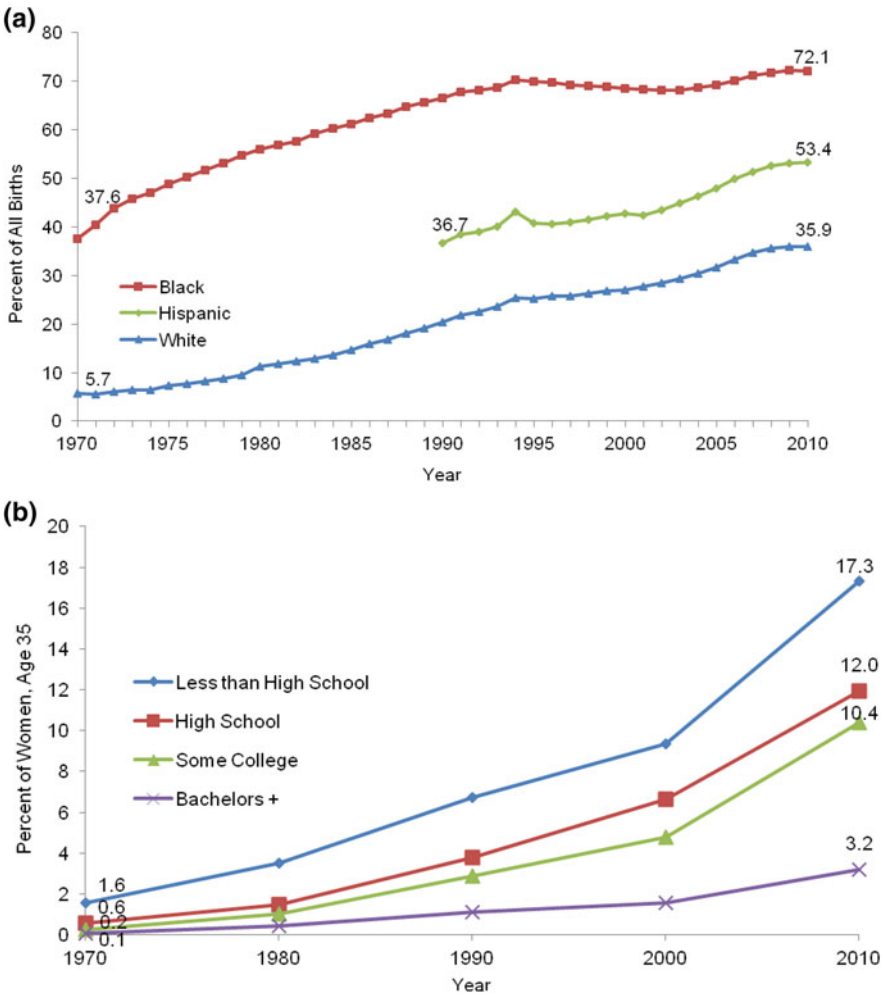

Fig. 13.2 **a** Percentage of births to unmarried women by race/ethnicity. **b** Percentage of women age 35 who are never-married mothers by education level. *Source* Author's calculations from the decennial census (US Bureau of the Census 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000) and the American Community Survey (US Bureau of the Census 2010)

blacks have the highest rate of births to unmarried women at 72.1 %, with Hispanics (at 53.4 %) about 20 % points below blacks, and whites (at 35.9 %) about 20 % points below Hispanics. Fortunately, the rate of nonmarital births to blacks has increased only 1.7 % points since 1994. However, with increases of 10.5 and 10.3 % points, respectively, the rates for whites and Hispanics have been on a steady rise during this period. Turning to nonmarital births and education, the measure portrayed in Fig. 13.2b is the percentage of women who are never-married mothers at age 35. This measure shows a consistent inverse relationship between

level of education and both the frequency of nonmarital births and the rate of increase over the period. By 2010, the percentage of women age 35 who were never-married mothers was 17.3 % for women with less than a high school degree, 12.0 % for women with a high school degree and no more, 10.4 % for women with some college, and 3.2 % for women with a 4-year degree or more.

Trends in Family Composition

The marriage and birthrate data are brought together by showing changes between 1970 and 2010 in the family structure in which women live at age 35 (Fig. 13.3). The most important trend for our purposes is that the married-couple-with-children family type has declined from a little over 78 % to a little over 51 % over the four-decade period, a decline of 35 %. Meanwhile, each of the other three family types increased; married without children by 72 %, single with children by 122 %, and single without children by 165 %. One consequence of these changes is that the share of the nation's children who live with single mothers increased from 11.6 % in 1970 to 25.4 % in 2010, an increase of 119 %. As shown later, this change in the share of children living with single mothers has a major impact on children's poverty rates.

Marriage rates have been declining for all ages, ethnic groups, and education groups except college-educated women for four decades. The decline in marriage

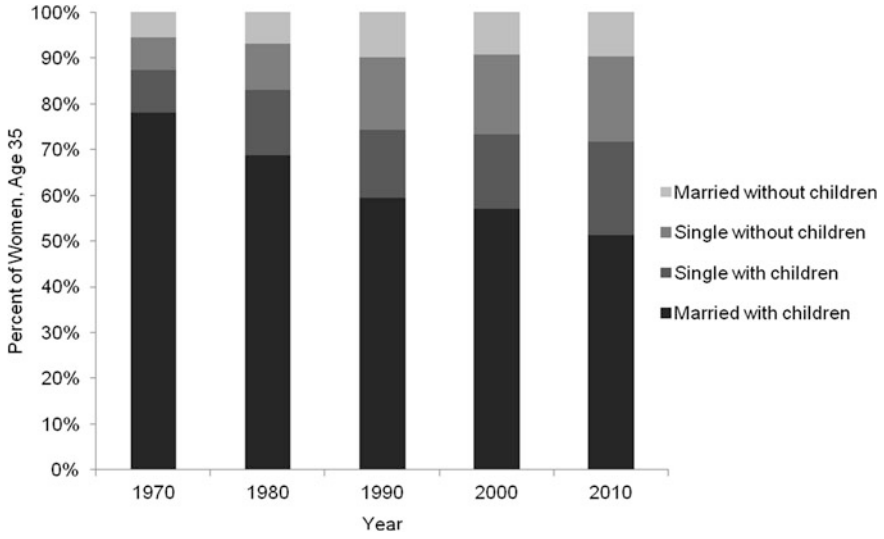

Fig. 13.3 Changes in women's family structure at age 35, 1970–2010. *Source* Author's calculations from the decennial census (US Bureau of the Census 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000) and the American Community Survey (US Bureau of the Census 2010)

has in turn played an important role in the rise of nonmarital births so that now about 40 % of the nation's children—and over 70 % of its black children—are born outside marriage. We turn now to a review of what these changes have meant for poverty and opportunity in America.

Three Consequences of the Increase in Female-Headed Families

Impact on Poverty Rates

Trends since 1980 in the poverty rate of children in female-headed and married-couple families are seen in Fig. 13.4. Poverty rates in female-headed families with children now hover around 40 %. By contrast, married couples with children have poverty rates that have been as low as 7 % in recent years. Married-couple families are also more resistant to large swings in poverty rates. Between 2000 and 2010, a period during which the nation suffered through the recessions of 2001 and 2007–2009, the poverty rate for children in female-headed families increased by nearly 8 % points as compared with just 3 % points for married-couple families, although in percentage terms the increase for married couples was greater, in part because the rate going into the recession was so low. Marriage appears to provide children with a degree of protection against poverty during recessions, perhaps in

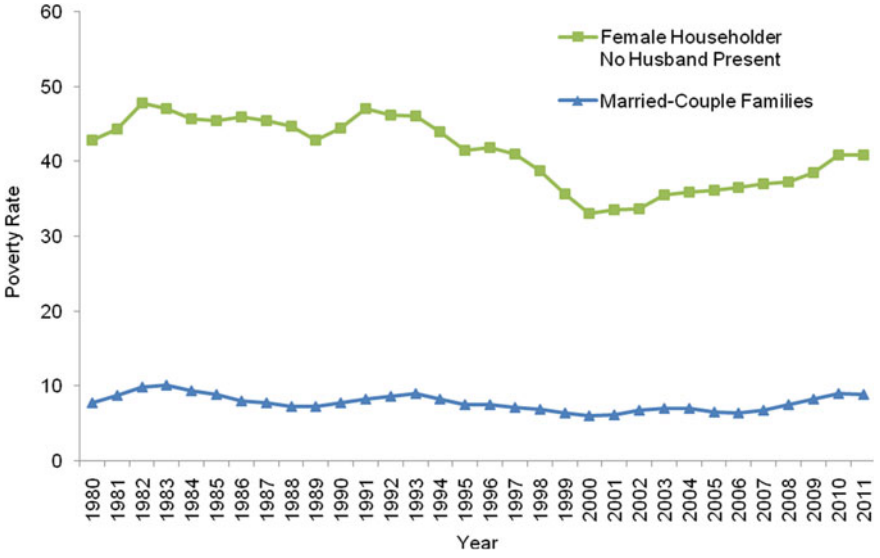

Fig. 13.4 Percentage of families with children in poverty by family structure, 1980–2011. *Source* US Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements

part because at least one parent in two-parent families is usually able to avoid unemployment—and in any case, the poverty rate of kids in married-couple families is always one-fourth or less than that of kids in female-headed families.

It is worth noting that between 1991 and 2000, the poverty rate among female-headed families with children dropped abruptly and reached its lowest level ever. We examine this felicitous drop in poverty in more detail below.

Impact on Income Inequality

One of the most widely covered economic stories in the past decade has been the very substantial increase in economic inequality. In the midst of this discussion, much of it highly partisan, the Congressional Budget Office (2011) conducted a study of changes in income between 1979, the peak of economic growth before the recessions of the early 1980s, and 2007, just before the beginning of the Great Recession. CBO divided the income distribution into five parts, called quintiles, with each quintile containing an equal number of households (Fig. 13.5). In addition, CBO examined changes in income in the top 1 %, probably because there was ample evidence that the growth of income at the top of the distribution had been especially robust. The analysts at CBO used a broad definition of income that included all government benefits, even the fungible value of health care paid by insurance or government programs (primarily Medicaid and Medicare), marking the first time CBO had used such a broad measure of income. An important point illustrated by Fig. 13.5 is that between 1979 and 2007, a period during which many

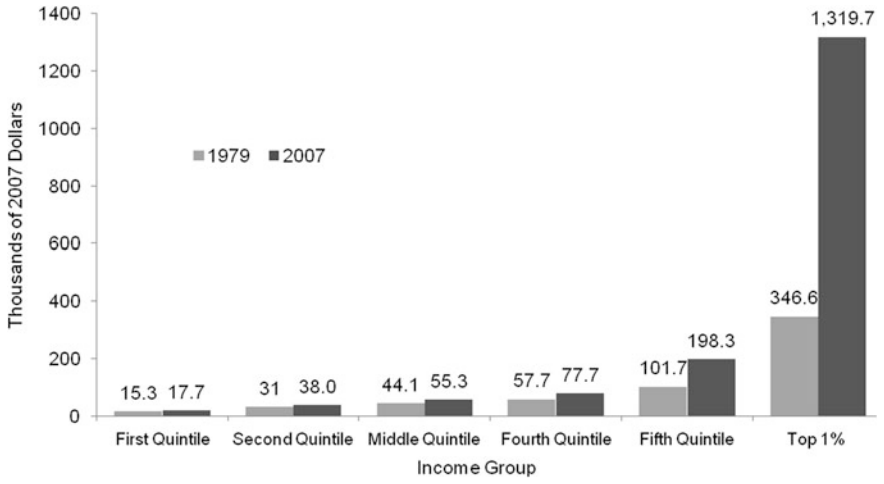

Fig. 13.5 Post-tax post-transfer income in thousands of 2007 dollars, by income quintile, 1979 and 2007. *Source* Congressional Budget Office, "Average After-Tax Household Income," available at http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/average_after-tax_income.pdf

analysts and the president claimed that the middle class was disappearing (Frank 2004; Krugman 2002; Obama 2011), all five quintiles gained income. Another important point shown graphically in Fig. 13.5 is that income inequality increased all along the income distribution. The increase in income over the period was 16 % in the bottom quintile, 23 % in the second quintile, 25 % in the middle quintile, 35 % in the fourth quintile, and 95 % in the top quintile. The increase in the top 1 % of households was an amazing 281 %. If one were to look higher in the income distribution, say at the top 0.1 %, the explosion of income would be even greater. Given that the percentage increases are bigger the further up the distribution we look, by definition income inequality has increased.

Based on the poverty data reviewed above, as well as the annual Census Bureau report on income, poverty, and health insurance coverage, we know that female-headed families with children are disproportionately found in the bottom of the income distribution where the increase in income was the smallest (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2012). It follows that as compared with average household income, female-headed families lost ground over the period 1979–2007. According to Census Bureau income figures, although the mean income of female-headed families increased a little more than 22 % between 1980 and 2011, they nonetheless lost ground to married-couple families whose income increased 38 % over the period from a much larger base in 1980 ($67,900 vs. $33,661). By 2011, the mean income for female-headed families was $41,194 as compared with $93,951 for married-couple families.

Further evidence of the growth of income inequality is provided in Fig. 13.6. Here, we plot changes in inequality between 1970 and 2011 by showing the ratio of income at the 90th percentile versus the 10th percentile, the 50th percentile versus the 10th percentile, and the 90th percentile versus the 50th percentile for all families with children headed by a person between the ages of 25 and 55. In view of the data on changes in income by quintile, it comes as no surprise that by all three measures inequality has increased more or less continuously throughout the four-decade period. Each of the three comparisons began the period with large gaps. People in the 90th percentile earned 4.6 times as much as people in the 10th percentile for example. It is noteworthy that all the ratios increased substantially: the top as compared with the bottom by 137 %, the middle compared with the bottom by 68 %, and the top as compared with the middle by 37 %. As with the CBO income distribution analysis, the separation at the top is the most striking, but the period ended with substantial increases in inequality all along the income distribution.

At the risk of joining the rather tiring partisan debate about inequality, I would draw two conclusions from these numbers. The first is that there is simply no question that the nation is becoming more unequal. I am personally struck by the separation at the top and the fabulous wealth and living styles of the very rich, some of whom prefer their yachts to be equipped with helicopters—or, at least in one case, a submarine (Frank 2008). However, the huge increase in inequality at the top should not obscure the fact that the growth in inequality is taking place all along the income distribution.

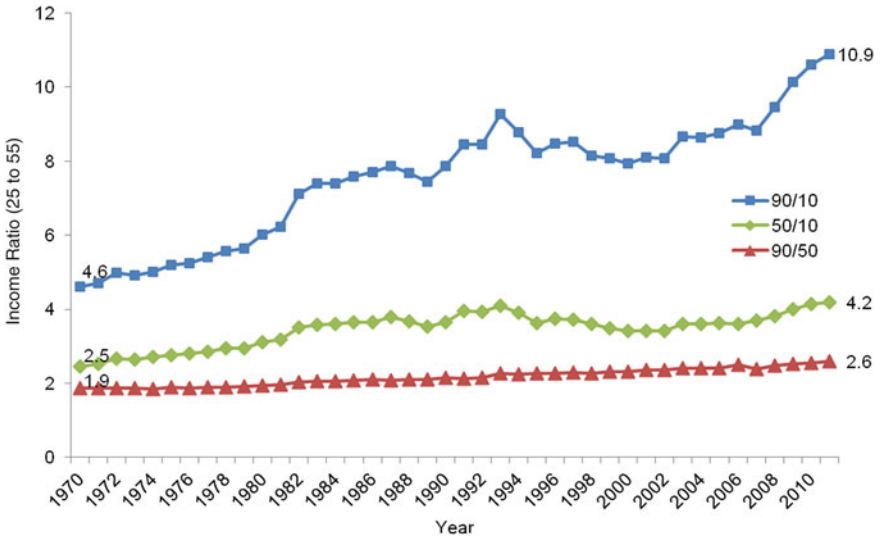

Fig. 13.6 Income ratios for all prime-age-headed families with children. *Source* Author's calculation from the US Census Bureau March Current Population Survey (1971–2012). *Note* Prime age refers to individuals age 25–55

Second, the data on income growth and inequality reviewed above makes it clear that female-headed families with children are falling further behind. As we will see, children from female-headed families are already behind on several measures of development as compared with children from wealthier families. To the extent that parental income enhances their children's development, growing inequality could add further to the gap in child development between children from female-headed and married-couple families. Of course, there are many influences on development other than income (Mayer 1997), a fact that comes into play when deciding whether children in female-headed families are worse off now because of the growth of income inequality. In this regard, two considerations come quickly to mind. As we have seen, the average income of female-headed families is increasing, including the income of mothers in the bottom 40 % of the distribution. In addition, although the economy is taking its toll on employment among low-income single mothers (and many other demographic groups), they are nonetheless more likely to work now than before the mid-1990s. It seems reasonable to assume that employment among single mothers will continue to rise, as indeed it is already doing, as employment recovers from the depredations of the Great Recession. Thus, even if there is downward pressure on children's development from increasing income inequality, increasing income and the rising likelihood of living in a household headed by a working adult might be expected to offset at least some of the supposed effect of rising income inequality.

Impact on Children

The increasing share of the nation's children in female-headed families with their high poverty rates, combined with problems with the parenting practices of the single mothers heading these families (see Kalil, Chap. 5), should cause serious concern about the waste of human potential and the decline in economic opportunity experienced by children in female-headed families. The claim that children's development is suppressed on average by living in a single parent family used to be a matter of controversy among social scientists and members of the media. As far as I can tell, since publication of Amato and Keith's meta-analysis of the effects of divorce on children in 1991 and McLanahan and Sandefur's *Growing Up with a Single Parent* in 1994, the ranks of those who deny that living in a single-parent family is not optimal for children's development have diminished greatly.

Although there may not yet be consensus on the specific impacts on child development and behavior of living in a female-headed family, the list of effects reported by one or more studies is extensive and includes higher school dropout rates, lower academic achievement, more mental health problems, higher rates of delinquency, higher rates of teen pregnancy and birth, more drug and alcohol use, and not working nor being in school in late adolescence and early adulthood (Amato and Keith 1991; Amato 2005; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; McLanahan et al. 2005; Pearlstein 2011).

Young boys appear to have special difficulty in female-headed families, especially minority boys. A compelling review of research on this issue is provided by Autor and Wasserman (2013) who argue two points. First, boys and males as a group have performed poorly in educational and economic terms over the past three decades while females have improved their educational and economic status. The authors grant that technological change, the decline of unions, and globalization have played a role in men's economic decline, but they also argue that what they call "pre-market" factors have played a role. Their review of the research on child development and single parenting cites studies showing that single mothers spend less time with sons and harshly discipline them more often than daughters. Similarly, Autor and Wasserman review evidence that the gap between boys acting out more in school than girls is greater for boys and girls from female-headed families than for boys and girls from married-couple families. Drawing heavily on research by Clampet-Lundquist and colleagues using data from the Moving to Opportunity Study, Autor and Wasserman point out that girls who moved from their old high-risk neighborhoods to new neighborhoods with lower poverty densities, compared with girls in the control group who did not necessarily move to these neighborhoods, showed better academic outcomes, engaged in fewer risky behaviors, and had better health (Clampet-Lundquist et al. 2011). In sharp contrast, boys who moved were more likely to be arrested, to abuse drugs and alcohol, and to have poorer health than boys in the control group. An important cause of the greater problems encountered by boys seemed to be that the move disrupted their relationship and contact with their fathers and father figures. In view of the fact that

boys see their fathers much less often after their parents separate (Carlson and Turner 2010), the negative effects of disrupting the bond between fathers and sons seem likely to have broader application than only to boys who have moved.

Trying to understand the dynamics of single-parent families, especially those created by nonmarital births, is becoming a new subdiscipline in family studies. The last 5 years or so have seen a rapid increase in research on complex families, that is, families that include a step-parent, half-sibling, or step-sibling. An idea that motivates much of this new research is that both the frequent changes in family composition, some of which include an ample share of adult conflict, and the possibility of difficult relationships both within the household and between adults inside and outside the household, may have negative impacts on the child's well-being.

As in any emerging field of research, the initial work is largely descriptive. Based on the nationally representative sample of nonmarital births from the Fragile Families study, Tach and Edin (2011) examined changes in the composition of families formed by a nonmarital birth during the first 5 years of the child's life. The data give an idea of the turmoil to which these children are subjected in their home life. A total of 55 % of the birth mothers or fathers had at least one new romantic relationship before the child turned 5, and 39 % of them had two or more new romantic relationships. Of the mothers, in whose household nearly all the children lived, more than half had new romantic relationships and 28 % had two or more. Given these new romantic relationships, and the data reviewed above about the frequency of sex among unmarried young adults, it comes as little surprise that 60 % of the children had half-siblings in their family on either their mother's or father's side before they reached age 5. More than 40 % of the children had two or more half-siblings and nearly 25 % had half-siblings on both their mother's and father's side. If we define an unstable family as one in which the relationship between the biological parents end or relationships with new partners begin, and a complex family as one or both parents having a child with a parent other than the child's parent, nearly 80 % of the children experienced either or both family instability and family complexity by their fifth birthday.

A great deal of research establishes a link between family instability and externalizing behavior, aggression, and delinquency. A recent study by Fomby and Osborne (2013), for example, also based on Fragile Families data, examined the relationship between family instability (changes in family structure) and multipartner fertility (parents having children with more than one partner) and three measures of the child's behavior at age 9. The child behaviors were mother-reported externalizing behavior (acting out; harming others), teacher-reported externalizing behavior, and the child's self-report of delinquency. Among other findings, Fomby and Osborne report that both family instability and multipartner fertility are correlated with increased problem behaviors in the child.

The analysis presented in this section leaves little or no doubt that the rise of single-parent families is associated with higher poverty rates, greater income inequality, and negative effects on children's development and behavior. The question arises—can government policy do anything to reduce the prevalence of single parenting, prevent the problems associated with single parenting, or contain the problems when they do occur?

Government Policy

One way to think about government policy on responding to the increase of single parenting and the associated problems of poverty, inequality, and child development is to focus on policies that help single-parent families and on policies to reduce the growth of single-parent families. Both approaches are undertaken in this section. First, I examine current policy that aims to help single-parent families. After examining proposals for increasing the effectiveness of policy for single mothers and their children, I turn to policies designed to reduce the growth of single-parent families. More specifically, in the second category, I consider policies that aim to reduce the number of nonmarital pregnancies and policies designed to increase marriage rates.

Supporting Female-Headed Families

Over one-quarter of the nation's children live in female-headed families, and the percentage is increasing. This figure, however, is for children living in a female-headed family at any one time; the percentage of children who ever live in a female-headed family before their 19th birthday is around 50 % (Bumpass et al. 1995). Although the rate of increase in children living with lone mothers has slowed somewhat, it is still increasing and no signs of a turnaround are in sight. It follows that the nation will have millions of children living in female-headed families during at least part of their childhood for the foreseeable future. In 2011, 18.9 million children lived in a female-headed family and millions more spend at least part of their childhood with a single parent (US Census Bureau 2012).

As much as marriage hawks (I consider myself a member of this species) envision a future of more and more children living with their married parents, the trend data show that the decline of married-couple families with children continues. We have now reached the point at which by age 25, more women have had babies outside marriage than are married (Hymowitz et al. 2013). One hopes that marriage hawks will continue to support policies to increase marriage rates, but meanwhile a huge share of the nation's children will continue to live in female-headed families. It seems wise to expand the focus of state and federal policy on these families.

Two broad approaches have been taken by both the federal and state governments to help poor single mothers and their children. One approach, which began with the Aid to Dependent Children program in the Social Security Act of 1935, is to provide cash and noncash support to the poor. Since 1935, and especially since the beginning of the War on Poverty in the mid-1960s, both the number of means-tested programs and federal and state spending on the programs have grown dramatically. Today about $1 trillion is spent every year on these programs (Haskins 2012). The second approach is to encourage poor mothers to work and then use government programs to subsidize their earnings (Haskins 2011; Heinrich and

Scholz 2009). One of the great tensions of American social policy has been whether it is better to give welfare benefits to able-bodied mothers or to encourage, cajole, or try to force them to work (Mead 1986; Haskins 2006). A key event in the work approach was passage of the welfare reform law of 1996. This law contained numerous provisions intended to increase work rates, none more important than cash sanctions (by reducing the family's welfare benefit) on mothers who did not meet state-designed requirements on preparing for and looking for work. A second work-inducing provision of the 1966 law was a 5-year time limit (with some exceptions) on cash welfare benefits, a provision designed to send the message that sooner or later mothers on welfare would have to become self-supporting.

Two points should be kept in mind when evaluating these two strategies. The first is that there is not a sharp division between the two approaches. The major reason is that poor and low-income workers almost always continue to qualify for means-tested benefits after they get a job and have earnings. All means-tested benefits have either a phase-out rate or an income level at which they end abruptly (Congressional Budget Office 2012). Indeed, the work strategy is premised specifically on the continued receipt of means-tested benefits as long as people work and continue to have low income. Second, many of the same programs provide benefits to workers and to nonworkers. Cash welfare, housing, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP; formerly food stamps), school lunch, Medicaid, and many others are provided to parents with no earnings and to parents with earnings.

Does the work strategy work? Using a broad definition of income that includes earnings, social insurance, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), means-tested cash and in-kind benefits, and other sources, the income of female-headed families in the bottom 40 % of the income distribution (below roughly $24,000 per year) increased from $13,404 to $15,549 between 1990 and 2010 in constant dollars, a rise of 16 %. Total income for this group had reached as high as $16,643 in 2000 before the recessions of 2001 and 2007–2009. However, between 2000 and 2010, their income fell by nearly $1,100 or about 7 %. We return to this point later, but a problem with the work strategy is that recessions disrupt earnings for low-income mothers just as they do for middle-class families. It may sound unusual to say that poor and low-income mothers, who are still often referred to as "welfare mothers," are dependent on earnings rather than welfare, but once they leave welfare for work, they may find it difficult to get back on cash welfare if they lose their job. Some will qualify for Unemployment Compensation, but many have family obligations that make them available only for part-time work and others left their job voluntarily, both of which would disqualify them for Unemployment Compensation.

Greater detail of changes in the sources of income for lone mothers is provided in Fig. 13.7. The most conspicuous feature of the figure is the steady rise of earnings between 1993 and 2000 and then a nontrivial decline that occurred in two phases following the recession of 2001 and then again following the onset of the 2007–2009 Great Recession. The shape of this income curve since 2000 is direct evidence of what it means to be dependent on work. Although earnings for moms in the bottom 40 % of female heads increased by almost 100 % between 1990 and 2000, they declined by about 30 % between 2000 and 2010. These earnings figures

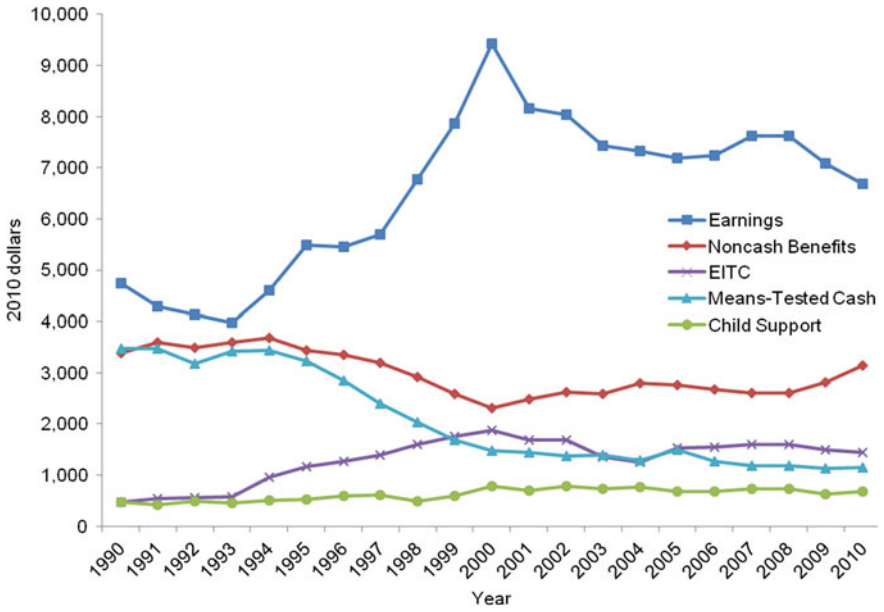

Fig. 13.7 Earnings and benefits for female heads with children in the bottom 40 %, 1990–2010. *Source* Tabulations by Richard Bavier, based on the US Census Bureau March Current Population Survey, 1990–2010

align well with the employment-to-population ratio (EPR) for single mothers which increased from about 61 to 73 % or by 21 % between 1990 and 2000 but then fell by 10 % between 2000 and 2010. Even after the two recessions, the second one the most severe since the Depression of the 1930s, the EPR of single mothers was still 8 % above its level before the 1996 welfare reforms. The never-married subgroup of single mothers, who were more likely to have been on welfare and were the least job-ready as measured by experience and education, were nearly 40 % more likely to be employed in 2010 than 1990 (Haskins 2011).

The other line graphs in Fig. 13.7 are equally revealing. The EITC performs just as expected. As more single mothers got jobs, their EITC payment rose; when the EPR began to decline after 2000, so did EITC payments. EITC payments recovered slightly as the impacts of the 2001 recession began to fade (but not disappear), only to fall again as the Great Recession took hold after 2007. At its peak in 2000, the EITC provided single moms in the bottom 40 % with an average of $1,883, up from $466 in 1990, an increase of more than 300 % in constant dollars. The EITC boosted earnings of single moms in the bottom 40 % in most years by a little less than 20 %.

The means-tested cash component of income is bound to be disappointing to many advocates. Over the entire period of two decades, means-tested cash, primarily from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program before 1997 and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in 1997 and after,

declined from $3,466 to $1,154, a decline of over 65 %. The goal of the 1996 TANF reforms was to encourage mothers to enter the workforce. When they responded as intended by leaving TANF, they lost part or all of their cash benefit if they had earnings (some mothers left welfare but did not get jobs). The hope of reformers was that earnings and the EITC and other work support benefits would make up for the loss of TANF cash and total income would increase. That the total earnings of lone mothers in the bottom 40 % did increase on average over the period suggests that earnings, the EITC, and other work support benefits did in fact make up for the loss of means-tested cash for most, but not all, single mothers. In this regard, it is notable that Fig. 13.7 shows that noncash income (SNAP, housing, school lunch) did not decline as precipitously as means-tested cash. Over the entire period, noncash income fell from $3,380 to $3,139, or by about 7 %. It declined more during the period of rapid employment growth by single mothers before 2000, but when the recessions of 2001 and 2007–2009 reduced employment, noncash benefits increased in most years. Over the decade of difficult economic times beginning in 2001, noncash benefits increased from $2,311 to $3,139 or by about 35 % (Fig. 13.7), demonstrating that these programs serve as both work supports and components of the safety net.

Many analysts and advocates may also be disappointed by the modest role of child support in boosting the income of lone mothers in the bottom 40 %. In percentage terms, over the two-decade period, the average payment of child support to this group of low-income mothers increased by nearly 45 %, but the increase was from $472 to only $678. One of the important characteristics of the child support system is that many fathers resist payments. Even so, state child support programs have become more and more effective at locating these fathers and using very strong measures, including expropriating their property and throwing them in jail, to force them to pay. The tools the child support enforcement system has at its disposal were increased greatly by the 1996 welfare reform law. These new tools were so effectively employed by the states and localities that collections increased by 50 % in the 4 years after welfare reform (Office of Child Support Enforcement 2000). The greatest limitation on child support payments to poor and low-income mothers is probably the poor employment record and low income of the fathers of their children. The EPRs of low-income fathers have been declining for many years; a large share of these fathers have prison records which makes getting a job difficult, and even when they do work, many low-income fathers are able to hide their income. As a result of these and similar considerations, many states have started programs to help fathers find jobs, so they can make more frequent and larger child support payments (Mead 2011; Schroeder and Doughty 2009). Nonetheless, it seems unlikely that child support payments to poor mothers will increase substantially in the near future.

There is good news and bad news for government programs that attempt to help low-income mothers achieve at least a modicum of financial stability on the positive side of the poverty line. After the welfare reform law of 1996, the work rates of low-income single mothers—especially never-married mothers who are the poorest, have the least education, and the least job experience—increased substantially.

When their earnings were augmented by work support benefits such as the EITC, SNAP, Medicaid, and childcare, many of the mothers worked their way out of poverty. By 2000, the poverty rate of children in single-parent families reached its lowest level ever as did the poverty rate of black children (who are disproportionately likely to live in female-headed families). That's the good news—the efforts of the mothers themselves, augmented by government work support benefits, turned out to be an effective strategy for helping single mothers and their children leave poverty. Even after the recessions of 2001 and 2007–2009, mothers in the bottom of the earnings distribution still had higher work rates and lower poverty rates than before the large increase in employment following welfare reform. However, their work rates fell and their poverty rates increased during the recessions, showing clearly that like other families, they are dependent on the economy generating jobs if they are to continue making progress in employment, income, and avoiding poverty.

Thus, the bad news is that the effectiveness of the work strategy is dependent on an economy that generates lots of jobs—and the American economy sometimes falls short, especially during recessions. Another piece of bad news is that some mothers were not able to make the transition to work and either used up their 5 years on TANF, were sanctioned off the rolls, or left the rolls voluntarily, perhaps to work at a job that they subsequently lost. This group of mothers does not have earnings and does not have TANF benefits. In one study, their annual income was $6,178 as compared with $17,681 for working mothers who left TANF. Not surprisingly, these mothers and their children also have high rates of food insecurity (Blank and Kovak 2009; Loprest 2011).

Despite the bad news, it is possible to imagine several changes in work support policy that could help these mothers increase their income and in some cases escape poverty. First, more could be done to ensure that these mothers get child support, especially by convincing states, perhaps with financial incentives, to give all child support collections to the mothers. As matters now stand, states and the federal government retain some of the child support payments in cases in which mothers and children had been on welfare. A second reform in child support policy would be to help states mount work programs for noncustodial fathers who owe child support, so they would be able to have earnings with which to make their payments (Mead 2011).

Another worthwhile improvement in the work support system would be to expand childcare subsidies. The federal government expanded childcare payments as part of welfare reform and then expanded the amount of available money on several occasions after that. Unfortunately, the money is still insufficient to help all eligible low-income mothers. Based on a longitudinal sample of families on a waiting list for childcare as well as a sample of families from the Fragile Families study, Forry (2009) found that parents who had a childcare subsidy saved between $160 and $200 per month on their childcare bill. Families also reported that there was a great deal of administrative hassle involved in getting the subsidy and in maintaining the subsidy. Helping more low-income parents with their childcare bill would increase the incentive to work, provide an income supplement, and reduce a

serious inequity in current law that allows only some low-income working families to receive a childcare subsidy while other equally situated families receive no subsidy.

Yet another promising policy would be to provide states with additional federal dollars to subsidize jobs for low-income parents, both mothers and fathers. As part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), passed in February 2009 during the Great Recession, Congress included a provision that gave states $5 billion additional dollars in the TANF program. The new TANF dollars could be used for three purposes: to provide regular TANF cash benefits, to provide one-time payments to families that needed immediate help, or to subsidize jobs. Much to everyone's surprise, states took full advantage of the provision allowing the creation of 260,000 jobs, most of them in the private sector (Pavetti et al. 2011). In addition, a number of states and local governments, especially Wisconsin and New York City, have created jobs for welfare recipients for many years. During difficult economic times, it makes sense for a program that requires work to supply jobs to those who cannot find them. Because of their experience using ARRA funds to create jobs during the Great Recession, many states should now have the ability to set up these jobs and establish the administrative systems necessary to run them. The federal government should provide states with a sum of money, perhaps $1 billion annually and more during recessions, to create jobs in the private or government sectors for people who cannot find a job. Developing state expertise in subsidizing jobs would be especially appropriate if Congress strengthened the work requirements in the nation's food stamp and housing programs in order to extend the message that the able-bodied must work or prepare for work as a condition of receiving means-tested benefits.

Marriage and the Tax Code

It is often observed that the federal tax code contains provisions that impose penalties on married couples. In this section, I focus on the EITC, the tax code provision that most directly affects poor and low-income families with earnings. Two features of the federal tax code that create marriage incentives and penalties are tax rates that vary with income and the requirement that married couples file jointly to qualify for the EITC and other tax credits (Carasso and Steuerle 2005). If the tax code had a flat rate for all incomes, the total tax bill for the two individuals whether married or single would be the same.

Consider the EITC as an example of how marriage bonuses or penalties might occur. The EITC is designed so that qualified workers receive more money as they earn more up to a certain amount. Working families with children qualify for the EITC if their annual income is below roughly $36,900–$50,300. When they reach a given income (depending on number of children and marital status), individuals or married couples can receive a maximum credit of around $3,200 for one child, $5,200 for two children, and $5,900 for three or more children. The credit then

phases out at an income level and rate that again depend on number of children and marital status.

Now assume that a woman earning $6,000 with two children and a man earning $4,000 get married. When they file jointly, their combined income is $10,000 which moves them up the EITC scale compared with just the mother's income. Thus, rather than an EITC of around $2,400 paid to the mother, the couple filing jointly would get an EITC payment of around $4,000. In this case, there is a marriage bonus of $1,600. Now assume that a mother with two children earning $12,000 marries a man earning $16,000. Their combined income is $28,000 which puts them in the EITC phase-out range. Rather than the mother's EITC of $4,800, their new EITC would be worth only around $4,000, for a marriage penalty of $800.

It is clear from this example that the only way to know the size of the marriage penalties and bonuses created by the EITC, and the net impact across all couples who marry, is to have descriptive data on a large sample of low-income adults who could marry and then analyze the size of the marriage penalties and bonuses they encounter. An important study of this type was published by Acs and Maag (2005) of the Urban Institute. They used data from the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), a representative sample of the US population that contained data on household composition, income, welfare receipt, and a number of other variables. Acs and Maag identified the 744 cohabiting couples in the sample who had combined income under 200 % of the poverty level to conduct their analysis. They calculated the impact that marriage would have on their EITC benefit as it existed in 2008 (there have been EITC expansions since 2008). They also conducted an analysis on the impact of marriage on their TANF welfare benefit if the mother received TANF.

The first finding was that 75 % of the cohabiting low-income couples would receive a marriage bonus, while only 10 % would receive a penalty (the remaining 15 % would experience little to no change in their EITC). The average increase in the EITC for the 75 % who received it would be about $1,400. Other tax code exemptions, deductions, and credits these couples could qualify for if married increased the marriage bonus to a total of $2,400. For the 10 % who were hit with a marriage penalty, the average penalty was around $1,750.

Because of the rapid phase-out rate of the TANF benefit as earnings increase, almost all the cohabiting couples who received TANF would have their benefit reduced. Surprisingly, Acs and Maag (2005) found that only 14 % of the couples were receiving TANF benefits. For this small minority of couples, the penalty averaged between $1,800 and $2,100. Of the 14 % of couples who received TANF, fewer than 4 % got both a tax penalty and a TANF reduction; for these families, the combined loss was substantial, about $3,300. But 70 % of the 14 % who received a tax reduction received an EITC bonus. The combined tax bonus and TANF reduction for these couples left them with a net marriage bonus that averaged $1,300.

Two conclusions from the Acs and Maag study seem clear. First, a small minority of cohabiting low-income couples who marry would have received an EITC marriage penalty. This number is almost certainly smaller now that the refundability of tax credits has been expanded, a reform that provides many or even most low-income couples with more money from the child tax credit that would add

to their EITC bonus and reduces the EITC penalty for those couples whose combined income would be in the phase-out range or above the phase-out range. Second, the marriage penalty for mothers or fathers who receive means-tested benefits seems likely in many cases to be substantial. The Acs and Maag study considered only TANF cash benefits, but other welfare benefits such as housing, school lunch, and childcare also have phase-out rules. In many cases, there would be marriage penalties from these programs.

It seems to follow that there should be greater concern about the marriage penalty low-income couples would encounter from means-tested programs than from the EITC and other tax credits, especially because the Tax Relief Act of 2010 extended the bottom 15 % tax bracket for married couples filing jointly, increased the standard deduction, and extended the EITC phase-out range for married couples. The cost of correcting any remaining marriage penalty for low-income couples in the tax code and for means-tested programs is likely to be substantial. For this reason, it seems unwise to call for changes in the law until it is clear that these penalties actually reduce marriage rates. One way to find out would be to conduct experiments in which several states are given the authority and funding to allow some low-income couples who marry to keep their TANF, housing, school lunch, and perhaps other benefits for a year or two, while other couples would continue to be subject to current program rules. Until there is better evidence on whether marriage penalties actually have an impact on marriage rates, Congress should not spend additional money correcting the penalties.

Reducing Nonmarital Births

The review of nonmarital births presented here shows that they increase the nation's poverty rate, increase income inequality, and have deleterious effects on children's development. Parents, children, and the nation as a whole would benefit from a reduction in the nation's nonmarital birth rate. Here, I begin with teen pregnancy and then turn to the broader issue of nonmarital births to older men and women.

Reducing teen pregnancy is an important goal of public policy because pregnancy imposes costs on young mothers, their babies, and society (for an alternative view, see Furstenberg 2007). The scholarly research literature on teen pregnancy has been growing since at least the 1970s, and the literature now includes empirical studies showing that many programs designed to reduce teen pregnancy can actually do so (Kirby 2007). As knowledge about teen pregnancy grew over the past several decades, many schools and other community-based organizations developed and implemented programs aiming to reduce teen sexual activity, increase use of birth control, and reduce teen pregnancy. In addition, the local organizations that sponsored or conducted these programs, along with many national organizations such as The National Campaign to Reduce Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, Promise Keepers, and Planned Parenthood, communicated a

host of messages to the nation—often using social media in clever ways—about the risks of teen pregnancy to adolescents, their babies, and society as a whole.

Although it is difficult to prove that all this activity caused teen births to decline, national data show that teen births have in fact declined every year except two since 1991. According to the most recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the teen birth rate fell 6 % from 2011 to 2012 and reached a historic low of 29.4 per 1,000 women aged 15–19. The number of teen births has fallen from the all-time high of 644,708 in 1970 to 305,420 in 2012, a decline of over 50 % (Hamilton et al. 2013). There are few social problems that afflict the nation that have declined as much and as consistently as teen pregnancy.

Even so, there are still far too many teen births in the USA. Compared to the US rate of over 29 per 1,000 women, the rate of teen births in France, Germany, Italy, and Sweden, all nations with cultures that are at least as sex-focused as ours, are below 8 per 1,000 (World Bank 2013). Moreover, several studies show that teen pregnancy imposes large costs on the USA; a study from The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2013), for example, estimates the cost at over $9 billion per year.

It is not surprising, then, that both Republican and Democratic administrations have focused attention and resources on reducing teen births. Unfortunately, the two parties are at war with one another about the best way to reduce them. Most Democrats favor a comprehensive approach in which teens are taught to practice abstinence but also instructed in use of and ensured availability of birth control and disease prevention methods in case they decide not to remain abstinent. By contrast, many Republicans favor an abstinence-only approach. The Republican approach holds that sex outside marriage is immoral and that programs that teach both abstinence and the use of birth control are inconsistent and hypocritical. These contrasting policy perspectives between Republicans and Democrats percolated below the surface in Washington for many years, but in 1996 the fight broke into the open when Republicans managed to enact their abstinence-only approach as part of that year's welfare reform legislation. The Republican provision, placed in Title V of the Social Security Act, established an annual $50 million grant fund to be divided among the states to design and implement abstinence-only programs. Republicans included a strikingly clear definition of abstinence-only in the statute, which has come to be called the "A through H" definition because of the designation of the sections of the Social Security Act in which the definition appears. The statute states that abstinence education means a program that "has as its exclusive purpose teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity; teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school age children; teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in context of marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity; and teaches that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects" among other provisions (Social Security Administration 2011, p. 1).

Democrats strongly objected to the abstinence-only program and argued that adolescents needed instruction in and access to birth control in order to protect

themselves from both pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Given that survey data show that around 65 % of high school seniors have had sex one or more times (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2008), Democrats held that even if abstinence-only education convinced some adolescents to remain abstinent, it was inevitable that a significant fraction of teens would still engage in sexual activity. Republicans countered that parents wanted their children to remain abstinent and that abstinence was the only certain way to avoid pregnancy and STIs. Almost 90 % of teens themselves indicated in a recent survey that they should "be given a strong message that they should not have sex until they are at least out of high school" (Albert 2012, p. 17). Besides, Republicans argued, there were many federal and state programs that pay for comprehensive sex education and for birth control. The Medicaid program, for example, provided about $140 million for family planning services to adolescents in 2008, although it provided no funds for sex education. In addition, Title XX of the Public Health Services Act provided about $13 million for pregnancy prevention demonstration grants, but no funds were available from this source for education or prevention.

Many Democrats at both the federal and state level have been implacable in their opposition to abstinence-only programs. By 2007, seven states had refused to take or stopped taking the abstinence-only money in part because they believed that abstinence-only programs did not provide teens with adequate protection against pregnancy or STIs (Huffstutter 2007). Their opposition was consistent with a random-assignment evaluation of abstinence-only programs, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, showing that none of four carefully selected abstinence-only programs, thought to be among the most effective abstinence-only programs in the nation, produced impacts on sexual activity or pregnancy (Trenholm et al. 2007). This study has been a mainstay in the Democrats' argument that abstinence programs do not work.

Fortunately, there appears to be little disagreement between the parties that teen pregnancy is a national problem and that its reduction is an appropriate target for government programs. Moreover, the nation has an array of programs that provide funds for both abstinence-only education and more comprehensive programs, most of which teach abstinence but also instruct in use of birth control and often make birth control available to teens. These programs were augmented at the beginning of the Obama administration with two new programs, both of which emphasized that evidence of program effectiveness in reducing some aspect of teen sexual activity or pregnancy was required in order to qualify for funding. These two programs, the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) program developed by the Obama administration and the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) developed by the Senate Finance Committee, are now funding at least 150 state and local programs that spend about $175 million a year on projects that attempt to prevent teen pregnancy. In addition, Democrats, in a surprise compromise fashioned by the Senate Finance Committee, agreed to renew funding for the abstinence-only program.

The Department of Health and Human Services has planned careful evaluations of both these programs as well as other teen pregnancy prevention programs, including many evaluations that feature random-assignment designs. Based on

descriptions of the projects being funded under both TPP and PREP, most programs emphasize both abstinence and birth control. In addition, many of the programs include a major focus on activities such as tutoring and community service that engage youth in constructive activities in the afternoon, evenings, and weekends. Despite the hostility between the political parties over abstinence and birth control, Congress and the administration compromised, and the favored programs of both sides received funding. According to HHS, at least 31 model teen pregnancy programs that have rigorous evidence of producing impacts on some aspect of teen sexual activity or pregnancy are being replicated and carefully evaluated by the TPP and PREP programs (Office of Adolescent Health 2012).

It seems wise to wait until some of the ongoing evaluations begin yielding results before calling for new spending or additional reforms. In the meantime, advocates and analysts committed to reducing teen pregnancy will have their hands full protecting the programs that now exist, especially TPP, the program that is funding most of the ongoing evaluations. Republicans have twice ended the TPP program in legislation enacted by the House, but on both occasions the Senate rescued the program. It seems all but certain that there will be future attempts to kill the program.

Moving from a specific focus on teen pregnancy prevention to the wider problem of nonmarital births by men and women of any age, there are many fewer model programs and much less research involving women over age 19 than there is on teens. Even so, there is some reasonable evidence on ways to reduce nonmarital births among young adults. One of the better studies was of women who were newly eligible for Medicaid coverage of family planning services (Kearney and Levine 2009). Between 1993 and 2006, twenty-five states implemented a waiver option under the Medicaid program to provide family planning coverage to women who were not eligible for the regular Medicaid program. Data reported to the Medicaid Statistical Information System and other sources were used by Kearney and Levine to estimate that a substantial number of women in the waiver states were made eligible by the waivers and that the number of women receiving family planning services through Medicaid grew substantially. They then used econometric models to estimate that births in these states fell by around 2 % for nonteens and 4.5 % for teens. If the analysis is confined just to the newly eligible group of women, the estimate is that births fell by nearly 9 %.

A series of simulations of three methods of reducing unplanned births was conducted by Thomas (2012a). Employing a model he and his colleagues at the Brookings Institution developed, Thomas estimated the effects of increased condom use resulting from a saturation media campaign, increased use of oral contraception services produced by expanded eligibility for family planning services under Medicaid (similar to the intervention studies by Kearney and Levine), and reduction of sex among teens that could result from an effective sex education program. All three simulations produced reduced rates of unprotected sex, pregnancy, abortions, or births among teens or older women. In a subsequent paper, Thomas (2012b) shows that all three policies produce savings to taxpayers and that if all three were implemented, the savings could exceed $2 billion per year.

This brief review suggests that the nation is making slow but steady progress against teen pregnancy and has developed some policy and program strategies that could reduce the rate of nonmarital births to young adults. To date, these strategies have not reversed the increase in the share of the nation's children born to unwed parents which is now in at least its fifth decade. A substantial number of programs, accompanied by high-quality evaluations, are now being implemented across the nation to reduce teen pregnancy. The policy goal should be to keep these programs in place and to wait for the results from the ongoing evaluations before considering additional reforms. The research by Kearney and Levine as well as by Thomas provides fairly strong evidence that expansion of family planning services and public media campaigns advocating condom use would reduce unintended pregnancy and save public dollars. If Obama care is fully implemented, virtually all women will be eligible for subsidized family planning services. This leaves media campaigns as the major evidence-based policy that might be expanded to have good effect.

The Bush Marriage Initiative

As many of the analyses presented above demonstrate, increased marriage rates would have impacts on poverty, inequality, and child development. A recent simulation study using data from the Current Population Survey by Sawhill and Karpilow (2013), for example, shows that if single mothers in the bottom third of the income distribution married men from the bottom third of matching race, age, and educational attainment, the average household earnings of the mothers and their children would increase by over 30 %. Simulations are not experiments, but a simulation such as this one shows, at minimum, that there are available males that could greatly increase the financial well-being of female-headed households.

The major question, of course, is whether it is possible to increase marriage rates. A comprehensive review of marriage education programs by the Urban Institute showed that on average, the programs produced substantial positive impacts on relationship satisfaction (average effect size = 0.68) and couple communication (average effect size = 0.26). This review was limited because it was based on only 39 studies, many of which were not fully reported, and even more important, because none of the studies involved low-income couples and none reported long-term impacts on marital stability or children's development or behavior. Nonetheless, as the authors concluded, "The review brings good news, as it indicates that evaluations of marriage programs show significant positive effects on average" (Reardon-Anderson et al. 2005, p. 23).

Hoping to capitalize on these effects, the Bush administration launched a marriage initiative in 2001 to test two propositions. The first was whether marriage education and associated services for couples would improve marital quality or relationship quality (in the case of unmarried couples) and help couples either get married or prolong their relationship. The second was whether the impacts on

couple relationships and marriage rates would in turn have a positive impact on child development and behavior. Whatever else might be said about the Bush marriage initiative, the administration showed the courage of its convictions by funding large-scale demonstrations that were evaluated by random-assignment experiments that met high standards of research design.

It is useful to think of the Bush marriage initiative in three parts. First, the administration launched three carefully evaluated demonstrations, all with multiple sites and two employing random-assignment designs. Second, the administration established two competitive grant programs, one to fund programs on healthy marriage and one to fund programs on responsible fatherhood. Today, there are 61 healthy marriage local programs and 60 responsible fatherhood programs operating throughout the nation that, taken together, are supported by $150 million a year in federal funding. Third, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), headed by Wade Horn, the point person for the Bush marriage initiative, created several programs based on administrative authority. These programs included the African American and Hispanic marriage initiatives as well as marriage education efforts that were integrated into several programs under jurisdiction of the ACF within HHS. The programs involved in these initiatives included refugee programs, faith-based programs, child support enforcement, and Head Start.

Here, I concentrate on two of the demonstration programs with strong evaluations because these programs produced the most reliable information directly relevant to marriage policy. The first well-evaluated Bush initiative is the Building Strong Families (BSF) program, evaluated by the research firm Mathematica Policy Research (Wood et al. 2010). The goal of the BSF program was to strengthen the relationships and parenting of young couples who had a baby together outside marriage. The program was implemented in eight sites with couples randomly assigned to an experimental group or a control group. More than 5,100 couples served in one of the two groups across the eight sites. Parents in the experimental group were offered marriage education classes in groups using a formal curriculum as well as advice and support from a family-services coordinator who encouraged participation in the marriage education classes, met with parents individually to help them address problems, and, if necessary, referred them to community services.

The Mathematica evaluation measured the quality of the couples' relationships, their co-parenting relationships, family stability, children's social–emotional development, and other outcomes. These measures were collected both at 15 months and 36 months after participants had enrolled in the program. The findings at 15 months were disappointing. Averaged across all sites, the BSF program had few significant impacts, including whether the couples stayed together or got married. There were very few effects of the program in six of the eight individual sites. However, the Oklahoma program produced a pattern of positive impacts while the Baltimore program produced some negative impacts, particularly a slight increase in physical assault by the father. The positive impacts in Oklahoma included relationship happiness, parenting skills, support and affection, use of constructive behaviors to resolve conflicts, avoidance of destructive conflict behaviors, marital fidelity, quality of co-parenting, father living with the child, and

father providing "substantial financial support." The fact that seven of the eight programs did not produce results like Oklahoma's, however, and that the Baltimore site produced some negative impacts, provides little support for the claim that marriage education programs can improve the quality of marriage or prolong intimate or marital relationships.

The Mathematica research team conducted a second follow-up evaluation at 36 months after enrollment (Wood et al. 2012). Averaged across sites, there was a modest positive impact on the socio-emotional development of children, but there were nonsignificant differences on all the other measures. Regarding individual sites, the negative impacts of the Baltimore program had disappeared, but so had most of the positive impacts of the Oklahoma program. As was the case at 15 months, the other programs produced virtually no significant impacts with the single exception that the Florida program had negative impacts on several outcomes. Although most of the Oklahoma impacts had disappeared by 36 months, one significant difference between the program and control groups was found. Specifically, 49 % of the children in the program group, as compared with 41 % of control children, were still living with both their parents.

Marriage advocates inclined to emphasize positive findings could point out that the Oklahoma results at 15 months were very positive and although most of them faded by 36 months, children were still more likely to live with both their parents, one of the major goals of the marriage movement. None of the other programs produced a pattern of positive results. A balanced conclusion is that the BSF program cannot be counted on to have positive impacts on the quality of the relationships between the parents, on their parenting, or on the stability of their relationship. Even so, some might conclude that it would be worthwhile to continue the Oklahoma program to see whether the program can replicate the strong results it produced at 15 months and to figure out how the program was able to be so successful at that point. It might be pointed out that the marriage education and services programs conducted by the Bush administration were the first large-scale effort to develop marriage programs for poor couples and to test their effectiveness. It would not be surprising if the initial effort to conduct these large and complex programs produced disappointing results, nor would it be surprising if the programs could be improved over time. This is especially the case because other high-quality studies have shown positive impacts of parent education on the relationships between couples and their breakup rates (Hawkins 2013; Schulz et al. 2006; Stanley et al. 2010).

The second well-evaluated Bush marriage initiative was the Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) program. SHM is similar to BSF; in that, it attempts to increase the relationship skills of couples which in turn could help them establish a higher-quality marital relationship and a more harmonious and stable home environment for their children. The program, implemented at eight sites and based on random-assignment designs at each site, involved couples in "group workshops based on structured curricula; supplemental activities to build on workshop themes; and family support services to address participation barriers, connect families with other services, and reinforce curricular themes" (Hsueh et al. 2012, p. v).

In 2012, MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research organization, published a detailed report of the impacts on couples at the eight sites 1 year after the program began. Summarizing across the eight sites, the report states that:

> Relative to the control group, the program group showed higher levels of marital happiness, lower levels of marital distress, greater warmth and support, more positive communication, and fewer negative behaviors and emotions in their interactions with their spouses. (Hsueh et al. 2012, p. v).

In January 2014, MDRC published a second follow-up report on data collected 30 months after SHM began. The results were similar to the results at one year—couples who participated in the healthy marriage program:

> Reported higher levels of martial happiness; lower levels of marital distress and infidelity; greater warmth, support, and positive communication; and less antagonistic and hostile behaviors in their interactions with their spouses (Lundquist et al.2014, pp. 5-10).

In addition, women, but not men, in the program group reported reduced feelings of sadness and anxiety. These are impressive results that are more encouraging than those obtained by the BSF program. But as the authors of the MDRC study point out, many of the measures collected did not show significant impacts and even the differences that were statistically significant were "very small." More important is the fact that program couples were not more likely to stay together and there were no impacts on measures of their children's behavior or development.

By contrast with the BSF and SHM programs, the Bush competitive grant programs on marriage and fatherhood, some of which are now in their seventh year, have had few high-quality evaluations. These programs are operating throughout the country, but it is not possible to know whether they are having impacts on participating couples or on the communities in which they are located. The federal government seems to specialize in grant programs that have poor or no evaluations, thereby depriving the public and policymakers of the information needed to decide whether the programs are worth their costs. It is easy enough for a researcher to recommend that HHS find the funds to conduct quality evaluations of both the marriage and fatherhood grant programs, but until that is done we simply do not know if they are producing any good.

As someone who strongly supported the programs in the Bush healthy marriage initiative, I will confess to a degree of disappointment in the results to date. I have not mentioned that both the BSF and SHM programs cost about $10,000 per couple. When the modest impacts of the BSF program are compared with this cost, many observers would conclude that the program needs to increase its impact, reduce its cost, or both. Some researchers and policymakers have concluded that the program should be abandoned. In the case of SHM, the early results are more encouraging than for BSF, but there is no evidence that the program results in marriages lasting longer which, along with impacts on children, are the most important goals of the Bush marriage programs. I think it is worth replicating the Oklahoma program, with a focus on finding ways to reduce its costs. It would be

especially important to study problems with attendance in the BSF programs. Averaged across sites, couples who signed up for the program attended only enough sessions to receive about 20 % of the marriage education curriculum used by the programs. Attendance varied greatly across the sites with a range of a shocking 3 % in Baton Rouge to 54 % in Oklahoma (Dion et al. 2010). It seems very unlikely that any curriculum can be effective when participants miss an average of 80 % of its sessions. Again, Oklahoma led the way in attendance so a close study of that program should begin with how the leaders were able to get couples to attend their sessions. I would also support continuing the SHM program until we know what its 30-month impacts are. However, there is little room for optimism that marriage education programs are going to have a sizeable long-term impact on the nation's problem with declining marriage rates among low-income and minority Americans.

Young Males

One of the nation's most pressing problems is that young males, especially minority males, are highly likely to be unemployed or out of the labor force. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that the EPR for black males between the ages of 20–24 has hovered around 60 % since at least 1980 and in the first quarter of 2014 dipped to just under 50 %. This is the lowest EPR of any demographic group. To make matters worse, young black males are very likely to serve time in prison. Nearly 60 % of black high school dropouts born between 1965 and 1969 had been in prison by the time they reached their early thirties (Pettit and Western 2004). Having a prison record makes it more difficult to find work when they leave prison and disrupts their relationships with their kin and friends, including in many cases their girlfriends and children. It would be hard to imagine a more perfect combination of factors that would reduce marriage prospects than a lousy work history and a prison record.

Three public policies could improve the life situation of these young males, increase the chances that they could find work, and improve their opportunity to develop a normal relationship with their children and the mother of their children. The first two policies are to create more opportunities for disadvantaged young men to prepare for employment and to reduce their rates of incarceration. There are a number of programs that have been tested by random-assignment evaluations that show positive impacts on the employment of young males (Holzer 2013). Foremost among them are the Career Academies program in high school and apprenticeship programs that give young people a skill and a certificate that can greatly increase their employment rates, often at good jobs (Kemple 2008; Lerman 2013). The Career Academies program even led to higher marriage rates. Participating in a good job preparation program and finding work will help reduce incarceration rates and may increase marriage rates. States and the federal government should also change mandatory sentencing laws and thereby reduce the number of nonviolent

offenders who serve prison sentences. Many states, sometimes forced by budget shortages, are already beginning to change their mandatory sentencing laws, although little is known yet about the effects of these changes.

Beyond these two policies, a policy that has been receiving attention for at least a decade is to provide an earnings supplement, similar to the EITC, to single adults. Even if job training and employment programs are successful, there will still be many young men who can only find jobs that pay modest wages. If a government program supplemented these low wages, more young men might be drawn into the job market because they could earn a reasonable income when their earnings and the wage supplement are combined. Proposals for this type of wage subsidy have been put forward by US Representative Charlie Rangel (Aron-Dine and Sherman 2007), by Edelman et al. (2006), by Berlin (2007), and by Steuerle (1999). These proposals have been thoroughly reviewed and analyzed by Carasso et al. (2008) at the Urban Institute. The cost of the proposals range from a little more than $1 billion per year for the Rangel proposal to over $35 billion for the Berlin proposal.

None of these proposals have been implemented and none have been well tested. However, former New York City Mayor Bloomberg implemented a wage subsidy proposal of this type before he left office. The research company MDRC is conducting the study of Bloomberg's policy, recruiting about 6,000 low-income New Yorkers between the ages of 21 and 64 (mean age = 37) who do not have dependent children for the experiment. Half were assigned to an experimental group that is now receiving a maximum wage supplement of up to $2,000 a year for 3 years. Thus, we will soon have good information on whether supplementing wages will draw more low-income individuals into the workforce, increase their marriage or cohabitation rates, reduce their incarceration or recidivism rates (18 % of the sample had been incarcerated), or increase their child support payments (12 % are noncustodial parents) (Pardoe and Bloom 2014). Given the federal budget deficit, the expense of most wage supplement proposals that would help noncustodial males, and the uncertainty about the impacts of a wage supplement of this type, it is appropriate and wise to undertake large-scale demonstrations of these wage supplements. Congress and the President should give HHS the authority to plan and conduct demonstrations like the one now being implemented in New York City in states or large cities that are willing to bear up to a quarter of the costs. Congress should be willing to spend up to $400 million a year on these demonstrations.

Concluding Observations

The decline of marriage and the rise of nonmarital births traced here present the nation with a huge challenge. The fact that an ever-increasing share of the nation's children are being raised in female-headed families puts upward pressure on poverty andincome inequality—not to mention the negative impacts on the chances that children will have a robust opportunity to get ahead.

We are not completely helpless though in the face of so many children being raised in single-parent families. The results of marriage programs are mostly disappointing, but there are many teen pregnancy prevention programs that have been shown by rigorous evaluations to produce impacts. Pregnancy prevention programs for young adults in their 20s and 30s have also shown some success, but these programs have not been widely implemented and little if any of the evidence is based on rigorous evaluations. Given the lack of success in restoring marriage rates and the modest success of pregnancy prevention programs, especially for young adults who have most of the nonmarital births, we should expect that the nation's high rate of nonmarital births leading to an increasing share of children living in female-headed families will continue.

It follows that policies that provide assistance to female-headed families will continue to be essential. The strategy of encouraging work by single mothers and then subsidizing their earnings has shown considerable success in reducing poverty rates, but the strategy does not work well during recessions. Nonetheless, protecting and even expanding policies that encourage work by both mothers and fathers and subsidizing their earnings should be high on the public agenda.

Given the continuing declines in marriage and increases in nonmarital births, and the modest success of programs to reverse these trends and deal with the consequences, it is difficult to believe that we will make much progress against poverty or income inequality any time soon. Unless we develop and test better programs and policies, there is little room for optimism. This conclusion is especially justified because the federal budget crisis is already leading to reduced spending on children's programs. Until the budget crisis is resolved, primarily by controlling the growth of spending on Social Security and Medicare, few of the recommendations made here have much of a chance of implementation. Under current budget constraints, the nation will be fortunate just to maintain the current level of spending on children's programs.

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Chapter 14
Struggling to Stay Afloat: Dynamic Models of Poverty-related Adversity and Child Outcomes

C. Cybele Raver, Amanda L. Roy and Emily Pressler

Abstract This chapter outlines several promising ways to capture the respective roles of poverty (as defined by falling below a federally defined threshold based on families' total household income and family size), and co-occurring risks (such as job loss, residential, and household instability) in research on child outcomes in the context of adversity. As high-quality longitudinal data has become increasingly available and the methods for analyzing data are more sophisticated, our approaches to the measurement of poverty-related risk have become more complex. Exposure to poverty-related risk can be understood as dynamic, with consequences for children likely to vary as a function of timing, type, and context (e.g., households, schools, and neighborhoods). The impact of poverty-related adversity may also depend on both adults' and children's subjective experiences of material hardship and level of disadvantage relative to neighbors or peers. The authors draw upon a preschool experiment and subsequent long-term longitudinal follow-up of over 600 low-income children (the Chicago School Readiness Project or CSRP) to illustrate these approaches.

Although decades of research have established that growing up in poverty has deleterious consequences for children's development, much of the focus has been on absolute levels of poverty (i.e., having a household income that falls below an established cutoff at a given point in time) (Yoshikawa et al. 2012). In contrast, emerging work in multiple areas of social scientific inquiry suggests that dynamic dimensions of poverty and poverty-related risk are subjectively experienced by families as highly stressful, with families struggling to navigate the concomitant turbulence that sometimes (though not always) accompanies low material resources.

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Families often face periods of cascading or accumulating stressors as a stormy or turbulent time, where events such as financial hardship, job loss, eviction, and dissolution of marriage follow one after another like large waves in close succession. As one parent in our longitudinal Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP) put it when reporting on material hardship, foreclosure, and divorce all in the past year, "We are struggling. It is hard to keep afloat."

While the literature on the roles of income poverty, residential instability, and changes in family structure have demonstrated the respective negative consequences of each of these types of adversity, their combined role may be less understood. New work in fields of developmental science and health psychology suggests that chronic socioeconomic disadvantage places children at risk for long-term psychobiological and behavioral problems: Much of this new work focuses on ways that the stress associated with low resources and lack of environmental stability (or increased turbulence) may "get under the skin" early in the life course (Blair and Raver 2013; Danese et al. 2009; Miller et al. 2011; Shonkoff et al. 2009). Over the past 10 years, we have carried out a preschool experiment and subsequent long-term longitudinal follow-up of over 600 low-income children in the Chicago School Readiness Project, or CSRP, as they navigate a wide array of poverty-related stressors from early childhood to early adolescence (see Raver et al. 2011 for further detail). Here, we outline several innovative approaches to the measurement and modeling of this turbulence, as a means of clearing the way for advances in our understanding of poverty-related adversity and its role in shaping children's subsequent health, behavior, and cognitive functioning (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 2005; Raver et al. 2013).

Modeling Poverty-related Risk Over Time

Recently, several innovative analytic approaches have been taken to model the role of multiple dimensions of family economic disadvantage over time in predicting young children's outcomes (Blair et al. 2011; Hutto et al. 2011; Votruba-Drzal 2003). As these new studies suggest, families' experiences of economic disadvantage can be more complexly understood as a dynamic process that may be characterized by trajectories of improvement in families' financial and material well-being, by worsening trajectories marked by income loss and lower material resources, or by patterns of volatility over time.

In previous chapters of this volume, our colleagues have provided us with sobering reminders of the ways that these trajectories have worsened for our nation's children, over the past decade. For example, using a 10-year window from 2000 and 2010 (when families faced 2 periods of significant economic recession), Haskins' analysis illustrates the stark reality that the poverty rate for children has substantially increased, with 40 % of children in female-headed households falling below the poverty line by 2010. Following our CSRP sample of low-income children (and their families) from early childhood through early adolescence, we

have found similar patterns of chronic exposure to income poverty: A large proportion of CSRP families remained very poor from 2004 to 2012, with 70 % of families falling below the poverty line between one to three time points from early through middle childhood.

Previous findings from other recent studies suggest that the chronicity, volatility, and depth of poverty exposure matter for children's development. The chronicity of exposure to poverty has been found to be more deleterious to children's outcomes than family poverty status at a single point in time (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997; Magnuson and Duncan 2006; Wagmiller et al. 2006). Accordingly, we are testing ways that those patterns of chronic exposure to time-varying hazards are predictive of specific self-regulatory mechanisms that serve as strong candidate mechanisms for poverty's negative impact on children's cognitive and behavioral development. Previous analyses (including our own) of the role of chronic poverty and poverty-related risk suggest that children's executive function (a key component of self-regulation) is jeopardized by each successive year spent in poverty, even after taking into account the depth of poverty and hardship experienced by families early in their child's lifetime (Raver et al. 2013). Moreover, recent work has argued that income volatility, or regular or repeated patterns of income *change*, may also have implications for children's development (Hill et al. 2013). This work argues that while increases in or chronic exposure to poverty may be detrimental for children's development, unexpected shifts or "shocks" in family economic circumstances may also have long-term consequences for family functioning and children's well-being. In short, the study of poverty and child cognitive function will be strengthened by increased attention not only to the depth (or frank magnitude) of poverty-related risk at any given time point, but also by more complex modeling of the chronicity and volatility of exposure to poverty and related risk over time.

Constellations of Risk Across Type

A second insight provided in several chapters in this volume is that for many children in the USA, exposure to income poverty co-occurs with a host of exposures to other poverty-related risks that increase children's odds of later emotional, behavioral, and cognitive difficulty, including their residence in single-headed households. In order to empirically specify this multivariate framework of cascading, or clustering of risks, investigators have alternately included a large number of individual variables for each type of risk as additive predictors of children's outcomes or have created cumulative risk models where risks are unit-weighted and summed to form a single risk index (e.g., Sameroff et al. 1993). More recently, several investigators have made a compelling case for the ways that a person-centered approach, using latent class analysis (LCA), offers a theoretically and empirically powerful solution to the problem of how best to analyze the role of "constellations of multiple, interacting risk factors" in the lives of young children

(Lanza et al. 2011, p. 391; Collins and Lanza 2010; Copeland et al. 2009). In the context of research on poverty-related risk and child outcomes, LCA offers a means of understanding ways that risks may coincide to predict negative outcomes in infancy (Rhoades et al. 2011), clinical outcomes in later childhood (Copeland et al. 2009), and academic trajectories in adolescence (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2010). To our knowledge, however, this approach has not been used extensively to understand the constellations of risk that may put children in jeopardy for school failure during the preschool and early elementary years.

Analyses of CSRP data suggest that LCA can be profitably leveraged to understand the ways that children's early experiences of deep poverty (income to needs ratio <0.5) and four other key risks (residence in a single-parent household, residential crowding, caregiver depression, and stressful life events) co-occur in preschool (Roy and Raver 2014). Even within a homogeneously low-income sample (i.e., families had to fall below the federal poverty guidelines in order to qualify for enrollment in Head Start programming at the outset of our study), we were able to identify variation in risk profiles. Almost half of the sample (47 %) fell into what we labeled the "low risk" profile, characterized by low probabilities of families' experience with most of the risks. However, a large percentage of families fell into the "deep poverty and single" (40 %) profile, characterized by high probabilities of being in deep poverty and of residing in a single-parent household. In addition, 9 % of families were labeled "single and stressed," characterized by high probabilities of being single, depressed, and experiencing many life stressors, and 5 % fell into the "deep poverty, crowded" profile, characterized by high probabilities of being in deep poverty and experiencing residential crowding. Results confirmed our hypothesis that while families were at or below the Federal poverty line at the study's outset, some children faced dramatically different constellations of family risk than others, and correspondingly faced greater odds of long-term academic and behavioral difficulty. Not surprisingly, children who experienced early "low risk" profiles (characterized by low levels of risk experienced when they were enrolled in Head Start) had higher levels of academic, behavioral, and self-regulatory functioning in 3rd grade than children in the other three classes. However, children who were identified as falling into the "single and stressed" and "deep poverty, crowded" profiles had the lowest levels of functioning, although these patterns varied across outcomes; children in the "single and stressed" profile experienced the largest detriments in behavior problems, while children in the "deep poverty and crowded" profile experienced the largest detriments in academic performance.

These findings demonstrate that while the accumulation of risk has important implications for children's development, the combination of particular risks may be equally salient. Potential explanations for the patterns in children's outcomes across the "single and stressed" and "deep poverty, crowded" profiles may be both economic and psychological: As indicated in earlier chapters, two-parent households may have better cushioned the children in our study from economic downturns such as the 2008 recession. Having a partner to share the financial burden may have helped parents in staying psychologically "afloat" by reducing feelings of strain or

psychological pressure (e.g., Mistry et al. 2009). While families may "double-up" as a strategy for getting by in times of economic strain, prior work has demonstrated that crowding, particularly when it is uncontrollable, is detrimental for children's socioemotional adjustment (Evans 2004). It is to those subjective experiences of financial hardship, the controllability of poverty-related stressors, and of income inequality among both children and adults in poor households that we now turn.

Subjective Experiences of Poverty-related Risk

As outlined earlier in this chapter, we argue that families' and children's experience of psychological strain when facing multiple types of poverty-related adversity can and should be empirically distinguished from material measures such as income. In much recent research, family financial strain is operationalized in terms of parents' subjective experience of not being able to keep up with the challenges of providing basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter with the limited income that is available (Conger et al. 1994). Parents' reports of financial strain are prospectively predictive of greater "wear and tear" or allostatic load on key physiological systems (such as the metabolic and cardiovascular systems) and lower levels of psychological well-being among adults, even after taking into account families' income insufficiency or poverty status (Edin and Lein 1997; McLoyd 1998; Newland et al. 2013; Raver et al. 2011; Burchinal et al. 2008). Recent work also indicates that parents' subjective experiences of financial strain may have substantial predictive power when trying to understand ways that parents make tough choices on how and when to best support (or invest in) their children's well-being. In fact, some work has found subjective perceptions of financial strain to be more consistently related to cutbacks in expenditures on children than objective experiences of strain (i.e., job loss and food insecurity) (Kalil et al. 2013).

A key question is the extent to which children are also consciously aware of and psychologically burdened by their families' financial struggles. Although much developmental literature calls for children to be considered as "active agents" who shape their environments (e.g., Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998; Conger and Donnellan 2007), fewer poverty-related studies have included the child's perspective of family economic hardship and financial strain. Children are clearly aware of and able to report on their families' experiences of poverty-related adversity, as indicated by positive correlations between child-reported and parent-reported measures of poverty (e.g., Clark-Lempers et al. 1990; Conger et al. 1999; McLoyd et al. 1994). Yet, while child and parent measures are correlated, they are often not synonymous, as likely parents, may not discuss the household's entire financial context to children (e.g., Clark-Lempers et al. 1990) or children may cope with stress via denial or wishful thinking (Wadsworth and Compas 2002). Parental reluctance may buffer children from undue stress as McLoyd and Wilson (1990) found; when isolated single mothers shared their worries with their offspring, these stressors quickly overburdened children, resulting in decreases to their psychological and emotional

well-being. Often startling is the young age at which children are able to recount realistic portraits of the financial pressures their families are under. As early as 6th grade, children's reports of family financial pressures are corroborated by parents (Clark-Lempers et al. 1990). Further, the links between child and adolescent perceptions of family economic hardship or financial strain and their own well-being are robust across "social address" characteristics such as child gender, race/ethnicity, geographical residence, parent occupation, and marital status (Clark-Lempers et al. 1990; Conger et al. 1999; McLoyd et al. 1994; Mistry et al. 2009; Shek 2003). It is clear from this small set of studies that youth are aware of the strain their family members feel and it is at least partially through these perceptions that economic hardship can negatively impact youth functioning across multiple domains (Conger et al. 1999; McLoyd et al. 1994; Mistry et al. 2009; Shek 2003). Finally, we must not ignore that families, and especially children, often do not have enough tools in their tool kits to effectively cope with these stressors (Wadsworth and Compas 2002; Wadsworth et al. 2005). Undoubtedly, there is great potential for future research to closely examine the links between youth perceptions of economic hardship and functioning as valuable empirical tools that can be combined with other measures of income poverty deployed in current literature.

An additional lens through which we can understand families' subjective experiences of poverty is through recent work on the controllability of psychological stressors. While past research suggests that material hardship and low (or falling) income places all members of the household under stress, different family members may cope with those stressors in different ways. Longitudinal analyses suggest adults and youth engage in both "primary" and "secondary" coping strategies that involve problem-solving, emotional regulation, cognitive restructuring, or alternately, active acceptance of the stressors that the family faces (Wadsworth and Compas 2002). Recent evidence from health research suggests that maintaining a "shift-and-persist" strategy of cognitively re-framing or re-appraising highly stressful socioeconomic conditions, while also setting a positive goal or intention to endure or overcome those conditions is associated with lower risk of the biobehavioral "wear and tear" (e.g., high blood pressure, higher risk of diabetes, and compromised immune function) (Chen and Miller 2012). Innovative work in prevention science has demonstrated that families' coping strategies are amenable to change. Involvement in psychoeducational intervention designed to support parents' positive coping strategies was associated both with improved coping and with later "down stream" outcomes including reduced depressive symptoms, reduced conflict among parents, and higher levels of adjustment among children (Wadsworth et al. 2011).

While the number of US children in poverty continues to climb, the divide between the nations' rich and poor also continues to widen. As such, another key dimension to consider is parents' and childrens' perceptions of economic inequality, or one's own economic standing relative to others in society. Prior work has shown that among adults, lower perceived economic standing (relative to others in the USA and the community) is related to detriments in physical and mental health (Franzini and Fernandez-Esquer 2006; Gong et al. 2012; Singh-Manoux et al. 2005) that are not explained by objective economic standing alone. While this

body of work suggests that perceptions of economic standing is an important predictor of adult health and well-being, almost nothing is known about how perceptions of economic standing affect parenting practices or investments in children. Moreover, children's own perceptions of their family's economic standing may have implications for development. Children and adults develop perceptions of economic standing based on knowledge of their financial resources and experiences with the people and settings in their environment; this makes the examination of poverty-related risks across contexts essential to the study of poverty and children's development.

Risks Across Contexts

How do we place families' perceptions of their economic position within larger social contexts? Recent application of ecological frameworks to studies of allostatic load, self-regulation, and children's longer-term outcomes have highlighted the fact that children are embedded within multiple social contexts (i.e., family, school, and neighborhood). As such, negative life events may both objectively vary and be subjectively perceived as larger or smaller in frequency and magnitude across those multiple contexts, particularly as children grow older (Bronfenbrenner 1979). For example, families who are poor may be more likely to be exposed to neighborhood poverty and crime, experience low quality housing, and attend lower quality schools, relative to their more economically advantaged counterparts (Yoshikawa et al. 2012). Many children in CSRP attended schools characterized by high poverty, high need, and low performance (e.g., where only 66 % of students within the child's school, on average, were able to pass grade-level proficiency standards in Language Arts and Math) (Raver et al. 2013). Our analyses (as well as those of others) suggest that it is critically important to consider children's exposure to risk across both home and school contexts. Analyses of CSRP children's self-regulation from preschool to elementary school suggest that family poverty across all time points was significantly associated with greater difficulty in key self-regulatory domains of attention and impulse control in 3rd grade. Importantly, lack of school safety during the elementary school years served as a particularly serious risk for children who had been identified as at greatest behavioral risk in early childhood, even after exposure to family poverty had been statistically taken into account (Raver et al. 2013). Analyses are currently underway to detect whether unsafe school climate substantially contributes to children's difficulty with cognitive dysregulation through 5th grade, even after taking into account the role of family poverty.

In addition, we learned that the children in our CSRP sample have been (and continue to be) exposed to staggering levels of community violence. Linking publically available crime statistics from Chicago's Police Department with children's geocoded home addresses revealed that, on average, over 500 violent crimes occurred in CSRP children's 5th grade neighborhoods (i.e., census tracts) over the course of a year. Our analyses suggest that exposure to neighborhood violence was

related to decreases in attention, impulse control, and pre-academic skills when children were in preschool (Sharkey et al. 2012) and attentional bias toward emotion stimuli when children were in 5th grade (McCoy et al. 2013).

In addition to absolute levels of exposure, children may experience their environments as neither uniformly good or bad, but rather as turbulent or chaotic. For example, CSRP families not only experienced substantial risk of chronic exposure to poverty, but also experienced high levels of household turbulence (i.e., changes in marital status, people moving in or out of the household); in preschool, over half (or 54 %) of families had experienced at least one of five indicators of household turbulence in the prior year. Children residing in highly turbulent homes had lower levels of early self-regulatory skills compared to children in stable homes (McCoy and Raver 2013). CSRP-enrolled families also had high rates of residential mobility with almost three-fourths of children (or 72 %) having moved at least once over the course of the study. Eleven percent of families, who moved, did so at least 3 times between preschool and 5th grade. Our examination of trajectories of the quality of move experienced by children in CSRP was illuminating: Although 41 % of the sample made a lateral move (moving into neighborhoods with a similar poverty level), 24 % of the sample moved into less safe neighborhoods with higher poverty levels (Roy et al. 2014). Residential mobility was clearly associated with substantial decrements (of almost 1/4 of a SD in effect size) in children's self-regulation in 5th grade (as indicated by both teacher reports and by standardized direct assessments of their executive function) (Roy et al. 2014).

Putting It All Together: Conclusions and Next Steps

In sum, our lab has spent a decade learning about self-regulation in early and middle childhood, and is well-poised to build on the knowledge gained from our previous studies and to learn about poverty, self-regulation, health, and mental health as our sample passes through key adolescent transitions in the life course. Moving forward, we plan to use the ideas presented in this chapter as a framework for conceptualizing and measuring the dynamic complexity of poverty-related adversity and the role it plays in children's development. Specifically, this work will focus on four key dimensions of risk: timing, type, perceptions, and context. Prior work has demonstrated that the influence of poverty is not static, but varies as a function of the **timing** of exposure. Our continued work in this area will explore both the chronicity and volatility of exposure to poverty, with special attention paid to whether influences on children's development vary by developmental period. Future work will also continue to keep in mind that poverty co-occurs with other poverty-related risk factors (e.g., single-headed household and residential crowding), and as such the **types** of risk that youth experience may matter. In addition, a growing body of work has found individual **perceptions** of financial strain and economic inequality to be predictive of individual health and well-being above and beyond the influence of absolute income alone. Therefore, it will be integral to

integrate both adult and child perceptions of economic hardship into our conceptualization and modeling of adversity and development. Finally, our work will continue to explore children's experiences of adversity **across** contexts (e.g., households, schools, and neighborhoods), keeping in mind that dimensions of timing, type, and perceptions can operate at multiple contextual levels.

Expansion in the conceptualization of poverty goes hand in hand with advances in analytic methods and measurement. As high-quality longitudinal data has become increasingly available and the methods for analyzing more sophisticated, the questions that researchers are able to pose have become more complex. In addition, the development of new measures is often both driven by and a precursor to the expansion of key constructs. As such, not only do we encourage researchers to draw on the ideas presented here in order to more accurately capture the diversity of lived experience, but also to move the field forward in terms of how we think about, measure, and model poverty-related adversity.

Innovations in the conceptualization and measurement of poverty-related adversity have potential to inform anti-poverty policy approaches. Prior work suggests that it may be instability or volatility (which often accompanies experiences of absolute poverty) which matters most for a families' functioning. As such, the provision of income supports in combination with services aimed at reducing family instability (e.g., child care) may produce the largest gains for both parents and children. In addition, recent advances in modeling the co-occurrence of poverty-related risk may provide a useful tool for identifying particular subsamples of the population who might benefit most from targeted intervention strategies. Finally, research demonstrating the power of subjective perceptions of economic standing present the possibility that psychological (e.g., changing perceptions on the controllability of risk) or skill-based interventions (e.g., increasing parents executive function skills—paying attention, planning, and remembering—as a means of coping with the multitude of stressors encountered on a daily basis), particularly when paired with economic supports, may provide an innovative approach to poverty reduction. As a whole, the ideas outlined here stress the dynamic and complex nature of the poverty-related adversity that many US families face, but more importantly provide a starting point for developing new and targeted policies designed to expand the safety net and throw life-lines out to families who are having trouble staying afloat.

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Chapter 15
The Diverging Destinies of Fathers and What it Means for Children's Lives

Kathryn Edin, Laura Tach and Timothy J. Nelson

Abstract There is a growing social class divide in the American family. While the most-educated couples are enjoying greater stability in family life than in previous decades, the opposite is true for those at the bottom of the distribution. For men, in particular, the least educated are more likely to become fathers in their early twenties, to have children outside of a marital bond with more than one partner, and to live apart from them. Interviews with low-income black and white fathers in Philadelphia and Camden, NJ reveal several important factors about this process. First, there is little partner search or selectivity regarding the woman who will become his child's mother. Second, pregnancies happen quickly in the relationship and are by and large not intended, though not avoided either. Third, news of a pregnancy is usually greeted with enthusiasm and sparks a "fatherhood thirst" which leads to the attempt to solidify the couple's relationship "for the sake of the baby." Yet because of the fragility of the couple's bond, the relationships rarely survive until the child turns five, and men find it increasingly hard to stay in contact with the child once the relationship ends. The fatherhood thirst remains unsatisfied, which may drive further childbearing with a new partner. Understanding this dynamic suggests several points of intervention for policymakers. First, we should do more to reduce early and unplanned childbearing among young men, targeting key features of the relationship formation process that lead to such outcomes. Second, in keeping with efforts of on-the-ground programs associated with the "responsible fatherhood movement," policymakers should do more to keep unmarried fathers connected with children, including assuring that those who pay child support have a visitation agreement that is enforced. Policy should clearly signal that fathers' potential contribution as parents, not just as paychecks, is valued.

Article Note The quotes used in this chapter are drawn from Kathryn Edin and Timothy J. Nelson's 2013 book Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City, Chap. 2.

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Children of college graduates are now less likely to see their parents separate than they were in 1980, at the height of the divorce revolution, and nearly all children of college graduates will be born within a marital bond (Martin 2006; Raley and Bumpass 2003). Thus, middle class children often grow up in stable families, which allows parents to make substantial investments in children's lives that prepare them for later success. Things could not be more different for the children of non-college graduates. Rates of marital dissolution continue to be high among parents without a college degree—especially for high school drop-outs—and non-marital childbearing is the statistical norm (Teachman 2002; Martinez et al. 2012). Kids born outside of marriage—even to parents who say they are in a romantic relationship at the time—seldom see their parents stay together for very long (Andersson 2002; Tach et al. 2011). Thus, the lives of working and lower class children are often characterized by instability. These children seldom enjoy the same level of parental investments that children in stable two-parent families receive. In particular, only a fraction will enjoy ongoing investments of money and time from their biological fathers as they move through the early life course.

McLanahan (2004) argued that the widening gap in parental education is both a likely consequence and a cause of growing inequality. Haskins (Chap. 13). asks what policy can do to address this widening gap. He offers an excellent review of policies aimed both at promoting paternal investments and preventing the formation of single-parent families. The review is detailed and comprehensive. However, we believe that in the area of policies aimed at prevention, pessimistic conclusions may be premature. Additionally, Haskins does not review efforts of the so-called responsible fatherhood movement and the programs it has generated, many at the grassroots level, that aim to ensure that noncustodial fathers will be more involved in their children's lives. We review recent ethnographic research that lends strong support to the idea that both kinds of efforts—those aimed at preventing early and unplanned births, and those aimed at keeping fathers more engaged in their children's lives—deserve more attention from policymakers and innovative social entrepreneurs.

The Diverging Destinies of Fathers

While McLahanan (2004) has focused on the diverging destinies of children, we focus on the diverging destinies of the men who father them. Elsewhere, we have drawn on the 2011 wave of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-1997 Cohort, whose members were 26–32 years of age by then, to create a portrait of fatherhood during young adulthood across the educational distribution (Tach et al. 2014). A strong educational gradient in the probability of entry into fatherhood by the time men reach their late twenties was found, with about three quarters of high school dropouts becoming fathers by that time versus only about a quarter of those with a four-year college degree. For both high school dropouts and those with a high school diploma but no college, most births are non-marital. In fact, more than

four fifths of births among dropouts are outside of marriage. In contrast, only about a fifth of college-educated young men who have had children by that time have done so outside of a marital bond.

This research also shows a strong educational gradient in the complexity of young men's family lives (Tach et al. 2014). Nearly 30 % of all fathers who have dropped out of high school have had children by more than one partner by that time. When we restrict our attention to fathers with two or more children, almost half of them have dropped out of high school. Fathers with only a high school degree show a pattern similar to those without a high school diploma or GED. In contrast, the prevalence of multiple partner fertility is only 2 % among fathers who are college educated and only 5 % even for those with more than one child. For this reason, less-educated fathers are far more likely to have ever lived apart from a biological child—more than two thirds of high school dropouts versus just over one in ten with a four-year college degree.

In sum, young men have sharply diverging family lives at different points of the educational distribution. The least educated are more likely to become fathers by their mid to late twenties, more likely to do so out of marriage, more likely to have children by more than one partner, and more likely to live apart from a child than their more-educated counterparts. The differences are large. In sum, while the family lives of men who are college-educated are typically characterized by stability, those at the bottom of the educational distribution have family lives that are characterized not just by higher rates of noncustodial parenting, which is Haskins' (Chap. 13) main focus, but by instability (partner churning) and complexity (parenting children across more than one household).

Family Complexity and Paternal Investments

Family complexity, which is so highly correlated with non-marital childbearing, is likely a key mechanism through which children are disadvantaged by living with so-called lone parents. The reality is that these children are seldom living with lone parents, at least for very long; they are instead living with parents who are churning through multiple partnerships. This point is acknowledged by Haskins (Chap. 13), referring to our past research on the topic (Tach et al. 2011). The policy response ought to depend on the degree to which families are successfully managing this complexity. If fathers, mothers, and children are coping well, which can be measured in part by examining the extent to which fathers are staying engaged with children across multiple households, children will presumably suffer less than if fathers manage it poorly.

One simple metric is how fathers with complex families are spending their time. In other work (Tach et al. 2014), we find that the vast majority of fathers with children by more than one mother (72.1 %) report seeing at least one of their biological children on a daily or almost daily basis—and fully 82 % are seeing that child at least weekly. The less encouraging news is that only about 45 % of such

men report at least weekly involvement with the child with whom they are least involved. Nearly four in ten of those fathers report minimal or no involvement with that child. Keep in mind that these men are only 26–32, so many of these children are still quite young and presumably benefit from their fathers' time and attention. In our view, this evidence suggests that fathers with complex families seem to struggle with managing that complexity. While they are usually intensively involved with at least one child at a given point in time, we find that they typically fail to maintain high levels of involvement with all of their children.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, two of us (Edin and Nelson) spent 7 years observing and interviewing 110 low-income noncustodial fathers in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. All of the fathers were earning less than the poverty line for a family of four and living in Philadelphia and Camden, NJ neighborhoods where at least 20 % of residents were poor (Edin and Nelson 2013). One of these men, David Williams, still lives with the grandmother who raised him but often "stays" with Deborah, the mother of his one year old child, Julian. He plays the role of social father to Deborah's two older children as well. Each evening, after eating dinner at his grandmother's home, David rushes over to Deborah's apartment to play with his son and help with the evening routine. On Saturday, his day off, he often takes the older children to the park or to a special venue, such as the zoo.

By these lights, David is a model father. Yet David has other sons in elementary school who he has not seen since about the time he and Deborah first got together. David's ex-partner severed contact with him after they broke up, and moved, leaving no forwarding address. He also has two older daughters by a woman he got pregnant when he was in his mid-teens, but he only sees his girls when he happens to run into them in the neighborhood, about once a month or so. David's intensive involvement with his youngest child Julian is, in part, driven by the fact that he has not been able to play the father role to his satisfaction with his older children. However, maintaining adequate performance of the fatherhood role in Deborah's home demands nearly all of his scarce resources of money and time. This has probably also reduced the resources he can devote to his daughters and may have distracted him from searching for his sons.

Relationship Formation and Fatherhood Thirst

As is typical for the men in this study (Edin and Nelson 2013), only one of David Williams' children was planned. David was not in a strong relationship with any of his children's mothers, including Julian's, when his children were conceived. For David, "one thing led to another" time and again. In *Doing the Best I Can* (2013), Edin and Nelson argue that the way in which disadvantaged men's relationships with their children's mothers form is a primary reason why these relationships do not usually stand the test of time, and why it is often so difficult for these couples to co-parent effectively after the romantic relationship ends.

Amin Jenkins, another father in the Philadelphia study, describes the process of relationship formation with his second son's mother in this way:

> Well, my youngest son's…mother, I met her in the University of Pennsylvania Hospital. She was attracted to me when I first saw her and I made my approach. We began to socialize and communicate and then from there we began to affiliate and at some point in time we became intimate and my son was born.

For Amin, the words "socialize," "communicate," and "affiliate," replace words such as love and commitment in the courtship narrative. There was little partner search involved. Antoinette became Amin's son's mother largely because she was the woman he happened to be with when an unplanned pregnancy occurred.

Here, another father in the study, John Carr, recounts the early days of his relationship with his daughter's mother Rayanne:

> Actually, she was dating a friend of mine and somehow…she wanted me. But it was my friend's girl, and I didn't want to have nothing to do with it. But then [my friend] heard some shit [and] started talking shit saying he would kick my ass. So I was like 'whatever Then I will be with your girl.' Eventually, I just got stuck with her for a while.

John's narrative also reveals little partner search. John ends up with Rayanne by default. Yet the girl he "got stuck with for awhile" would give birth in just 14 months time to his child.

Tim O'Brien describes the course of his relationship with his child's mother in this way:

> I was hanging at a friend of mine's house. And her and a couple of her friends were there, and she used to go out with my friend. My friend was trying to get back with her and I ended up getting with her…We were only together for about two months and she was getting pregnant…I didn't mind at all.

Tim too "ended up getting with" his child's mother—he did not choose her as the mother of his child.

In the typical case, "socializing" leads to a conception in just a few months' time, resulting in a birth. Indeed, the young people involved rarely know each other well when an unplanned pregnancy issues a one-way ticket to parenthood. Often there is too little shared history, shared values, or tastes for these relationships to survive very long, yet most do endure for a time. In fact, news of the pregnancy often galvanizes what is mere "togetherness" but not yet a "real relationship" into something more. Will Donnelly's account reveals what is a typical sequence of events:

> I had just come out of a juvenile institution. I think I had just turned 17…and I started going with [Lori's] friend. And then one day she came around and we started talking. Then I went with her and left her friend, and me and her got together and started having kids together and then we got closer and closer.

For Will, getting closer and closer is something he and Lori accomplish only after they start having children together.

Typically, it is a surprise pregnancy that sparks the transformation of mere "togetherness" into something more—a "real relationship." Let us return to the

story of David Williams, who describes his relationship with Deborah, the mother of his youngest child, both before and after the pregnancy. Here is how David describes the relationship before pregnancy:

> [When I was first with Deborah]I had a girlfriend on the side too, Kathy. She's somebody that I met at a [Narcotics Anonymous] meeting. We got close and we were helping each other [with our addictions]. One thing led to another and we got intimate….Me and Deborah would get into an argument. She'd tell me to leave. I'd go stay with Kathy. (Interviewer: So how did you end it with Kathy?) Deborah got pregnant, and I had to do what was right, stand by Deborah.

After finding out she was pregnant and deciding to "do what was right," David's relationship with Deborah strengthens:

> Each month [of the pregnancy], you know, we got closer and closer. I wanted to be with her more…. And then like 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, she had me running to a Pathmark [grocery store] buying different foods. So that brought us a lot closer too. And then, watching [him] born [brought us even closer]. On her last push, he came out spinning like a bullet. Nothing was more beautiful than Julian. The way he came out of his mother…, that was amazing. And I held him, I didn't want to let him go.

In sum, the process of relationship formation documented in *Doing the Best I Can* begins with short courtships, if they can even be called that, with little selectivity involved. Most men say they were "just not thinking" at the time the conception occurred. "One thing led to another," is a phrase that appears throughout the narratives and reflects the path-dependent nature of the process. Pregnancy is what prompts mere togetherness to coalesce into a "real relationship" but, as David Williams' story shows, these relationships are often "all about the baby"—men derive immense value from fathering and quickly embrace fatherhood.

Evidence of this "fatherhood thirst" sparked by pregnancy can be seen in men's answers to the following question: "Think back to the first moment you learned she was pregnant. How did you respond to the news?" We expected that initially men would receive the news negatively, panic, and run. Instead, nearly seven in ten times, their reaction was happiness or acceptance. Here are some typical responses: "I lit up"; "I wanted a kid real bad"; "Deep inside, I wanted to have a child"; "I had wanted a child for years"; "I was so happy, even though in the back of my mind I wondered, 'Is it mine?" "I was glad! It was no major obstacle!" One father responded as follows: "I thought, 'Aw Sweetie, I'm going to be a daddy.' That was my feeling… If I could [have] bottled it and kept it, I would have."

Men's responses to another question were equally revealing: "What would your life be like if you didn't have children?" We thought that men would point to opportunities they had forgone—the "opportunity cost" of childbearing. Instead, here is how most men answered: "I'd probably be dead somewhere, or back in jail, in and out of rehabs. It's given me something to fight for, something like a destination I got to BE somewhere;" "I guess after I got caught up in the bad life, as far as jail, the kids helped me keep my head up, look forward. I got something to live for. Kids give you something to live for;" "Without the kids, I'd probably be a dog, I hope not with AIDS;" "I couldn't imagine being without them because when I am

spending time with my kids it is like, now that is love. That is unconditional love… It's is like a drug you've got to have."

Bill, age 38, responded, "I'd still be out there… I'd still be fucking off, drugs and all. I think about my kids and there is just this HOPE [I have now] of getting a good relationship with them." We asked Elvis, "What did you think your future was going to be before you had him?" "I wasn't going to live past the age of 30." He said. "And then once you had him?" "I can't even picture my life without [little] Elvis in it…. I had already made a promise to myself. I had told my friends, 'I don't want to live past the age of 30. If I make it to 30, I'm going to take myself out…. He came into the picture when I was like 27, and that all changed. Everything changed. My whole life changed."

Like David Williams, when men's fatherhood thirst is met with failure in one relationship—they fail to maintain ongoing contact with their child, whether due to men's own failings (a prison term separated David from the mother of his daughters), maternal gate-keeping (as in the case of his older sons' mother), or other factors—there may be strong motivation to seek the "whole father experience" in a relationship with a subsequent child. This puts fathers on a family-go-round.

Doing the Best I Can reveals that these men's vision of family life—an ala cart version where fathers believe their primary relationship ought to be with their child while their tie to the mother is secondary—reduces the motivation to invest in the relationship with the child's mother. This is why, we argue, the family-like bond researchers so often observe around the time of the birth often fails to motivate men to fully turn their lives around, at least soon enough to preserve their relationships with their children's mothers. (Roughly 80 % of unmarried newborns' parents tell survey researchers they are in a romantic relationship (Center for Research on Child Wellbeing 2002) at the time, and most say there is a good chance they will marry each other).

Policy for Pregnancy Prevention and Responsible Fatherhood

Programs that aim to prevent early and unplanned pregnancy, which Haskins reviews (Chap. 13), could benefit from better knowledge of the modal sequence of events that lead disadvantaged men—and women—into parenthood. Explicit attention should be paid to the haphazard way that many enter into parenthood, as described above. Edin and Nelson's research reveals, for example, that men usually practice a "don't ask, don't tell" approach to contraception, seldom even asking their partners whether they are using some form of hormonal contraception once the couple decides to no longer use a condom (a commonly recognized marker that the relationship is more than a casual liaison). Additionally, the fathers interviewed by Edin and Nelson often said that the father–child bond was unassailable and should have nothing to do with a father's relationship to the mother of that child. Young men should be forewarned that, in fact, their relationship to their children's mother

could not be more consequential for co-parenting and their future contact with the child. Young men should also be made aware of the high price they may pay for having children across multiple mothers. Given the child support formula states typically employ, men who have children by more than one partner are assessed a greater share of their income in child support than fathers who have their children by one partner (Meyer et al. 2011). It is not uncommon for men who have children across multiple households to be assessed more than half of their pay, which often leaves them with too little to survive on or to support the household they are currently living in. Information regarding the consequences of multiple partner fertility for child support should be widely disseminated. If young men can be convinced they should be more planful with regard to pregnancy, more of them might remain in their child's homes, and the quality of co-parenting might be improved.

Enhancing a father's bond with the child he has first may also be a way to prevent the "father-go-round"—the pattern of serial selective involvement documented in our past work and reviewed here. A wide array of programs associated with the "responsible fatherhood" movement have the explicit aim of keeping noncustodial fathers engaged with their children, many of them operating at a grassroots level. Those efforts should be bolstered, and the body of best practices research that guides them ought to be strengthened.

Though these grassroots social entrepreneurs have focused on increasing father involvement for decades, policy has paid far too little attention to disadvantaged men's desire to be valued as parents, and not just as paychecks. As Haskins (Chap. 13) notes, significant efforts were made in the aftermath of welfare reform to collect child support from fathers, and to penalize men who did not pay by seizing tax refunds, revoking professional licenses, and even placing men in jail. Yet little has been done to ensure these men can play an ongoing role in their children's lives.

Our view is that one potential way to disrupt the family-go-round is to capitalize on the fatherhood thirst that is awakened when they first become a father, and do more to keep fathers engaged with their children by that mother. The best way to keep dad involved, of course, is to do what we can to improve his relationship with the mother, but as Haskins' review has shown, our attempts to do so have been disappointing thus far. It should be said that none of the interventions Haskins reviews make a serious attempt to attend to these couples' considerable economic troubles, which may have doomed these efforts from the start.

Once the relationship has dissolved, however, policy must clearly signal that society honors father's value as parents and not just as paychecks. In particular, fathers' rights with regard to their children must correspond with their responsibilities. Building on the efforts of programs under the umbrella of the responsible fatherhood movement, which often aim to remove some of the barriers fathers face as they seek to fulfill their paternal responsibilities—especially lack of employment, we need to insure that unmarried fathers have the same de facto rights to a visitation agreement that formerly married fathers—who are more often middle class and white—have via the courts though the divorce process. When courts assign unmarried dads a child support obligation, in most locales there is no automatic

process that grants them corresponding parenting time. Visitation agreements must furthermore be monitored and enforced, as maternal gatekeeping is a common problem. In doing so, though, courts must also insure that visitation does not put children or their mothers at risk of harm. Finally, we need to integrate fathers into the full range of social institutions that serve families with children, and make these institutions truly gender neutral. "Family" should not mean merely the mother and child. Dads should be both expected and welcomed into the prenatal clinic, the local WIC clinic, the Head Start classroom, and the parent–teacher conference.

Ultimately, of course, healing family life at the bottom of the educational distribution will require addressing the economic woes of those with too few skills to escape the low-wage labor market. There is de facto gender inequality in the existing programs to help ameliorate the plight of the working poor. Currently, the federal government uses a system of tax credits to benefit low-earner parents with custodial children—generally single mothers—by subsidizing their wages. There is no corresponding program to make work pay for noncustodial fathers, even those who are living up to obligations to support their children, though New York City is experimenting with such a plan (Nichols et al. 2012). Just under five decades ago, Lyndon Johnson launched the War on Poverty, unveiling a set of programs that were largely focused on women, children, and the elderly. At that time, unskilled men's wages were on their way to approaching an all-time high. Things are far different now. Perhaps it is time to launch a new war on poverty that includes noncustodial fathers.

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Part V
Reflecting on Diverging Destinies of American Families

Chapter 16
Reflecting on the Diverging Destinies of American Families: Policy Approaches as We Move Forward

Maggie L. Thorsen and Bo-Ram Kim

Abstract In an era of increasing income inequality and shifting patterns of family demographics, a growing body of research highlights the widespread consequences of these trends for families and children. The chapters in this volume highlight the numerous ways these trends may be impacting families and draw our attention to how these challenges will impact research and policy approaches in the years to come. This conclusion chapter draws out some of the major themes and ideas presented at Penn State's 21st annual Symposium on Family Issues and in the preceding chapters. Over the past few decades, policies and programs have been implemented, each with different foci and targets of intervention. The programs generally fall into two broad categories: structural and family-based approaches. These approaches are reviewed, with a discussion of how specific policies may be able to address the patterns and consequences of diverging destinies. Future directions and challenges for policy and program implementation and research are also considered, including constraints for funding and the incorporation of a two-gender approach.

Introduction

The past several decades have witnessed simultaneous shifts in family demographics and growing economic inequality. The structure of family ties has become more diverse, including more varied patterns of union formation, high rates of divorce and re-partnering, and growth in non-marital childbearing (Casper and Bianchi 2002; McLanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1). At the same time, widespread economic changes have contributed to a substantial increase in income inequality, with rapid income

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growth among top earners coupled with an eroding minimum wage (McCall and Percheski 2010). Together the trends reflect dramatic changes in both family behavior and socioeconomic opportunities, contributing to an increasing divergence of trajectories and life chances. These "diverging destinies" generally reflect the increasingly strong association between socioeconomic status and family demographic behaviors, including rates of single parenthood, divorce, and non-marital childbearing. As the chapters in this volume convey, these changes in family demographics exacerbate social class disparities in access to resources in ways that have implications for the outcomes of children (Kalil, Chap. 5; Vernon-Feagans, Burchinal, and Mokrova, Chap. 3), young adults (Schoon, Chap. 9; Staff, Ramirez, and Vuolo, Chap. 10; Wilcox and Stokes, Chap. 11; Diemer, Chap. 12), and adults (Sastry, Chap. 8).

McLanahan and Jacobsen (Chap. 1) begin by revisiting McLanahan's (2004) thesis of diverging destinies, providing an update on trends, drawing cross-cultural comparisons, discussing the potential causes and consequences of these trends, and suggesting policy approaches. They lay the foundation for the remaining chapters in this volume by highlighting the fundamental idea behind the thesis of diverging destinies: that patterns of family behavior vary by socioeconomic status in ways that are associated with gains in resources among the educated and losses in resources among those from less educated family backgrounds. Certain patterns of family behavior, including delayed and declining marriage rates, high divorce rates, single parenthood, and rising rates of non-marital childbearing, are increasingly concentrated among individuals with the fewest economic and educational resources, which may make it even more difficult for them (and their children) to escape from poverty and be upwardly mobile (McLanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1; Smeeding, Chap. 4). Growing up in a context of economic deprivation can have direct effects on the well-being, and in turn, the life chances of children (Wadsworth and Ahlkvist, Chap. 7), but a range of family processes can mediate the links between economic factors and child outcomes, including parenting investments (Cunha, Chap. 6), language use in the home (Vernon-Feagans et al., Chap. 3), parental psychological distress (Sastry, Chap. 8), and exposure to poverty-related risk (Raver, Roy, and Pressler, Chap. 14). Exposure to socioeconomic disadvantage and family instability, such as parental divorce, remarriage, and re-partnering, may also influence the pathways youth take in the transition to adulthood (Schoon, Chap. 9), with different dimensions of the socioeconomic environment (Diemer, Chap. 12) and family structure (Wilcox and Stokes, Chap. 11) impacting the socioeconomic and family-related behavior of offspring as they age.

In an era of both increasing family structure diversity and income inequality, family structure instability may operate as an important mechanism to reproduce inequality (McLanahan and Percheski 2008). The economic impact of family structure instability may help to explain the pattern of divergent outcomes by family structure (Holden and Smock 1991; Smock et al. 1999; Avellar and Smock 2005), and economic insecurity may also shape family demographic behavior (Lampard 1994; Aassve 2003). These trends are likely linked in a reciprocal fashion. Individuals with low-incomes are more likely to have children outside of marriage, less likely to marry, and more likely to divorceif they do (McLanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1). Each of

these factors, in turn, appears to increase the risk of poverty for parents and their children (Avellar and Smock 2005). Although research points to the importance and negative implications of these interrelated trends, questions remain about the underlying processes through which these trends are related (Martin 2006). If economic hardship and family instability are related reciprocally, where does it make sense to intervene? How we answer this question and our understanding of the linkages between these trends have important implications for the policy approach we take. Given that these processes are likely reciprocal suggests that a multifaceted and comprehensive policy approach to reducing inequality among families must be taken.

McLanahan and Percheski's (2008) review of the literature draws attention to the myriad ways through which family structure instability, and economic inequality are interrelated. Broad economic restructuring, increasing returns of post-secondary education, and eroding wages among low-skilled workers appear to have helped shift the timing of marriage and contributed to more diverse partnership experiences (Schoon, Chap. 9) and divergences in childbearing behavior (Wu et al. 2001) in young adulthood. Challenges to efforts aimed at disentangling the causal processes underlying the association between economic inequality and family demographic trends include endogeneity and selection, reliance on cross-sectional data, and the use of aggregate trends to infer information on individual behavior. Experimental and quasi-experimental designs help to deal with selection bias and may provide some insight into underlying processes (e.g., the Moving to Opportunity Study; Goering and Feins 2003). Additionally, adopting a life course perspective may help researchers untangle the reciprocal association between economic and demographic experiences. For instance, Staff et al. (Chap. 10) highlight several methodological techniques, particularly multi-level latent class analysis, which may help to illuminate heterogeneity in life course pathways across different groups and thereby uncover mechanisms through which advantages and disadvantages are conveyed.

A number of policy approaches have been adopted in an effort to address the issue of diverging destinies. These policies fall under two main frameworks: structural approaches and family-based approaches. Each one identifies different targets for intervention, and in doing so make assumptions about the causal direction of economic disadvantage-family structure linkages and the best place to intervene. A structural approach is focused on the larger opportunity structure and the resources and constraints afforded by the environment outside of the family, such as inequities in access to income, employment, and education. A family-based approach focuses on the stability of ties and the nature of interpersonal interactions within families. These frameworks are not mutually exclusive, and some policies and programs may attempt to address diverging destinies at multiple levels.

Further, the policy and program implementation strategies within these frameworks may take either an investment or a direct approach. Programs that invest in individuals or families with expected returns in the distant future, such as educational policies and programs, attempt to reduce inequality through long-term investments. Alternatively, a policy strategy that provides direct interventions, such as income supplements, attempts to reduce inequality through immediate and focused expenditures.

Structural Approaches

A structural approach attempts to address inequality in the underlying opportunity structure through policies aimed at improving job opportunities, income, and access to education. In targeting structural phenomena, this approach builds on the idea that improving the socioeconomic prospects of individuals will have a downstream effect on other behaviors—including relationship stability, childbearing choices, and parenting. This structural perspective emphasizes that problematic behaviors of those who are poor are due to structural opportunities and constraints. Thus, in order to change behavior, the structure of economic opportunities must be changed. Programs and policies that fall under a structural approach aim to improve the well-being of individuals and families by intervening within the larger social systems and institutions beyond the family. Many of the policies under this framework adopt a direct strategy which aims to make immediate changes to distribute opportunities and resources.

In the current era of both increasing economic inequality and economic recovery from the Great Recession, improving access to high-quality employment opportunities is an important challenge. The structure of job opportunities has become increasingly bifurcated over the past few decades, with more extensive opportunities for both high-skilled, high-wage occupations and low-skilled, low-wage occupations and reduced opportunities for individuals in middle-skilled jobs (Autor 2011). Individuals with less education are also more likely to work nonstandard work hours (Vernon-Feagans et al., Chap. 3). Further, the job security of low-skilled workers is tenuous, with reduced employer demands for low-skilled workers, higher rates of unemployment, and greater sensitivity to economic fluctuations (Oesch 2010; Western et al. 2012). Labor market trends have made it increasingly difficult for individuals without post-secondary education or niche skill training to find and maintain high-quality employment (Symonds et al. 2011).

For young adults in particular, limited education and/or experience may put them at a disadvantage and inhibit their prospects for economic security (Danziger and Ratner 2010). Importantly, a large number of young adults do not obtain post-secondary schooling, especially youth from low-income family backgrounds, which puts them at a disadvantage in the labor market (Halperin 2010). As pathways through the transition to adulthood have become more varied, young adults need more flexible opportunities to gain steady employment, regardless of their education levels (Schoon, Chap. 9; Symonds et al. 2011). Programs that provide multiple pathways through which young people can gain skills training and career counseling, such as the *Career Academies* (Haskins, Chap. 13), may help broaden the employment opportunities of youth and help them to make a successful transition to work (Symonds et al. 2011; Settersten 2005). Such an approach may lead to improved outcomes for individuals and their families.

Although job training programs help to provide avenues through which individuals can improve their chances of securing employment, other policies are aimed at improving the ability of individuals to maintain their employment. Often

such policies aim to address the balance between work and family responsibilities. Child care subsidies may help individuals maintain employment (Blau and Tekin 2007), while also supporting families in ways that reduce instability (Raver et al., Chap. 14). Child care subsidies also act as income supplements to working parents (Haskins, Chap. 13).

In the context of increasing income inequality, several policies attempt to improve the incomes of individuals in order to improve the well-being of their families. Federal programs that provide families with supplemental income include: the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), cash welfare, housing subsidies, the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program* (SNAP), Medicaid, and reduced school lunch. These programs generally fall under a direct implementation strategy. Criteria for receiving assistance vary across these programs and may be means-tested or include work requirements. Many of these programs are targeted at single mothers (Haskins, Chap. 13). Although some evidence indicates that these programs supplement the earnings of single mothers and moderately improve their incomes (Haskins, Chap. 13), many programs hinge on the ability of single mothers to find high-quality jobs, which remains a challenge, especially in times of economic recession. Finally, there have been increased efforts by lawmakers and advocacy groups to draw attention to the eroding value of low-skilled wages and to raise the minimum wage (e.g., Greenhouse 2012; Koba 2013). From a structural perspective, combating wage-stagnation and the falling real value of the minimum wage through an increase in the federal minimum wage would improve the economic prospects of low-wage workers and improve their labor market outcomes (Danziger and Ratner 2010).

A structural approach also includes policies that target increased access to education. These policies are generally aimed at addressing structural inequality in educational access and incorporate an investment strategy for reducing inequality. Several authors in this volume identified policy measures that could help reduce the financial and social barriers to higher education, including increased access to and flexibility in applying educational Pell grants and practical support for navigating the bureaucracy of higher education (Diemer, Chap. 12). Strengthening the community college system in the USA has also been recommended (Symonds et al. 2011) and was discussed during the Family Symposium as an increasingly important arena for training among low-income individuals. As Cohen (Chap. 2) argues, policies that increase both access to and completion of higher education may also contribute to shifts in family demographic behavior, such as non-marital childbearing.

Family-Based Approaches

Whereas a structural approach to addressing diverging destinies employs policies that target the broad structural opportunities and constraints of socioeconomic inequality, a family-based approach focuses on both family structure and family

processes. This type of approach may target the structure of families or the intra- and inter-individual functioning within families. In this way, policies that operate under a family-based approach may target demographic patterns and behavior, or the processes that play out in families.

Family structure instability is considered to be an important factor contributing to economic hardship. That is, instability of the parental relationship, non-marital childbearing, and single parenthood (typically father absence), all of which are on the rise, are considered to be important factors that lead to or maintain economic disadvantage (Haskins, Chap. 13; McLanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1). Intervention and policy efforts of a demographic family-based approach are thus targeted toward changing the structure of the family, with the goal of reducing economic inequality. One type of policy program within this approach aims to increase the stability of marriage, such as through marriage initiatives and relationship workshops, including the *Supporting Healthy Marriages* and *Building Strong Families* programs pursued within the Bush Marriage Initiative (Haskins, Chap. 13). These programs aim to strengthen marriages and reduce family structure instability, while also fostering relationship skill-building. Thus, the programs target both family structure and family processes. Another approach provides sex education programs and access to contraceptives in order to decrease non-marital births among teenagers and older women (Haskins, Chap. 13; Smeeding, Chap. 4). Examples include *The National Campaign to Reduce Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy* and *Planned Parenthood.*

Efforts to engender changes in family structure and processes are not without challenges. Evidence of the effectiveness of marriage initiative programs in stabilizing marriage has been limited (Cohen, Chap. 2; Haskins, Chap. 13). One example of evidence is the large-scale federal evaluation of the *Supporting Healthy Marriages* initiative which did find that the program was successful in raising the reported quality of marriages among low-income couples (Hsueh et al. 2012). The limited success of marriage initiative programs in general may indicate the difficulty of the task of cultivating and strengthening couple relationships, as well as the need for more comprehensive and multidimensional programs. In addition, although programs that provide sex education and access to contraceptives have shown to be effective in decreasing non-marital births (Haskins, Chap. 13), these programs are faced with resistance from supporters of an abstinence-only approach who oppose policies that cover contraceptives, such as the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA; Haskins, Chap. 13). A largely unaddressed challenge is men's contraceptive use. Instead, birth control appears to be regarded in the context of most social programs as the primary responsibility of women, and few efforts are directed at encouraging men to use contraceptives, to delay childbearing, to be selective in choosing a partner, or to maintain a relationship with their child's mother. Current policy efforts, in effect, fail to address the rising rates of men's multi-partner fertility (Edin, Tach, and Nelson, Chap. 15). We further address the need for a two-gender approach in policy programs in the conclusion section of this chapter.

The challenges of programs based on a family-based approach imply the need for more comprehensive and multidimensional efforts at the federal level. Some of the recent steps taken by the Obama administration, such as *Teen Pregnancy*

Prevention (TPP), *Personal Responsibility Education Program* (PREP), and the ACA which provides access to contraceptives for young people who have low rates of health insurance, may provide for more comprehensive sex education and better access to contraceptives for both men and women (Haskins, Chap. 13). Policy efforts that are directed toward the expansion of family planning services, public media campaigns and programs aimed at the use of contraceptives (Haskins, Chap. 13), and active incorporation of men in intervention and policy efforts (Edin et al., Chap. 15), may also help to shift cultural views toward increasing responsibility for contraception among both men and women, as well as greater inclusion of men as valued partners and fathers within families. In addition, policy efforts may need to take into account the diverse pathways of young people's transitions to adulthood (Schoon, Chap. 9; Staff et al., Chap. 10). With increasing complexity in union formation and childbearing experiences, young adults who have limited resources may be more vulnerable and in need of greater support as they navigate the transition to adulthood (Wilcox and Stokes, Chap. 11).

A family-based approach may also focus on improving individual- and family-level processes. At the individual child level, early childhood education and intervention programs (e.g., Early Head Start, Abecedarian, PATHS), and K-12 education reforms (e.g., Schools for All, KIPP) are implemented in order to enhance child skills and outcomes (e.g., Battistich et al. 2004; Botvin and Griffin 2004; Campbell et al. 2001; Greenberg et al. 1998). Intervention efforts also target interactions between family members and the quality of relationships within the family, with the goals of improving couple relationship skills, parenting quality, and family functioning (e.g., Marvin et al. 2002; Sanders et al. 2002; Vernon-Feagans et al., Chap. 3). Such educational programs and relationship and family interventions operate under the premise that changes in individual, couple, and family behaviors and skills will help reduce disadvantage and lead to better child outcomes over the long term.

By focusing on individual-level processes, this kind of family-based approach emphasizes the role of human agency. The assumption is that people can break the cycle of poverty and improve their own and/or their children's life chances and destinies if they pursue higher education, improve relationships with their partners/spouses, and engage in sensitive, involved, and supportive parenting. Substantial research supports this view in that sensitive parenting within a supportive parent–child relationship is a protective factor for economically disadvantaged children (Kalil, Chap. 5; Pollard et al. 1999; Vernon-Feagans et al., Chap. 3). Programs that fall under a family-based approach do acknowledge the challenges and risks associated with a context of disadvantage, often targeting families in high-risk contexts. However, interventions should operate within those contexts to target intra- and interpersonal processes in order to improve child and family outcomes (Wadsworth and Ahlkvist, Chap. 7; Sastry, Chap. 8; Raver et al., Chap. 14).

The ability of programs to maintain engagement with parents in intervention efforts is a major challenge facing family-based programs (Kalil, Chap. 5). When parents are struggling with structural constraints such as the stressors of inadequate housing, unemployment or job insecurity, lack of adequate food, and mental health

difficulties, these demands often take precedence over spending high-quality time with partners/spouses and children (Sastry, Chap. 8; Wadsworth and Ahlkvist, Chap. 7). Another challenge to promoting parenting skills is that family is considered to be a private domain, such that local wisdom, traditions, and beliefs, rather than advice from experts, may be the preferred source of parenting know how (Kalil, Chap. 5).

As indicated by the modest evidence of the effectiveness of early childhood education programs, K-12 education programs, and parenting interventions in enhancing the development and adjustment of low-income children (Kalil, Chap. 5; Smeeding, Chap. 4), an ideal policy approach may be a multidimensional and multilevel one that addresses structural constraints while also bolstering children's competencies and the parenting skills of their mothers and fathers. Home-visiting programs based on *Nurse-Family Partnership* (Olds et al. 1998) and *New Hope* (Huston et al. 2005) models, with additional components that increase mothers' and fathers' ability to remain engaged, may be an effective avenue for policy to pursue (Cunha, Chap. 6; Kalil, Chap. 5). These programs intervene early in a child's life, starting from birth (or even earlier in the prenatal months) through at least age five; enhance parents' education, economic self-sufficiency, mental health, and social support; delay subsequent pregnancies; and improve parenting quality—while making efforts to engage, motivate, and retain both mothers and fathers in program activities (Edin et al., Chap. 15; Kalil, Chap. 5; Sastry, Chap. 8; Wadsworth and Ahlkvist, Chap. 7).

Another important focus of policy effects would be the universal dissemination of high-quality early childhood education programs and preschools, perhaps using child care subsidies to enable program participation. This dissemination should be accompanied by greater coordination between early childhood education programs and preschools, home-visiting programs, family interventions, school systems, as well as supplemental health and income programs (Kalil, Chap. 5; Sastry, Chap. 8; Wadsworth and Ahlkvist, Chap. 7). Examples of supplemental health and income programs include the *Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children* (WIC), *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program* (SNAP), reduced/free school lunch, Medicaid, EITC, and housing subsidies.

Future Directions

We face many challenges moving forward in an era of increasing inequality, both as scholars and as citizens. The task of ameliorating disparities and improving the life chances of all citizens is daunting, but we have several policy and program approaches in our toolbox that can help us make progress toward this goal. As our discussion asserts, the targets of specific policies and programs appear to be built on assumptions about the nature of the interplay between demographic and economic trends and individual and family behaviors. The reality, we know, is far more complicated; family demographic and economic trends and individual and family behavior are reciprocally related. Thus, a multidimensional and systemic approach

will aid us in achieving the larger goal of reducing economic inequality and improving the outcomes of children and families. There are several important considerations that policy makers and researchers alike must consider in order to be successful, but we focus here on two major ones: funding constraints and incorporating a two-gender approach.

Funding Constraints in Policy and Research

The post-recession economy is still in recovery, with high rates of unemployment, low likelihood of wage growth from market forces, and states cutting social spending and public jobs (Western et al. 2012). In the current context of constrained budgets and fiscal deficits, decisions are being made about the funding of policies and programs. For example, programs such as SNAP have seen budget cuts leading to drops in benefits that have impacted thousands of families (Rampell 2013). Whether existing policies and programs can continue, whether better programs can be tested for their effectiveness and implemented with fidelity in ways that are sustainable, and whether multidimensional programs that address the structural constraints of economically disadvantaged families as well as individual and family behaviors can be developed, will depend largely on the availability of funding at federal and state levels. Additionally, support for and adoption of policies is inherently shaped by the political ideologies of the governing body. Ideological tensions across the aisle over the role and goals of government interventions will continue to plague policy legislation aimed at addressing economic inequality. It is crucial that lawmakers search for common ground and work together to improve the well-being of American families.

Funding constraints in the current economy also have implications for researchers. Deep budget cuts in federal agencies imply less funding not only for policies and programs, but also for universities and research institutes. Reductions in (or lack of) funding for graduate-level study, shortage of grants for research projects that test the effectiveness and efficacy of intervention/prevention and policy programs, and scarcity of full-time tenure-track faculty positions may preclude the significant research still needed to successfully counter the diverging destinies of American families.

Two-Gender Approach

The thesis of diverging destinies focuses on how trends in family behaviors have contributed to different trajectories, primarily for women and children (McLanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1). That is, challenges facing mothers, particularly single mothers, are a primary focus of both research and policy. In order to come to a deeper understanding of the roots of inequality among families and to develop

comprehensive and effective policy programs, we must integrate the experiences of both women and men into the equation. Incorporating a two-gender approach would involve the implementation of several strategies. We focus on two: Those that improve father involvement and those that improve the economic conditions of low-SES men.

There are many challenges of living in poverty that can create stress in the family environment and undermine the functioning of marital, romantic, and parent–child relationships (Conger et al. 2010). Economic disadvantage and financial strain increase the risk for psychological and physiological stress (Sastry, Chap. 8; Raver et al., Chap. 14) as well as elevate cognitive loads and reduce executive function (Wadsworth and Ahlkvist, Chap. 7). The pressures that families experience when faced with economic hardship elevate the risk that parents will exhibit emotional and behavioral problems (Conger et al. 2010), which in turn increase the risk of marital conflict and instability (Conger et al. 1990; Edin and Kissane 2010). Research consistently finds that the quality of parents' romantic relationship is associated with the quality and degree of paternal involvement (Coley and Hernandez 2006; Cummings et al. 2004), with fathers less likely to be involved with their children when they have a more conflictual relationship with their children's mother. The quality of parental relationships, communication, and interactional styles may also impact the ability of parents to participate in co-parenting (Margolin et al. 2001), which helps to promote father engagement (Fagan and Palkovitz 2011). Additionally, psychological distress and involvement in antisocial activities (e.g., substance use, crime) may undermine the ability of low-income fathers to remain actively involved with their children (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Edin et al., Chap. 15; Waller and Swisher 2006).

Given the multiple interacting challenges facing low-income men, policy interventions aimed at improving father involvement must necessarily be multidimensional in scope. Successful programs will likely have several intervention targets, including: individual mental health, parenting, couple relationship quality, the intergenerational transmission of relationship patterns, and stress-coping and support seeking behaviors (e.g., Supporting Father Involvement project, Cowan et al. 2009). These types of interventions appear to have greater long-term positive effects on child outcomes and father involvement when they involve both fathers and mothers (Cowan et al. 2009). Ultimately, increases in father involvement may improve child outcomes (Carlson 2006) and help reduce family instability (Kalmijn 1999).

There are merits to increasing father involvement, but positive and sustained father involvement will rest on the success of policies and programs aimed at the economic challenges facing young men from low socioeconomic backgrounds. These men face unemployment, underemployment, and high rates of incarceration, all of which make it difficult for them to obtain stable wages to help support their families (Haskins, Chap. 13; Edin et al., Chap. 15). Programs that help disadvantaged men gain skills, complete their education, and find jobs are needed to improve the labor market attachment of these young men (Holzer 2013). Helping young men gain practical on-the-job training and skills may also improve their position in the labor market over the long term and improve economic mobility and employment stability (Corcoran and

Matsudaira 2005). Ultimately, improving the economic prospects of low-skilled, less educated men will help to keep their families out of poverty and create more stability for their children.

Conclusions

As we move forward in an era of increasing inequality, we must continue to strive to be interdisciplinary in our research and maintain open discourse between family and stratification scholars. As the evidence from chapters in this volume demonstrates, we must think about family and economic trends, and family processes and individual behavior, as reciprocally influential. Scholarship that takes differing disciplinary perspectives and levels of analysis into account will deepen our understanding of the roots and transmission of inequality (Smeeding, Chap. 4), as well as better support policy and programming efforts. The work presented in this volume also demonstrates the utility of incorporating a life course perspective to identify pathways through life (Schoon, Chap. 9; Staff et al., Chap. 10). Through interdisciplinary projects utilizing longitudinal data, research on family inequality will continue to provide new insights in the coming years.

In the context of increasing economic inequality and widening disparities in resources, the life course experiences of Americans will continue to diverge along social class lines. Furthermore, in the context of increasing family structure diversity and wide-spread family instability, the life courses of families and children will be increasingly varied (Casper and Bianchi 2002; McLanahan and Jacobsen, Chap. 1). The disadvantages associated with these wide-spread and co-occurring trends have real implications for individuals, families, and society. A multi-level policy approach to address these problems is of vital national interest. Failure to address them will likely intensify inequalities and impair the well-being of future generations, and undermine the functioning of society.

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