

## Commentary, Afterword, and Concluding Thoughts on Family Change and Economic Inequality

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Throughout the developed world, inequality is increasing and the family is changing. Yet, there is no agreement on the links between the two. Some claim that family change – particularly class-based increases in relationship instability, nonmarital cohabitation, and single-parent births – contributes to societal inequality. Accordingly, a renewed emphasis on marriage should be an important part of any solution. Others see economic change as the source of both greater inequality and family transformation, and favor solutions that provide greater support to those left behind – both for poverty alleviation and to enhance relationship stability. Both groups agree that a new information-based society has witnessed a series of overlapping changes: A greater demand for women’s market labor, an elite shift to later marriage and relatively more egalitarian relationships, declining wages for unskilled men, greater tolerance for nonmarital sexuality, and lower overall fertility. Yet, they differ in the way they address the relationship between economic change and family values. Some scholars see the values change as a product of the economic changes; elite couples have delayed marriage and childbearing and embraced more cooperative and flexible parental roles in order to be able take advantage of dual career opportunities. We call this “blue” family values (Cahn and Carbone 2010). In accordance with this view, the instability in working-class families involves problems of transition; many societies do not provide sufficient support to systematize the advantages of the new family system, which depend on women’s reproductive autonomy, the creation of meaningful social roles for blue-collar men, and greater parental security irrespective of family form. Others view the change in terms of values as independent of the economic changes, and favor stronger support for more responsible decisions about partnering and child-rearing. While the approaches overlap, they differ in their identification of causation, preferred family strategies, and proposed government interventions. Accordingly, while both see increasing working-class instability in employment,

residences, and family composition as bad for children, they differ as to whether greater economic insecurity or cultural shifts in family composition play the larger role in increasing that instability.

Testing the relative merits of these viewpoints in a comparative context is challenging. Academic study of the increase in inequality is relatively new, and the study of the connections between inequalities of the family is even more contemporary. Moreover, while economies and families are changing almost everywhere, they are not necessarily changing everywhere in the same ways or at the same rates (Perelli-Harris, Chapter 4). Even within the same countries, for example, urban areas tend to be earlier adopters of the new family model than rural areas; and this may be true whether the urban areas are struggling or thriving (Cahn and Carbone 2010; Kurek 2011). Indeed, family scholars do not even agree on what to call the “new family behaviors” (Perelli-Harris, Chapter 4), sometimes terming them the “deinstitutionalization of marriage” (Cherlin 2005), “the second demographic transition” (Lesthaeghe 2010), or something else entirely.

To make sense of the inquiry, an interdisciplinary and international group of scholars came to together in Rome, Italy. In this volume, they provide a comparative analysis of the relationship between growing economic inequality in a large portion of the Western world and the process of family change. Unsurprisingly, they provide no comprehensive resolution of the debate over the implications of family change or the solution to economic inequality. Yet, they create a much more informed foundation for these discussions. Based on the contributions to this volume and our past scholarship in the area within this Commentary, we highlight where grounds emerge for at least tentative agreement, the issues likely to remain subjects of intense disagreement, and the areas which have yet to be fully explored. In doing so, we draw our examples primarily from the United States, although we recognize that it is often an outlier in both economic and family terms. Our goal is to shift the focus from the areas of disagreement toward positive policies with proven impact.

This Commentary breaks the debate down into three areas. We term the first “The View From 10,000 Feet.” This section provides an overview of where some agreement is likely. A major part of the debate to date has been between those who see family change as a product of cultural shifts and those who view it as a reaction to a new, postindustrial economic model. Our response, which frames this Commentary and which we explore in this Section, is an emphatic “yes.” Economic and cultural changes interact; viewing them as independent of each other is neither necessary nor sustainable. We conclude, therefore, that some agreement should be possible at the 10,000 foot level, and such

agreement could involve recognition that the changes we see in the family are part of a transition to a new economy. There also seems to be agreement that this new economy causes reorganization of families' division of market and domestic work, with profound implications for investments in children.

In the second section, "The Nitty-Gritty," we consider the need to develop a dynamic analysis that examines the interaction of cultural, social, economic, and legal factors, rather than the isolation of individual causal agents. We note that determining causation in family change is always challenging. Nonetheless, most scholars agree that a significant factor underlying family composition is the status of women. However, accounting for the impact of change in women's roles is complicated because it involves not only relationships between men and women but also how those relationships affect both men's relative status among men, and women's ability to command societal support for their child-rearing efforts. We conclude that international, regional, and class comparisons are incomplete unless they take into account the societal and legal context for intimate relationships, as some chapters in this volume do.

In the third section, "Why Can't We All Get Along?" we observe the forces blocking comprehensive approaches to the family. If we see what is happening to the family as part of a process of economic and cultural change, the question should be whether it is desirable or possible to speed the transition to the new system of gender egalitarianism and public support for the transition to an information economy for those who might be left behind. In fact, some countries seem to have cushioned the transition to the new system; either because the values underlying the new system are more broadly shared, or because the society provides a greater degree of family support. In other countries however, the process of economic and family change has triggered greater divisions, blocking public support for a more comprehensive approach. We conclude by reviewing the proposals in this volume and their prospects for implementation.

#### THE VIEW FROM 10,000 FEET

Efforts to describe the family in comparative terms are a fraught enterprise, as they must account for cultural, economic, and legal changes in differing countries with diverse heritages. It is understandable therefore that the papers do not agree on an overall framework as to what exactly has caused changing family structures. Indeed, to the extent they agree on anything, it is most likely to be certain basic facts, and identification of the theories whose predictions *cannot* be validated. We therefore start with the factual assertions on which

there is at least some agreement, then move on to the claims that do not stand up to examination, and close with the identification of the missing parts of a full analysis.

To the extent that there is a shared set of assumptions for this volume, they are basic. First, the family has changed. Between 1980 and 2000, fertility declined substantially across most of the developed world, though with greater variation after 2000. Nonmarital cohabitation and childbearing increased during the same period in every developed country. The patterns, however, are not uniform. Sweden and Iceland, which had much higher rates of nonmarital childbearing compared to other European countries in 1980, did not experience a sharp increase. The growth in nonmarital births is leveling off in both Sweden and Iceland (Perelli-Harris, Chapter 4, Figure 4.1).

Second, all developed countries experienced similar economic changes with a reduction in middle-wage jobs. The countries varied, however, in the degree to which they experienced a corresponding increase in higher or lower wage occupations (Cooke, Chapter 11, Table 11.1). France and Denmark, for example, experienced large increases in high-paying occupations, the Republic of Ireland and Finland saw their low-paying jobs expand most; while both high-paying and low paying jobs grew in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

Third, women's roles have changed, with women increasing their workforce participation throughout Europe and North America since 1960, although those rates have plateaued in many countries (Cooke, Chapter 11, Table 11.2). The impact of these changes on family, however, varies across countries and regions. In countries with patriarchal gender attitudes, for example, the highest-earning women are less likely to marry than women with less education while in countries with more egalitarian gender attitudes, the highest-earning women have become more likely to marry than other women (Cooke, Chapter 11). In addition, access to employment and contraception has given women greater independence, but the form that independence takes varies considerably. Comparatively, more patriarchal countries such as Italy and Greece may have relatively low levels of nonmarital childbearing, for example, but also have substantially lower fertility rates.

Fourth, the increase in family instability has not affected the well off to the same extent as the middle-class and low-income families, particularly in the countries that have experienced the sharpest increases in nonmarital births and cohabitation. While the class-based divergences are not universal (Garriga and Berta, Chapter 6), such differences are widespread and there is a shared concern that family change may exacerbate economic inequality (Wilcox and Price, Chapter 8).

Despite agreement on the basic facts, there is little agreement on cause or effect. Indeed, the greater theoretical agreement may be on the failure of existing theories to account for what has occurred. Initial studies of the changing family have treated it as a process of cultural change, with elite women among the first to question patriarchal marriage and to embrace a redefinition of intimate relationships. In economics, Gary Becker predicted that low-income couples would experience the greatest increases in relationship instability as they forewent the benefits of “specialization” in the respective spheres of home and market.<sup>1</sup> (Becker 1981) Demographers described the changes in terms of a shift in values toward greater individualization and search for self-fulfillment, with higher educated people leading the way (Lesthaeghe 2010; Van de Kaa 1987). The problem with these theories, however, is that they do not fit the evidence. In the United States in particular, elite families have seen little increase in nonmarital child-rearing and their families have experienced comparative stability (Lundberg, Pollack, and Stearns 2016) at the same time working-class groups with more traditional gender attitudes have experienced the most dramatic increases in relationship instability (Cherlin, Chapter 3). Thus, the authors in this volume share skepticism about the existing theories, but none offers a single, comprehensive, consensus-based alternative account.

Developing such a theory is particularly challenging because, as we have argued elsewhere, it involves integrating the economic and normative changes. The interaction between the two is a dynamic process in which causality likely flows in multiple directions. For example, industrialization made education the new pathway into the middle class (economic); and the family and women’s roles within it changed to facilitate greater investment in children (normative) (Carbone and Cahn 2014; Lesthaeghe 2010). The hallmark of the middle class thus became women’s ability to stay out of the paid labor market; a luxury beyond the reach of most of the working class until well into the twentieth century, except perhaps during the short-lived postwar economy of the 1950s.

Yet, the embrace of women’s distinctive role in overseeing the moral training and development of the young occurred readily in only some places. In the United States for example, farmwives embraced the new gender model before the urban working class; viewing it as an elevation in women’s status as they became the moral arbiters of family life (Carbone and Cahn 2014).

<sup>1</sup> This is despite the fact that the homemaker role of cook, cleaner, and career tends to be treated as a low-skill occupation that could be the epitome of generalization, while women’s increased market labor in fact involves greater specialization among women (Carbone 2000).

European scholars associate similar increases in parental investment in children with greater parental affection (Lesthaeghe 2010), and view rural families as lagging behind urban ones in embracing the new values (Scott and Tilly 1975). On both continents, the shifts in “sentiment” associated with expressive individualism, the move away from arranged marriages, greater female status, and greater investment in children unfolded over centuries (Stone 1977, p. 198). In Europe, for example, women’s ability to devote themselves to the home came earlier in Britain, with only 9% of married women in the labor market at the turn of the twentieth century, in contrast to France, where 38% of married women remained in the labor market during the same time period (Scott and Tilly 1975). Cherlin observes in this volume that the American working class acquired the ability to keep wives and children out of the workplace and to invest more heavily in children’s education only after World War II (Cherlin, Chapter 3).

Today’s information economy has created a similar long-term transformation in the relationship between home and family. The new, postindustrial economy has generated greater demand for women’s market labor, making two-income families more important to middle-class status, and rewarding even greater investment in girls and boys. This has also required a reorganization of the family. To realize two incomes, college graduates embrace contraception and delay marriage and childbearing. When they do form families, they engage in a greater degree of assortative mating, with spouses choosing mates with similar interests and socioeconomic status. In managing children, the spouses trade off work force participation and child care, which requires a greater degree of trust and flexibility in managing relationships. We have previously termed this new system of family patterns as “blue” (Cahn and Carbone 2010).

Each of these new systems – one developing during the rise of industrialization and the other coinciding with the information economy – combine adaptation to new economies with new moral understandings. Yet, the process of universalizing these new systems can be slower if the new values are contested, or if the society is unwilling to support economic policies that allow transmission of the new model to those left behind. Unemployed men do not necessarily contribute to the creation of more egalitarian parenting relationships, even if they adore their children. Moreover, community health mediates the impact of growing economic inequality on family stability, with the result that close-knit communities built around shared religious or cultural values and communities with more robust safety nets may not see as much of an increase in family dysfunction. The result – at least in the short term – is greater income and educational inequality.

We have written about these shifts over the last twenty years in the United States (Cahn and Carbone 2010; Carbone 2000; Carbone and Cahn 2014), and we have tried to capture a 10,000-foot view of the nature of the changes. Our story involves the intersection of economic change with family organization and increased class divisions. We have argued that the changes that took place with the rise of industrialization involved the same issues that occur today – greater economic inequality as opportunities increase for some while remaining beyond the reach of others, changing women’s roles that reallocate power in intimate relationships, and changing norms that become a source of tension in the recreation of culture. Cooke, with more of a European focus, describes the changes in similar terms (Cooke, Chapter 11). Underlying these changes has been the recreation of class advantage as the middle classes reorganize the family in order to realize the new opportunities – men’s entry into the management positions and professions of the industrial economy, and women’s similar expansion into the paid labor market today – while securing the investment in children necessary to realize these advantages (Lesthaeghe 2010). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this involved women’s increased status within the home and greater emphasis on child-rearing. In the twenty-first century, it involves shared parenting and greater reliance on paid child care (Cooke, Chapter 11; Goldscheider and Sassler, Chapter 9). Seeing the changes as part of a long-term, unevenly disseminating process provides the basis for more in-depth explorations of the integration of economics and normative change.

Today’s shifts – which involve investing in women as well as men’s income opportunities, embracing the birth control pill and postponing childbearing, high investment in children based on intensive male and female parenting – also face a difficult challenge to greater acceptance. The reasons, however, lie not with the overall ideal – more egalitarian family practices appear to have won the day in principle throughout the developed world – but rather with the difficulties of implementation. These challenges involve what we label the “nitty-gritty,” and they do help explain why analyses of the family remain so divisive.

#### THE “NITTY–GRITTY”

What we refer to here as “the nitty-gritty” involves the factors that explain how new normative systems spread, such as acceptance of new gendered roles. These factors are context-dependent – potentially varying substantially from rural Calabria to urban Stockholm for example. As explained below, the factors interact with each other in an iterative fashion. In short, they require

a dynamic systems analysis, not just the isolation of individual causal agents. In this section, we identify a number of issues that complicate the analyses in this book and serve as important factors that explain differences in perspectives and outcomes. The factors involve men's status, women's sources of support for child-rearing, the legal treatment of intimate and child-rearing relationships, and the interaction between employment and migration in determining the composition of various communities.

### *Men's Status*

All authors concur that declining prospects for working-class men contribute to family change (Cherlin, Chapter 3; Cooke, Chapter 11; Wilcox and Price, Chapter 8). Yet, there is no agreement on the mechanisms that translate a loss in income or employment into a decline in marriage, much less demonstration of a comparative effect across cultures. Indeed, Wilcox and Price (see Chapter 8) report that one of their more surprising findings is that societies with a higher rate of two-parent families do not necessarily have higher levels of male workforce participation.

Two missing pieces may contribute to the analyses: Men's reactions to more competitive status hierarchies and women's choice among possible partners (Carbone and Cahn 2014). In European societies, periods of higher unemployment correlate with lower marriage rates, but these studies do not necessarily track the impact of persistent unemployment or distinguish among subgroups who are more or less connected to stable employment (Kalmijn 2007). Ethnographic studies of low-income communities in the United States, where marriage rates have plummeted, generally indicate that women do not refuse to stay with low-income fathers because of their lack of income in itself. Instead, the women emphasize men's behavior. In one study, over half of the mothers listed domestic violence as a major reason why they were no longer with the fathers of their children (Edin and Kefalas 2005). A more recent study finds that domestic violence may also be a significant factor in younger women's likelihood of pregnancy in the context of unstable relationships (Barber et al. 2017); the violent men were more likely to father children than the women's other male partners. These studies further indicate that infidelity, criminality, and contact with the criminal justice system exacerbate relationship instability.

These correlations may well be a product of more unequal societies. In essence, societies with greater income inequality tend to also have higher levels of violence, imprisonment, and substance abuse (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). Layoffs further aggravate domestic violence and substance abuse levels

(Carbone and Cahn 2014). In the United States, racial differences exacerbate the effect as communities of color tend to be disproportionate targets for criminal justice enforcement (Butler 2017), and have seen the most rapidly declining marriage rates. Moreover, as unequal societies tend to provide less comprehensive social safety nets, men may experience greater pressure to engage in illegal activities to raise money to support their families (Edin and Nelson 2013). A study of people's reasons for divorce in the Netherlands, a society with a stronger social safety net than the United States, also found that less-educated women were more likely to cite violence, substance abuse, and conflict over expenses as reasons for divorce than the better educated. Indeed, the Dutch women were four times more likely than men to list physical violence (26% women and 6% men) and alcohol and drug abuse (36% and 9%), problems that tend to increase with added stress (De Graaf and Kalmijn 2006). Yet, even the less-educated Dutch women do not cite these factors as often as unmarried American women as the reasons for their break-ups. The study further found that the Dutch women often stated that their husbands worked too much, and that sharing of household responsibilities had been a source of conflict, suggesting that tensions over the transition to more egalitarian family norms remain a factor.

The cumulative impact of these factors may be a series of reinforcing effects. Greater societal marginalization that results in higher levels of death, incapacitation, or incarceration reduces the number of available men (Carlson, Chapter 1). As women see the prospects for good relationships decline, they invest more in their own income opportunities. A paper examining the effect of incarceration on African-Americans, for example, finds that higher levels of incarceration tend to correlate with greater emphasis on women's education and work force participation (Mechoulan 2011). A cross-country comparison similarly found that where the available women outnumbered the men, the women became warier about commitment altogether (Stone, Shackelford, and Buss 2007, p. 297). This process does not just affect the individual woman who might have been partnered with a man who is arrested or otherwise unavailable.

The marginalization of a large number of men, effectively removed them from consideration as appropriate mates, may have similar effects. As Cooke notes, "more desirable men are selected into stable marriages, either because men who are particularly keen to have a family actively prepare for it earlier in the life course, or because savvy women actively pursue such men for marriage" (Cooke, Chapter 11). Where women enjoy the opportunity to select such men, they reinforce the desired characteristics, whether those characteristics are stable employment (Cherlin, Chapter 3), egalitarian attitudes

(Goldscheider and Sassler, Chapter 9), or a college degree, increasing the association of these characteristics with marriage. Where, however, women enjoy worse relationship prospects, they may become more reluctant to commit to any relationships (Carbone and Cahn 2014; Cooke, Chapter 11). Instead, they invest in themselves and their own income prospects and do not necessarily wait for the “right” partner, to whom they are willing to make a commitment before having children. Men within such communities may find that investment in themselves also has little effect on their relationship opportunities, and they may respond to the women’s attitudes with greater distrust of their own (Edin and Nelson 2013; Wilson 1996, p. 99).

This combination of the effect of inequality on men’s behavior and the corresponding reaction of the available women is harder to measure than the impact of declining employment prospects for men or even the prevalence of egalitarian gender attitudes. This dynamic may also contribute to the creation of distinct subgroups, such as African-Americans in racially and economically segregated communities in the United States, where the number of marriageable men has declined precipitously with high rates of incarceration. In other communities with high poverty or unemployment rates, however, low-income men may not experience the same degree of societal marginalization. In these cases, relationship stability may not decline to the same extent. Accordingly, the question becomes identifying the filter that translates changing men’s employment prospects into behavior that disrupts relationships, and produces women’s strategies that move family formation efforts away from marriage or long-term cohabitation. While Goldscheider and Sassler (Chapter 9) are optimistic that middle-class norms will permeate lower income relationships, this seems unlikely in the absence of economic stability and decreasing incarceration rates – at least in the United States.

### *Sources of Support for Child-Rearing*

The second factor that may connect economic change to relationship stability is the perceived source of support for child-rearing. Historically, marriage involved an exchange of men’s financial support for recognition as the head of the household. In many countries, fathers could secure recognition of their paternity and right to a relationship to their children only through marriage. Likewise, mothers could claim paternal, societal, and often familial support for their children only if they married. Otherwise, they faced being ostracized (Carbone and Cahn 2014; Perelli-Harris, Chapter 4). Today however, sources of financial and emotional support for child-rearing vary widely. In this context, women who rely on their own earnings to provide for children may find

marriage to an unreliable, abusive, or needy partner to be a more of a threat rather than an advantage in raising children.

The new ideal, as Cooke (see Chapter 11) and Goldscheider and Sassler (see Chapter 9) suggest, may be an egalitarian one: Fathers and mothers trade off providing financial and carer contributions to the family. This changes marriage from a hierarchical relationship in which wives are expected to obey their husbands to partnerships that depend on greater degrees of trust, flexibility, and collaboration. This in turn changes the nature of relationship bargains making them far more individualized and more dependent on the relative positions of intimate partners, the legal and cultural context in which the bargain is struck, and the expected sources of support for child-rearing. Both men and women, for example, fear the consequences of divorce – which may be expensive and emotionally wrenching. Yet, different groups may fear divorce for different reasons.

High-income partners have long been wary of an intimate spouse's rights to leave a relationship and command continued spousal support. Mid- and low-income women may be more concerned about their ability to leave an abusive or unfaithful spouse without having to share decision-making power over their children. An American study that surveyed cohabiting couples in their twenties about their plans to marry indicated that wariness about marriage reflected class and gender differences. Among those with at least some college attendance, two thirds of the women while only about one third of the men reported that they planned to marry their current partners. Among individuals who did not attend college, the percentages were reversed: Two thirds of the men, but far fewer of the women planned to marry their current parents (Hymowitz et al. 2013).

The reasons may have to do with the legal consequences of marriage. In all countries, marriage is associated with a commitment to the other spouse (Perelli-Harris, Chapter 4). Couples who see cohabitation as a testing ground may be wary of whether the other partner is worthy of that commitment. The consequences can be stark. Two incomes are increasingly necessary to enjoy a comfortable family life, particularly in expensive cities such as London and New York. Marrying a partner who does not contribute a fair share to the household may threaten middle-class status. In addition, if the relationship does not last, the higher earning spouse may be subject to a substantial obligation for support, or an equal division of family property, making marriage an expensive proposition.

Yet, the impact of these considerations on relationship-form can be complex. In more traditional European countries, for example, the influence of religion is greater, divorce is rarer, and better-educated women

may be less likely to marry than other women (Kamlijin 2007, 2013). These patterns suggest that marriage still reflects more traditional gender roles, which deter divorce – and in some countries, may simultaneously deter marriage and childbearing. In more egalitarian societies on the other hand, gender-based support obligations have disappeared, and more equal contributions to the relationship have become a more important source of stability (Carbone and Cahn 2014).

For those who are not wealthy, marriage has risks as well as benefits. In the United States, the median working-age household has approximately \$5,000 in retirement savings (Elkins 2017); and more than half of Americans have less than \$1,000 in the bank (Maxfield 2016). Commitment to a partner with an unstable income, who runs up the credit card bills, incurs large health care expenses in the absence of insurance, or needs to be bailed out of jail, can diminish family savings. Marriage entails a commitment – legally, financially and emotionally – to equally share the couple's joint resources (Miller, Sassler, and Kusi-Appouh 2011). For couples with unstable finances, particularly where one partner's contributions are more variable than the others, this commitment may be a source of peril – and this may be true even if the couple would be financially better off combining their resources. For the more reliable partner, it may only take one fender-bender, missed mortgage payment, or wrongful arrest to trigger a financial crisis. In the Republic of Ireland, the expense and inconvenience of divorce appears to have contributed to the self-selection of the stable into marriage as well as to greater legal and social acceptance of nonmarital unions (Fahey 2012).

Custody laws tend to further complicate the analysis. In all countries, marriage makes paternity recognition easier, even if unmarried couples can also receive acknowledgment, and for both mothers and fathers, fear of losing access to children may discourage divorce. In the United States, where courts increasingly award custody to both parents, mothers who fear loss of control over their children become less likely to file for divorce (Carbone and Cahn 2014). In Europe, this may discourage men from filing divorce, “possibly reflecting an anticipation of weaker postdivorce contact with their children” (Härkönen 2014, p. 15). Similar custody concerns may also affect a willingness to marry. In the United States for example, women frequently cite the difficulties and expense of divorce as a reason not to marry; and custody is a major part of their concern, particularly where shared parenting orders have become the norm at divorce while they are more difficult for unmarried men to obtain. (Carbone and Cahn 2013).

*Labor Market Effects and the Difficulties of Measurement*

An additional factor complicating the relationship between inequality and the family is the impact of labor market policies in different societies. These policies may not only affect various groups within the same country differently, but the policies may also encourage migration to different regions which skews the results of statistical measures.

Underlying these different effects is employment stability. The ability to secure stable employment tends to increase marriage rates. Yet, we know less about the consequences of readily available, but insecure sources of employment. For example, a major difference between the United States and Europe is that European labor market regulations tend to produce more stable jobs, while increasing unemployment. These policies simultaneously create greater security for those with permanent jobs, incentives to postpone marriage and childbearing for people who hope to receive such jobs in the future, and greater emigration to other countries with better employment possibilities (Alderman 2017). In the United States, where there is less labor regulation, employment and income instability has increased on a more permanent basis for blue-collar workers. This has had at least some impact on people's abilities to create and maintain families (Pew Charitable Trusts 2017; Pugh 2017, p. 4). We have yet to see a comprehensive comparative study of the impact of this type of instability, but we would expect income instability to increase the reluctance to marry and undermine the level of commitment in lower income families.

A second issue is migration. In the United States, the states that enjoyed the greatest drops in teenage births were those that had the greatest immigration of college graduates (Cahn and Carbone 2010). This changed the composition of both the origin states and the destination states. More recently, the end of net migration to the United States from Mexico appears to have made a significant contribution to the drop in overall fertility within the United States – with approximately half of the overall decline and an even greater percentage of the drop within teenage births coming from the changing fertility patterns of the Latino population (Cahn, Carbone, and Levine 2016). On the other hand, Germany has both the largest number of its citizens living abroad, and also the largest volume of immigration in Europe. Similarly, Italy has also experienced a loss of many of its most ambitious citizens abroad (Anelli and Peri 2016), and the Republic of Ireland has long claimed that its most prominent export is the Irish people (The *Irish Examiner* 2010). Indeed, even within countries, the differences between urban and rural areas may be influenced by migration of the young, the ambitious,

and the adventurous to cities while those left behind tend to be older, more traditional, and more religious. Migration thus increases the cultural differences between rural and urban areas.

These migration patterns may affect not just the overall composition of particular countries, but gender ratios within regions. For example, a major factor depressing the marriage rates of well-educated minority women in American cities is the differential migration rates of men and women to those cities. In New York, 53% of women in their twenties working are college graduates in comparison to only 38% of the men, a gap greater for Blacks and Latinos than Whites (Carbone and Cahn 2014). Large diverse cities such as New York offer more employment opportunities than other places for both highly educated minority women and less-educated immigrant men (Carbone and Cahn 2014). Thus, overall statistics with respect to these cities may seem misleading.

A third issue concerns regional, cultural, and racial differences, factors that are considered in some of the contributors to the volume (e.g., Perelli-Harris, Chapter 4). Within the United States, the counties that have the highest proportion of single-parent families tend to be those which are racially and economically isolated (Chetty 2014a,b). Conversely in Europe, cultural differences may involve long-established cultural patterns, such as those between northwestern and southern Poland (Kurek 2011), or Northwestern and Southern Europe (Kalmijn 2011). Cultural differences that took root a century or more ago may continue to influence family patterns in ways that are difficult to tease out in cross-country comparisons.

All of these complexities present challenges to constructing an overall model of the feedback mechanisms between economic inequality and family change. The immediate challenge, however, is to develop policies that respond to the consequences of increasingly inequality.

#### “WHY CAN’T WE ALL GET ALONG?”

The predominant view of the contributions to this volume is that we are in the midst of a profound family change. The family instability we are witnessing could simply be an issue of transition. For example, comparative studies show that the higher the amount of cohabitation in a society, the more cohabitants resemble married couples (Soons and Kalmijn 2009). A more universal embrace of the new system could therefore improve stability, as couples once again internalize similar expectations about their relationships (Cooke, Chapter 11; Goldscheider and Sassler, Chapter 9). Alternatively, a move toward more egalitarian gender relationships may also provide single parents

greater freedom to raise children on their own and more incentive for the state to support them. Greater variety may therefore become a more permanent feature of family life, but variety does not have to be associated with instability. In the meantime, we should do everything to mitigate the negative consequences of the transition; and to cushion the negative impact of greater economic inequality on children's life chances – an effort that other countries are undertaking (Boertien, Bernardi, and Härkönen, Chapter 7).

Three substantial obstacles complicate this process. First, there are cultural differences rooted in religion (Perelli-Harris, Chapter 4). The new egalitarian system rests on providing women substantial control of reproduction, partly through the availability of contraception and abortion. This postponement of family formation, and state support for the universalization of the means to do so, offends many religious teachings (Cahn and Carbone 2010). Where religious opposition becomes entrenched, as which occurred in the United States to systematic sex education and provision of contraception, or in the Republic of Ireland to divorce and abortion, the result tends to be the exacerbation of class and regional differences. In the case of abortion for example, the Irish elite evade the religiously based restrictions through travel abroad while the poor are subject to them (Aiken, Gomperts, and Trussell 2016). In the United States, the class-based differences in unintended pregnancies grew substantially between the early 1990s and 2009 at the same time that abortion rates fell for all groups (Carbone and Cahn 2014). The changes in unintended pregnancy rates correlated with the increasing class divergence in family formation practices, particularly among Whites and Latinos. Thus, while Reeves' proposals in this volume (see Chapter 10) for more universal access to contraception make eminent sense and have already produced impressive results in Colorado and many European countries in preventing early births, we believe universal adoption of such policies will be gradual. Indeed, the 2017 Trump Administration proposals would further undermine access to contraception, not just abortion, in the name of religious liberty.

The second obstacle increasing inequality pertains to the same practices lacking the same meanings throughout society. College graduate women, for example, have embraced an ethic that they should not have children with a partner they do not trust. In the United States, higher income women have relatively low levels of unintended pregnancies, and abort a higher percentage of unintended pregnancies than any other group (Guttmacher 2016). Their willingness to marry may in turn reflect acceptance of the egalitarian custody norms marriage now imposes, which include shared parenting and equal custody rights. In contrast, working-class women are more likely to have a child as a result of an unintended pregnancy or in circumstances where

they view few available men as worthy of trust (Barber et al. 2017; Burton et al. 2009). In these circumstances, the egalitarian custody norms applicable at divorce may be inappropriate (Carbone and Cahn 2013). For example, an American study of divorcing couples found that the award of increased rates of shared parenting time correlated with increased domestic violence complaints, holding the other factors as constant (Brinig 2017). The author speculates “should the same logic hold true for unmarried parents, who as noted experience more domestic violence in their relationships, the concerns about insisting upon parenting orders for them at the time support is established would be justified” (Brinig 2017).

The third factor involves the lack of shared ways of discussing the cultural changes. Most studies find that greater family stability of all kinds, including more stable employment and income, fewer residential moves, and more stable household composition, benefits children. Further, while groups differ on the degree to which economic vs. cultural factors influence such stability, they agree that individual decisions play a role in family outcomes. Yet, different cultural groups fundamentally differ not just on the content, but the sources of individual responsibility and moral values. Modernist societies (which we have labeled “blue”) differ from traditionalist ones (red) in the way they allocate discussions of morality to the public and private spheres. In modernist societies, the public virtues are equality and tolerance; notions of family form, consensual sexual behavior, and appropriate child-rearing practices are matters of private choice. More traditionalist societies insist on the importance of upholding shared values (such as childbearing within marriage) in the public square in order to reinforce the right values at home (Carbone 2017). Blue societies thus distrust a public emphasis on marriage *per se*, either because they associate with it with an older form of hierarchical gender roles or because they see it as a substitute for a process of individual selection of the right partner and the right values. Instead, they see family stability as coming from relationships premised on flexibility and trust. This in turn place much more emphasis on parental guidance in raising children who develop the individual moral codes, which they internalize as central to their personal integrity and which in turn make them trustworthy. These individual codes can vary, but responsible adulthood and personal self-respect depend on having one that orders a person’s adult commitments and life choices, and that informs selection of an appropriate partner. Central to this process is avoiding childbearing until one is fully capable of assuming the responsibilities that comes with it in part because the system’s success depends on a substantial degree of parental investment in children. Within this system, fully mature adults with well-developed personal codes do not need marriage; they would

largely behave the same way without it. Also, without development of the underlying individual codes, marriage in an era in which it rests on flexibility and trust is unlikely to succeed. Indeed, within the United States, red states tend to have higher teen birth and divorce rates (Cahn and Carbone 2010; Glass and Levchak 2014).

Traditionalist societies often criticize the modernist approach as license. They associate tolerance in the public square with irresponsibility within the family. They prefer systems that seek to instill universal values that come from religious traditions or shared cultural norms. Historically, this system sought to insure family stability through marriage soon after completion of one's education, and socialization into adulthood through the assumption of gendered family roles (Cherlin 2005). Yet, this system also produced stability in part because of women's dependence. Today, such an approach works best with two parents who share the same traditionalist commitments, especially when the couple resides in a community that reinforces these values.

These two systems talk past each other, about both the source of moral values and the way to promote them. Traditionalists see moral failings as a product of insufficient public affirmation and private acceptance of responsibility; modernists see them as a product of the failure to create the conditions that promote individual flourishing. With greater inequality undermining both public support for family well-being and individual ability to live up to traditional precepts, the cultural clash between these views intensifies.

As a result, there are no easy policy prescriptions for increasing family stability because the interaction between economic changes and cultural norms is multi-causal, dynamic, and interactive (Cooke, Chapter 11), and there is no shared set of assumption for discussing the issues – other than an agreement that family stability is good for children. The evidence indicates that a narrow focus on family form, while it may produce benefits for relatively homogenous groups, does not work as a more universal public policy prescription. For example, in the United States, studies show that where both spouses are religious and attend the same church, divorce rates are low even if the spouses marry young. Other studies indicate, however, that in more religious communities in the United States, those who attend church less often have higher divorce rates than comparable couples in less religious communities. This is true in part because the religious practice of younger marriage in these communities tends to lower the average age of marriage for everyone, and marriage at younger ages carries with it a higher risk of divorce (Glass and Levchak 2014). While the selection effects make the picture more complicated, encouraging a return to marriage as the sole locale for child-rearing, for example, does not solve the problem of economic instability,

which tends to weaken the resilience of most communities. In the United States, race tempers the financial benefits of marriage; as the St. Louis Federal Reserve reported, “when we focus on family-structure differences *within* racial or ethnic groups, rather than *between* groups, there is essentially no relationship at all” between family structure and wealth (Emmons & Rickett 2017). A cross-cultural study similarly found that differences in family structure have virtually no impact on children’s educational attainment, after controlling for other factors (Bernardi and Boertien 2015). As Boertien, Bernardi, and Härkönen ask, in Chapter 7: “Does the result that family structure can explain little of socioeconomic background differences in educational attainment imply that family structure does not matter for socioeconomic inequality of opportunity in general?” They conclude that we simply do not know. The existing evidence on the relationship between family structure and educational attainment is simply too limited, with a small set of countries and time periods (Boertien, Bernardi, and Härkönen, Chapter 7).

Even if marriage were at least a partial solution, marriage promotion programs do not “affect marriage or poverty rates” for low-income couples (Randles 2017, p. 14), particularly in the absence of societal efforts to address the economic instability that correlates with unstable relationships (Cherlin, Chapter 3). Moreover, growing up in a single-parent family home has different effects on children’s outcomes, depending on the country (Garriga and Berta, Chapter 6), or even the number of single-parent families in the community (Soons and Kalmijn 2009). Interventions strengthening children’s well-being may be more effective than marriage promotion *per se* (Reeves, Chapter 10), and policies that support reproductive rights, greater access to health care, and improved workers’ rights (such as a higher minimum wage) are also associated with family stability (Robbins and Fremstad 2016).

By presenting the complexity of variations between and within countries, this volume shows that generalizations about the impact of family structure do not work. Nonetheless, the weight of the evidence in this volume suggests that economic change is producing both family change and greater inequality, at different rates, in different forms across different societies. Cultural factors in these societies may, in turn aggravate or ameliorate the effects on family well-being; so too may societal interventions that cushion or worsen the consequences of greater economic inequality. All of these societies are moving toward at least slightly more egalitarian gender relationships as women’s workforce participation has increased. Moreover, all societies are finding that it is difficult to maintain traditional understandings as a universal basis for family relationships. We conclude that, while there is much we still do not

know about the interactions between changing families and changing economies, future family stability and the marshaling of resources necessary for children's well-being will require acceptance of at least a degree of family change and also a deeper integration of egalitarian relationships into our understanding of family function.