The casualization of employment and family life among the American working class

Andrew Cherlin
Institute for Research on Poverty
University of Wisconsin
April 13, 2011
THE MARRIAGE-GO-ROUND

The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today

ANDREW J. CHERLIN
• Americans marry and cohabit for the first time sooner than people in most other Western nations.
From the Fertility and Family Surveys data:

- Americans marry and cohabit for the first time sooner than people in most other Western nations.
- A higher proportion of Americans marry at some point in their lives than in most other Western nations.
From the Fertility and Family Surveys data:

- Americans marry and cohabit for the first time sooner than people in most other Western nations.
- A higher proportion of Americans marry at some point in their lives than in most other Western nations.
- Marriages and cohabiting unions in the United States are far more fragile than elsewhere.
From the Fertility and Family Surveys data:

- Americans marry and cohabit for the first time sooner than people in most other Western nations.
- A higher proportion of Americans marry at some point in their lives than in most other Western nations.
- Marriages and cohabiting unions in the United States are far more fragile than elsewhere.
- As a result, American children born to married or cohabiting parents are more likely to see their parents’ union break up than are children in most other countries.
• Americans marry and cohabit for the first time sooner than people in most other Western nations.

• A higher proportion of Americans marry at some point in their lives than in most other Western nations.

• Marriages and cohabiting unions in the United States are far more fragile than elsewhere.

• As a result, American children born to married or cohabiting parents are more likely to see their parents’ union break up than are children in most other countries.

• In addition, American children who have seen their parents’ partnership end are more likely to have another adult partner (cohabiting or married) enter their households.
Percentage of children, living with their mothers, who experience **three or more** maternal partnerships by age 15.

Percentage of women aged 35 to 44 who have experienced three or more partnerships (marital or cohabiting) by race/ethnicity and education.

Source: Author’s tabulations from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth.
Percentage of women aged 35 to 44 who have experienced three or more partnerships (marital or cohabiting) by race/ethnicity and education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; high School</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.S. Degree</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coll. Degree</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hisp. White</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hisp. Black</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s tabulations from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth.

Note: Income expressed in 1999 dollars and adjusted for family size.
The Polarization of the U.S. Labor Market

Class and Strata

• The least educated: No high-school degree
• The moderately educated: High-school degree but no four-year college degree
• The most educated: Four-year college degree or more

Percent of non-Hispanic white women, age 25 to 44, who attended church more than once per month, pooled 1980s to pooled 2000s (GSS) or 1982 to 2006-8 (NSFG)
Percent of non-Hispanic white women, age 25 to 44, who attended church more than once per month, pooled 1980s to pooled 2000s (GSS) or 1982 to 2006-8 (NSFG)
Percent of non-Hispanic white women, age 25 to 44, who attended church more than once per month, pooled 1980s to pooled 2000s (GSS) or 1982 to 2006-8 (NSFG)
Percent of non-Hispanic white women, age 25 to 44, who attended church more than once per month, pooled 1980s to pooled 2000s (GSS) or 1982 to 2006-8 (NSFG)
Percent of non-Hispanic white women, age 25 to 44, who attended church more than once per month, pooled 1980s to pooled 2000s (GSS) or 1982 to 2006-8 (NSFG)
A Theory of Institutional Disengagement
A Theory of Institutional Disengagement

The “casualization of employment relations” – Sassen (2000,2006)*


A Theory of Institutional Disengagement

The Casualization of Family Life
“Everything’s There Except Money”: How Money Shapes Decisions to Marry Among Cohabitors

Cohabitation is now the modal path to marriage in the United States. Drawing on data from 115 in-depth interviews with cohabitors from the working and lower middle classes, this paper explores how economics shape marital decision making. We find that cohabitors typically perceive financial issues as important for marriage, and we delineate several key themes. Whereas some social scientists speculate that cohabitors must think that marriage will change their lives in order to motivate marriage, our findings suggest that cohabitors believe marriage should occur once something has already changed—in this case, their financial status. Our results also imply that political and scientific discourse on financial problems as deterrents to marriage should be broadened beyond a focus on poor unmarried parents.

The last few decades have ushered in significant changes in family patterns (Casper & Bianchi, 2002; Thornton, Fricke, Axinn, & Alwin, 2001; Thornton & Young-Demaree, 2001). After a brief period characterized by early marriage and low levels of divorce after World War II, recent decades have been marked by lower levels of childbearing, higher divorce rates, increases in the average age at marriage, rising nonmarital childbearing, and rising levels of cohabitation. Although most Americans still marry at some point and the vast majority express strong desires to marry, unmarried cohabitation has dramatically transformed the marriage process. Today, the majority of marriages and remarriages begin as cohabiting relationships. Most young men and women have cohabited or will cohabit, cohabitation has increased in all age groups, and cohabitation is increasingly a context for childbearing and childrearing (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Casper & Bianchi; Manning, 2002).

Given that cohabitation is now the modal path to marriage, an important issue is whether and under what circumstances cohabitation leads to marriage. A long line of research in the social sciences has drawn on data from surveys to examine the economic determinants of marriage. More recently, studies have emerged examining similar issues for cohabiting unions (e.g., Clarkberg, 1999; Oppenheimer, 2003; Samler & McNally, 2003).

Our paper builds on this body of work by analyzing in-depth interview data with a diverse
Stopgap jobs and marriage.

During the past 25 years, the incidence of delayed marriage in the United States has increased rapidly. This trend has been particularly characteristic of blacks—so much so that it implies a substantial rise in nonmarriage among African Americans (Mare and Winship 1991; Oppenheimer 1994). For example, between 1970 and 1993, the proportion of white males aged 25–29 who were ever married declined from 82% to 54%; for blacks in this age group the decline was from 72% to 39% (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1994).

Two types of explanations for these changes have been especially prominent in the recent literature—one female-oriented and the other male-oriented. Those adopting the female-oriented approach argue that the desirability of marriage has declined because of women’s rising economic independence, achieved through either their own employment or welfare receipts. This perspective arises partly out of Becker’s theory of marriage (1981), which stresses the division of labor between the spouse as the major gain to marriage. Exchange theory provides a rough counterpart in sociology (Cherlin 1992; Farley 1988; Goldscheider and Waite 1986; McLanahan 1991; Schoen and Wooldredge 1989).

Although this theoretical perspective has enjoyed considerable popularity, more recently it has been seriously questioned (Oppenheimer 1994, 1995, 1997). For example, Oppenheimer suggests that the economic independence argument, based on the specialization model of the gain to marriage, is essentially an argument for nonmarriage, not delayed marriage. At least for whites, however, the trend is predominately one of delayed marriage. Oppenheimer suggests that specialization is a high-risk strategy in a small independent nuclear family system. The temporary or permanent loss of the services of one spouse specialist can seriously jeopardize the welfare of both the children and the remaining spouse. On the other hand, two-earner families can provide economic flexibility and backup over the family’s developmental cycle. In the past, families often have relied on the employment of their teen-age and young adult children to provide this function; today it is mainly accomplished by the periodic or regular employment of wives.

Much of the empirical work on the independence hypothesis also has been generally negative. At any given time, indicators of women’s economic independence have not generally had a negative effect on marriage formation. For example, under an independence argument, better educated women should be more economically independent of marriage; micro-level regression analyses, however, show that once school enrollment is taken into account, they have a higher rather than a lower propensity to marry. In addition, most micro-level analyses find that women’s employment and earnings have either no significant effect or, more usually, a positive effect on marriage formation (Cherlin 1980; Goldscheider and Waite 1986; Lichter et al. 1992; Mare and Winship 1991; Oppenheimer, Blessfeld, and Wackerow 1995; Oppenheimer and Lew 1995, Teachman, Polonko, and Leigh 1987). Furthermore, Oppenheimer and Lew (1995) found that the only significant effect of white women’s occupations on marriage formation was the negative effect of having an unskilled job compared to having a white-collar job. In sum, there is little empirical support for the argument.

Valerie K. Oppenheimer and Nelson Lim, Department of Sociology, University of California, 405 Hilgard Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90095; e-mail: vko@ucla.edu; Matthijs Kalmin, Department of Sociology, Utrecht University, The Netherlands. This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 1995 annual meeting of the Population Association of America, New Orleans. The research was supported by NICHD (grant KO1 HD-17953). We are grateful to Kazuo Yamaguchi for his suggestions on how to deal with the problem of missing information on time-varying covariates and for other methodological advice in the early stages of the project. Responsibility for any statistical drawbacks of the study are ours alone, however.


1. Mare and Winship obtained somewhat mixed results. Using census data, they found that schooling and earnings had a positive effect on women’s marriage propensities, whereas their employment status had a somewhat negative effect. It is unclear why earnings would have a positive effect (albeit a weak one), while employment has a negative impact; and it is difficult to see how this provides very consistent support for the independence hypothesis.
COHABITING AND MARRIAGE DURING YOUNG MEN’S CAREER-DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

VALERIE KINCADE OPPENHEIMER

Using recently released cohabitation data for the male sample of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, first interviewed in 1979, I conducted multinomial discrete-time event-history analyses of how young men’s career-development process affects both the formation and the dissolution of cohabiting unions. For a substantial proportion of young men, cohabitation seemed to represent an adaptive strategy during a period of career immaturity, whereas marriage was a far more likely outcome for both stably employed cohabiters and noncohabiters alike. Earnings positively affected the entry into either a cohabiting or marital union but exhibited a strong threshold effect. Once the men were in cohabiting unions, however, earnings had little effect on the odds of marrying. Men with better long-run socioeconomic prospects were far more likely to marry from either the noncohabiting or cohabiting state, and this was particularly true for blacks.

Two closely related trends in American family behavior during the past 30 years have been the sharp rise in delayed marriage and a substantial increase in nonmarital cohabitation. For example, between 1970 and 1998, the percentage of white males aged 25–29 who were ever married declined from 82% to 52%; for blacks in this age group the decrease was from 72% to 36% (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1994, 1998). In the case of cohabitation, Bumpass and Lu (2000) found that, by 1995, almost half of women aged 35–39 had ever cohabited in the United States compared with 30% in as short a time ago as 1987. Moreover, increasing percentages of young people are now cohabiting with their partners before marriage—up to 52% of women for unions formed in 1990–1994. Another important characteristic of cohabitations is that they are typically short-term, rapidly leading to either marriage or separation. In sum, cohabiting has come to be closely intertwined with the marriage behavior of a high proportion of Americans.

Marriage formation has been the most extensively studied of these two partnering patterns, whereas the analysis of cohabitation has lagged well behind, primarily because it is such a recently emerging union type that there has been little available data on it. It is only with the first wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), a large cross-sectional sample first interviewed in 1987–1988, that reasonably good retrospective descriptive data became available to describe the extensive changes in cohabitation over time. Data sets that are well suited to undertaking multivariate causal analyses of the determinants and consequences of nonmarital cohabitation have been rarer still because they require good longitudinal or retrospective data.

I used a recently released addition to the male sample of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, first interviewed in 1979 (NLSY’79), which provides detailed partnering information dating back to the first interview (Gryn, Mott, and Burchett-Patel 2000). I first used these data to carry out a multinomial discrete-time multivariate analysis of...
Informal sector : formal sector
Informal sector : formal sector

:: casual jobs: career jobs
Informal sector : formal sector

:: casual jobs: career jobs

:: cohabitation : marriage
A Theory of Institutional Disengagement

The Casualization of Family Life

The Casualization of Religious Life
Informal sector : formal sector

:: casual jobs : career jobs

:: cohabitation : marriage

:: informal religious activity : church attendance
A Theory of Institutional Disengagement

The Casualization of Family Life

The Casualization of Religious Life

Testing the Theory
The casualization of employment and family life among the American working class

Andrew Cherlin
Institute for Research on Poverty
University of Wisconsin
April 13, 2011