

SOME RECENT CHANGES IN AMERICAN FAMILIES

More Delay in Marriage

More Divorce Among Upper Socioeconomic Groups

More Single-Parent Families

More Variety in Living Arrangements

CURRENT POPULATION
REPORTS

Special Studies
Series P-23, No. 52

U.S. DEPARTMENT
OF COMMERCE
Social and Economic
Statistics Administration
BUREAU OF
THE CENSUS

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by Paul C. Glick

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FOREWORD

This is the first in a new series of analytical reports prepared by demographers in the Population Division, Bureau of the Census. A distinguishing feature of these occasional reports is that they are to include broad speculative analysis and illustrative hypotheses by the authors as an aid in understanding the statistics and in assessing their potential impact on public policy. The usual scope of these reports will probably be broader than that of annual census reports on population subjects but less complete than book-length monographs.

This report is a revised version of an address by Dr. Paul C. Glick that was given in connection with his receiving the E. W. Burgess Award for "continuous and meritorious contributions to theory and research in the family field." This award was made by the National Council on Family Relations on October 17, 1973, and the address was given at the annual meeting of the NCFR on October 25, 1974, in St. Louis. The address as originally presented was published in the February 1975 issue of the NCFR's *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 15-26), under the title "A Demographer Looks at American Families."

The author received three college degrees in sociology, B.A. in 1933 at DePauw University and M.A. in 1935 and Ph.D. in 1938 at the University of Wisconsin. His first book, *American Families*, was published by John Wiley and Sons in 1957 as one of the 1950 census monographs sponsored by the Social Science Research Council. His second book, with Hugh Carter as co-author, was entitled *Marriage and Divorce: A Social and Economic Study* and was published by the Harvard University Press in 1970 as one of the 1960 census monographs sponsored by the American Public Health Association. In 1974 he edited a book-length monograph, *Population of the United States, Trends and Prospects: 1950 to 1990*,¹ that was published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census as background material for the World Population Conference. He received the Department of Commerce's *Gold Medal Award* in 1970 for "distinguished authorship and important contributions to the better understanding of our Nation's social statistics."

Dr. Glick, whose career with the Bureau of the Census dates from 1939, is now Senior Demographer in the Population Division.

SOME RECENT CHANGES IN AMERICAN FAMILIES

Paul C. Glick

Recent Changes in Marriage and Fertility

The population picture in the late 1930's was gloomy. Many marriages had been delayed, so that the average age at marriage had risen, and a near-record 9 percent of the women 50 years old had never married.

Birth rates had lingered at a low level, even without today's wide variety of means for birth control and without today's high degree of acceptance of a small number of children as a desirable family goal. Lifetime childlessness was edging up toward 20 percent, and many of the children whom some leading demographers thought were merely being postponed were never borne; a speculative interpretation is that many of the women who delayed having those other children reached the point where they liked it better without them than they had thought they would.

Then came World War II, with its extensive dislocations of family life particularly among families with husbands—or would-be husbands—of draft age, extending up to around 40 years of age. Marriage and birth rates remained low, and millions of women—married as well as single—were welcomed into the labor force who would never have gone to work outside the home if the male civilian work force had not shrunk so much.

After World War II, the marriage and divorce rates shot up briefly, fell again sharply, and then subsided gradually (Glick, 1974: chapter III). By the mid-1950's, a relatively familistic period had arrived. Couples were entering marriage at the youngest ages on record, and all but 4 percent of those at the height of the childbearing period eventually married. Moreover, the baby boom that had started with the return of World War II service men reached a plateau in the mid-1950's and did not diminish significantly until after 1960. By that time, the rate of entry into first marriage had already been falling and the divorce rate had resumed its historical upward trend.

By the late 1960's and early 1970's, the familistic style of life seemed to be on the wane again. The marriage rate among single persons under 45 years old was as low as it had been at the end of the Depression. Last year, the average age at marriage was close to a year higher than it had been in the mid-1950's, and the proportion of women who remained single until they were 20 to 24 years old had increased by one-third since 1960 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1974).

The divorce rate had soared to the high level it had reached soon after the end of World War II, and an estimated one out of every three marriages of women 30 years old had been, or would eventually be, dissolved by divorce (Glick and Norton, 1973; Glick, 1973). The birth rate in 1973 was the lowest in the country's history, 15 per 1,000 population. The total fertility rate in 1973, which shows how many children women would have if they continued having children throughout their childbearing years at the same rate as in 1973, stood at a new low level of 1.9 children per woman. This is just one-half as many as in 1957, when the total fertility rate was 3.8 children per woman.

All of this has happened in the last 35 years, with high or low inflection points (depending on the variable) occurring near the middle of this period. It was an exciting period for a demographer to live through, because it was marked by sharp changes which called for careful measurement and perceptive interpretation. It was a period full of headaches for school administrators who had to adjust plant capacity to student load, as well as for manufacturers and distributors of products for babies or teenagers or any other functional age group because of the widely fluctuating demands by age. And it was a period when ideas were changing about the proper age for marriage, about desired family size, and about how serious it is to disrupt a marriage that does not seem to be viable. As ideas changed in one of these fundamental aspects of family life, other ideas came into question. So, we are now going through a period of change in demographic patterns that undoubtedly reflects basic, underlying attitudes toward conformity with traditional behavior, especially as such conformity comes in conflict with the development of the full potentiality of each member of the family.

Some Implications of Recent Changes

During the 12-month period ending in August 1974, the estimated number of marriages in the United States was about 2,233,000, and the number of divorces was 948,000. For the first time since soon after World War II the marriage total for a 12-month period was significantly smaller (by 68,000) than it had been in the preceding year. However, the divorce total for the 12 months ending in August 1974 had continued to rise (by 56,000) above the level for the preceding 12 months (U.S. Center for Health Statistics, 1974a).

These current figures are the latest available in a growing series which document a slow down of marriage and a speedup of divorce. Since 1965, the annual number of first marriages has not been keeping pace with the rapid growth in the number of persons in the prime years for first marriage—those who were born soon after World War II. In fact, the number of marriages in recent years would have been even smaller if it had not been for the sharp upturn in remarriages associated with the increase in the number of divorces in this period. According to the latest information available, about four out of every five of those who obtain a divorce will eventually remarry (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1972a).

From the peak year for births, 1957, to the present the declining birth rate has resulted in part from a decrease in the proportion of children born to women above 30 years of age and has been associated with a decrease in the median age at which women bear their children, from 25 years to 24 years. During this period there has been little change in the interval between marriage and the birth of the first child. At the same time, the proportion of first births that have occurred outside marriage has just about doubled, from 5 percent in the late 1950's to 11 percent in 1971.

When married women today are asked how many children they expect to have in their lifetime, those under 25 years old say they believe they will have just about enough for zero population growth (aside from immigration). And answers to this question have been generally consistent over the last few years, with more changes in replies by identical women being in the direction of fewer rather than more children. Although fertility changes during the last 35 years provide ample evidence of the capacity of American couples to change their minds about how many children to have, the general concensus among most demographers is that a repeat of the post-World War II baby boom is most unlikely in the foreseeable future (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1974a).

Recent Delay in Marriage Among the Young

The average woman at first marriage today is 21 years old. During the approximately 15 years of the post-World War II baby boom, the average woman had been one year younger at marriage, 20 years. Another way of showing the extent of the recent delay in marriage is to point out that a new low level of 28 percent single was registered for women 20 to 24 years of age in 1960; but the corresponding figure for women in their early twenties in 1974 had jumped up by more than one-third to a level of 40 percent single (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1974b). There is no doubt about it. Young women are now postponing marriage longer than their mothers did in the late 1940's and early 1950's. (Corresponding data for men are not presented because their coverage in censuses and surveys has fluctuated as the size and location of men in the Armed Forces has varied widely since 1940.)

A delay in marriage—identified by an increase in the percent single—has been common to young women (under 25 years old) of all education levels, but census figures show that the increase in singleness was greatest during the 1960's among young women who had not attended college. This finding is probably at least tangentially related to the sharp rise in unwed motherhood among white women during the 1960's; most unwed mothers have never attended college. Young women with a high school education but with no college training continue to be the ones with the smallest percent single. (The situation among older women is different, as will be shown below.)

Why has this delay in marriage occurred among the young? At least a part of the answer lies in the fact that nearly three times as many women were enrolled in college in 1972 as in 1960 (3.5 million versus 1.2 million), and the

college enrollment rate has more than doubled for women in their twenties during those 12 years. Another demographic factor was the "marriage squeeze;" during recent years this phenomenon has taken the form of an excess of young women of ages when marriage rates are highest, because women born in a given year during the baby boom after World War II reached their most marriageable age range two or three years before men born in the same year (Carter and Glick, 1970). (Still other demographic factors include the sharper increase in the employment of women than men and the amazing decline in the birth rate, both of which signaled expanding roles open to women outside the home.) Among the less tangible factors has been the revival of the women's movement. In fact, the excess of marriageable women in the last few years may have contributed as much to the development of that movement as the ideology of the movement has contributed to the increase in singleness.

A detailed analysis of recent marriage trends has suggested that it is too early to predict with confidence that the recent increase in singleness among the young will lead to an eventual decline in lifetime marriage. However, just as cohorts of young women who have postponed childbearing for an unusually long time seldom make up for the child deficit as they grow older, so also young people who are delaying marriage may never make up for the marriage deficit later on. They may try alternatives to marriage and like them.

Early Marriage and High Fertility of Those Approaching Middle Age

Women who are now 35 to 44 years old were born during the Depression years of the 1930's. They have been a most interesting group for demographers to study because of their many unique features: they were born when the birth rate was at the lowest level recorded up to that time (total fertility rate averaging about 2.3 children), with only the rates after 1970 being still lower; they set a record for early marriage (average about 20 years) and for high birth rates (total fertility rate peaking at 3.8 in 1957); and now they have in prospect one of the lowest proportions single on record (likely to fall below 4 percent before they end their fifties) and one of the lowest proportions who will remain childless throughout life (10 percent for women regardless of marital status and 6 percent among those who ever marry). They have shared more fully than the preceding generation—and probably more than the following generation—in the process of marrying and replenishing the population.

These women, now 35 to 44 years of age, are featured here and in the discussion of divorce below because of their uniqueness in another respect. They are old enough to have experienced most of their lifetime marriages, childbirths, and divorces, and yet they are young enough to reflect recent changes in family life patterns. Because of the recent developments with regard to the delay in marriage and the fertility decline among those now in their twenties, it would have been tempting to have featured this younger age group. However, this

option was not adopted because not enough time would have elapsed after school attendance for those with 4 or more years of college to have essentially established their lifetime levels of marriage and childbearing.

As noted above, the marriage history of women now 35 to 44 has culminated in a record low proportion single for women of that age range (now 5 percent and likely to drop below 4 percent by 1990). But the continuing decline in singleness for women of this age range was not uniformly distributed among the several educational groups. Although the percent single was **rising** most rapidly among young college-educated women (those under 25), the percent single was **declining** most rapidly among **older** college-educated women (those 35 to 44). Women college graduates 35 to 44 reduced their excess percent single, as compared with all women in the age group, by a substantial one-fourth during the 1960's. Still, women college graduates with no graduate school training have continued to record a high proportion single, 10 percent in 1960 and 8 percent in 1970; and those with graduate school training recorded a **very high** level of 24 percent single in 1960 but "only" 19 percent single in 1970 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1967 and 1972b).

Similar socioeconomic differentials in the decline in singleness were found when the measurement was in terms of occupation and income. For example, the proportion single among women who were professional workers dropped by about one-third from the high level of 19 percent in 1960 to 13 percent in 1970. Moreover, women in the upper income bracket (\$7,000 or more in 1960 and \$10,000 or more in 1970—about the right difference in income level to adjust for the decreasing value of the dollar) had about a one-fourth decline in the proportion single between 1960 and 1970 (from the very high level of 27 percent to the still quite high level of 21 percent). Thus, in summary, the declines in singleness among the women in these upper socioeconomic groups consisted of tendencies for this aspect of their marital pattern to converge with—to become more like—that of women in the lower socioeconomic groups.

Why did this happen? A partial answer must be the relative **scarcity of women** of optimum age to marry during the mid-1950's, a period of affluence when nearly all men in the upper socioeconomic group were marrying. Thus, all but 2 or 3 percent of the men in 1970 in the upper income bracket had married by early middle age; they had been at the height of their period for first marriage during the late 1940's and the 1950's. Another part of the answer must have been the greatly increasing opportunities for young women to work at attractive jobs outside the home even though they were married—a phenomenon that was far less common only a generation before 1960. It had obviously become far easier for a woman to combine a working career and marriage (Davis, 1972).

Why have not still more of the women in the upper socioeconomic groups become married? In 1970, fully 1 in every 5 women around 40 years of age with some graduate school education or with an income of \$20,000 or more have not married, as compared with only 1 in every 20 women with no college education (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1972b). Most of these women were submitted to the

maximum pressure to marry during the period 10 to 20 years ago. Probably no one would argue with the interpretation that women with graduate school training have far more options for interesting roles to cultivate—including wife, mother, and/or career woman—than those with less education. But, despite the sharp increase in marriage among “fortyish” upper group women, could it be that a significant proportion of men who are also in the upper socioeconomic group still hesitate to marry a woman who expects to be a partner in an **egalitarian** marriage—or a woman who might be a serious competitor for the role of chief breadwinner or “head of the household”? It seems reasonable to expect a substantial further decline in the force of this factor as the impact of the women’s movement is felt increasingly among both men and women. The expected direction of change would seem to be a growing acceptance of the situation in which the wife equals or outranks the husband in such matters—without as much of a disturbing effect on the couple’s social relationships as it evidently continues to have today.

Divergence and Convergence of Divorce by Social Level

In 1970, the proportion divorced (and not remarried) continued to be lower among men approaching middle age (35 to 44 years old) than among women of comparable age—3.6 percent versus 5.5 percent. This pattern results from the older average age of men at marriage, hence the shorter duration of marriage for the men, and also from the larger proportion of men than women who eventually remarry—about five-sixths versus three-fourths. The difference between men and women in the proportion currently divorced has increased substantially since 1960, when 2.6 percent of the men and 3.8 percent of the women were divorced (and not remarried). This divergence between the sexes may have developed because of several factors including the increasing extent to which divorced women tend to outlive divorced men.

Meanwhile, a “democratizing” development in relation to marriage patterns is reflected in the fact that the proportion divorced among men 35 to 44 years of age has tended to converge since 1960 among the educational, occupational, and income groups. Men in the upper status groups continue to have a below-average proportion divorced (but not remarried), however, the gap was smaller in 1970 than it was in 1960. More specifically, the proportion divorced increased during the 1960’s by about three-eighths for all men in the age group but by a considerably larger proportion (about one-half to two-thirds) for men with 4 or more years of college, for professional men, and for men in the top income class for which data are available (\$10,000 or more in 1960 and \$15,000 or more in 1970).

Changes during the 1960’s in the proportion divorced among women by social and economic groups were more complex than those for men. For all women 35 to 44, the proportion divorced went up, on the average, by nearly one-half during the 1960’s, from 3.8 percent to 5.5 percent. But among women who were professional workers or in the uppermost income level—where the

percent divorced among women (unlike men) has been characteristically quite high—the percent divorced rose by a smaller proportion (under one-third) than among other women. (The percent divorced for professional women went up from 6.0 percent in 1960 to 7.8 percent in 1970; and the percent divorced for women in the uppermost income group rose from 11.8 percent to 15.1 percent.) Thus, for these categories of upper group women, the percent divorced was tending to converge with that for other women by increasing more **slowly** than the average, while for upper group men the percent divorced was tending to converge with that for other men by increasing more **rapidly** than the average.

The pattern is especially complex when changes in the proportion divorced are analyzed for women college graduates 35 to 44 years old. Women who terminated their education with 4 years of college hold the record for the smallest percent divorced (3.0 percent in 1960 and 3.9 percent in 1970). Moreover, they reinforced this position during the 1960's by being the educational group with the **smallest** proportional increase in the percent divorced (three-tenths). By contrast, women 35 to 44 with one or more years of graduate school have had fewer years since marriage in which to obtain a divorce but still hold the record among educational groups for the largest percent divorced (4.8 percent in 1960 and 7.3 percent in 1970). Moreover, they reinforced this position by having the **largest** proportional increase in the percent divorced of all educational groups (over one-half). Thus, both women with 4 years of college and those with 5 or more years of college have tended to diverge from the general level of increase in the proportion divorced but in opposite directions.

Why the Upturn in Divorce?

While the number of couples experiencing divorce has been rising, many other changes have also been occurring. Some of these changes might have actually been expected to cause the divorce rate to **decline**. For example, divorce rates are generally lowest among men in the upper socioeconomic groups, and the proportion of men in the upper education, occupation, and income groups has been increasing; yet the proportion divorced has been rising most in these very same groups. One of the many plausible hypotheses for investigation in this context can be posed in the form of a question: Was a larger proportion of men with "divorce proneness" being drawn into the ranks of upper socioeconomic groups in the two decades after World War II? This was a period when those ranks were being augmented by upwardly mobile persons who were rising from the lower socioeconomic groups; persons in the groups from which they were rising have probably always had the highest rates of marital dissolution.

This hypothesis could be examined by studying the relationship between the direction of intergenerational socioeconomic mobility and rates of marriage and divorce. Men who have been upwardly mobile by a substantial amount (defined as men whose achievement is quite perceptibly above that of their fathers) might be shown to have more initial advantage in the marriage market than their brothers with little or no such upward mobility. However, for many

the advantage may not have lasted; these upwardly mobile men might have permitted "excessive achievement orientation" or complications resulting from their change of social level to interfere with the promotion of satisfaction in their marriages. Downwardly mobile persons may tend to have even more difficulty in their marital adjustment. This hypothetical relationship may be tested in the next year or so by the present writer and Arthur J. Norton as a byproduct of the study of "occupational change in a generation" that is being conducted by David L. Featherman and Robert M. Hauser, of the University of Wisconsin, on the basis of data from a Census Bureau survey in 1973.

Socioeconomic changes during the last decade or two that might have been expected to cause a rise in the divorce rate are numerous, but the contribution each has made to this rise cannot be readily demonstrated. Illustrations include the increasing proportion of young wives with small families who have succeeded in translating their higher level of education into jobs that make them financially independent of their husband; an increasing proportion of couples whose income has risen to a level at which they can afford the cost of obtaining a divorce to resolve a marriage that is not viable; the increased availability of free legal aid which may have permitted a large number of impoverished families to obtain a divorce; the war in Vietnam which complicated the transition of millions of young men into marriage or made their adjustment in marriage more difficult than it would have otherwise been.

Other changes that may have contributed in varying degrees to the increase in divorce during the last decade have less of an economic orientation. One cluster of such changes includes a greater social acceptance of divorce as a means for resolving marriage difficulties—in particular, the relaxation of attitudes toward divorce by a growing number of religious denominations; the relatively objective study of marriage and family relationships at the high school and college levels; the movement to increase the degree of equality of the sexes which is making some headway toward easing the social adjustment of persons who are not married; and the reform of divorce laws, in particular, the adoption of no-fault divorce.

No-fault Divorce Laws

An article entitled "Legal Status of Women," prepared at the U.S. Women's Bureau lists 23 States that had adopted "some form" of no-fault divorce by January 1974—16 of them since 1971 (Rosenberg and Mendelsohn, 1974). The 23 States are Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oregon, Texas, and Washington. A 24th State, Minnesota, passed a no-fault divorce law in the 1974 legislative session. Moreover, the legislators in nearly all other States are in the process of considering how to incorporate this feature into their divorce laws.

Persons who have examined the divorce laws closely have cautioned, however, that the no-fault movement is not really as far along as the advocates of "true" no-fault divorce would like to see. This view was expressed in a letter from Lenore J. Weitzman (University of California at Davis) who, together with two colleagues, is conducting a Federally sponsored study of "The Impact of Divorce Law Reform on the Process of Marital Dissolution: The California Case" (Weitzman, Kay, and Dixon, 1974). According to their calculations, five States have instituted true no-fault divorce by adopting the provisions of the Uniform Act; nine other States have adopted some other form of no-fault divorce. The States which have merely **added** no-fault divorce to their existing grounds for divorce should really not, according to Dr. Weitzman, be considered no-fault divorce States. Under a "true" no-fault divorce law, a couple may terminate its marriage without any expectation of punitive consequences resulting from the action; the main items to be settled are a reasonable division of joint property and arrangements for the maintenance of the children and the maintenance of one spouse on the basis of need. However, in States where no-fault is only one of several grounds for divorce, one spouse may threaten to charge the other "with fault" but settle for a no-fault divorce in return for a more favorable property or support settlement. For this reason, the number of no-fault divorces in those States may not indicate the true number of couples who obtained divorces without negotiations involving fault and the adversary concept.

Children of Parents Who Have (Or Have Not) Been Divorced

Women whose first marriage ended in divorce have been, on the average, about two years younger when they entered marriage than married women of the same age who have not been divorced (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973c). However, on the average, about three years elapse between divorce and remarriage. So, if the average divorcee gains a couple of years of married life through early marriage but loses three years of married life through divorce, what is the net effect on her family size? According to 1970 census data for women 35 to 39 years old, the answer varies according to her later marriage experience. First, divorced women 35 to 39 years old who had gone on to marry a man who had not been married before wound up with him and 3.1 children, on the average, or virtually the same number at the census date as that (3.2 children) for couples with both the husband and wife still in their first marriage. Second, those who were still divorced at the census date had borne a smaller number, namely, an average of 2.6 children. And third, among married couples at the census date where both the husband and the wife were divorced after their first marriage, the average number of children was intermediate, 2.9 children ever born (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973a).

Another way to show how many children are affected by divorce is to note that 15 percent of all **children under 18 years of age** in 1970 were living with one or both parents who had been divorced after their first or most recent marriage. Some of these children were born after their divorced parent had remarried, but a larger number were living with a stepparent at the census date.

Thus, about two-fifths of the children with a previously divorced parent were born after the remarriage and hence were living with their two natural parents; however, the other three-fifths were living with a stepparent. Besides these children of "ever divorced" parents, another 15 percent were not living with both (once-married) natural parents. In other words, these figures imply that only about 70 percent of the children under 18 years of age in 1970 were living with their two natural parents who had been married only once. Among black children the corresponding figure was very low, 45 percent, but that for white children was also low, 73 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973b).

The proportion of children of school age living with both natural parents in their first marriage was even smaller than 70 percent in 1970. Therefore, the remaining more than 30 percent of school children were not living with a father and a mother who were in a continuous first marriage. This means that such children are no longer rare. Even though children of separated, divorced, or never-married parents still have many problems today, they at least have far less cause to feel unique or exceptionally deprived than similar children of yesterday. Moreover, because the birth rate has been declining for several years, the average number of children involved per divorce has declined since the mid-1960's (to 1.22 in 1970 and 1971); however, the total number of children involved in divorce was still rising in 1971, when it was 946,000 (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 1974b). In a country where many legal grounds for divorce have been established and used, a large number of children will inevitably be involved in separation and/or divorce. But there is no optimum proportion of children who should be thus involved, any more than there is a fixed optimum proportion of couples who should dissolve their marriage by divorce.

What Is a Reasonable Amount of Lifetime Marriage (Or Divorce)?

Saying that there is no fixed optimum proportion of marriages that really should not remain intact leaves much to be said about the current level of divorce and the prospective level over the next decade or two. For one thing it is now very high, in fact the highest in the world, and seems likely to remain that way. In 1972, the most recent date for which many international figures are available, the divorce rate was the highest in the U.S.A., with a rate of 3.72 per 1,000 population. Other countries with high 1972 levels of divorce were the U.S.S.R. with a rate of 2.64 and Hungary with a rate of 2.32. Cuba had a 1971 rate of 3.23 (United Nations, 1973). More recently, the U.S. divorce rate climbed on up to 4.4 per 1,000 population in 1973 and to 4.5 per 1,000 during the 12 months ending in August 1974 (U.S. Center for Health Statistics, 1974a).

In the context of the high divorce rate, some questions worthy of exploration can be raised. How many of the divorces are desired by both parties? On the basis of experience in divorce counseling, Emily Brown, current chairman of the Family Action Section of the National Council on Family Relations, estimates that around 4 out of every 10 of the couples obtaining a divorce include one member who did not want it. But that leaves around 6 out of every 10 who did

want it. Did the right couples obtain a divorce? Surely some who did so were ill-advised in this respect, whereas others with far more justification for a divorce were inhibited from obtaining one. And yet the situation may be so complex—when all of the pros and cons are considered—that even the wisest of family counselors must have difficulty in rendering objective judgment about the advisability of continuing or ending the marriages of a large proportion of those who come to them for counseling service.

A certain amount of divorce undoubtedly grows out of the fact that the supply of acceptable marriage partners is very often quite limited, and those who would be most ideal partners never meet, or if they do, they may do so at the wrong time or become unavailable to each other at the optimum time for marriage. In other words, marriage partners are typically joined through a process of chance, often involving compromise, and if the compromise element is substantial, there should be no great surprise if the marriage is eventually dissolved by permanent separation or divorce. In view of the haphazard manner in which the important step of marriage is generally undertaken, and in view of the many frailties of human adults, the surprise may be that the proportion of marriages that last is as large as it is.

Men at the top of the socioeconomic scale must have the most advantages in marital selection and in the means for achieving a satisfactory adjustment after marriage. Thus, a potential husband with a promising occupational future no doubt arrived at that enviable position usually—but, of course, not always—because of personal characteristics that should also make him an attractive candidate for marriage. This type of man has the widest choice of women for a potential wife—one with maximum appeal and few “hangups.” And if the man’s work history materializes into occupational success, his chances of keeping his marriage partner satisfied with their marriage arrangement should be accordingly enhanced—other things being equal. In fact, the statistics demonstrate that the most lasting marriages are contracted by men in the upper socioeconomic levels.

Viewed from the vantage point of the potential wife, the line of reasoning is quite similar in some key respects but has important differences. One similar feature is the great amount of competition they face in their search for men who are attractive candidates for marriage. A dissimilar feature is the somewhat different set of personal characteristics which describe an attractive woman as compared with an attractive man for selection as a marriage partner—under the situation as it has existed for a long time but under a situation that may have already started to make a wide-ranging change.

But if the most attractive men marry the most attractive women, as so often happens, is it any wonder that they turn out to have the highest proportion of continuing marriages? And, by implication, is it any wonder that other persons more often terminate their less-than-ideal matches through separation and divorce? But the situation may not be as bad as it seems, in view of the fact that this discussion relates to a band of persons on or near the diagonal of a distribution showing the marriage appeal of potential husbands cross-classified by the marriage appeal of potential wives.

Thus, a study might be expected to show that, for a given type of men in a given marriage market area, somewhere around the top 20 percent of men in attractiveness might be considered as reasonably acceptable husbands for the top 20 percent or so of women, with (sliding) lower quintiles of men being "acceptables" for corresponding lower quintiles of women. As the lowest 20 percent of potential husbands and wives is approached, those in this group should theoretically be relatively satisfied with their marital partners provided they marry someone within their own range. But are they going to be all that satisfied? And what about those who either by choice or because they lost out in the competition married someone outside their optimal range? It would be logical to expect their marital dissolution rate to be substantial and to account for a disproportionately large share of all divorces. Although dissolution of marriage by divorce is by far the most likely among couples in the lowest economic level, undoubtedly a relatively large proportion of these same couples would still have an above-average divorce rate even if their income levels were augmented considerably.

A key variable in this context is "coping power." Presumably those of upper status have much more of it, on the average, than those who achieve only lower status. Although the development of superior coping mechanisms would ordinarily be expected to result in maintaining a marriage intact, it would also be expected to result from time to time in the firm decision that a marriage is not tolerable and should be dissolved. And yet, the kinds of talent and support that fail to elevate the standing of a person above a low level must tend to leave that person with fewer options within which to achieve satisfactory adjustment either occupationally or maritally. At least the findings for men are generally consistent with this interpretation.

For women, however, the pattern is different, with those who have the most education and the most income being generally less likely to enter marriage or to maintain continuing marriages, on the average, than those with lesser achievement in their educational background and work experience. How long this pattern for women will persist is anyone's guess, but it could last indefinitely among those who genuinely prefer being unmarried. On the other hand, it could change substantially over the next decade or two if modifications of attitudes about what constitute proper sex roles become modernized through appropriate socialization of the younger generation and resocialization of the older generations (Bernard, 1972).

Recent Changes In Living Arrangements

Along with the recent decrease in fertility and increases in separation and divorce have come other developments that have shrunk the typical cluster of persons who live together as a household. Very few married couples live in with relatives as they once did. At the height of the housing shortage after World War II, fully 9 percent of all couples were without their own house or apartment, but now only 1 percent have to—or choose to—double up with others. In the 1940's

only 1 in every 10 households was maintained by persons living alone or with a lodger or two, but now 1 in 5 households is of this type, and 1 in every 6 households consists of one person living entirely alone. As an overall measure of the shrinking family size, it is instructive to note that the average household consisted of 5 persons from 1890 to 1910, then 4 persons from 1920 to 1950, and 3 persons since 1960—with the 1974 average dipping fractionally below 3 persons, to 2.97 persons (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1974b).

This development reflects mainly the longtime decline in fertility, but now more young adults live in apartments away from their parental home or in apartments rather than college dormitories, and more elderly persons are financially able—and evidently prefer—to live apart from their adult children. The most rapid increase in household formation since 1960 has occurred among young adults with no relatives present, but the numerical increase has been much larger among elderly persons living alone. A spectacular 8-fold increase occurred during the 1960's in the number of household heads who were reported as living apart from relatives while sharing their living quarters with an unrelated adult "partner" (roommate or friend) of the opposite sex. One out of every four of these 143,000 "unmarried couples" in 1970 were women who had a male partner "living in." Among older men sharing their living quarters with non-relatives only, one in every five shared it with a female partner (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1964 and 1973b). These older couples must include a substantial proportion of widowed persons who were living in this manner in order to avoid losing survivor benefits through remarriage.

Another "variant family form" is the commune, a type of living arrangement that has not been adequately quantified on a nationwide basis, partly because many of the communes are not welcome in their neighborhood and would rather not be identified in a census or survey.

The shrinking household size and the growing number of small households consisting of single-parent families, unmarried couples, or persons living entirely alone are evidence that large families are no longer regarded with favor by many persons and that new life styles are being tried by persons who want to learn whether the new ways are more satisfying to them than more conventional patterns. Some of the living arrangements with increasing numbers of adherents are bringing unrelated persons into closer companionship, whereas more of them are providing at least temporary relief from contacts with relatives that were regarded as too close for comfort.

But with four out of every five divorced persons eventually remarrying, the single-parent family has been in large part a temporary arrangement serving as a transition for the parent from one marital partner to another, and between parenthood and stepparenthood. New surveys will be watched for possible evidence that more of those with dissolved marriages will settle down with another unmarried person in a relatively stable union (with or) without a legal "cohabitation contract" that would have to be retracted through a court procedure if the union is to be dissolved later on.

Kin Network Ties and Neighborhood Characteristics

The scattering of adult married and unmarried family members has been accelerated during recent decades through increased migration, which is related to increased amounts of higher education, among many other things. Fewer neighborhoods are now dotted by families of the same surname. Yet a substantial amount of contact is maintained with relatives, even with those who live at a considerable distance. A study under the direction of David M. Heer (on behalf of a committee established by the Family Section of the American Sociological Association) contemplates the collection and analysis of national data on the extent and nature of relationships that keep alive the kin network among persons under 40 years of age and their parents and siblings. The results are expected to quantify variations in types of communication and mutual assistance that are characteristics of "kinspersons" living different distances apart and belonging to different socioeconomic groups. Funds for the support of this project are now being negotiated.

As adults move to localities that are beyond commuting distance of their close relatives, they may (or may not) become closely integrated into their new local neighborhoods. Studies are therefore needed to show the adjustment patterns of families in relation to the type of community in which they live. One study along this line is being planned by the present writer and Larry H. Long, also of the Bureau of the Census, on the basis of computer tapes available from the 1970 census. This source permits the analysis of marital and family characteristics in relation to such variables as duration of residence in the neighborhood (census tract or other small area), the ethnic composition of the neighborhood, the educational and income level of the neighborhood, the rate of turnover of population in the neighborhood, and the age and quality of housing in the neighborhood. Funding for this project may be obtained during the next year.

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing review of certain aspects of American marriage and living arrangements included some facts about what has been happening recently to family life in this country and has called attention to some areas where further research is needed. The accompanying interpretative comments were intended to add understanding to the census and vital facts that were presented. That is about as far as a demographer is expected to go in trying to help people do something about "the situation" in which so many American families find themselves today. Surely there is plenty of room for a division of labor between demographers and others who have a contribution to make in this area, including family lawyers, family counselors, socioeconomicists, home economists, psychologists, social workers, religious leaders, and journalists.

However, there are undoubtedly some nondemographers who are looking for a cause to promote in this context. They might be well-advised to consider some of the following directions in which to exert their efforts:

1. The development of the contents for more practical and effective training at home, in the high schools, and in colleges about how young persons can make a wise selection of their marriage partner and how they can keep their marriage alive and healthy over a long period of time—and about how they can use reasonable criteria to decide whether it is any longer practical to keep their marriage intact (Broderick and Bernard, 1969).

2. Designing a scientifically tested and appealing system for selecting a marriage partner, for bringing together young men and women who would have a much higher probability of establishing an enduring and satisfying marriage than could be expected through the almost universally haphazard system that now exists—at the same time realizing that the rational approach must be supplemented by the strength of emotional appeal (Glick, 1967).

3. Acceptance by the public of the concept of periodic marriage checkups through visits to highly expert marriage counselors (when a sufficient supply becomes available), with these visits occurring in a manner analogous to periodic physical checkups that are voluntarily made, and with the visits considered urgent when a seemingly dangerous marital condition is developing.

4. Continuing modernization of marriage and divorce laws, which would tend to encourage couples to take much more seriously their entry into marriage but not quite so seriously as some couples do the hazards of ending a marriage that is no longer worthy of continuation.

5. Development of child care facilities staffed by highly professional personnel, so that more mothers can feel free to maximize the alternatives available for the use of their time while their children are growing up—provided that careful attention is given in choosing the ways in which the additional free time is used (Campbell, 1973; Low and Spindler, 1968).

6. Finally, programs to increase the appeal of experiencing a good marriage, including the continued collection and dissemination of knowledge about how to cultivate such a marriage—so that more emphasis can be placed on building up the positive side of married life, in a period when so many stimuli that reach the public have the effect of making nonmarriage appear to be much more desirable (Mace and Mace, 1974).

Certainly demographers cannot be counted upon—in their capacity as practicing demographers—to promote such causes as these to improve family relations in the modern world, but they can help to promote such causes indirectly by providing imaginative factual information about the types of circumstances which tend to be associated with enduring marriages and about other types of circumstances that tend to be associated with a substantial amount of seemingly inevitable marital dissolution.

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