

DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILIES IN THE U.S., BY SEX OF HEAD AND PRESENCE OF CHILDREN UNDER 18, 1975

Source: "Household and Family Characteristics: March 1975," Table I, *Current Population Reports, Population Characteristics*, Series P-20, No. 291, issued February 1976, U.S. Bureau of the Census.



The Changing Family

Alexis de Tocqueville saw the American family, so different from the European, as an exemplar and bulwark of sober democracy. Writing in the 1830s, he noted the “species of equality [that] prevails around the domestic hearth,” the informality between parents and children, the early independence of sons and daughters, and the general belief that “though their lot is different,” men and women are “beings of equal value” to society.

Since Tocqueville’s visit, of course, much has changed. The family has been affected, like other American institutions, by the shift from farm to city, by technology, by individual mobility. Of late, something like a family upheaval has taken place, widely publicized but only dimly understood. The new statistics on marriage and remarriage, working wives, fertility rates, divorce, “female-headed” households are dramatic. But the change has been accompanied by little comprehensive analysis by scholars of its social causes and effects. There has been a trickle of specialized studies—on women, on child care, on family welfare policy. The futurologists have been busy. But solid research is scarce.

On the following two pages, as a reminder of Tocqueville’s time, we reproduce part of an 1838 guide to “domestic happiness.” Next, as an indication of the current scholarly “state of the art” we present some basic statistics and three essays on the family as an institution in the 1970s. Economists Heather L. Ross and Isabel V. Sawhill survey the family’s changing role. Educator Mary Jo Bane discusses the children most affected—those in “female-headed” families. Finally, from yet another perspective, social psychologist George Levinger examines the trends, reviews the research, and notes some of the unanswered questions.

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mistake in history, geography, grammar, or indeed on any other subject. There are, I am persuaded, many wives of such keen feelings and high spirits, (and such wives deserve to be treated with the utmost delicacy,) that they would rather receive a severe and bitter scolding in private, than a rebuke in company, calculated to display ignorance or folly, or to impair them in their own opinion, or in that of others.

"To sum up all you now have heard,
Young men and old, peruse the bard:
A female trusted to your care,
His rule is pithy, short and clear:—
'Be to her faults a little blind;
Be to her virtues very kind
Let all her ways be unconfid'
And place your padlock on her mind.'"

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RULES FOR WIVES.

I. Always receive your husband with smiles—leaving nothing undone to render home agreeable—and gratefully reciprocating his kindness and attention.

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II. Study to gratify his inclinations, in regard to food and cookery; in the management of the family; in your dress, manners, and deportment.

III. Never attempt to rule or appear to rule your husband. Such conduct degrades husbands—and wives always partake largely in the degradation of their husbands.

IV. In every thing reasonable comply with his wishes with cheerfulness—and even as far as possible anticipate them.

V. Avoid all altercations or arguments leading to ill humour—and more especially before company. Few things are more disgusting than the altercations of the married, when in the company of friends or strangers.

VI. Never attempt to interfere in his business, unless he ask your advice or counsel; and never attempt to control him in the management of it.

VII. Never confide to gossips any of the failings or imperfections of your husband—nor any of those little differences that occasionally arise in the married state. If you do, you may rest assured that however strong

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the injunctions of secrecy on the one hand, or the pledge on the other, they will in a day or two become the common talk of the neighbourhood.

VIII. Try to cultivate your mind, so as, should your husband be intelligent and well-informed, you may join in rational conversation with him and his friends.

IX. Think nothing a trifle that may produce even a momentary breach of harmony, or the slightest uneasy sensation.

"Think nought a trifle, though it small appear;
Small sands the mountain, moments make the year,
And trifles life. Your care to trifles give,
Else you may die ere you have learn'd to live."
Young.

X. If your husband be in business, always, in your expenditures, bear in mind the trying vicissitudes to which trade and commerce are subject; and do not expose yourself to the reproach, should he experience one of them, of having unnecessarily expended money, of

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which you and your offspring may afterwards be in want.

XI. While you carefully shun, in providing for your family, the Scylla of meanness and parsimony, avoid equally the Charybdis of extravagance, an error too common here; as remarked by most of the travellers who visit this country.

XII. If you be disposed to economize, I beseech you not to extend your economy to the wages you pay to seamstresses or washerwomen, who, particularly the latter, are too frequently ground to the earth, by the inadequacy of the wages they receive. Economize, if you will, in shawls, bonnets, and handkerchiefs; but never, by exacting labour from the poor, without adequate compensation, incur the dire anathemas pronounced in the Scriptures against the oppressors of the poor.

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WHAT THE STATISTICS SHOW

As can be seen from the graph on the opposite page, the three basic measures of American family formation and dissolution have changed in recent years.

The first-marriage rate is approaching an all-time low.

The divorce rate is at an all-time high.

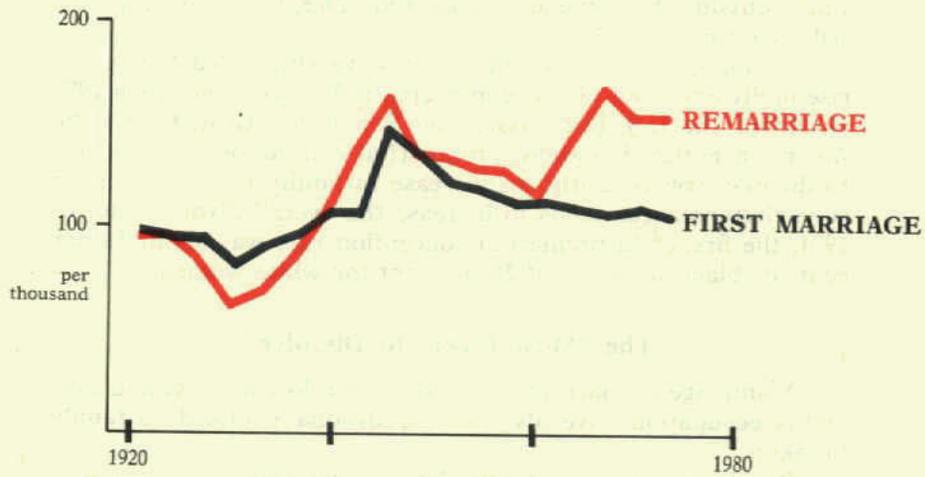
The remarriage rate is down slightly.

Until the end of the 1960s, all three trend lines followed a roughly parallel pattern. They dipped together to simultaneous "lows" during the Depression years, rose rapidly to "highs" immediately after World War II, declined together in the 1950s, and then began to part company. During most of the 1960s, the divorce rate and the remarriage rate continued their parallel rise (this is not surprising, given the fact that three-fourths of all divorced women and five-sixths of all divorced men remarry). But the rate for persons getting married for the first time leveled off, then dipped slightly between 1970 and 1974. In the 1970s, the divorce rate began to climb spectacularly, and the remarriage rate declined modestly.

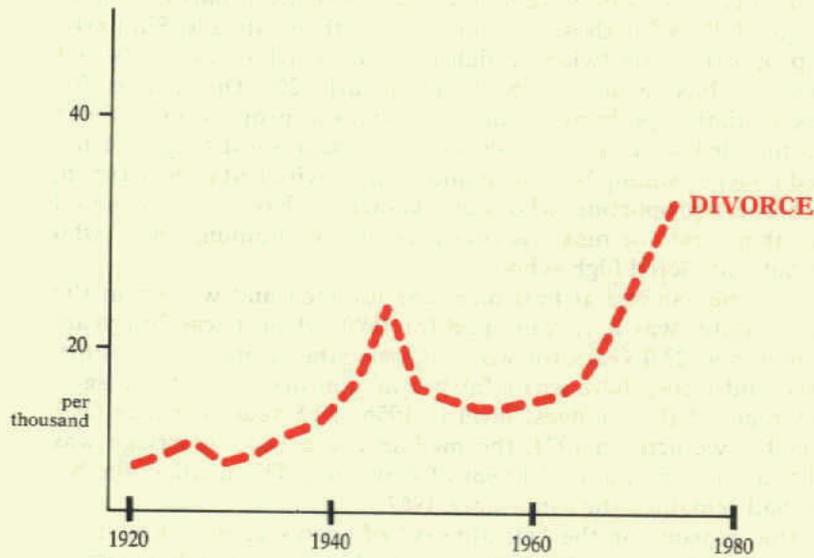
While there may be no agreement about the reasons for the divorce rate being 2.5 times what it was at the end of the 1960s, it is clear—as can be seen from the graph opposite—that the realities of particular time periods affect the disposition of people to marry, divorce, or remarry. In the 1930s, the Depression's pinch created a downturn in all three rates. The mood of relief and release following World War II generated a temporary but substantial increase in all three rates. In the 1960s and 1970s, it seems clear that the changes in the rates have been due, in part, to new perceptions of the institution of marriage itself.

A declining fertility rate may also have contributed to the rise in the divorce rate. Women with small families are more likely to be in the labor force and therefore financially more independent of their husbands. And as family size has declined, the proportion

FIRST-MARRIAGE AND REMARRIAGE RATES



DIVORCE RATE



Note: The first-marriage rate is based on first marriages per 1,000 single women 14 to 44. The divorce rate is based on divorces per 1,000 women 14 to 44. The remarriage rate is based on remarriages per 1,000 widowed and divorced women 14 to 54.

Source: Arthur J. Norton and Paul C. Glick, "Marital Instability: Past, Present, and Future," *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 1976.

of children in the average family who are of pre-school age has declined. This development has tended to free the mother to earn wages outside the home and, more and more, to become a potential divorcée.

Among other factors which may have stimulated the recent rise in divorce is an increase in premarital conceptions. As a 1972 study for the U.S. Commission on Population Growth and the American Future has shown, premarital conception is conducive to divorce; consequently, an increase in family formation under such circumstances tends to increase the overall divorce rate. In 1971, the first-child premarital conception rate was about 58 per cent for black women and 20 per cent for white women.

The "Most Likely to Dissolve"

Young age at marriage, low education, low income, and low-status occupation have also been traditionally linked to family breakup.

Results of the 1970 census showed that among persons who married for the first time between 1901 and 1970, the proportion of men divorced was twice as high for those who married before the age of 20 as for those who married in their late 20s. Similarly, the proportion was twice as high for women who married before 18 as for those who married in their early 20s. One reason for these statistics, perhaps, is that a substantial proportion of those who married at a later age delayed marriage until they had finished college. Among both men and women who had ever married, the highest proportion who were known to have been divorced after their first (or most recent) marriage was among those who had not completed high school.

The median age at first marriage for men and women in the United States was first computed for 1890, when it was 26.1 years for men and 22.0 years for women. From the turn of the century to the mid-1950s, there was a fairly constant decline in these ages. They reached the youngest level in 1956—22.5 years for men, 20.1 years for women. In 1974, the median age at first marriage was 23.1 years for men and 21.1 years for women. The median age for men had remained the same since 1967.

One reason for the "steadiness" of men's ages at first marriage, and the continuing "olderness" of women, is what demographers call the "marriage squeeze." Given the tradition that women marry men a few years older than themselves, a squeeze situation arose in the mid-1960s because more women 18 and 19 years old were entering the marriage market than were men 20

and 21. The women were products of the post-World War II baby boom, whereas the men were born during the war years, when birth rates were down.

The marriage squeeze may also have contributed to a recent pattern of delayed marriage, particularly among young women, beyond ages that have traditionally been considered prime years for first marriage. In 1960, 28 per cent of the women between 20 and 24 were single; in 1974, 40 per cent were.

The proportion of persons in the "ever divorced" category is highest for relatively disadvantaged groups, although the increased incidence of divorce has been occurring at all socioeconomic levels. According to data from the 1970 census, men 35 to 44 with low incomes and a low level of educational attainment were more likely to have been divorced than men in the same age bracket who had higher incomes and more education. Yet between 1960 and 1970, the increase in the proportion of divorced men was more rapid among men in the upper than in the lower levels. Thus there is less difference than there used to be in the divorce rates for poor men and well-to-do men.

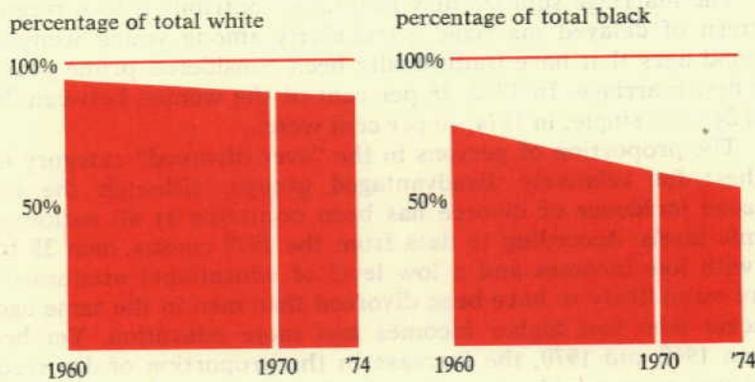
There is also less difference among women—but not for the same reason. Although the proportion of divorced women in the 35-to-44 age bracket went up by nearly one-half during the 1960s, the percentage of divorced women in the highest income brackets rose more slowly than among other women. In other words, the percentage of divorced among upper-status women was converging with that of other women by increasing *more slowly* than the average, whereas for upper-status men the percentage of divorced was converging with that of other men by increasing *more rapidly* than the average.

These trends show that the recent increase in divorce has been pervasive with regard to social and economic levels and that socioeconomic differences in divorce are now smaller than they used to be.

Divorce: The Racial Differences

The incidence of divorce is uniformly higher for blacks than for whites, although both display generally similar patterns by social and economic characteristics. In 1970—again in the 35-to-44 age bracket—19 per cent of black men who had ever been married were known to have had a divorce (compared with 15 per cent among white men) and 23 per cent of black women who had ever been married were known to have had a divorce (compared with 17 per cent for white women).

**CHILDREN UNDER 18 LIVING WITH TWO PARENTS,
BY RACE**



Sources: *U.S. Census of Population: 1960, Detailed Characteristics, U.S. Summary, Final Report PC(1)-1D, table 185*; U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 271, "Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1974," tables 4 and 5*; U.S. Bureau of the Census. *1970 Census of Population, Vol. II-4B, Persons by Family Characteristics, tables 1 and 8*; U.S. Bureau of the Census.

A further indication of the higher rate of marital disruption among blacks is the difference in the proportions of people who reported themselves as separated but not divorced. In 1970, eight per cent of all black men between 35 and 44, and 15 per cent of all black women in that age group, were reported as separated, whereas the rate for both white men and white women was less than two per cent.

Although there is an increasing similarity in the pattern of marital disruption displayed by the two racial groups, differences continue. For example, the percentage of children who are living with two parents has been declining steadily among both races, but is consistently lower among blacks. In 1974, 50.7 per cent of all black children under 18 were living with two parents, compared with 86.7 per cent of the white children. (See graph above.)

The Working Mother

Although the sharp rise in the divorce rate is most dramatic, the family is changing in several other ways, some of which have remained relatively obscure.

The first and most widely recognized trend is the increase in the number and percentage of working mothers. Here are some

statistics about one type of working mother—the one who lives with her husband and children:

¶ As of March 1974 (the latest time for which figures are available), 51 per cent of such women with children aged between six and 17 were in the labor force—that is, either working or seeking work. In 1948, the figure was 26 per cent.

¶ Since the early 1950s, mothers of school-age children have been holding jobs at a greater rate than have married women without children.

¶ The most rapid (and recent) increase in entry into the job market has been among mothers of pre-school children. In 1974, one of every three such women was in the labor force; in 1948, it was one of nine.

¶ Two-thirds of all working mothers had full-time jobs in 1974.

It is now the younger mother—particularly the one under 25 years of age—who is most likely to enter the labor force. One reason for this is that younger mothers feel the need to supplement the relatively low earnings of a young husband just beginning his career. In general, it is in households in which the husbands have incomes below \$5,000 that the wives are most likely to be working. In families at this income level, almost half the mothers are under 25. And all of these working mothers—including the youngest ones with the youngest children—work because they have to.

But this does not mean that all the mothers whose families need the extra income have jobs. Only mothers with at least a high-school education are likely to find work. Because the overwhelming majority (68 per cent) of family heads below the poverty line have not completed high school, this means that the wives in families which most need the extra income tend to be the least able to get a job.

Yet mothers in middle- and high-income families are showing the most rapid increase as job-holders—entering the work force at a higher rate than married women from *low*-income families did in the early 1960s.

The working mothers with the highest rate of labor-force participation are the single parents. And here, too, it is among the younger generation that single parenthood has been growing the most rapidly. By 1974, among parents under 25 heading a family, one out of four was without a spouse (it was one out of about seven just six years earlier). Their incomes are usually low.

In sharp contrast, the proportion of single-parent families in the “over \$15,000” income bracket has remained consistently be-

low two per cent. But it would be a mistake to conclude that a well-to-do intact family runs little risk of disruption. This is because the breakup of the family usually results in a lower income for the new, single-parent head (in the overwhelming majority of cases, the mother).

There are few single parents with incomes as high as \$10,000. In 1973, the median income for all families headed by a male with a wife present and at least one child under six was \$12,000; the corresponding figure for a single-parent female-headed family was \$3,600 (far below the poverty line). In the small proportion of father-headed, single-parent families with pre-school children, the average income was \$9,500.

In other words, it is the single-parent mother who finds herself in severely strained financial circumstances. And if she is under 25, her degree of economic deprivation is likely to be extreme. Such a mother, when all her children are under the age of six, must make do with a median income of only \$2,800. There are more than 1.5 million mothers in this age group, and they

"The survival rate of married or remarried women in a sample of 52 women with an average age of 75 was higher than that of the never-married, the separated, the unremarried divorced, or the unremarried newly widowed..."



Drawing by Lou Myers. © 1976 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

constitute one-third of all female-headed families with children under six. (See further discussion on pp. 87-92.)

As for the future, no one can tell for certain how many children will be born to American families, but there are a few indications.

The fertility rate for American women—the number of babies born per 1,000 women—dropped 25 per cent between the start of the 1970s and November 1975.

Other fertility patterns show that women born between 1935 and 1940 had an average of 1.0 children by age 22, while women born in a four-year period 15 years later were estimated to have an average of only 0.5 children by the same age. This is at about the same level as for women whose childbearing occurred during the Depression.

In 1975, three out of every four American wives aged 18 to 24 said they expected to have no more than two children, whereas in 1967 the proportion was only 45 per cent. Moreover, one-third of the women aged 40 to 49 in 1975 already had given birth to four or more children; among women who were in their 20s in 1975, only one out of 10 said she expected to have four or more children.

If such women live up to their expectations, the percentage of children who come from large families will be relatively tiny, and the fertility rate will be close to the minimum required for replacement of the population.

EDITOR'S NOTE. *The bulk of the material in the foregoing article was drawn from "Marital Instability: Past, Present, and Future" by Arthur J. Norton and Paul C. Glick, in volume 32, no. 1 of The Journal of Social Issues, and from "Reality and Research in the Ecology of Human Development" by Urie Bronfenbrenner in volume 119, no. 6 of the Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society. Mr. Norton is chief of the Marriage and Family Statistics Branch of the U.S. Bureau of the Census; Mr. Glick is senior demographer in the Population Division of the U.S. Bureau of the Census; Mr. Bronfenbrenner is professor of human development and family studies at Cornell University.*



THE FAMILY AS ECONOMIC UNIT

by Heather L. Ross and Isabel V. Sawhill

Looking at the family over the long sweep of history, it is clear that its old economic functions have been changing in character and diminishing in importance. These shifts have large, but often ignored, implications for both the family and American society.

In an early, pre-industrial stage, technology was limited and unchanging. Most economic activity took place within the household, and production and distribution were organized by custom and tradition. High mortality rates and low productivity meant that on the farms and in the towns life was short and living conditions were harsh—an existence which was accepted fatalistically. In this society the family played a central role, since economic and social status were defined by birth, family ties, and local custom. Most importantly, the family was a productive unit, and physical strength—typically a male attribute—was an essential element in survival.

During the industrial stage of development, going from the 18th century to the present, new technology and the benefits of specialization caused production to shift from home to factory. In Western Europe and America, living standards rose, death rates fell, and individuals felt a greater sense of control over their environment and their social institutions. Social status was determined increasingly by one's occupation and less and less by membership in a particular family. To some extent, the family itself became a more specialized unit whose major responsibility was the creation and socialization of children. But because it had been stripped of some of its basic economic functions, the family was no longer the central institution in society.

Today's declining fertility, the loosening of kinship ties, and the shrinking of the "extended" family into its present "nuclear" form can be viewed as adaptations to industrialization. Children

are no longer needed to help on the farm or to provide for one's old age. Smaller families are more mobile and less costly to support. At the same time, as a vestige of an earlier era, the household remains an economically primitive organization; roles within the family continue to be somewhat dominated by custom and tradition—examples being the often arbitrary division of tasks between men and women and the continued authority of the male head of household.

During this current stage, however, the family continues to play a crucial but unpublicized economic role in redistributing resources. In the industrialized world, East or West, the family, not the state, is still the major agency for transferring money from those who work (primarily male breadwinners) to those who do not or cannot (primarily dependent women and children). In America, government accounted for \$74 billion in such one-way transfers in 1970, private charity accounted for \$20 billion, and the family for \$313 billion. Indeed, as economist Kenneth Boulding has suggested, much of the nation's nagging poverty problem stems from the inability of individual families to fill this role of supporting dependent citizens, as in the case of many female-headed households.

The shift from the "productive" to the "distributive" household is now a matter of history. It is of interest only because it places recent family trends in some perspective. Futurologists have made it fashionable to speculate about a further shift, but it is difficult to substantiate these projections.

A third stage of family development is still unfolding. We may speculate that its inception came with the recent extension of technology to those responsibilities which have remained

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rooted in the family—especially control over reproduction—and that its fruition will be marked by equality between the sexes, and families operating largely as consumption (income-pooling) units.

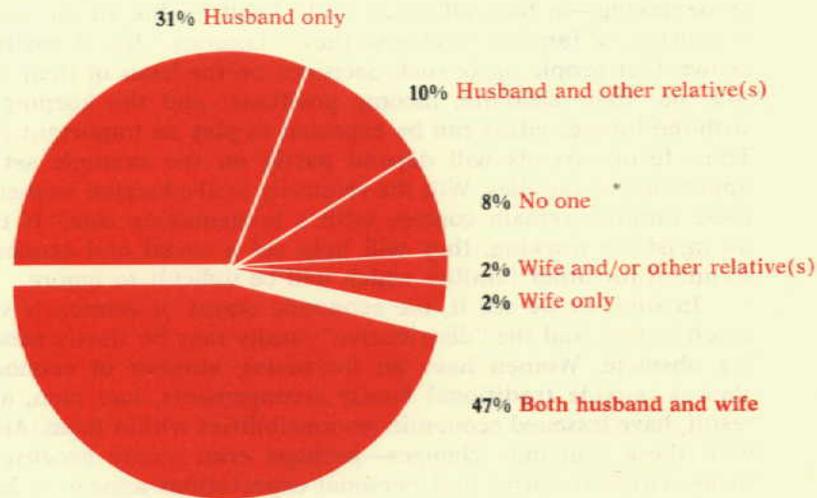
The present “distributive” family will become at least partially obsolete in America if and when (1) fertility declines to the point where a large proportion of families contain few or no children, (2) women’s job opportunities increase to the point where the present male-female division of labor has little economic justification, and (3) child-care and household tasks are increasingly turned over to specialized institutions, or living and working arrangements change the focus of such activities.

Smaller Families, Larger Incomes

It is already obvious that women’s economic position has been changing rapidly. The proportion of women in the labor force increased from 25 per cent in 1950 to 43 per cent in 1970. Currently, more than *half* the married women with school-age children are working, and each generation of women is spending an increasing proportion of the family life cycle in paid employment. In addition, there is evidence that over the longer run, women’s earnings have risen relative to men’s. Far more women are financially independent than ever before. Along with these labor-force trends, we find that younger women are planning much smaller families than in the past, and the fertility rate has dropped from 3.6 births per thousand women in 1961 to about 2.0 in 1971.

The increased employment of women appears largely due to an expansion of job opportunities in predominantly “female occupations” (e.g., white-collar work). Thus, current decisions about family size are closely related to the job opportunities available to women, which are an important determinant of the “cost” of children. Moreover, as the market earnings of women increase, a greater demand is created for day care, prepared foods, commercial laundries, and other market substitutes for those services historically provided by wives within the home. This trend also provides the basis for a reallocation of duties between husbands and wives, although there is little evidence that men are taking on child-care and other domestic tasks as women enter the world of paid work. This disequilibrium has undoubtedly contributed to the strains that modern marriages face.

These social trends appear likely to shape the future character of the family. But, once set in motion, they may set up a dynamic and partially self-generating reaction which also needs

EARNERS IN HUSBAND-WIFE FAMILIES, 1973


Source: *U.S. Working Women*, Bulletin 1880, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 1975.

to be considered. For example, as "two-paycheck families" become the norm, two things are likely to happen.

First of all, society will adjust to their existence with changes in hours of work, living arrangements, availability of supportive services, and the like, making the "two-paycheck" pattern more attractive.

Keeping Up with the Two-Paycheck Joneses

Second, there will be strong economic pressures on single-earner families who will find themselves increasingly at a competitive disadvantage in terms of standards of living. It is difficult enough to keep up with the Joneses under normal circumstances, but when both Joneses are working it becomes virtually impossible. In 1974, the median income in younger families with a working wife was \$15,000, compared with \$12,000 where there was only one earner (even though wives' participation in the work force goes down as the husband's income goes up and women earn only about 60 per cent of what men do).

More and more families may be discovering that their economic welfare is tied up as much with the ratio of earners to non-

earners in the household as with wage levels. This doesn't mean that all families will forfeit the choice of children and full-time homemaking—in fact, affluence could itself enable an increasing proportion of families to choose these “luxuries.” But it has been shown that people make such decisions on the basis of their *relative*, not their absolute, income positions; and the keeping-up-with-the-Joneses effect can be expected to play an important role. Thus, future trends will depend partly on the example set by upper-income families. Will the relatively well-educated women in these families remain content with a homemaking role? If they do insist on working, they will help set a social and economic standard for other families which will be difficult to ignore.

In sum, as we see it, the economic status of women is very much in flux, and the “distributive” family may be slowly becoming obsolete. Women have an increasing number of economic choices outside traditional family arrangements, and men, as a result, have lessened economic responsibilities within them. Along with these economic changes—perhaps even partly *because* of them—cultural norms and personal expectations appear to have been shifting. What we find, then, is that people are moving in and out of marriage more freely than in the past because marriage is less and less bound up with social and economic status. Rising divorce rates may be viewed as an indicator of changing personal aspirations, coupled with greater economic opportunities for women.

The future of the family will be shaped by how people respond to these changing circumstances. The growing financial independence of women will certainly affect individual decisions pertaining to marriage, divorce, childbearing, and household formation—decisions which are likely to result in continued growth of female-headed families. However, at some point this growth is likely to level off. Once women have achieved a greater measure of economic independence, and family roles and responsibilities have adjusted to the new realities, those marriages that continue to form and endure will be based—to a greater degree than ever before—on the personal satisfactions they provide husband and wife and not on economic needs.



CHILDREN, DIVORCE, AND WELFARE

by Mary Jo Bane

In 19th-century America, children who had lost one parent were not uncommon. As health conditions improved, fewer children lost parents through death. Today, parents rarely die young. Most children who lose parents lose them through divorce.

With the divorce rate rising rapidly, the proportion of children affected is increasingly large—larger even than the proportion of children affected by parental death at the turn of the century. Children of disrupted families will become a prominent feature of the American social landscape in the next few years, but as yet we have not faced up to the magnitude of the trend or its costs.

Statistics abound. In 1975, for example, about 15 per cent of all the nation's children lived in female-headed, one-parent families. This proportion has been rising—only about 7.4 per cent of all children lived in female-headed families in 1954. But such figures understate the scope of what is happening. One problem with these percentages is that they reflect "net" numbers—added to by children who come into "single-parent status" in a given year, subtracted from by other children who turn 18 or whose parents reconcile or remarry. Thus, the percentage of children who were living in single-parent families during a given year does not show how many were affected *at some point* during their entire childhood by a divorce or a parental death.

To obtain better data on longtime trends, I used a large survey conducted by the Census Bureau in 1967. My analysis shows that the proportion of children affected by family disruption of all kinds in this century has been large—between 25 and 30 per cent. However, the importance of divorce as a cause of disruption has increased considerably; among those children born in 1941–50, more were affected by divorce than by death. Now, as the "plus" effect of rising divorce rates overcomes the "minus" effect of falling death rates, the total proportion of children affected by disruption is beginning to rise.

The number of divorces granted in the United States went from 377,000 in 1955 to approximately 1,026,000 in 1975.

The proportion of *all* American children under 18 involved in a divorce each year has gone steadily up from 0.6 per cent in 1955 to an estimated 1.7 per cent in 1975. One can estimate that about 14 per cent of the children born in 1955 had parents who were divorced during the next 18 years.

Making predictions for children born after 1955 is difficult. But a rough estimate of total disruption involving American children can be made by adding up the various causes. Based on recent divorce rates, it appears that the parents of about 30 per cent of the children growing up in the 1970s will be divorced.* Adding annulments, long-term separations, parental deaths, and illegitimacy brings the total proportion of children affected by disruption to 40 to 45 per cent.

This estimate is roughly consistent with the proportion of children now living in one-parent families at any given time. The average duration of a disruption—before the child reaches adulthood or the parent remarries—is about six years; thus the number of children in single-parent families at any time is about a third of the number who will be in such families over an 18-year period. Since about 15 per cent of all children in the United States were in female-headed families in 1975, 45 per cent might be so situated at some point during their childhood.

This prospect does not fit America's conception of the typical family, and it calls for some fresh thinking.

What, if anything, should be done?

Should American parents be allowed to form and dissolve their marriages as they wish—as they do now—with society assuming that parents will take responsibility for their children?

*I have assumed that the proportion of children involved each year during the next decade will be the same as in the early 1970s, a fairly conservative projection. The proportion affected by a divorce at some point during their childhood is about equal to the proportion involved each year multiplied by 18, assuming that most children are involved in only one divorce. Using this logic, the 1974 data suggest that 29.5 per cent of the children born around 1970 will be involved in a divorce by 1988.

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CHILDREN UNDER 18 INVOLVED IN DIVORCE, 1955 to 1972

Total number of divorces granted		Mean number of children per decree	Total number of children	Number per 1000 children
377,000	1955	0.92	347,000	6.3
393,000	1960	1.18	463,000	7.2
479,000	1965	1.32	630,000	8.9
708,000	1970	1.22	870,000	12.5
773,000	1971	1.22	946,000	13.6
845,000	1972	1.20	1,021,000	14.8
915,000	1973	1.17	1,079,000	15.9
977,000	1974	1.12	1,099,000	16.4
1,026,000	1975	1.1*	1,129,000*	17.1

* estimates

Calculations by Mary Jo Bane. Sources: Monthly Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 25, No. 1, Supplement April 14, 1976. Advance Report Final Divorce Statistics 1974; Monthly Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 24, No. 13, June 30, 1976. Provisional Statistics. Annual Summary for the United States 1975; and various publications of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports P-20 Series in "Marital Status and Living Arrangements."*

Or should we make the responsibilities for children more public, as often advocated by those who have sought to liberalize both divorce laws and welfare benefits?

Social-science research does not help much in answering these questions. First of all, the research provides no clear insights into how divorce affects children. Few would quarrel with the popular notion that children are better off in happy stable families than in unhappy unstable families. However, increasingly vigorous debate has arisen over questions of how bad the effects of disruption are and what really causes them.

It is widely believed that divorce is bad for children; this belief was long supported by studies which seemed to show that children from broken marriages were more likely than others to be delinquent, psychologically disturbed, low achievers. But recent critics of the research on father absence and marital disruption argue that most of those studies did not separate out the effects

of disruption from the effects of poverty, which so often accompanies family breakup. Other studies that, in my opinion, adequately take into account economic status challenge the popular belief that divorce *per se* is psychologically disastrous for children; they show that there are few differences in school achievement, social adjustment, and delinquent behavior between children from one-parent and two-parent homes of comparable economic status.

More relevant, perhaps, are those recent studies which compare children from disrupted marriages with children from unbroken but unhappy homes. When such comparisons are made, even the small disadvantages of children from broken marriages depicted in other studies disappear. One study, for example, found that adolescents in divorced homes showed "less psychosomatic illness, less delinquent behavior and better adjustment to parents, and did not differ significantly [from those in unhappy unbroken homes] on school adjustments or delinquent companions." But again, the research in this complicated area is far from definitive; amid all the conflicting claims, much serious work remains to be done.

The Money Problem

In contrast to emotional problems, the financial handicaps of female-headed families and the children in them are clear. In 1974, the mean family income of male-headed families was \$13,788 and of female-headed families, \$6,413. Perhaps the most important U.S. Census statistic is that in 1974, 51.5 per cent of children under 18 (and 61.4 per cent of children under six) in female-headed families lived below the poverty level; a disproportionate share of these children are black. These data suggest that doing nothing will consign an increasing number of children of divorce to poverty and its related difficulties.

The realistic responses seem to boil down to assuring increased parental responsibility for children after divorce or having the government assume more of the costs of raising children. Liberal opinion has, in recent years, tended to de-emphasize the importance of parental support for children in female-headed families and to emphasize bigger government subsidies.

There are good reasons for this. Child-support is hard to collect. In some cases, a father's ability to support his children is stretched to the limit by remarriage and the financial burdens of a new family. In other cases, the ex-husband's income is simply too low to share. The mother's income is, of course, another

source of support, and one which can become more important if wages and work opportunities for women improve. But child-care is an important task which cannot be coupled with full-time employment outside the home. So to hold a job, a mother must pay someone else to provide child-care while she works, and thus ends up with far less net income than most other workers. In short, such families seem to need more income than they are capable of earning or collecting from the absent father.

However, the liberals' emphasis on more generous public welfare has provoked understandable resentment. Many Americans ask why some parents are required to support their children while other parents (those who separate or divorce) are not. Thus, any expanded welfare or income-maintenance scheme for single-parent families will have to include provisions for ensuring that both parents contribute as best they can to the support of their children.

One can imagine schemes which would work better than the present welfare system.* A "maintenance allowance" guaranteed by the federal government, for example. Under such a plan, needy families headed by women would receive allowances that would bring them up to a poverty-line income. The subsidy could be financed by an increase in the social security tax. Courts would set the amount of maintenance awards to be paid by absent fathers on the basis of their ability to pay. The money would be collected by the court or other agency, perhaps the Internal Revenue Service, and turned over to the social insurance agency up to the amount of the federal guarantee. Support payments above the level of this allowance would go directly to the family. Well-off fathers would thus get no special relief; they would have to support their children to the same extent they do now.

A Matter of Fairness

A guaranteed maintenance allowance would have many obvious benefits for single-parent families. It would also, of course, raise some major problems, the largest being cost. But the real test for such a program will probably come in people's perceptions of how fair and necessary the system is.

Divorce and separation are well on their way to being widespread phenomena in the United States. But low-income people

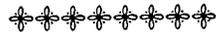
*The federal-state "Aid to Families with Dependent Children" program paid out \$8.4 billion for 11,328,000 adults and children in fiscal 1975. The average monthly payment per family under AFDC was \$220.22. Of the AFDC families, 76 per cent were "female-headed households" (in 1973). The official "poverty line" for a non-farm family of four in 1975 was \$5,500 per year.

are still more likely to divorce than are high-income couples; blacks are somewhat more likely to divorce than whites. At any given time, a much larger proportion of blacks than whites report themselves as separated. Likewise, the proportion of black children living in female-headed families is much higher than the proportion of white children.

These high black-white differentials have contributed to a widespread sentiment that the single-parent family is "their" problem—that of poor blacks in central cities—and not "ours." The racial differentials are not likely to change until the relative income position of black families further improves. What is likely to happen quite quickly in the meantime, however, is that divorce, separation, and single-parent rates among the well-off will rise to levels so high that the problem cannot be ignored. If 20 per cent of the children of the non-poor wind up living in single-parent families for an interval during their childhood, which is entirely possible, the general public may adopt a more generous attitude.

But neither a "guaranteed maintenance allowance" nor a more generous AFDC subsidy is likely as long as the public believes that such subsidies are incentives to family breakup. It seems to me there are only two ways to eliminate potentially bad incentives. One is a fairly foolproof system for allocating support responsibilities between divorced parents and collecting a proper level of payment from absent fathers. The other is a general program of children's allowances that would ensure a level of economic decency *regardless* of family type. Neither would be easy or free of red tape, and both would be costly.

Yet it seems clear that the *economic* problems of female-headed families ought to be the first concern of American policymakers who worry about the effects of marital disruption on children. They are real problems and they are solvable. Given present trends, the need to examine solutions seems compelling.



WHERE IS THE FAMILY GOING?

by George Levinger

Imagine, for a moment, two contrasting models of society. In Society X, all marriages last for a lifetime. In Society Y, no marriages are allowed to continue beyond the partners' fourth wedding anniversary. In the first society, the barrier against family breakup is very strong; in the second, there is no barrier.

Society X assumes a stability which has not been uncommon in the history of the Western family; even today, it remains the ideal in much of America and in many regions of the world. The marital vow is here considered sacred; it represents a contract not only on earth, but also in heaven. The vow creates a bond between man and wife; it also ties together irrevocably two families and their communities. In Society X, one's marriage is as important as one's birth and death. The spouse becomes, in all likelihood, the mother or father of all one's children; only in widowhood does one continue living without the partner.

Family relationships in Society X are remarkably stable. Once allied through the nuptial bond, kinship lines are unbroken unless death comes before there are children; the couple is part of a larger clan—of parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and nephews. The adventurous may find such social stability excessively static; they may feel oppressed by the pressures of family and community.

Now consider a society where family relations are founded on instability. Society Y emphasizes the individual's mobility and readiness to cut ties of intimacy, and the exploration of many successive personal relationships. In Society Y, all marriages by law are temporary; if and when they attain the statutory four-year limit, their warranty expires and they become officially null. One's marriage is like a four-year college course or a stint in the army.

The recurrent dissolution of intimate relationships in Society

Y makes its citizens more dependent on larger institutions—government, corporations, unions. It encourages job changes and geographical shifts. The care of children, their financial support, and their assimilation into adult society become to a large extent the responsibility of the state. So do the care and comfort of aging parents or ex-spouses. Neighborhood and family ties fade.

While citizens of Society Y believe that this system enables them to “maximize self-growth” and “fulfill personal happiness,” the total society is also affected. Adults are so busy with the formation, maintenance, and termination of personal relationships that they pay little heed to the workings of the larger community; left in charge is a managerial elite.

While Societies X and Y present almost polar opposites, they do share one common property. Both illustrate the effect of the rigid application of rules that may fit reality under some conditions but become sources of strain or even social pathology under other conditions.

A flat ban on divorce may make sense in a tightly knit society where there is little geographic movement, great homogeneity among eligible partners, and little change in people's tastes or opportunities over the course of their lives. But if the same injunction remains intact in a culture of instability and impersonality—such as modern Western urban culture—the prohibition itself may become a source of marital strain. Despite formal adherence to the marriage contract, the frequency of informal violations—infidelity, desertion, separation—goes up. For example, in Catholic Italy, before divorce was legalized, some observers estimated that 40,000 de facto divorces occurred annually in the 1950s.

Similarly, Society Y's prescription of regular breakup—which some contemporary writers appear almost to advocate—is also likely to be intolerable. It may fit a kind of Brave New World where all adults move to new locations every four years, where childbirth is highly restricted and child-rearing is an impersonal function. But where such conditions do not prevail, a ban on

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permanent marriage would be oppressive.

In short, marriage and family—which involve our most personal relationships—are inseparable from the nature of the society in which they exist. High divorce rates in the America of the 1970s reflect far more than the aggregate of individual choices and actions or fluctuations in social mores. They also reflect broad changes in economic conditions, social mobility, and technology.

But the interplay of these forces is extremely difficult to disentangle. We have demographic and economic data; we have polls showing changes in attitudes toward marriage; we have statistics on church attendance, divorce decrees, welfare rolls; we have studies of divorcées in Boston; we have national studies of “happiness” by researchers in Michigan and analyses underway elsewhere of the effects of new “no-fault” divorce laws. But such studies vary greatly in their scope, method, and conclusions.

We don't have answers to some basic questions. Are the increases in divorce rates due mostly to (1) a lowering of barriers around the marital relationship, (2) a lowering of the attractiveness of staying married, or (3) a rise in the attractiveness of alternatives outside of marriage?*

The Eroding Barriers

We know that American divorce laws have been liberalized over the past half-century and that attitudes toward marriage have changed. According to a 1974 Roper Survey, some 60 per cent of all Americans believe in divorce as “a way out of a marriage that isn't working.” No good media research studies seem to be available, but analyses of trends in news coverage, popular fiction, and television dramas would probably show a large increase in sympathetic or neutral portrayals of divorce over the last three decades. We also know that divorced American politicians are no longer disqualified in the eyes of voters from seeking election or reelection.

It is likely that, today, spouses' feelings of obligation toward marriage are lower than those of previous generations. For some people, this decline may be related to their own experience of

*My own social-psychological approach to divorce and separation assumes that people stay in marriages because (a) they are attracted to them and/or (b) they are barred from leaving them by law, custom, or economic penalties. Furthermore, I assume that, consciously or not, men and women compare a current relationship with alternative ones. If the internal attractions and the barriers surrounding the present relationship become distinctly weaker than those of a promising alternative, the result is apt to be breakup. This theoretical perspective translates the effects of cultural trends, social pressures, or economic shocks into psychological forces experienced by individuals or couples.

divorce. Others' attitudes may be shaped by a history of divorce in their parents' marriage. Indeed, an increasing proportion of American children whose parents have been separated are growing up—children who are therefore less likely to expect a permanent marriage in their own future. In a 1976 analysis of national survey data, two Iowa sociologists, Hallowell Pope and Charles W. Mueller, found that children from homes broken by divorce were slightly more likely to go through divorce in their own marriages than were those who grew up in intact homes or in homes broken by a parent's death. This "intergenerational transmission effect" of divorce rates is not yet well understood; obviously, if this effect were found to be stronger, the impact over time on American society could be considerable.

The Ties That Bind

Another past "barrier" to family breakup has been the spouses' religious beliefs. Practicing Catholics, Jews, and conservative Protestants have tended to have far lower divorce rates than non-church attenders, according to reputable data. As religious orthodoxy weakens, so does the churches' overall influence in holding marriages together.

If barriers to divorce have grown weaker, have marriages also become less attractive? Who knows? There are few good data to answer that question. The more extreme representatives of the women's liberation movement, as well as certain popular male writers, argue variously that conventional marriage is repressive for women and inhibiting for men. Nevertheless, judging by the polls, the average American views "getting married" as less important to a successful life than was the case decades or centuries ago. Almost all young people today still aspire to get married *eventually*, and most divorced people try to get remarried (although more men than women succeed). Most Americans—men and women alike—expect their spouses to continue being in love, to remain sexually compatible, to enjoy similar interests and activities, and to resolve all conflicts through honest communication. However, research on "happiness" suggests that the early peak experiences are eventually followed by a slide toward a more prosaic routine which does not match earlier expectations.

If Americans in the 1970s tend to demand more of a "good" marriage, they may also be quicker to rate a marriage as "bad." In the 1974 Roper Survey, for example, about half of all respondents said that a *sufficient reason* for considering divorce is "no longer being in love"; agreeing with that statement were 59 per

cent among 18-29-year-olds, and 45 per cent among 50-59-year-olds. While younger people revealed somewhat higher expectations than older people, all segments of our society placed high demands on marriage, demands that are often hard to meet in the real world of jobs, children, and installment payments.

On a more concrete level, census and other survey data show clear evidence that a husband's low income and low employment stability are associated with marital instability. For example, Phillips Cutright, in a 1971 analysis of 1960 U.S. census data, found that a husband's income was a far clearer clue to intact marriage than either his occupation or his education. In a more recent analysis, sociologist Andrew Cherlin found a husband's job stability to be even more important than his income. So did Heather Ross and Isabel Sawhill in their 1975 analysis of data from the University of Michigan's *Panel Study of Income Dynamics*. They concluded that layoffs, discrimination, and marginal employment help explain high marital breakup rates among low-income blacks.

What Makes the Grass Greener?

Even if a marriage seems unattractive and the costs of terminating it are low, it will not be broken unless some alternative becomes more attractive, unless the grass looks greener elsewhere. What, then, are the social forces that have enhanced alternative attractions?

Oddly enough, researchers have only recently recognized that the husband's income and employment are only one part of the divorce picture. As women's own income-earning opportunities have risen, as their aspirations to independence have climbed, they have become able to consider divorces that earlier seemed financially impossible.* Other research indicated that a wife's independent income at all economic levels is correlated with a propensity toward divorce; my own research at a divorce court in Cleveland, Ohio, indicated that female divorce applicants who earned wages were significantly less likely to dismiss their divorce suits than were those who did not. Hence, the rising participation of married women in the labor force, especially in the professions, seems likely to have future impact on family stability. Again, no one knows what offsetting effects might also occur.

Because state or federal programs of aid to dependent children subsidize low-income, one-parent families, but not low-

*According to survey data analyzed by Cherlin in 1976 and other data reported by Ross and Sawhill in 1975.

income, two-parent families, another potential economic incentive is provided for marital breakup. But Oliver C. Moles's analysis of 1960-1970 welfare programs suggests that any link between divorce and the level of welfare payments is tenuous at best. Others, notably Ross and Sawhill, have suggested that rather than promoting marital breakups, such payments may tend to deter already-separated welfare mothers from seeking remarriage to the available men whose low incomes may not match government support to single mothers.

At all income levels, the divorced or separated woman no longer suffers the social stigma of two decades ago. If we believe evidence that divorce rates rise with the social acceptability of divorcées, then this shift signals another important weakening of barriers to divorce.

The ethic of "self-actualization" is important, too. Not only in the literature of the women's movement, but in Western cultures generally, we have witnessed a rising desire to pursue individual happiness, variously defined. The achievement of "self-growth" in career or in romance often seems to conflict with continued obligations to those others who are near and dear. Like Hollywood stars, American middle-class spouses may seek out external opportunities or pursue the paradox of an "open marriage," and thereby fatally neglect their existing obligations.

Curbing Breakups

Let us now look at the other side of the issue. What social policies act to keep down the rate of marital breakup? While easier divorce and separation may provide American society with necessary escape valves, their benefits may eventually become lower than their costs—costs to children, to family and friends, to the social fabric, and especially to the ex-partners themselves. And these costs, variously perceived, have already elicited public declarations from politicians, church leaders, and academics in favor of "preserving the family."

If increasing legal permissiveness (such as "no-fault" divorce) over the past decade has tended to erode the barriers against divorce, a reversal would tend to raise them. In some totalitarian societies—such as the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China—reversals of policy have indeed occurred. After an early post-revolutionary period of official permissiveness, government policy changed to make divorce difficult and unlikely.*

*Soviet policy shifted again; the Russians now have a "Western" divorce rate.

American social policy lacks coherence; it is, instead, a contradictory patchwork attempting to satisfy competing interests. If divorce is tolerated, or even tacitly encouraged, by local social custom in Beverly Hills, on Park Avenue, or in Watts, there are many communities where more traditional views prevail. Few Americans, it may be assumed, are in favor of going all the way back to something like Society X. But if divorce trends continue, some reaction in social and legal policy may indeed occur during the next decade, if only to ward off the spectre of something like Society Y.

Perhaps the most palatable device for increasing the seriousness of marital commitments would be to make it more difficult for people to get married in the first place. Increasing the obstacles to "quickie" marriage may merit some social experimentation—raising the legal age for marriage or requiring lengthy engagements, for example. Making it harder to marry might force men and women to consider marriage more carefully and enable them to predict better what their marriage would be like.

An obvious major contributor to disruption of American families is economic instability, as we have seen. Subsidies that would support two-parent families (as distinguished from one-parent families headed by the mother) might help increase the attractiveness of remaining married for low-income people with children. Such a policy might be part of a federal program of reducing extreme financial distress in general—notably by increasing low incomes. We do not know if money alone would lessen the high breakup rate in poor families; we only know that the poor divorce more than the non-poor.

A Hazy Picture

Finally, a "psychological" note. The current hazy picture of personal and social dissatisfaction suggests that many Americans' "interpersonal expectations" have risen faster than the ability to meet them. Is it possible to foresee political leadership that will, among other goals, seek to encourage American men and women to become more realistic in their expectations, and hence lower the risk of disillusionment?

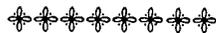
One doubts it. The United States is still a country heavily committed to optimism, personal enhancement, and change for the better. Moreover, the constant thrust of political rhetoric and consumer advertising, of themes in women's magazines and television drama, is to stir great expectations, to create confidence in quick remedies ("fast, fast, *fast* relief"), and to evoke visions of

a richer life for all. Such visions, indeed, are implicit in much of the "advocacy" research dealing with marriage, divorce, and the changing socioeconomic role of men and women. We may be in for continuing tumult.

Already, conflicting views of the family and its future are reflected (and often distorted) in the current debates over abortion laws, the Equal Rights Amendment, "no-fault" divorce legislation, day-care programs, and welfare reform. But as I have indicated in this essay, serious gaps still exist in scholarly knowledge of the social causes and effects of family disruption. We know some important statistics. We know America is somewhere between Society X and Society Y; but exactly where we are headed, and why, remains largely conjectural. In any case, when a national debate on family policy begins, as it surely will if present divorce trends persist, none of us should overestimate the efficacy of policymakers in hastening or reversing changes in the role and structure of the American family.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Listed below are specialized studies cited in this essay or otherwise worthy of note:

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- "Social and Economic Determinants of Marital Separation" by Andrew Cherlin, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles (1976).
- "Income and Family Events: Marital Stability" by P. Cutright, in *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (no. 33, 1971).
- "Marital Satisfaction and Instability: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Divorce Rates" by W. J. Goode, in *International Social Science Journal* (no. 14, 1962).
- "Boys in Fatherless Families" by E. Herzog and C. E. Sudia, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Children's Bureau (U.S. Government Printing Office: no. 72-33, 1971).
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- "The Intergenerational Transmission of Marital Instability: Comparisons by Race and Sex" by Hollowell Pope and Charles W. Mueller, in *Journal of Social Issues* (vol. 32, no. 1, 1976).
- "Marital Instability by Race and Income, Based on 1960 Census Data" by J. R. Udry, in *American Journal of Sociology* (no. 6, 1967).
- "Effects of Parental Divorce: Experiences of the Child in Early Latency" by J. Wallerstein and J. Kelly, paper presented at the 1975 meeting of the American Orthopsychiatric Association.



BACKGROUND BOOKS

THE CHANGING FAMILY

As always in periods of unusual upheaval, some people profit. Among them these days are the American writers, editors, publishers, and sellers of popular books on such subjects as "Creative Divorce," "Utopian Motherhood," "How To Be Your Own Sex Therapist," "Part-Time Fathering" (for the "Second-Time Single Man") on through a seemingly endless list that demonstrates, if nothing else, the existence of a vigorous sub-industry in U.S. publishing.

Some of the self-help manuals have serious ideas behind their exhortations; some avoid the turgid prose that characterizes much of the published research on marriage and the family; some may even provide practical advice to the troubled. But make no mistake. These are not books. They are "products," so designated by their manufacturers and in the book trade journals.

A great deal of the academic writing and publishing in this field is also "product"—though never so described in periodicals like the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* and the *American Sociologist* where both work-in-progress and reviews of published books by recognized specialists and new researchers appear. Too often, professional jargon ("decoupling," "dyads," "serial monogamy," "serial polygamy," "the coefficient of preservation") fails to cloak advocacy or hack work aimed at the college textbook market.

In short, books on marriage and the family are legion, but few are worthy of the general reader's attention. Several notable technical studies of women, black families, and the effects of modern life on children have been published

in recent years. These are, however, too narrow to provide sufficient perspective on the broader causes of contemporary discontents. For a longer-range view of changes in marriage and the family, we turn to two books that introduce to American readers the promising new work begun in the 1960s and '70s by European social historians of the *Annales* school.

These scholars combine the techniques of demography, anthropology, sociology, economic history, biology, linguistics, group psychology, and other disciplines. Their close attention to shifting marital patterns in France and elsewhere has produced a new understanding of the forces behind fundamental changes in the family from the 16th through the 19th centuries. Some of their esoteric findings are available in **Family and Society: Selections from the *Annales* Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations** (Johns Hopkins, 1976, cloth & paper) edited by Robert Forster and Orest Ranum. This book can be recommended to readers with an interest in minutiae, the significance of which they may wish to ponder for themselves.

Much wider in its appeal is Edward Shorter's breezy **The Making of the Modern Family** (Basic Books, 1975), the first successful synthesis of *Annales* papers and similar historical work done by Philippe Ariès, Etienne van de Walle, John Demos, author of **A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony** (Oxford, 1970), and scores of other European and American scholars. Shorter, associate professor of history at the University of Toronto, brings the story down to our own perplexing time.

His rueful conclusion: "Towards the

end of the eighteenth century a transformation in domestic life occurred, the shift from traditional to nuclear family. I argued that 'capitalism' was the driving force behind that change. What master variable is at work today though, I must say, is unclear. . . . I think that things are much more complex than just the 'wish to be free' suddenly popping itself into the consciousness of the millions and millions of anonymous women about whom this book has mainly been."

The best path to understanding the social forces that are disrupting American family life in the 20th century may eventually emerge from scholarship of the *Annales* sort applied to the recent past. If so, the four-volume study, **Five Thousand American Families—Patterns of Economic Progress** edited by Greg J. Duncan, James N. Morgan, et al. (Institute for Social Research, Univ. of Mich., 1974-76, cloth & paper) is a move in the right direction. The Michigan researchers, investigating the economic well-being of their 5,000 subject families over an extended (seven-year) period, learned much as well about changes in family composition (often as a result of divorce and remarriage).

It is in the interpretation of such raw data to depict causes—not only effects—that problems arise, however. Much of even the better social science output in this field is excessively colored by the author's own biases or acceptance of current fashion. Many of Shorter's comments, for example, seem clearly derived from first-hand experience. And a tendency to reflect the attitudes of the moment flavors the prolific output of Jessie S. Bernard, emerita professor at Pennsylvania State University, who is to the sociology of American marriage what Margaret Mead is to the anthropology of family life in primitive cultures. Her first book, written with her

husband, L. L. Bernard, and published in 1934, was on sociology and the study of international relations. After that she switched to "interpersonal relations."

Mrs. Bernard's successive volumes (and views) on courtship, dating, mating, and marriage, the renovation of marriage, divorce, remarriage, teen-age culture, women, wives, mothers, the future of motherhood, the future of parenthood, and related subjects constitute a veritable fever chart of American family life.

For example, her **American Family Behavior** (Harper, 1942), a straightforward textbook, marches firmly forward to the optimistic conclusion that, although "a certain amount of malfunctioning and maladjustment is inevitable," social science "will help us discern trends and give us methods of adjusting family life to them."

How changed her tone 30 years later! In **The Future of Marriage** (World, 1972, cloth & paper), Mrs. Bernard explores such matters as the different perceptions of the same marriage held by husband and wife, as seen in their contradictory answers to interviewers' questions concerning sex, money, who disciplines the children, even who mows the lawn. She now says that marriage has a future but not with its traditional form retaining a monopolistic sway. As options, she sees many different living arrangements, including "temporary permanent" marriages for child-rearing, and new relationships for middle age and beyond, including, perhaps, polygynous combinations (one man, more than one woman). In an autobiographical afterword she adds that she did not "expect this book to turn out to be on the destructiveness for women of marriage, with its 'structured strain'—a result all the more remarkable because most of the facts had been generally known. . . . I had reported many of

them myself a generation ago. This time round, however, they looked different. The message of the radical young women had reached me."

Only the demographers seem able to preserve a certain detachment. The outstanding compilation of American data is **Marriage and Divorce: A Social and Economic Study** by Hugh Carter and Paul C. Glick (Harvard, 1976, rev. ed.), based on statistics gathered by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, where Mr. Glick is a senior demographer. Its authors note that though their new research "highlights extensive recent changes in life-styles relating to marriage," it also "documents the continuing preference of a vast majority of post-adolescent adults for life as married (or remarried) persons." Many of the changes, they say, "may be properly interpreted as reflections of a deep desire for greater satisfaction from married life, even if delayed marriage or divorce is required to realize it."

A few scholars have turned to the study of fiction to help illuminate the puzzles of family life and marriage. Among them is William J. Goode, sociologist and author of an important work on marriage and kinship in Arabia, Africa, India, and the West entitled **World Revolution and Family Patterns** (Free Press, 1963, cloth, 1970, paper).

With Nicholas Tavuschic, he compiled **The Family Through Literature** (McGraw-Hill, 1975, paper), organized to fit the framework that Goode uses in teaching students about the family as institution. It includes excerpts that range from Tolstoy to Portnoy.

Jenni Calder, in **Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction** (Oxford, 1976) also analyzes the work of Tolstoy—along with that of Jane Austen, Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot, Meredith, Hardy, Gissing, Marie Corelli, Mrs. Gaskell, and others. The sharp images of family life—good and bad—that she has chosen mirror an institution that was, in the 19th century, essentially static and well-defined, hence easier to portray than is now the case (one is led to speculate whether a connection exists between the growing instability of family life and the decline of the novel in the mid-20th century). Not that the writers of the Victorian era were invariably successful in dealing with their basic material. Tolstoy's **Anna Karenina** may be as fine a book about marriage as we will ever have. But in an 1889 short story, "The Kreutzer Sonata," even Tolstoy finds himself, in Ms. Calder's view, defeated by "the contradictions of marriage and family life" in a way that suggests "we should not under-estimate their depth and influence."

—Lois Decker O'Neill, Associate Editor (Books)