

If divorce carries a stigma, divorced persons can remarry only on less favorable terms than they had in previous marriages. Since a deterioration in the terms of marriage reduces the incentive to marry, the stigma attached to divorce implies that the probability of marriage declines with the number of prior divorces. Moreover, the evidence in Tables 10.1 and 10.2 also suggests that divorced persons expect to gain less from remarriage than they expected from prior marriages: divorced (but not widowed) persons are likely to remarry outside their religion even when they had previously married inside their religion.

The expected gain from remaining married was generally quite large in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fertility was high and few married women participated in the market sector (see Chapter 11 for a fuller discussion). Consequently, persons divorcing then must have been *very* badly matched or temperamentally *very* unsuited to marriage. The decline during this century in the gains from remaining married has encouraged persons with modest mismatches or moderately difficult temperaments to divorce. Therefore, the stigma attached to divorce would have declined over time along with the increase in divorces, even without increased "permissiveness" or greater tolerance of "deviant" behavior. The average divorced person is now considered temperamentally more normal than in the past.

Divorced persons usually gain less from remarriage than the average person gains from a first marriage because divorced persons tend to have more quarrelsome temperaments. Moreover, divorced persons gain less because they tend to have other characteristics that lower their expected gains from marriage, or they are inefficient searchers. Remarriages should then be more likely to dissolve than first marriages, especially remarriages of persons previously divorced more than once. Table 10.3 shows that the divorce rate on second marriages is much higher during the first five years of marriage, and a little higher during the second five years, than the rate on all first marriages, even when duration of the current marriage and several other variables are held constant. The divorce rate on third (or higher order) marriages of persons previously divorced twice (or more) appears to be extremely high (Monahan, 1958, table 5).

CHAPTER 11

The Evolution of the Family

Divorce rates, fertility, the labor force participation of married women, and other aspects of the organization and behavior of families have changed dramatically during recent decades. The magnitude and rapidity of these changes, and the attention they have received, should not be allowed to convey the impression that the family had stagnated previously. It was a radically different institution in primitive and peasant societies, one that has undergone a considerable transformation in the West during the last few centuries.

This last chapter uses the analysis developed in previous chapters to consider both the long-term evolution of the family and the ways the family has altered in the recent past. The discussion is speculative and sketched with broad strokes, for I am no expert on the historical and anthropological materials. I believe, however, that the sketch produced by the economic approach to the family portrays the main factors responsible both for the long-term evolution of the family and for contemporary developments.

Traditional Societies

All traditional societies have enormous problems coping with uncertainty and limited information. Witchcraft, sorcery, and superstition

thrive on ignorance of the material world (Thomas, 1971). The majority of children die prior to age ten (see Chapter 5), and many persons become widowed before the tenth year of their marriage. Bad weather and pests can destroy a harvest, and predators or disease destroy herds and prey. Even ordinary transactions are fraught with uncertainty about the quality of merchandise and the honesty and reliability of buyers and sellers. A noted anthropologist has claimed that in all peasant market systems, "information is poor, scarce, maldistributed, inefficiently communicated, and intensely valued," and "the search for information one lacks and the protection of information one has is the name of the game" (Geertz, 1978, p. 29).

Traditional societies, as exemplified by primitive and peasant societies, generally do not experience cumulative change in the techniques used for farming, hunting, fishing, or other activities. Although families rise and fall because of the unequal incidence of luck and ability, and plagues and unusual weather may last for many years, the economy and social life tend to be static and stationary.

These societies cope with uncertainty and ignorance in various ways. Since they lack formal insurance programs, persons having a good harvest, catch, or kill are encouraged (even required) to share their good fortune with others.¹ Open fields with physically scattered plots of land are a crude and costly method of reducing fluctuations in income from crops, but they are common in peasant societies as the best available protection against the vagaries of weather and pests (McCloskey, 1976).

The family—or more accurately, the kinship group—is important in traditional societies in large measure because it protects members against uncertainty. The gifts that are so common in many primitive societies are mainly given to kin, and persons in distress can rely on their relatives for assistance (Herskovits, 1965; Posner, 1980). A kinship group is a reasonably effective "insurance company," in that even an extended group is sufficiently small to enable members to monitor other members—to prevent them from becoming lazy or careless, and in other ways taking advantage of the protection provided by their kin. Moreover, the characteristics of the members are known and their behavior easily observed, since they live together or close by.

1. Richard Posner (1980) examines this interpretation of the prevalence of gifts in primitive societies. Although my emphasis on the importance of family in traditional societies was independent in origin, its development has been greatly aided by discussions with Posner and by the analysis in his essay. Yoram Ben-Porath (1980) has an analysis that is similar in some respects.

In addition, altruism is more common in families than in other organizations, and even selfish members are induced by the *automatic* responses of altruistic members to incorporate the interests of altruistic members into their behavior. Otherwise, selfish members would be harmed by selfish behavior, because the time and other resources spent on them by altruistic members would be reduced. Chapter 8 demonstrates how the Rotten Kid Theorem induces even selfish members to act as if they were altruistic.

The importance of kin in protecting against uncertainty also reconciles the view that plots are scattered because of partible inheritances with the view that they are scattered to protect against fluctuations in income. Scattered plots of *family* members due to partible inheritances reduce fluctuations in family income, and thereby reduce fluctuations in the income of each member because of family insurance.

Older persons are held in esteem in traditional societies because they have accumulated knowledge that is especially valuable to younger persons in stationary environments (Brenner, 1979). Knowledge is passed to younger generations through the family mainly via the culture inherited by children, nephews, and other younger relatives. Specialized skills and knowledge of the elderly concerning their jobs, land, and so on are more readily conveyed to younger persons with similar family backgrounds (see Chapter 6 and Rosenzweig and Wolpin, 1979). Since members monitor one another to protect against shirking and other "moral hazards" of insurance by kin, traditional societies encourage families to monitor members to detect crimes against other families, including nonpayment of debts. Encouragement often includes the punishment of whole families for antisocial acts by their members (Stone, 1977, p. 126; Posner, 1980).

Younger members tend to follow the same occupations and till the same land as their parents and other relatives because they acquire the specific knowledge of their elder relatives. Indeed, families can be considered small specialized schools that train graduates for particular occupations, land, or firms, and accept responsibility for certifying the qualifications of their graduates when qualifications are not readily ascertained. The importance of family "schools" in traditional societies explains why peasant farms remain in the same family for many generations, and why families specialize in producing soldiers (samurai), clergymen (Brahmins), merchants (Bazari), farmers (peasants), servants, and other workers.

Often, families have the right only to produce graduates for specified occupations or other activities and are held accountable for badly pre-

pared or dishonest graduates. The great Japanese ukiyoe artist, Andō Hiroshige, inherited the occupation of fire warden in Tokyo from his father and passed this right to his cousin, then to his son and grandson during the nineteenth century (Narazaki, 1968). One major implication is that caste and feudal systems did not simply redistribute wealth to upper-class families but these systems relied on families to train and certify their members for particular occupations, inasmuch as better methods for determining the distribution of persons among occupations were not available.

Families held accountable for the performance of their members would guide and, if necessary, force members into activities where they could contribute most to the reputation and opportunities of the whole family. Seventeenth-century England was an individualistic society by comparison with other countries (Macfarlane, 1979, chap. 7), but upper-class fathers there apparently still chose the occupations of their sons (Stone, 1977, esp. p. 179).

Marriages are among the most important events in traditional societies, so families want to avoid affiliation with dishonorable or badly managed families that will frequently ask for help or damage the family's own reputation. Therefore, families exercise considerable control over the mates chosen by their members. In a fourteenth-century French village, "many marriages were arranged by the family or friends of the people concerned without much attention being paid to their feelings," or "one married a domus [a family] rather than an individual marriage partner" (Le Roy Ladurie, 1978, pp. 188-189).

Two families sometimes cement an alliance by multiple marriages between members, as in the "connubium" of primitive societies (Fox, 1969). In describing a caste of Indian civil servants during the nineteenth century, Leonard said: "Multiple marriages were occurring among limited numbers of families. Sometimes as many as five marriages in one generation occurred between two families" (1978, p. 88). Marriage of cousins and other kin was common in some societies partly because risk of bad affiliation was reduced by marrying within the (extended) family.²

Under these circumstances marriage for love is not sanctioned unless it also contributes to the family's interests. In sixteenth-century

2. A Syrian proverb describes marriage between cousins: "Ill luck which you know is better than good luck with which you get acquainted" (Patari, 1971, p. 170).

England, "romantic love and just were strongly condemned as ephemeral and irrational grounds for marriage" (Stone, 1977, p. 86). In the fourteenth-century French village studied by Le Roy Ladurie, "it was possible to love passionately," but only "within apparently rigid structures which predisposed towards and presided over the choice of a marriage partner" (1978, pp. 186-187). Concubines could be loved, and discreet affairs overlooked, but families had too great a stake in the marriages of members to allow love to thwart family objectives.

The families of an unhappily married couple in these societies would discourage them from divorcing if these families continued to benefit from the union. Instead, the husband, and sometimes the wife also, might be permitted to find solace with concubines and affairs. Since religious or social authorities might not be able to ascertain readily whether kin would agree to a divorce, they might prohibit or greatly discourage divorce, as in peasant societies and most of Western Europe prior to the middle of the nineteenth century.³

The importance of kin in traditional societies is indicated by the emphasis on kinship and descent, and by the many separate terms for different kinds of kin even in languages of primitive societies (Fox, 1969). In primitive and peasant societies a family line owns the farm; individuals and even nuclear families have only "usufruct" rights to work during their lifetimes the farm owned by their family lines (Herskovits, 1965, chap. 16; Nash, 1966, p. 34; Macfarlane, 1979, pp. 18 ff.).

In the United States a person can legally choose any family name, including the prefix *Von* or well-known names like Rockefeller or Carnegie, because a family name carries little advantage. Traditional societies, however, protect family names (when they have them) as vigorously as most countries protect business trademarks, because a family name in these societies can be a valuable asset or "trademark". Ancestors are usually respected and even worshipped in traditional societies for their accomplishments, and families do not tolerate criticisms of them.

Uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, cousins, and other kin meet often to transfer gifts, plan family strategy, teach younger members, and inspect and monitor one another's performance and behavior. The pri-

3. For example, a divorce in England prior to the 1850s required an Act of Parliament, and fewer than two divorces were granted per year (Rowntree and Carrier, 1958). Many primitive societies, however, had high divorce rates; see Pryor (1977, pp. 335, 339) and the discussion in Posner (1980).

vacy of members is reduced by these frequent contacts and monitoring. Unmarried persons are chaperoned to prevent undesirable pregnancies and other entanglements, married women are secluded in Islamic societies to prevent affairs (see Maududi, 1975), and contacts with other families are controlled to prevent behavior that damages the family's reputation or increases its obligations. The privacy of members is invaded because the behavior of each member affects the well-being of other members. (For a more general discussion of the relation between privacy and "malfeasance," see Becker, 1980.)

Although members of poor and unsuccessful families have little physical privacy in most societies because they eat, live, and sleep in a small space, they usually have greater autonomy in their economic and social choices than do members of successful families. A poor person can choose his spouse and activities, for his family has little to lose from his behavior. Indeed, an ambitious poor person may move away from his family precisely to prevent his progress from being thwarted by their low status.

Modern Societies

In modern societies markets facilitate trade and production, and dynamic economic environments rapidly change technologies, incomes, and opportunities. The knowledge accumulated by older members is much less useful to younger members than in traditional societies because the young face a different economic milieu. Small family schools that prepare members for a traditional activity are not as efficient as large schools with students from many families that teach general knowledge adaptable to new environments. The "certification" provided by families in traditional societies is provided today by schools and examinations. Moreover, contracts and the possibility of repeat business reduce the need for prior certification; individuals who violate a contract can be punished by the legal system, and individuals who misrepresent themselves or are incompetent will not have repeat business.

Family insurance through gifts and loans to members in distress are less necessary in modern societies. Individuals can "self-insure" by borrowing in the capital market during bad times or by saving during good times. Moreover, market insurance based on the experience of

thousands of families provides more effective protection against fire, death, old age, ill health, and other hazards than any single family can.

Consequently, kinship is less important in modern than traditional societies because market insurance is used instead of kin insurance, market schools instead of family schools, and examinations and contracts instead of family certification. Not only are kin less concerned about monitoring and controlling members, they are also less able to do so because members scatter to find their best opportunities. Since kinship is less important in modern societies, elder members and ancestors receive less respect and attention; they are less likely to be defended against criticism by others and more likely to be criticized in public or in the privacy of a psychiatrist's office. Samuel Johnson had already made some observations on this subject in the latter part of the eighteenth century:

In uncommercial countries many of the branches of a family must depend on the stock; so, in order to make the head of the family take care of them, they are represented as connected with his reputation, that, self-love being interested, he may exert himself to promote their interest. You have first large circles, or clans; as commerce increases, the connexion is confined to families. By degrees, that too goes off, as having become unnecessary and there being few opportunities of intercourse.⁴

The reduced importance of the family implies that members of middle-class and upper-class families gain the freedom and privacy of action available only to poor families in traditional societies. Children may begin by having the right to reject spouses chosen by their parents, then the right to choose subject to parental veto, and finally the right to choose with little concern about parental opposition. Dating, even by young teenagers, and search in marriage markets to find mates with desirable characteristics are more common in modern societies because personal, rather than family, compatibility is sought. In particular, individuals search actively (and often unsuccessfully) for mates they can love.

Unfortunately, love and other personal characteristics are less readily ascertainable prior to marriage than are family reputation and position, the important considerations in traditional societies. Many married persons discover that they are not still in love or are disappointed in other ways by their marital experiences. Some of these divorce to

4. Boswell (1959, p. 98). I owe this reference to Stone (1977, p. 259).

try again in the marriage market. Consequently, modern societies have what may appear to be a paradoxical combination of many love-marriages and high rates of divorce.

Parents have fewer children and more is invested in each child in modern than in traditional societies (see the discussion in Chapter 5). Moreover, in traditional societies much of the investment of time and other resources is made by grandparents, aunts, and other kin because of their interest in the children's well-being and behavior. As a result, modern parents are more shocked by the death of a child and generally more concerned about the welfare of each child because of their sizable commitment of time, money, and energy. In addition, the Rotten Kid Theorem implies that even selfish children gain by altruistic behavior toward parents who invest much in them, for the welfare of children whose parents invest much is closely dependent on the welfare of those parents.

Many historians have noted that nuclear families are more affectionate and closer in modern than in traditional societies, whereas cousins and more distant kin are closer in traditional societies (see for example Shorter, 1975, pp. 55 ff., 234 ff.; Stone, 1977, pp. 85 ff., 124). I argue here that modern spouses are closer, because love is more important in the selection of mates—and that present-day parents and children are closer, because quality rather than quantity of children is emphasized. Cousins and other kin are closer in traditional societies, because kin groups insure and train members and are more broadly responsible for them.

If modern society evolved from traditional society with the characteristics emphasized in this chapter, the individualism and nuclear familism of modern society would have evolved from the extended families and kinship groups of traditional society. Many deplore individualism and lament the passing of the traditional family, but my analysis implies that individualism replaced familism because many family functions in traditional societies are more effectively handled by markets and other organizations of modern societies. For example, family insurance and family provision and certification of training are less efficient than market insurance and market training in the dynamic environments of modern societies. Nostalgia for the supposed closeness of traditional families overlooks the restrictions on privacy and free choice, the very imperfect protection against disasters, and the limited opportunities to transcend family background.

The Evolution of the Family *The Last Half of the Twentieth Century*

Figures 11.1 to 11.9 show the trends in the United States since 1950 of fertility, divorce, labor force participation of married women, school enrollment of young adults, elderly living alone, and a few other series indicative of family organization and structure. They leave no doubt that the family changed dramatically after the Second World War; for example, from 1950 to 1977 the legitimate birth rate declined by about one-third, the divorce rate more than doubled, the labor force participation rate of married women with young children more than tripled, and the percent of households headed by women with dependent children also almost tripled. Indeed, the family in the United States changed more rapidly than during any equivalent period since the founding of the colonies.

I believe that the major cause of these changes is the growth in the earning power of women as the American economy developed. The real weekly earnings of employed women over age fourteen grew by about 30 percent from 1950 to 1964 and by about 10 percent from 1964 to 1978 (see Figure 11.4). A growth in the earning power of women raises the labor force participation of married women by raising the foregone value of time spent at nonmarket activities. It also raises the

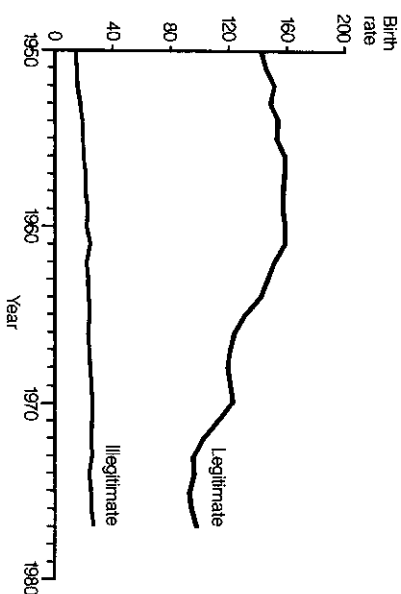


FIGURE 11.1 Legitimate birth rate per 1,000 married women ages 14-44 and illegitimate birth rate per 1,000 unmarried women ages 15-44 in the United States, 1950-1977.

SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1979c and preceding issues; U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1978.

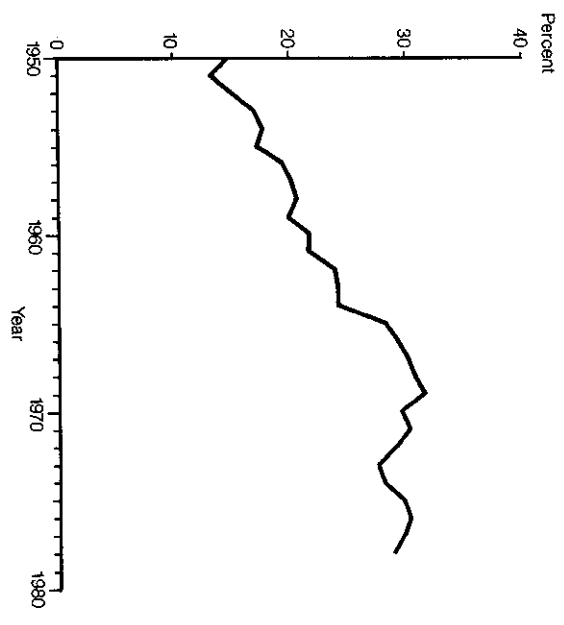


FIGURE 11.2 Percentage of population ages 18-24 in the United States enrolled in school, 1950-1978.

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1979b and preceding issues.

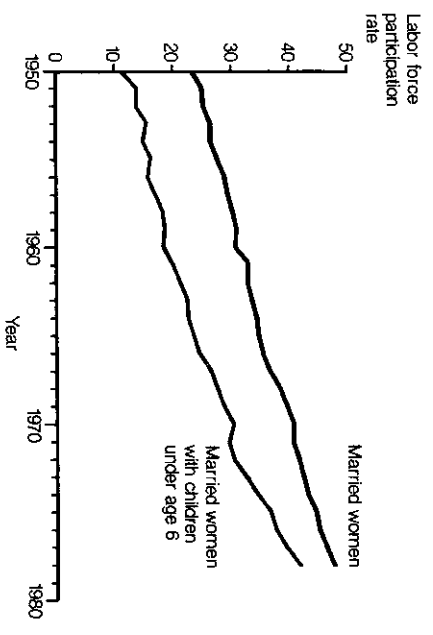


FIGURE 11.3 U.S. labor force participation of married women and of married women with children under 6 years, 1950-1978.

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975c, 1979c and preceding issues.

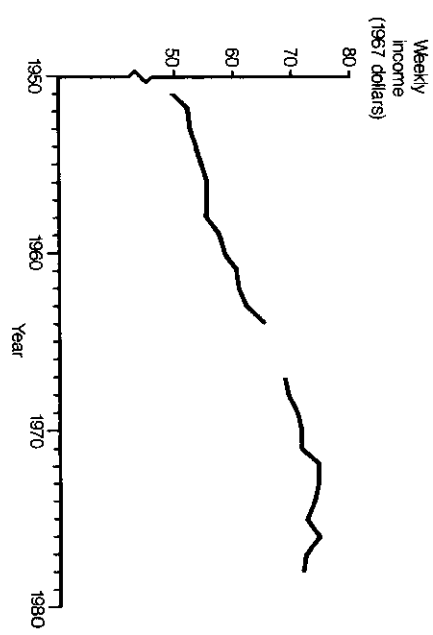


FIGURE 11.4 Real average weekly income of U.S. women in 1967 dollars, 1951-1978.

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1967, 1980c and preceding issues.

relative cost of children and thereby reduces the demand for children because children require much time of their mothers (see the extended discussion in Chapter 5). Statistical studies (Butz and Ward, 1979; Ward and Butz, 1980) suggest that the growth in the earnings and labor force participation of women have been important causes of the significant decline in fertility since 1957.

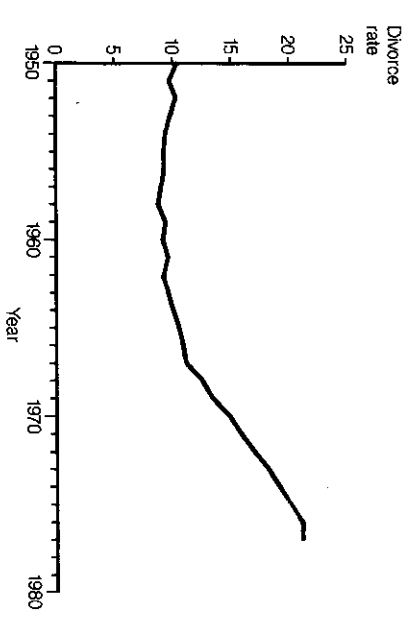


FIGURE 11.5 U.S. divorce rate per 1,000 married women, 1950-1977.

SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1979c and preceding issues; U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979.

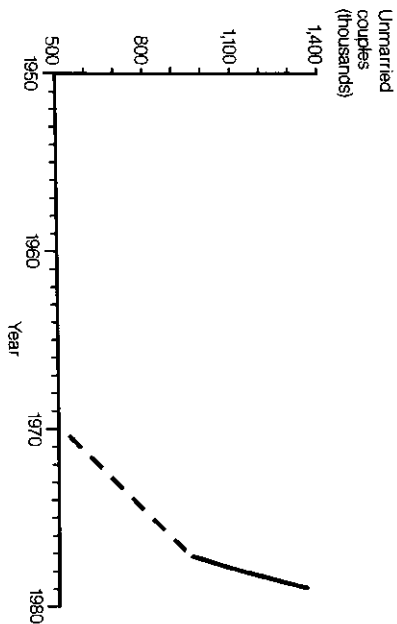


FIGURE 11.6 Number of unmarried couples living together in the United States, 1970–1979.

source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1979a, 1980a.

The gain from marriage is reduced by a rise in the earnings and labor force participation of women and by a fall in fertility because a sexual division of labor becomes less advantageous (see the discussion in Chapters 2 to 4). And divorce is more attractive when the gain from marriage is reduced. Michael's study (1978) of the interaction between fertility, divorce, and labor force participation since 1950 suggests that changes in the labor force participation rate of married women with

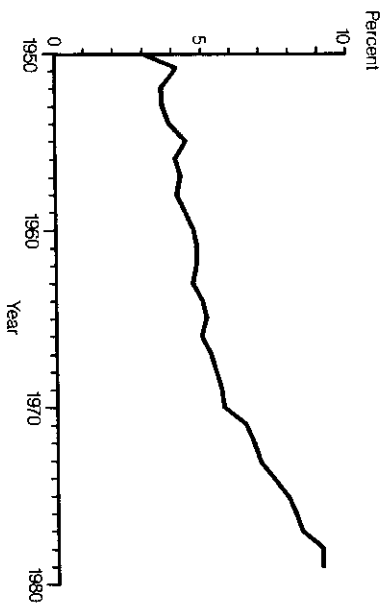


FIGURE 11.7 Percentage of families with female heads and own children under 18 years in the United States, 1950–1979.

source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980b and preceding issues.

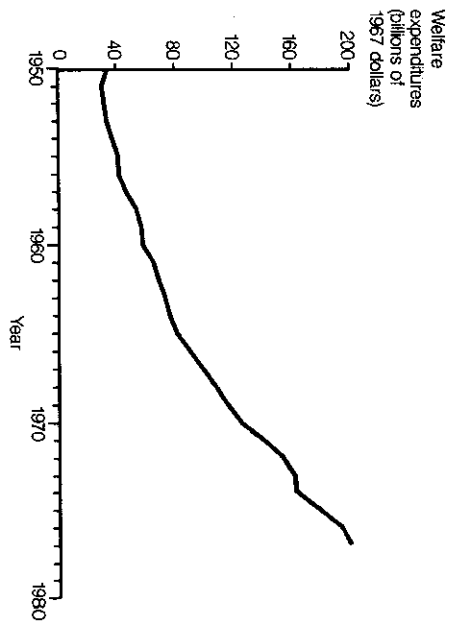


FIGURE 11.8 Real U.S. welfare expenditures, 1950–1977.

source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975c, 1979c and preceding issues.

spouse present has been positively related to subsequent changes in the divorce rate. The decline in the gain from marriage and the increase in divorce have raised the number of unmarried couples living together and the percent of families headed by women (see Figures 11.6 and 11.7) and are partially responsible for the large growth in the illegitimate birth rate relative to the legitimate rate (see Figure 11.1).

Greater labor force participation of women (resulting from an in-

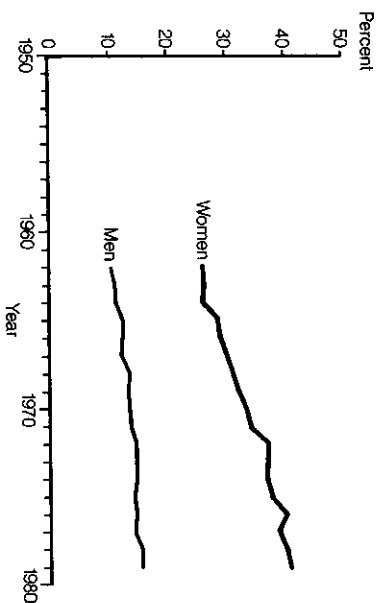


FIGURE 11.9 Percentage of men and of women ages 65 and over living alone in the United States, 1962–1979.

source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980a and preceding issues.

crease in their wage rate, a decline in fertility, and/or an increase in the propensity to divorce) would itself raise the earning power of women and thereby reinforce the effects of economic development. Women invest more in market skills and experiences when they spend a larger fraction of their time at market activities, as we saw in Chapter 2 (see also Polachek, 1975).

Divorce rates, fertility levels, and labor force participation rates interact in other ways. For example, fertility is reduced when divorce becomes more likely, because children are more difficult to rear and may provide less pleasure after a marriage dissolves. Chapter 10 presents evidence that couples who anticipate higher probabilities of divorce have fewer children while married. The labor force participation of single and married women is also affected when divorce becomes more likely, for market experience is useful when a marriage dissolves and a woman must become the main financial support for her dependent children.

Economic development of the United States and the resulting growth in the earning power of women has not accelerated since 1950, yet both the divorce and the labor force participation rates of married women have risen more rapidly since then, especially during the last 20 years (Chiswick and O'Neill, 1977; Michael, 1978), and the decline in fertility between 1956 and 1976 exceeded the declines during any previous 20-year period (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979). Threshold effects of increases in female earning power on labor force participation of married women, fertility, and divorce are partly responsible for the accelerated changes in these series. When fertility is high and divorce and labor force participation of married women uncommon—as in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a decline in fertility, say, due to an increase in female earning power, has relatively little effect on the participation of married women, who still spend most of their prime years having and rearing children. They would not invest much in market-oriented human capital, partly because they can spend only a short time in the labor force making use of such capital, and partly because their investment would depreciate significantly during the many years that they care for children (Mincer and Ofek, 1980). The effect on the divorce rate is also small in that the gain from marriage and an extensive sexual division of labor remains high.

Eventually, however, as female earning power continues to grow and fertility continues to fall, the time spent in child care is sufficiently

reduced to permit married women to spend appreciable time in the labor force prior to their first child and after their last child has entered school. The expectation of greater participation at older ages encourages girls and young women to invest more in market-oriented human capital, which further increases earning power and participation, and further reduces fertility. Consequently, the increase in labor force participation and the decline in fertility eventually accelerate even when the growth in female earning power does not. Moreover, these two factors accelerate the increase in the divorce rate because the decline in the gain from marriage also accelerates. Furthermore, a growth in the divorce rate itself eventually encourages additional divorces: divorced persons become less stigmatized and can more readily find other divorcees to marry (see Chapter 10 and Becker et al., 1977).

The nature of the typical family may have changed especially rapidly during recent decades because of other events. Perhaps the contraceptive revolution ushered in by the introduction of "the pill" during the 1950s greatly reduced the number of unwanted children and thereby increased divorce and the labor force participation of married women. Although it has provided better control over the timing and number of children, I argue in Chapter 5 that the contraceptive revolution explains only a small part of the decline in fertility since the mid-1950s.

One aspect of the women's movement has encouraged women to reduce their childbearing, raise their labor force participation, and (when necessary) assert their independence by divorcing their husbands and becoming head of their own households. The movement undoubtedly provides emotional support and various arguments and evidence that help some women to take these steps. I believe, however, that the movement is primarily a response to other forces that have dramatically changed the role of women rather than a major independent force in changing their role.

The growth of the welfare state has been a powerful force that has changed the family in recent decades. Expenditures on social security, unemployment compensation, medicare and medicaid, aid to mothers with dependent children, food stamps, and other transfer programs grew in real terms by 123 percent from 1950 to 1963 and by 167 percent from 1963 to 1976 (see Figure 11.8). Aid to mothers with dependent children and other kinds of "welfare" grew rapidly during the earlier period, whereas medical care and social security flourished during the later period.

Payments to mothers with dependent children are reduced when the

earnings of parents increase, and are raised when additional children are born or when fathers do not support their children. It is a program, then, that raises the fertility of eligible women, including single women, and also encourages divorce and discourages marriage (the financial well-being of recipients is increased by children and decreased by marriage). In effect, welfare is the poor woman's alimony, which substitutes for husband's earnings. The expansion of welfare, along with the general decline in the gain from marriage, explains the sizable growth in the ratio of illegitimate to legitimate birth rates despite the introduction of the pill and other effective contraceptives.

Before the days of unemployment compensation and medicare and Medicaid, unemployed and sick persons commonly relied on parents, children, and other family members for assistance, in part through increased labor force participation of wives when husbands were unemployed (Mincer, 1966; Smith, 1979). Consequently, the growth of public programs, like the growth in the nineteenth century of private-market life insurance (Zelizer, 1978), weakened the ties of family members by further eroding the traditional role of the family in protecting members against hazards.

Several important public programs principally transfer resources between generations. For example, social security transfers from workers to retired persons, and "free" schools transfer from adults to children. Intergenerational transfers may not change the *combined* income of the average family with children (see the discussion in Chapter 7), but they still have important effects on family behavior and living arrangements.

Consider public support of education financed by taxes on the adult (mainly parent) population. Since parents reduce their own expenditures on the education and other human capital of children to recoup some of the resources for themselves that are taxed away to provide public education for children, public support may have a small net effect on the *total* investment in children (see Chapter 6). Public support and these parental responses, however, weaken the ties between parents and children and are partly responsible for the growing conflict between the generations in recent decades. If parents spend less on children because the state spends more, selfish children have less incentive to consider the effects of their behavior on the welfare of altruistic parents—a decline in parental welfare cannot harm the children as much. Selfish children then would have less incentive to obey parents who try to control their behavior by threatening to reduce or withdraw financial and other support.

Social security payments financed by taxes on the working population reduce the amount spent by children to support retired parents because children recoup for themselves some of their resources taxed away (Barro, 1978). Parents are less likely to heed or otherwise consider the interests of children who contribute less to their support. The rapid increase during recent decades in the fraction of elderly men and women living apart from their children, either in separate households or in nursing homes (see Figure 11.9) is one manifestation of the weakened ties between children and older parents. Evidence presented by Michael and colleagues (1980) suggests that the growth in social security payments has been an important cause of the decline in joint households containing married children and widowed parents.

The earning power of women increased and the welfare state greatly expanded in other Western countries also after World War II. If my interpretation of the change in the United States during this period is valid, the family should have changed dramatically in these other countries as well. Figures 11.10 to 11.12 show that since 1964 fertility has declined by about 30 percent in France, England and Wales, and Sweden; the divorce rate has more than doubled in these countries;

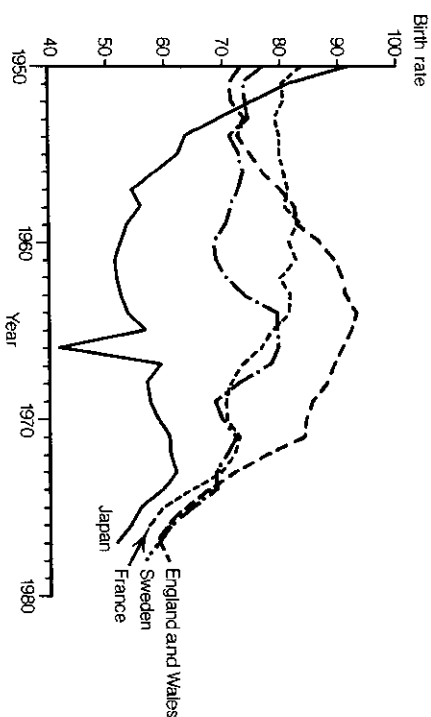


FIGURE 11.10 Birth rates per 1,000 women ages 15-44 in England and Wales, France, Japan, and Sweden, 1950-1978. (Statistics for France cover ages 15-49; for Japan, 10-49.)

SOURCES: France, Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, 1978a and preceding issues; Great Britain Registrar General, 1975; Great Britain Central Statistical Office, 1980 and preceding issues; Japan Statistics Bureau, 1980 and preceding issues; Sweden National Central Bureau of Statistics, 1980 and preceding issues.

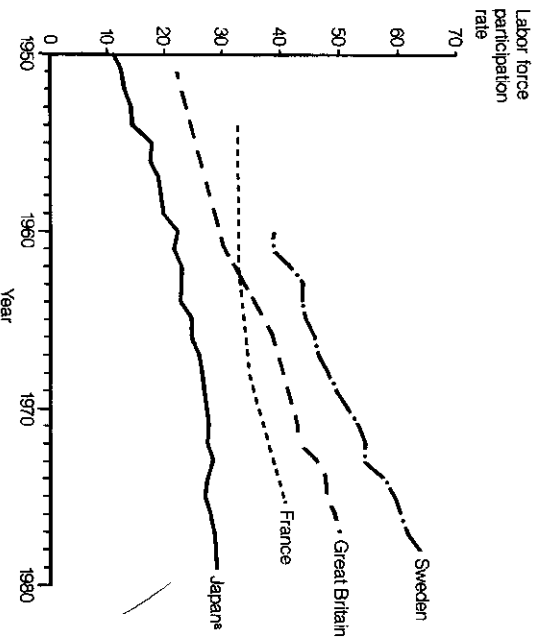


FIGURE 11.11 Labor force participation rates of married women in France, Great Britain, Japan, and Sweden, 1950–1979.

^a The percent of all women who are paid employees is shown for Japan.

SOURCES: France, Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, 1956, 1964, 1971, 1978b; Great Britain Department of Employment, 1975, 1978; Japan Statistics Bureau, 1980 and preceding issues; Sweden National Central Bureau of Statistics, 1980 and preceding issues.

and the labor force participation rate of married women has increased by more than 20 percent in these countries. Japan is especially interesting: the women's movement has not been influential there and the pill has been banned, yet fertility has declined by more than 40 percent since 1950, the divorce rate has risen by almost 20 percent since 1960, and the percent of women who are paid employees has risen by more than 50 percent since 1955.

Although the major changes for the five countries depicted in these figures are similar, significant differences are also apparent. For example, the decline in fertility in England and Wales, Sweden, and France began several years after, and in Japan several years before, the decline began in the United States. And divorce rates increased by much less in Japan than in the other countries. These and other differences have not yet been satisfactorily explained. Still, the main message of these data, and those for other developed countries, is not diversity but uniformity: the family has changed in a similar revolu-

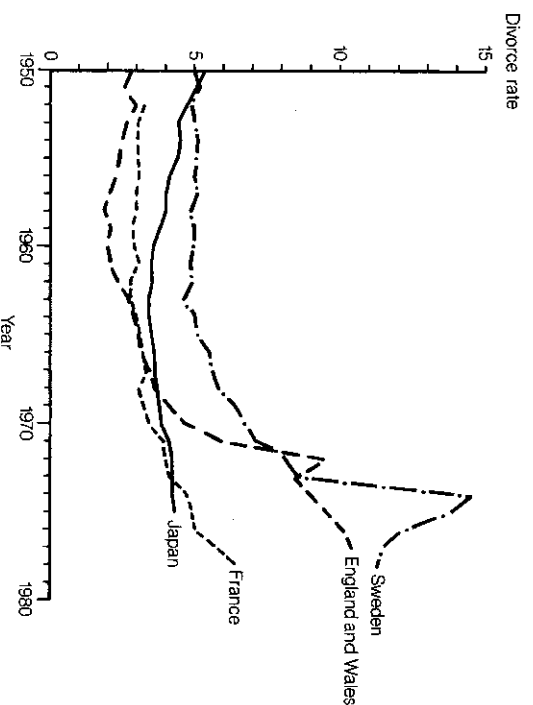


FIGURE 11.12 Divorce rates per 1,000 married women in England and Wales, France, Japan, and Sweden, 1950–1978.

SOURCES: See Figure 11.10.

tionary manner in essentially all economically advanced countries during the last several decades.

Both the welfare state and economic activity have grown much more slowly in advanced countries since the early 1970s. The momentum from the prior rapid changes explains why fertility continued to fall significantly, and divorce and labor force participation of married women continued to rise sharply, throughout most of the 1970s. However, if economic development continues to slow down and the expansion of the welfare state continues to moderate,⁵ the analysis in this chapter predicts much less steep declines in fertility and less rapid increases in divorce, labor force participation of married women, illegitimacy, and female-headed households—and more gradual changes in many other dimensions of family organization and behavior as well. Indeed, a sufficient slowing of the pace of development could eventually raise fertility and also reverse the trends in other aspects of family behavior. I deli-

5. This is a shaky assumption because the causes of these slowdowns are not well understood; see the relevant discussion by Edward Denison (1979) of the attenuation of economic growth in the United States.

erately say "eventually" because not much is known about the timing of responses in fertility, labor force participation, and divorce.

These tentative forecasts of the future may be a fitting way to conclude a speculative chapter on long-run developments in the family. This chapter has tried to show that the economic approach provides a powerful framework for analyzing both the dramatic changes in the family during the last half-century, and the much slower, yet even larger changes extending over hundreds of years during the evolution from traditional to modern societies. Although the economic approach does not encompass all facets of human behavior, it does appear to focus attention on those aspects primarily responsible for changing the family over time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

INDEX