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## INTRODUCTION

**A**S WOMEN have taken on more roles outside the home, they have transformed society as well as their own lives. This monograph traces women's transition from the private domains of marriage and family life to the more public domains of higher education and paid employment. Fertility is at a historic low, while women's educational attainment and labor force participation are at an all-time high. These trends are the hallmark of an industrialized society and thus somewhat predictable. Yet the timing of the shift is important.

In the twenty years between the 1960 and 1980 censuses, the average number of children per American woman declined from over three to fewer than two (below replacement level), the proportion of women with a college degree doubled, and the proportion of women in the labor force increased dramatically. The greatest changes in labor force participation took place among women with children: In 1960, very few wives with children were in the labor force; by the early 1980s, one-half of wives with preschoolers and over three-fifths of wives with school-age children were working outside the home.

From both society's and the individual's standpoint, the structure of the family and the labor market have changed. Families are

smaller and demands for child care are greater than they were in the past. Some traditionally male occupations are increasingly female. Greater participation in the labor force has resulted in different expectations and demands by women, which in turn have produced efforts at social change. The women's movement of the 1960s gave birth to the Equal Rights Amendment legislation of the 1970s, but the ERA had been defeated by the time this book was completed in 1985.

The typical adult woman now works for wages in addition to caring for a husband, children, and home. For the past century, nearly 90 percent of all women have married by age 30 and between 80 and 90 percent have become mothers by age 40, but the addition of labor force duties is relatively new. For the majority of women, time is now split between family obligations and work responsibilities. Women's time is also split in ways that men's time is not: Wives who are employed full time spend nearly twice as many hours per week on housework as husbands do.

If taking care of a family and home are traditionally important tasks to society and the individual, and if paid labor force participation is becoming increasingly important, how do women combine both successfully? Many women refer to their lives as a "balancing act" between family and work responsibilities. The ability to juggle competing demands often depends on taking traditionally female jobs, such as teaching and nursing, to ensure working hours compatible with childrearing. Approximately half of all employed women work part time or for only part of the year, another possible adaptation to the conflicting needs for income and for family caretaking.

Delayed age at marriage and delayed childbearing may be other adaptations to competing roles. By remaining single longer, women can pursue schooling and work without family responsibilities. Average age at first marriage rose from 20 to 23 between 1960 and 1983, suggesting that women were beginning to take advantage of increased opportunities in education and in the labor force. The proportion of women in their early 20s who had never married almost doubled between 1960 and 1980 and continued to increase sharply through 1983.

More young women are also remaining childless. Only 25 percent of ever-married women aged 20 to 24 were childless in 1960, but that figure had risen to 42 percent by 1980. Later childbearing allows women more time to establish themselves in the labor force and is associated with increased economic assets for couples.

Those who see women's work outside the home as contributing to marital instability might argue that divorce is another adaptation to conflicting roles for women. Divorce rates have risen, and 7 percent of all women were currently divorced in 1980 compared with just 3 percent in 1960. But women who are divorced from their husbands are seldom divorced from their children; most children of divorced parents live with their mother. If anything, the divorced woman is likely to have more problems reconciling work and home life than a married woman. Also, women usually experience a reduction in their standard of living following divorce.

Whether by choice of later marriage or necessity due to divorce or widowhood, an increasing proportion of women are maintaining their own households. The proportion of households maintained by a woman increased from about 17 percent in 1960 to 25 percent in 1980. Older widowed women have one of the highest rates of maintaining separate households: In 1960, 60 percent of unmarried women aged 65 and over, most of whom are widowed, lived independently; that figure had risen to approximately 80 percent by 1980.

Women have made great strides in educational attainment: The proportion of women who were college educated doubled from 6 to 13 percent between 1960 and 1980. This improvement is somewhat tempered by the fact that there is still a fairly large discrepancy between the proportion of men and women who complete four or more years of college. In 1960 there was a 4 percentage point difference between men and women, but by 1980 that gap had widened to almost 8 percentage points. Nevertheless, women's rates of college enrollment were equal to those of men by 1980, a promising sign for future equality in graduation trends.

Increasing educational achievements are partly responsible for women's increased labor force participation. Between 1960 and 1980, the proportion of women in the labor force increased from 38 to 52 percent. Since 1970, women have become much less likely to leave the labor force once they have entered, which suggests that women are becoming more committed to working outside the home. The greatest changes occurred among married women with children, a group traditionally the least likely to be employed.

Changes for women in marital status, fertility, living arrangements, education, and labor force participation have all been more dramatic than changes in earnings. The ratio of female earnings to male earnings has remained remarkably stable over time. Whether one uses annual earnings, weekly earnings, or annual income,

women on average make 70 percent or less of what men make when both are working full time. Common explanations for this difference are that women enter and leave the labor force more frequently than men, resulting in less work experience; women's skills, education, and training are not equal to those of men; and women are concentrated in relatively low-paying occupations compared with men. Some researchers believe that earnings differences may also arise from sex discrimination.

Whatever the reason for the discrepancy between men's and women's income, its persistence makes the balancing act particularly difficult for women who maintain independent households. Part-time employment may not be a financial option for women who support dependents by themselves, and increased work responsibilities are complicated by the lack of a husband to help with child care. Add to this the fact that most working women do not earn as much as most working men and that fewer than one-half of divorced mothers who were awarded child support in 1981 received the full amount due, and it becomes apparent why the average female householder often faces serious economic difficulty. Poverty rates among women who maintain households are higher than for households maintained by men or by husband-wife couples, and women and their children constitute an increasing proportion of the poverty population.

In sum, this volume documents a period of history in which large numbers of women are moving rapidly into the paid labor force and independent living arrangements, but are not giving up traditional homemaking and mothering roles. Many Americans still expect women to be unpaid caretakers in the home, but now also expect them to be paid workers outside the home. Just as research has shown that American families are "here to stay,"<sup>1</sup> it appears that working women are also here to stay. The challenge for the future is to find a reconciliation between the roles of wife and mother and that of wage earner.

## Overview

Previous series of Census monographs have not included a separate volume on women. A wide variety of data for women were

<sup>1</sup>Mary Jo Bane, *Here to Stay: American Families in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

available in monographs on the family, education, and the labor force, but not until 1980 were changes in women's roles considered sufficiently important to warrant the introduction of a specialized volume. Indeed, in the past, a woman's arena was primarily in the home and was almost synonymous with "marriage and the family." But extensive social changes have taken place between the monographs written after the 1940 census and today; much of that change occurred since the last monographs based on the 1960 census were published. This book summarizes the major demographic and social changes for women in the post-World War II period and presents them in one integrated reference work.

The monograph is organized around the theme of women's transition from the private spheres of home and family to the more public spheres of education and work for pay. Chapters 1 through 3 review changes in marital status, fertility, and household living arrangements, documenting the trend toward delayed marriage, higher divorce rates, lower and later fertility, and greater independence in living arrangements. These chapters cover the roles of wife, mother, and caregiver traditionally held by women. They show that the vast majority of women continue to marry and have children, but do so at later ages than they did in the past. Partly due to delayed marriage and higher divorce rates, more women are maintaining their own households now. While chapters 1 and 2 show support for continued commitment to marriage and the family, chapter 3 challenges the assumption that most women are cared for by others, first by their fathers and then by their husbands. The increase in the proportion of households maintained by women reflects today's more independent lifestyles.

These changes in living arrangements set the stage for chapters 4, 5, and 6, which focus on the increasingly public roles women are playing by attending college, participating in the labor force, and earning a living. Historically, women have had higher rates of high school graduation than men, but lower rates of college enrollment and completion. Women have now caught up with men in college enrollment rates and continue their progress in earning degrees (although completion rates are still lower than men's). Partly due to greater educational attainment, women's labor force participation rates have increased dramatically in the past twenty years. Changes in education and the labor force, however, have been more significant than changes in earnings: Women continue to earn considerably

less than men, and this earnings difference has a particularly harsh impact on households in which women are the primary earners.

Chapters 7 and 8 examine the outcome of the overlap between women's private and public roles by reviewing the relationship between household living arrangements, income, and poverty and between fertility and labor force participation. The concluding chapter speculates on the balance struck by women in their attempt to integrate private and public roles. We say "speculate" because the census data which form the core of this book do not address sociological or psychological correlates of the demographic changes summarized. Our framework focuses on transition and balance: The subtitle of the book could be "The Balancing Act" to reflect the challenge of competing roles that women face today.

## Data and Analysis

### *Sources of Data*

We rely primarily on three types of data. First, we rely on data collected in the decennial census of 1980. We also rely quite heavily on the 1960 and 1970 and, to a lesser extent, the 1940 and 1950 Censuses of Population. Microdata tapes from the 1960, 1970, and 1980 censuses are used to supplement information available in published form. Although microdata tapes from the 1940 and 1950 censuses now exist, they were not available at the beginning of this project. Thus, as a practical measure, we restrict many of our analyses to the 1960–80 period. The 1960s and 1970s were decades of very rapid change in women's lives, which makes this period a particularly relevant time frame for analysis. Also, because the last census monographs were produced after the 1960 census, there is greater need to document changes that have occurred since that time.

Second, at various points in the analysis, we use Current Population Survey (CPS) data to add to the picture afforded by the decennial censuses at ten-year intervals and to extend trends through the early 1980s. The CPS is a monthly household survey which has been conducted since the late 1940s. It is primarily designed to produce information on employment and unemployment, but information on a variety of additional topics is collected in regular supplements to the survey. For example, marital history supplements to the June

1971, 1975, and 1980 CPS provide information that augments the picture of changing marriage patterns during the 1970s, a decade of particularly rapid increase in divorce. School enrollment supplements to the October CPS enrich the analysis of educational change for women; fertility supplements to the June CPS aid in understanding recent changes in the timing of childbearing; and income and child support supplements to the March and April CPS provide information on the economic well-being of families, in particular those maintained by women.

In addition to the census and CPS, data collected by federal agencies other than the Bureau of the Census are utilized where relevant. For example, data from the vital registration system of birth, deaths, marriages, and divorces, collected by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), complement information on marital status, age at first marriage, number of times married, and children ever born collected in the decennial censuses. Data on the conferral of college degrees, collected by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), augment data on school enrollment and educational attainment collected in the census and CPS.

The advantages of multiple sources of information must, of course, be weighed against the disadvantages, the major one being that information collected in the CPS or through registration of vital events is not always consistent with information provided by the decennial censuses. For example, labor force information is collected in both the decennial censuses and the CPS and, although definitions used are similar in the two sources, the resultant CPS and census labor force participation rates differ. Typically, rates obtained from the census are slightly lower than rates from the CPS. Major trends appear regardless of which source is used, but we rely on the more sensitive, year-to-year readings provided by CPS data. In general, because the CPS is devoted to monitoring the labor force, we consider it the superior data source. Throughout the monograph, when data from other sources are clearly superior to the census or when information is not collected in the census but is available from either vital statistics or the CPS, we turn to the auxiliary source.

### *Period Versus Cohort Analysis*

In order to interpret trends presented in subsequent chapters, it is important to distinguish between period and cohort measures. A

cohort is a group of people who experience the same event (birth, marriage, entry into the labor force) during the same period of time. Persons born between 1950 and 1959 form the core of the "baby boom" cohort, for example. All persons who marry during a given year can be thought of as a marriage cohort.

A cohort effect is any feature of a group of people that distinguishes their experiences from those of other cohorts. For example, women who reached childbearing age during the Depression had very low fertility, with consequences which persisted throughout their lives. Cohort analysis describes a group's experience of an event over time: If, for instance, we use the 1960 census to calculate the proportion of persons aged 20 who had never married, the 1970 census to calculate the proportion of persons aged 30 who remained single, and the 1980 census to calculate the proportion of persons aged 40 who still had not married, we would be doing cohort analysis. That is, we would be tracking the actual first marriage experience of the birth cohort of 1940.

Whereas cohort analysis provides a "lifetime picture" of an event, period analysis provides a "snapshot" of an event at a particular point in time. That is, period analysis describes an event as represented by many groups at one point in time: For example, if we used the 1980 census to calculate the proportion of persons aged 20, 30, and 40 who had not yet married, we again would be focusing on first-marriage experience but as represented by several birth cohorts (those born in 1960, 1950, and 1940). The first-marriage rates calculated would be period rates.

Period and cohort data often differ only in the way the data are grouped. Sometimes period analysis is all that is feasible because adequate historical data necessary for cohort analysis are missing. For example, many of the tables in subsequent chapters provide only a "snapshot" at ten-year intervals. By covering three (sometimes five) census dates in this monographs, however, it is possible to conduct limited cohort analysis. We attempt to provide a cohort perspective, or at least a discussion of the ways in which the period data may be misleading, wherever possible.