The Growth of Families Headed by Women: 1950-1980

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In recent decades, the number of families headed by women has increased dramatically. In this article, we use U.S. census data from 1950 to 1980 to consider the extent to which population growth, fertility change, decreased marriage, increased divorce, and increased household headship have contributed to the growth of female-headed families. For white women, the major source of growth during the 1960s and 1970s was an increase in the number of formerly married mothers due to increased divorce and decreased remarriage. There is a similar pattern for black women for the 1960–1970 period. During the 1970–1980 decade, however, the major source of growth for black women was an increase in the number of never-married mothers due to decreased marriage and increased fertility among nonmarried women.

The proportion of all families in the United States headed by women has increased dramatically in recent decades, increasing from 7.4% in 1960 to 23.2% in 1985 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1964, 1985). As a consequence of this change, the proportion of all children who live in a female-headed family is now larger than it has been at any time in the past, and estimates indicate that the trend will continue throughout this century (Bumpass 1984). There is much debate over the psychological effects of growing up in a female-headed family, but the economic consequences are clear.[1] Nearly half of the female-headed families with children have incomes below the official U.S. poverty line, and nearly half depend on welfare for a major portion of their income (Garfinkel & McLanahan 1986). Indeed, the growth of female-headed families is a proximate cause of two widely cited trends: the feminization of poverty and the decline in the economic position of children relative to the elderly (Garfinkel & McLanahan 1986; Preston 1984).

The purpose of this article is to examine and evaluate the relative importance of the demographic components underlying the growth of female-headed families between 1950 and 1980. The components are (1) change in the proportion of women who ever marry, (2) change in the proportion of women who live with their own dependent children, (3) change in the proportion of mothers who are divorced, separated, or widowed, (4) change

in the proportion of single mothers who head households, and (5) change in the population size. Each of these components reflects changes in demographic behavior such as marriage, fertility, divorce, and the propensity to live alone; and each has contributed, to a greater or lesser degree, to the growth of female headship during the past 40 years.

Previous Research

Several researchers have used cross-sectional data to decompose the growth in female-headed families. The first studies were carried out in the 1970s by Cutright (1974) and Ross and Sawhill (1975), who examined different time periods, using different age ranges and methodologies. Not surprisingly, their results differed as well. Whereas Cutright pointed to increased headship as the principle component of growth in female-headed families among women aged 15–44 between 1940 and 1970, Ross and Sawhill found that marital disruption was the major factor behind growth among women aged 17 and older between 1960 and 1970.

Cooney (1979) examined the methodological differences between the two studies, using 1960 and 1970 data for a sample limited to Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. She applied each of the two methodologies to the two age ranges used in the studies, finding that the relative sizes of the decomposition components were sensitive to the methodology and age range used. Because of the geographically restricted sample used in her study, Cooney was not able to reconcile the differences between Cutright's (1974) and Ross and Sawhill's (1975) findings.

Recently, Smith and Cutright (1985) reported new findings based on a slightly modified methodology. Their results showed that for white ever-married women, fertility and headship were the principle components of growth during the 1950s, whereas marital disruption and headship were the principle components during the 1960s and 1970s. For nonwhites, the pattern was somewhat different. Headship and fertility were the principle components during the 1950s, and headship and population size were more important during the 1960s and 1970s.

Although Smith and Cutright's analysis represents a major advance by providing findings for the 1970s, it is limited in a number of important respects. First, their fertility component led them to confound changes in headship with changes in child retention (adoption, custody, mortality, and home leaving).[2] If child retention increases, as it has since 1960, the headship component will be upwardly biased. Second, Smith and Cutright did not include never-married women in their decomposition analysis. Although this group represents only a small proportion of white female-headed families, it is a significant part of the black population. Hence its absence is a serious omission.[3]

Third, the sequence of events used in the construction of decomposition components confounded change in fertility with change in divorce. The sequence used by Smith and Cutright (as well as by previous studies) progresses from (1) ever married to (2) formerly married to (3) formerly married with child to (4) formerly married with child and living independently. Under this approach, a change in the proportion of formerly married women who have children may be due to a change in fertility or a change in the propensity of married women with children to divorce.

Our research improves on Smith and Cutright's (1985) in a number of ways. First, the sequence of events in our analysis is from (1) ever married to (2) ever married with child to (3) formerly married with child to (4) formerly married with child and living independently. Our approach provides more easily interpretable results because it incorporates the fertility and marital disruption events in their usual time order. In addition, all of our components can be interpreted as rates, that is, as the number of persons who experienced an event divided by the number of persons exposed to the event. Second, as well as altering the sequence of events, we start with the total number of women and then include an additional

component, marriage, which allows us to separate the impact of population growth from change in marriage.[4]

Third, our analysis is based on the Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) from the 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 decennial censuses, whereas Smith and Cutright (1985) used published tables. The microdata provide more accurate measures of the fertility component (change in the proportion of women who live with their own child) and the headship component (change in the proportion of single mothers who head their own household). The microdata also allow us to consider the contribution of never-married mothers to the growth in the number of female-headed families over the three decades of 1950–1980.

Our analysis is based on a 1/100 sample of women between 18 and 59 years of age. This age range is preferable to the Smith and Cutright (1985) age range because it includes women aged 45–59, who often have a child under the age of 18 living in the household. It is also preferable to the Ross and Sawhill (1975) age range because it excludes women aged 60 and older, who rarely have an own child under the age of 18 living in the household. Whites and blacks are examined separately.

Method

In each decade, the total number of female-headed families ($TFHF$) is equal to the sum of the number of formerly married female family heads ($FMFH$) and the number of never-married female family heads ($NMFH$). This relation holds because for every female-headed family, there is a female family head:

$$TFHF = FMFH + NMFH.$$

The number of formerly married female family heads can be expressed as the product of the total number of women aged 18–59 times the proportion of women who are formerly married and heading their own household with children present. The headship proportion is in turn a product of four conditional proportions: the proportion of women who ever married, the proportion of ever-married women who have their own children living with them, the proportion of ever-married mothers who are formerly married, and the proportion of formerly married mothers who head their own household.

Thus the number of formerly married female family heads can be expressed as the multiplicative sum of five factors:

$$FMFH = T\,(EM/T)\,(EMC/EM)\,(FMC/EMC)\,(FMFH/FMC),$$

where T is the total number of women aged 18–59, EM is the number of ever-married women, EMC is the number of ever-married women with their own children living with them, FMC is the number of ever-married mothers who are formerly married, and $FMFH$ is the number of formerly married mothers who head their own households.

The number of never-married female family heads can also be expressed as a product. In this case, the product is the total number of women aged 18–59 times the proportion of women who are never married and heading their own household with children present. This headship proportion is the product of three conditional proportions: the proportion of women who never married, the proportion of never-married women who have their own children living with them, and the proportion of never-married mothers who head their own household.

Thus the number of never-married female family heads can be expressed as the multiplicative sum of four factors:

$$NMFH = T\,(NM/T)\,(NMC/NM)\,(NMFH/NMC),$$

where T is the total number of women aged 18–59, NM is the number of never-married

women, NMC is the number of never-married women with children, and $NMFH$ is the number of never-married mothers who head their own households.

The change in the number of female-headed families between two points in time is the sum of the change in the number of formerly married female heads and the change in the number of never-married female heads. These two changes can each be decomposed into additive components corresponding to change in the multiplicative factors.[5] This approach to decomposition is similar to that used in Winsborough and Dickinson (1972) and Cutright and Smith (1986).

The total change in the number of female-headed families can be broken down into the following additive components:

1. Changes attributable to change in the number of formerly married female family heads

   a. Change in T holding constant other changes
   b. Change in EM/T holding constant other changes
   c. Change in EMC/EM holding constant other changes
   d. Change in FMC/EMC holding constant other changes
   e. Change in $FMFH/FMC$ holding constant other changes
   f. Interaction between changes in the conditional proportions
   g. Interaction between change in T and change in the conditional proportions

2. Changes attributable to change in the number of never-married female family heads

   a. Change in T holding constant other changes
   b. Change in NM/T holding constant other changes
   c. Change in NMC/NM holding constant other changes
   d. Change in $NMFH/NMC$ holding constant other changes
   e. Interaction between changes in the conditional proportions
   f. Interaction between change in T and change in the conditional proportions

The decomposition analysis is based on changes in the proportion of women occupying different statuses in different decades, as opposed to changes in rates of entry into and exit from different statuses. Although proportions are not the same as rates, they are driven by changes in demographic behavior. For example, changes in the proportion of women who are married (EM/T) are driven by changes in rates of first marriage; changes in the proportion of women who live with their own children (EMC/EM) are driven by changes in fertility (number and spacing), child mortality, adoption, custody, and home leaving; changes in the proportion of formerly married women with children (FMC/EMC) are driven by changes in divorce, separation, widowhood, and remarriage; and changes in the proportion of formerly married single mothers who are female household heads ($FMFH/FMC$) are driven by changes in the propensity of single mothers to head their own households.

Change in Family Status

Table 1 reports information on the total number of female-headed families and the total number of women for each decade between 1950 and 1980. Between 1950 and 1980, the number of female family heads increased more than threefold among whites and more than sixfold among blacks. The female population also increased dramatically during each of the three decades, which means that part of the increase in the total number of female family heads was due to increases in the number of women. Table 1 also reports the rate of female headship between 1950 and 1980 for formerly married and never-married women. According to these figures, headship rates for ever-married women increased by nearly 250%

Table 1.   Numbers and Headship Rates for Women Aged 18–59 by Race and Year

Variable and race	Year			
	1950	1960	1970	1980
Total Number				
Female family heads				
White	883,000	1,308,000	2,008,000	2,828,000
Black	244,000	450,000	872,000	1,545,000
Females				
White	38,765,000	40,931,000	46,204,000	51,552,000
Black	4,415,000	4,835,000	5,737,000	7,706,000
Headship Rates (per 1,000 women)				
Formerly married females				
White	22.50	31.45	41.80	51.32
Black	51.46	82.66	123.38	130.75
Never-married females				
White	.28	.50	1.65	3.54
Black	3.87	10.32	28.59	69.77

among both whites and blacks between 1950 and 1980. Headship rates for never-married women increased by about 1,200% and 1,800% for whites and blacks, respectively, during the same period.

As noted earlier, the family headship rates for never-married and formerly married females are the products of conditional proportions. Table 2 shows the conditional proportions by race and year.

Whites

According to Table 2, both the proportion of white women aged 18–59 who ever married and the proportion of ever-married women who lived with their own child increased in the 1950–1960 period, reflecting the marriage and baby "booms" that occurred during the 1950s. Conversely, both proportions decreased during the next two decades, reflecting the marriage and baby "busts" of the 1960s and 1970s. Altogether, the changes in the proportions of women married and living with children increased exposure to female family headship in the earlier period and decreased exposure in the later periods. Since ever-married women are more likely to become female heads than never-married women, a decline in marriage has a negative impact on the overall rate of female headship.

The proportion of ever-married mothers who were formerly married mothers increased in each period, reflecting the steady increase in divorce rates and decline in remarriage. Finally, the headship rate among formerly married mothers increased steadily during each decade as the propensity among formerly married mothers to head their own households increased.

The proportion of white women aged 18–59 who never married decreased in the 1950–1960 period and increased in the 1960–1970 and 1970–1980 periods. By construction, these changes are the exact opposite of the changes in the proportion married. The proportion of never-married women who lived with their own child increased slightly in the 1950–1960 period and more noticeably in the 1960–1970 and 1970–1980 periods. These changes, although small, increased the exposure of never-married women to family headship. The proportion of never-married mothers who lived independently increased in the 1950–1960

Table 2.   Proportion of Women Aged 18–59 in Family Statuses by Race and Year

Proportion	Year			
	1950	1960	1970	1980
White				
Ever married (*EM/T*)	.851	.875	.844	.808
Ever-married women who have children (*EMC/EM*)	.571	.641	.614	.562
Ever-married mothers who are formerly married (*FMC/EMC*)	.067	.072	.095	.129
Formerly married mothers who are household heads (*FMFH/FMC*)	.688	.783	.845	.878
Never married (*NM/T*)	.149	.125	.156	.192
Never-married women who have children (*NMC/NM*)	.004	.005	.018	.030
Never-married mothers who are household heads (*NMFH/NMC*)	.509	.735	.595	.623
Black				
Ever married (*EM/T*)	.863	.845	.786	.675
Ever-married women who have children (*EMC/EM*)	.437	.549	.611	.597
Ever-married mothers who are formerly married (*FMC/EMC*)	.206	.240	.299	.361
Formerly married mothers who are household heads (*FMFH/FMC*)	.663	.743	.860	.898
Never married (*NM/T*)	.137	.155	.214	.325
Never-married women who have children (*NMC/NM*)	.046	.090	.208	.298
Never-married mothers who are household heads (*NMFH/NMC*)	.617	.737	.641	.720

Note: See text for definitions of variables.

period, decreased in the 1960–1970 period, and then increased again in the 1970–1980 period.[6]

Blacks

The pattern of change for black women is somewhat different from the pattern for whites. The proportion of women who ever married decreased in each decade, which reduced exposure to family headship. As was true for whites, never-married black women are less likely to become mothers than married black women, and therefore a decline in marriage has a negative impact on the overall rate of female headship. The proportion of ever-married black women who lived with their own child increased in the 1950–1960 and 1960–1970 periods but decreased in the 1970–1980 period. During the same time, the proportion of formerly married mothers increased, as did the proportion of formerly married mothers who headed their own household. Both changes increased the exposure of black women to family headship.

Mirroring the change in proportions ever married, the proportion of black women who never married increased during each decade. The proportion of never-married black women who lived with their own child also increased during each decade, with large increases in

the 1960–1970 and 1970–1980 periods. As a result of these increases, 30% of never-married black women aged 18–59 had a child present in their household in 1980. Note that this percentage is 10 times as large as the percentage for whites. The proportion of never-married mothers who headed their own household fluctuated among blacks, as it did among whites. The proportion increased in the 1950–1960 period, decreased in the 1960–1970 period (probably because of the falling age of the mothers), and increased again in the 1970–1980 period.

Decomposition Results

The analysis of change in the conditional proportions highlighted those changes (components) that may have contributed to the growth in female-headed families. It did not, however, tell us about the relative importance of each change to the overall growth. In this section, we estimate the relative size of the different components of change, both in the number of women and in the proportion of women in various family statuses.

Whites

Table 3 reports the components of growth for white female family heads during three time periods: 1950–1960, 1960–1970, and 1970–1980. The total change is broken down first by type of family headship, formerly married versus never married, and then by whether growth is due to population increase, behavioral change, or interactions among components.

In the 1950–1960 period, nearly all of the growth in female-headed families was due to an increase in formerly married family heads. This subgroup accounted for 97.7% of the overall growth, whereas never-married family heads accounted for only 2.3%. Of the 97.7%, 11.5% was due to the increase in the sheer number of women (population component), 81.6% to changes in the proportion of women occupying different statuses (behavioral

Table 3. Percentage Components of Change in the Number of Female Family Heads for Whites by Period of Change

	Period of change		
Change component	1950–1960	1960–1970	1970–1980
Formerly married family heads	97.7	92.0	87.1
Population size	11.5	23.7	27.3
Proportions	81.6	60.5	53.6
Ever married	5.8	−6.4	−10.1
With own children	25.2	−7.8	−19.9
Formerly married	13.3	61.0	82.2
Family head	28.1	14.7	9.1
Interaction	9.2	−1.0	−7.7
Interaction	4.6	7.8	6.2
Never-married family heads	2.3	8.0	12.9
Population size	.1	.4	1.1
Proportions	2.1	6.7	10.6
Never married	−.4	.7	2.2
With own children	1.3	6.7	6.1
Family head	1.1	−.6	.4
Interaction	.1	−.1	1.9
Interaction	.1	.9	1.2
Total change in number	425,000	700,000	820,000

components), and 4.6% to the interaction between the population and behavioral components.[7]

The most important changes in proportions (behavioral components) were the increase in the proportion of ever-married women with children (fertility component), which contributed 25.2% to total change, and the increase in the proportion of formerly married mothers who were family heads (headship component), which contributed 28.1%.

In the 1960–1970 period, 92.0% of the growth in female headship was due to an increase in formerly married family heads, whereas 8.0% was due to an increase in never-married heads. Of the 92.0%, population increase accounted for 23.7% of the increase, behavioral change accounted for 60.5% and the interaction between population growth and behavioral change accounted for 7.8%. During this period, there were counteracting forces among the behavioral components. Change in the proportion of ever-married women (marriage component) and change in the proportion of ever-married women with a child (fertility component) reduced overall growth by −6.4% and −7.8%, respectively. Change in the proportion of mothers who were formerly married (marital disruption component) and change in the proportion of single mothers who headed households (headship component) increased overall growth by 61.0% and 14.7%.

In the 1970–1980 period, formerly married mothers accounted for 87.1% of the total growth. Of the 87.1%, population growth accounted for 27.3% of the increase, behavioral change for 53.6%, and their interaction for 6.2%. Among the behavioral components, declines in marriage and fertility contributed −10.1% and −19.9%, respectively, to growth, whereas increases in marital disruption and family headship contributed 82.2% and 9.1%, respectively. About 13% of the total change in 1970–1980 was due to the increase in never-married family heads, with fertility being the most important component of growth for this subgroup.

Table 4. Percentage Components of Change in the Number of Female Family Heads for Blacks by Period of Change

	Period of Change		
Change component	1950–1960	1960–1970	1970–1980
Formerly married family heads	84.0	73.0	44.5
Population size	10.6	17.7	36.1
Proportions	67.0	46.6	6.3
Ever married	−2.2	−6.7	−14.8
With own children	28.1	10.7	−2.4
Formerly married	18.3	23.2	22.0
Family head	13.4	15.0	4.6
Interaction	9.4	4.4	−3.1
Interaction	6.4	8.7	2.1
Never-married family heads	16.0	27.0	55.5
Population size	.8	2.2	8.4
Proportions	13.9	20.9	35.1
Never married	1.1	4.5	12.6
With own children	8.2	15.4	10.5
Family head	1.6	−1.5	3.0
Interaction	3.0	2.5	9.0
Interaction	1.3	3.9	12.0
Total change in number	206,000	422,000	673,000

Blacks

Table 4 reports the components of growth for black female-headed families. As was true for whites, most of the growth during the 1950–1960 period was due to increases in formerly married family heads. Of the 84.0% due to formerly married mothers, 10.6% of the change was due to the population growth, 67.0% to change in behavior, and 6.4% to the interaction between the two. The most important behavioral components were changes in fertility, which accounted for 28.1% of total growth; changes in marital disruption, which accounted for 18.3%; and changes in headship, which accounted for 13.4%.

During the 1960–1970 period, the pattern was similar. Seventy-three percent of the total growth was due to an increase in formerly married family heads, whereas 27.0% was due to an increase in never-married mothers. Of the 73.0% increase due to formerly married heads, 17.7% was due to population increase, 46.6% to behavioral change, and 8.7% to the interaction between change in population size and change in proportions. Again, the most important behavioral changes were the increase in fertility, which contributed 10.7% to total change; the increase in marital disruption, which contributed 23.2%; and the increase in headship, which contributed 15.0%.

More than a quarter of the increase in female-headed families between 1960 and 1970 was due to the growth of never-married family heads. The main factor behind this growth was the increase in the proportion of never-married women who lived with a child (non-marital fertility component), which accounted for 15.4% of the total change.

During the 1970–1980 decade, never-married family heads become more important than formerly married heads, with the former accounting for more than half of the total growth. Among formerly married women, population size was the primary factor responsible for growth, accounting for 36.1% of the total change. Change in the behavior of ever-married women contributed only 6.3% to overall growth, primarily because increases in marital disruption were offset by declines in marriage and marital fertility.

Among never-married women, population growth contributed 8.4% to total change, changes in behavior contributed 35.1%, and the interaction between population size and behavioral change contributed 12.0%. With respect to behavior, declines in marriage had the largest effect, accounting for 12.6% of the total change, and increases in nonmarital motherhood and the interaction among the behavioral components accounted for 10.5% and 9.0%, respectively. Since marriage and fertility decisions are not necessarily independent of one another, their contribution may be considered together. Taken together, the decline in marriage and increase in nonmarital fertility accounted for about 23% of the growth in female headship.

Conclusion

This article has decomposed the growth in female-headed families during three periods: 1950–1960, 1960–1970, and 1970–1980. The analysis has gone beyond previous studies in several ways. First, we define our components somewhat differently. In particular, our marital fertility component is calculated for all ever-married women, as opposed to formerly married women, which means that the fertility and marital disruption components are not con-founded. Our decomposition approach results in a much larger marital disruption component after 1960 than that in Smith and Cutright (1985) and shows that changes in fertility had a larger negative effect on female headship.

Second, the use of microdata samples for the entire 1950–1980 period makes it possible to measure the fertility and headship components more precisely. Our measure of fertility is based on the proportion of women who live with their own children as opposed to women who ever gave birth. Our measure of headship distinguishes between single mothers who

live in subfamilies and single mothers who head their own households. Defined in this way, the headship component does not confound changes in living arrangements with changes in child retention. Our approach leads to a smaller headship effect than that reported by Smith and Cutright (1985).

Third, and most important, we examine growth in the entire population of female-headed families, including never-married as well as ever-married family heads. By including never-married women in the analysis, we highlight the divergence in the dynamics of growth among whites and blacks. Whereas marital disruption has dominated all other components in accounting for the growth in white female-headed families since 1960, nonmarriage and the presence of children among nonmarried women have become increasingly important in accounting for the growth in black female headship.

The implications of this divergence were noted by Cooney nearly 10 years ago when she argued that female headship may be a very different experience for white and minority women. Like Ross and Sawhill, she viewed single motherhood as a "time of transition" for whites and as an indicator of increased economic and social opportunity. She warned, however, that for blacks and Puerto Ricans, female headship was "less voluntary" and carried with it more negative implications. Although recent trends indicate that female headship is not a short-term phenomenon, even for white women, Cooney was correct in arguing that poverty and welfare dependence are much more common among minority women who head families (Garfinkel & McLanahan 1986). Whether the different paths to female headship are a cause or consequence of socioeconomic conditions is not entirely clear, but the demographic dynamics clearly differ. Whereas the two-parent family continues to be the predominant family form among whites in the sense that most single mothers were married at the time of their first birth and a large proportion remarry after disruption, among blacks the mother–child dyad has become more common than the two-parent family.

Our study is limited because we do not consider changes in the age structure between 1950 and 1980 as a separate component of growth. Ignoring the shift in age structure can bias the results with respect to the relative importance of different behavioral components. If marital disruption is more common among young couples, for example, a downward shift in the age structure would increase the proportion of formerly married mothers, even though age-specific divorce rates remained the same. Similarly, if nonmarriage and nonmarital births are more common among young women, a downward shift in age structure would inflate the importance of these components. Although the change in age structure did occur during the 1960s and 1970s, we do not believe that taking it into account would seriously alter our conclusions. For whites in particular, the marital disruption component so dominates all other changes that the shift in age structure would have had only a minor effect. Moreover, our own crude estimates of the contribution of age structure indicate that the increase in formerly married mothers was actually greater among middle-aged women than among young women, because the latter were more likely to remarry. For blacks, the downward shift in age structure undoubtedly inflates the relative importance of never-married mothers as a proportion of all female family heads. In doing so, it exaggerates the impact of nonmarriage and nonmarital fertility in accounting for overall growth. Despite this bias, we believe that the increase in never-married motherhood reflects real changes in demographic behavior and that the race difference in the paths to female headship reflects a real divergence between blacks and whites in the propensity to bear and raise children outside of marriage.

Notes

[1] For reviews of the literature on the psychological consequences of growing up in a single-parent family, see Hetherington, Camera, and Featherman (1983) and McLanahan and Booth (1989).

[2] The measure of fertility used by Smith and Cutright (1985) is based on whether a woman ever gave birth to a child as opposed to whether she lived with her own child. Hence, their fertility component

is insensitive to factors affecting child retention, such as mortality, adoption, custody, and home leaving. Since their headship component is based on whether a female householder lives with her own child, it picks up the influence of changes in child retention. We believe that it makes more sense to combine fertility and child-retention factors in the same component. Smith and Cutright's choice of fertility measure was limited by their use of published data. Since the data that we used gave us flexibility in constructing variables, we combined the two factors. Thus our fertility component should be interpreted as a measure of child presence rather than purely fertility. Our headship component is therefore free from the confounding effects of child retention.

[3] The omission of never-married women from the decomposition analysis results from Smith and Cutright's (1985) use of children ever born to measure fertility combined with the absence of fertility histories from never-married women in censuses prior to 1970.

[4] Cutright (1974), Ross and Sawhill (1975), and Smith and Cutright (1985) started with the total number of ever-married women and the total number of never-married women and therefore did not include a marriage component in their analysis.

[5] An appendix containing the equations for the decomposition is available from the authors on request.

[6] The headship rate decline in the 1960–1970 period was probably due to change in age composition. The proportion of never-married mothers who were teenagers increased over the period. Younger mothers are more likely to live at home than older mothers.

[7] What we refer to here as "behavioral components" do not reflect changes in behavior alone. Most of the demographic behaviors we are interested in vary by age, and therefore shifts in the age structure of the population will appear as behavioral changes, simply because of changes in the relative weight given to particular age groups. For example, younger single mothers are less likely to live independently, and therefore a downward shift in mean age will result in a decline in headship, all else being equal.

Acknowledgments

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