

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF CHILDLESSNESS: CENSUS DATA

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CHILDLESSNESS is a topic of interest from many points of view. From the viewpoint of demographers, the person who remains childless throughout the child-bearing period leaves behind no permanent addition to the population. If the number of inhabitants is to be maintained, the people who have children must make up for those who have no progeny. Eugenicians are concerned with the possible effect of differential fertility on the quality of the future population—and childlessness is one of the factors involved. Clinicians and physicians who are called upon to offer advice and medical aid to people of limited fecundity have a strong interest in the number and description of persons who are childless. Public health officials are concerned about childlessness for many reasons, including the high incidence of sterility from venereal disease among certain population groups. Housing needs and other consumer requirements are affected by the extent to which people do or do not have children. Changes in the timing of first births and in the amount of childlessness may cause important fluctuations in birth rates over a period of years.

Data on voluntary or involuntary childlessness are sometimes presented as one aspect of comprehensive demographic investigations. For example, the well-known Indianapolis Study of Social and Psychological Factors Affecting Fertility found in 1941 that among native white Protestant couples who had been married 12 to 14 years and who had completed at least the eighth grade of school, 19 per cent had never had a live-born child and 9 to 13 per cent of the couples were classified as involun-

¹ Bureau of the Census.

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tarily childless. A statement that about 10 per cent of married couples of childbearing age have seriously impaired fecundity is occasionally seen in the literature. It may also be relevant to note that in public opinion polls which ask about the ideal size of family, less than one per cent of the people regard the childless family as the ideal size.

The present paper is a summary and brief analysis of data on childlessness that are available in the reports of the Bureau of the Census. The cause of the childlessness is not sought. The term is used here to describe the status of the woman or of the couple at the time of the census or survey rather than the lifetime status. It simply means that the woman being studied has never had a live-born child up to the time of the census or survey. To the writers' knowledge, this is the first time that census data on childlessness have been brought together in a report dealing with that topic alone.

The data come from the decennial censuses of 1910, 1940, and 1950, and from the Current Population Surveys of April 1952, April 1954, and March 1957. In these censuses and surveys, only those women who were reported as having been married were asked the number of children they had ever borne. The data probably include most of the illegitimate as well as legitimate fertility, however, because there is evidence that most women with illegitimate sons or daughters in their home report themselves as having been married.

A brief note of quality of the data is in order. The data on childlessness are of variable quality for different dates and for different groups, but in general the biases are small. Thus, there is some indication that the data for 1910 include a few stillbirths, thereby reducing slightly the apparent percentage of women who are childless. Moreover, a study of the number of children in the homes of women with and without a report on number of children ever born shows that the 1940 data are affected by a tendency for some enumerators to make no entry on the number of children for childless women, for whom they should have, of course, entered a "zero." Accordingly, the

women with no report on number of children include a relatively large proportion who actually have borne no children. Thus, in 1940, among ever-married white women 45 to 49 years old reporting on number of children ever born, 14.8 per cent reported that they had had no children; if the results were extended to cover all women (including those with no report on children), the proportion childless would be raised by 1.3 points, to 16.1 per cent. Data adjusted for nonreports are presented in this paper for all dates except 1910. Again, white women in the 1950 Census had a net undercount of 1.7 per cent in number of children ever born as judged by a comparison with the entry for order of birth on the birth registration record for children born in the first three months of 1950. Nonwhite women had a net undercount of 7.6 per cent. Thus, the figures on per cent childless among ever-married women may tend to be a little too high from underreporting of children, especially for nonwhites. There is evidence of relatively more underreporting of children ever born for old women than for middle-age women, perhaps in part because of some mothers being reported as childless, and in part because of higher survival rates for women with moderate to small families. Thus, the surviving white women 70 to 74 years old in 1940 reported about 10 per cent fewer children ever born, on the average, than the same cohort 30 years earlier, that is, in 1910 when the women were 40 to 44 years old. On balance, the census data are thought to be of reasonable quality, but the small biases should be kept in mind.

SECULAR TRENDS

It is probable that at one time, many years ago, the percentage of married women who were childless was far smaller than it is today. As an example of extreme possibilities in this respect, Table 1 presents data for women from Russia and from Poland who were living in the United States in 1910. According to this table, only about 3 per cent were childless among aged women who had ever been married. The women of Utah, most of whom are Mormons, offer another interesting

but a typical example of low proportions childless. In 1910, only 6.1 per cent of all Utah women 50 to 74 years old, were childless; the corresponding figure was 4.5 per cent for ever-married women. Though a mere 1.6 per cent of the older women in Utah half a century ago had never married, closer to 8 per cent of the women in the country as a whole never marry and, in addition, a sizable proportion of those who do marry never have a child. The lowest recorded national (United States) figures on childlessness are for women 70 to 74 years

Table 1. Per cent childless and average number of children ever born for ever-married white women who were born in Russia and Poland, by age, for the United States: 1910. (Data based on 8.9 per cent sample.)

AGE AND COUNTRY OF BIRTH OF WOMAN	WOMEN REPORTING ON CHILDREN			WOMEN NOT REPORTING ON CHILDREN
	Number	Per Cent Childless	Children Ever Born Per 1,000 Women	
<i>Russia</i>				
15 to 19 Years	3,464	59.0	476	838
20 to 24 Years	44,047	25.1	1,211	3,678
25 to 29 Years	66,096	9.8	2,362	2,375
30 to 34 Years	53,775	6.2	3,730	1,745
35 to 39 Years	49,584	5.4	4,917	1,417
40 to 44 Years	34,870	3.2	6,192	1,044
45 to 54 Years	44,733	3.1	6,963	1,554
55 to 64 Years	18,923	2.3	7,500	1,306
65 to 74 Years	7,039	3.2	7,464	904
<i>"Poland"¹</i>				
15 to 19 Years	5,338	51.9	586	987
20 to 24 Years	44,864	19.8	1,430	3,393
25 to 29 Years	51,034	9.5	2,644	2,097
30 to 34 Years	38,435	5.9	4,047	1,171
35 to 39 Years	32,441	5.2	5,509	1,276
40 to 44 Years	25,373	4.8	6,702	876
45 to 54 Years	33,662	4.1	7,314	1,432
55 to 64 Years	14,160	3.9	7,580	1,013
65 to 74 Years	5,826	3.2	7,661	863

¹ Poland was not a political entity in 1910. The category "Poland" comprises persons who nonetheless reported Poland as their birthplace and those who reported that they were born in Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia but who reported Polish mother tongue.

SOURCE: 1940 CENSUS OF POPULATION, special report, DIFFERENTIAL FERTILITY, 1940 and 1910—Women by Number of Children Ever Born, Table 43.

old at the time of the 1910 Census: 14.4 per cent of all women and 7.7 per cent of the ever-married women 70 to 74 years old were childless.

Table 2 and Figures 1 and 2 present data for women of childbearing age from 1910 to 1957. As may be noted from the table, 10.4 per cent of the ever-married women 40 to 44 years old in 1910 were childless. By comparing the figure of 7.7 per cent for women 70 to 74 in 1910 with the figure of 10.4 per cent for those 40 to 44 in 1910, we find suggestion of an upward trend in childlessness which started as far back as the available data extend and which continued until only a few years ago. By 1940, the proportion childless had advanced to 17.4 per cent among ever-married women 40 to 44 years old and by 1950 it had reached a peak of 20 per cent.

Subsequent cohorts of women have had a declining proportion with no children, but the cycle will not be complete for at least another decade. The upsurge in childbearing that occurred during and especially after World War II brought the

Table 2. Per cent childless among women 15 to 49 years old, by age and marital status, for the United States: 1957, 1950, 1940, and 1910.

MARITAL STATUS AND AGE	1957	1950	1940	1910
<i>All Women</i>				
15 to 19 Years	91.6	91.8	94.6	94.5
20 to 24 Years	48.1	54.5	68.2	63.3
25 to 29 Years	22.8	31.5	45.9	39.2
30 to 34 Years	17.7	24.8	34.5	28.6
35 to 39 Years	17.5	25.8	28.8	23.2
40 to 44 Years	20.0	26.6	25.3	20.2
45 to 49 Years	23.3	26.8	23.9	18.1
<i>Ever-Married Women</i>				
15 to 19 Years	47.9	52.8	54.6	42.7
20 to 24 Years	26.9	33.3	39.9	24.2
25 to 29 Years	13.1	21.1	30.1	17.2
30 to 34 Years	11.3	17.3	23.3	13.7
35 to 39 Years	12.3	19.1	19.9	11.6
40 to 44 Years	14.1	20.0	17.4	10.4
45 to 49 Years	17.7	20.4	16.8	9.5

SOURCE: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 82, in preparation, and 1940 CENSUS OF POPULATION, special report, DIFFERENTIAL FERTILITY, 1940 and 1910—Fertility for States and Large Cities, Table 4.

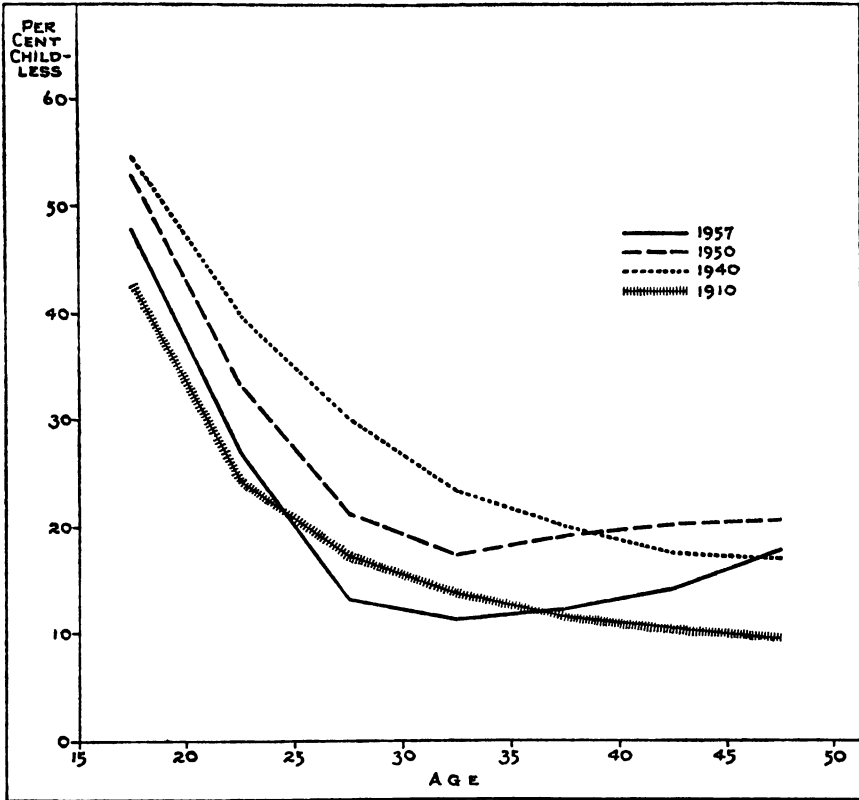


Fig. 1. Per cent childless among ever-married women 15 to 49 years old, by age, for the United States: 1957, 1950, 1940, and 1910. SOURCE: Table 2.

proportion childless among ever-married women 40 to 44 years old down to 14.1 per cent by 1957. Already, however, women in younger groups had attained still lower rates of childlessness, as illustrated by those 30 to 34 years old with only 11.3 per cent with no children born alive. Almost beyond doubt, this group will eventually complete the childbearing period with less than 10 per cent childless—a lower rate than that for women who completed their childbearing about 1910.

Most of the data in this report are for women who have been married. From the viewpoint of requirements for population replacement, women who have children must make up for those who have none. In this very important sense, the proportion childless among all women is more significant than

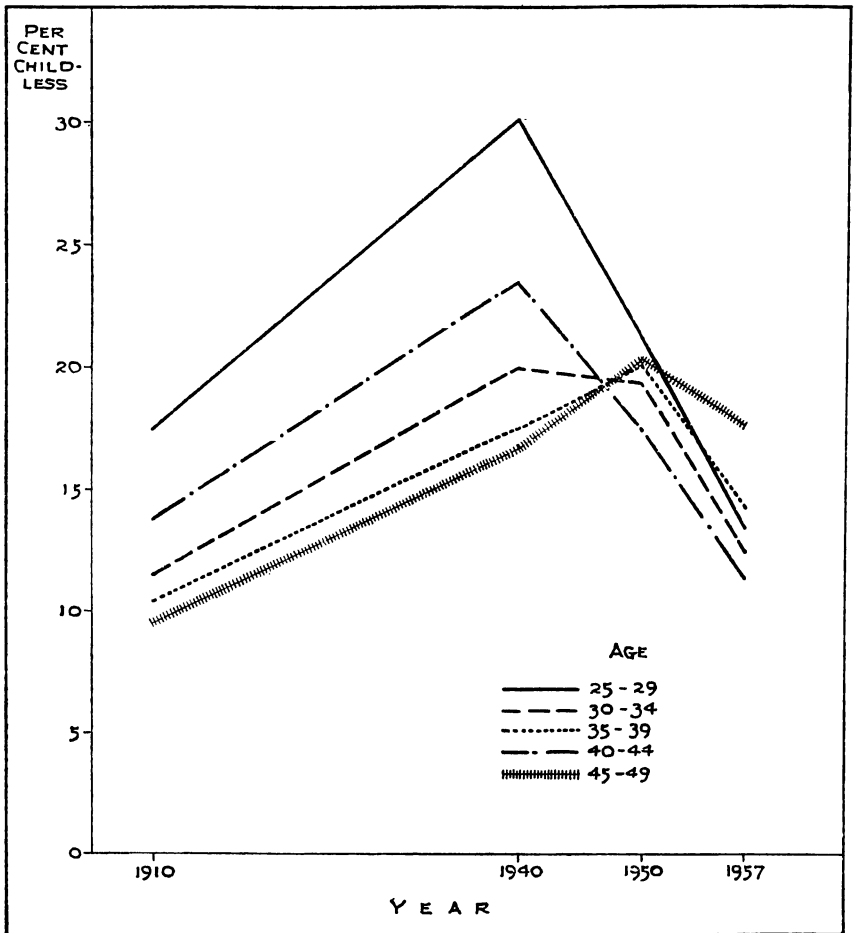


Fig. 2. Trends in the per cent childless among ever-married women 25 to 49 years old, by age, for the United States, 1910 to 1957. SOURCE: Table 2.

the proportion among women who have been married. For those whose concern is national population growth, data on per cent childless for all women presented in Table 2 may well be the most meaningful figures in our report.

The trends in per cent childless among women of all marital classes are similar to those for ever-married women but the magnitudes are uniformly larger. In March 1957, about 18 per cent were childless among all women 30 to 34 years old, as compared with 35 per cent of the women of this age in 1940

and 29 per cent in 1910. These figures may be interpreted as showing that a larger proportion of the women in 1957 than in 1940 were participating in the replacement of the population.

GEOGRAPHIC VARIATIONS

Age group 30 to 34 years will be used to demonstrate some of the geographic variations in childlessness. This age group was selected because it had the lowest per cent childless in both 1950 and 1957.

Table 3 shows that the rate of childlessness was highest in urban areas and lowest on rural farms, among white and non-white women, in 1910, 1940, and 1950. For all color-area groups, the 1940 rates of childlessness were higher than those for 1910 or 1950. These facts indicate that the upward trend in childlessness before 1940 was not limited to any segment of the population. Similarly the decline in childlessness in the 1940's and 1950's spread to all area and color groups.

Table 4 presents data from the 1950 Census for ever-married women by regions, urban and rural. As may be seen from the table, the regions have similar proportions of ever-married white women who are childless. The range of variation is quite narrow, from 15.1 per cent in the North Central region to 16.8 per cent in the West. There is also little difference

Table 3. Per cent childless among white and nonwhite ever-married women 30 to 34 years old, for the United States, urban and rural: 1950, 1940, and 1910. (Urban-rural classification by 1940 Census rules, for all dates.)

COLOR AND RESIDENCE	1950	1940	1910
White	15.8	22.4	13.4
Urban	17.9	26.6	17.9
Rural Nonfarm	13.5	18.7	10.8
Rural Farm	10.0	11.8	6.8
Nonwhite	30.2	30.8	16.4
Urban	35.1	38.3	27.4
Rural Nonfarm	23.2	26.5	12.8
Rural Farm	14.4	16.1	8.5

SOURCE: 1950 CENSUS OF POPULATION, Vol. IV, Special Reports, Part 5, Chapter C, Tables 4 and 5; 1940 CENSUS OF POPULATION, DIFFERENTIAL FERTILITY, 1940 and 1910—Fertility for States and Large Cities, Table 4.

when inter-regional comparisons are made by urban and rural residence. In every region, a much larger proportion of non-white women than of white women are childless. In urban areas about one-third of the nonwhite women are childless. In the various types of areas rates of childlessness are about half again to twice as high for nonwhite women as for white women.

Table 5 presents data for white ever-married women 30 to 34 years old in 1950 by States. The proportion childless among these women varies from 7.0 per cent in Utah to 20.6 per cent in Florida. It is 28.0 per cent in Washington, D. C., a city which has long had one of the least fertile white populations of any large city in the United States. The pattern of the rates of childlessness by States suggests that local conditions of other kinds may be more significant as determining factors than the degree of industrialization. Thus, the childlessness rate is relatively low in Michigan but relatively high in Rhode Island, both of which are industrial States. It is low in Alabama and the Dakotas but high in many of the other largely rural States.

In Table 6, a high degree of consistency is found in the rates of childlessness by size of place. For women living in urban-

Table 4. Per cent childless among ever-married white and nonwhite women 30 to 34 years old, for regions, urban and rural: 1950. (Data based on 2.4 per cent sample. Per cent not shown where base is less than 4,000.)

COLOR AND REGION	TOTAL	URBAN	RURAL NONFARM	RURAL FARM
White	15.8	17.7	13.0	10.0
Northeast	15.6	16.5	12.9	9.0
North Central	15.1	17.1	12.2	10.5
South	16.1	19.3	13.7	10.3
West	16.8	18.8	13.0	8.2
Nonwhite	30.2	34.8	22.5	14.4
Northeast	33.7	34.4	—	—
North Central	38.4	39.6	—	—
South	26.8	32.9	22.7	14.7
West	30.2	33.7	19.5	—

SOURCE: 1950 CENSUS OF POPULATION, Vol. IV, Special Reports, Part 5, Chapter C, Table 32. (United States figures from Tables 20 and 22.)

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ized areas, the entire urbanized area is used as the basis of size classification. (An urbanized area consists of a city of 50,000 or more inhabitants in 1950 plus the surrounding thickly populated area.) The table shows that childlessness increases with the size of the place of residence. Thus, among ever-married women of childbearing age in 1952, the per cent childless increased from about 19 per cent for women in urbanized areas of less than 250,000 inhabitants to 26 per cent in urbanized areas of 3,000,000 or more. A continuum of consistently increasing childlessness rates was also found from rural farms up through the smaller (nonurbanized) urban areas.

Table 5. Per cent childless among ever-married white women 30 to 34 years old, for states: 1950.

<i>Northeast:</i>		District of Columbia	28.0
Maine	13.7	Virginia	17.2
New Hampshire	12.3	West Virginia	14.2
Vermont	9.1	North Carolina	16.5
Massachusetts	15.9	South Carolina	15.8
Rhode Island	17.8	Georgia	16.8
Connecticut	16.2	Florida	20.6
New York	16.2	Kentucky	14.7
New Jersey	15.8	Tennessee	16.2
Pennsylvania	15.0	Alabama	13.2
		Mississippi	15.3
<i>North Central:</i>			
Ohio	16.1	Arkansas	13.6
Indiana	15.7	Louisiana	14.3
Illinois	15.6	Oklahoma	14.8
Michigan	13.1	Texas	16.3
Wisconsin	13.4		
		<i>West:</i>	
Minnesota	13.7	Montana	14.1
Iowa	15.0	Idaho	11.2
Missouri	17.9	Wyoming	11.5
North Dakota	12.1	Colorado	15.5
South Dakota	10.8	New Mexico	16.7
Nebraska	15.2	Arizona	15.9
Kansas	15.6	Utah	7.0
		Nevada	19.8
<i>South:</i>			
Delaware	19.8	Washington	14.7
Maryland	14.7	Oregon	15.4
		California	18.8

SOURCE: Same as Table 4.

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIATION

Age. Figure 3 demonstrates the rapid decline in per cent childless from age 15 to age 29. As a word of caution, the figure shows the per cent childless among women by single years of age in 1950 rather than the experience of a real cohort as it passes through life. In the chart, the increase in per cent childless after age 30 reflects secular trends of the past; a real cohort would continue to have at least a small decrease in per cent childless until the end of the childbearing ages. The chart is plotted so as to show that many of the childless women are still living with their first husband. From the graph, it can be inferred that broken marriages account for little of the childlessness.

Detailed Marital Status. The observation just made about broken marriages does not preclude the existence of wide differences in rates of childlessness among women in the several marital status categories. According to Table 7, among white women 30 to 34 years old in 1950, the unusually high rate of 34 per cent childless was found among women living apart from their husband for reasons other than marital discord. The husbands of many of these women were in institutions or employed in remote areas. By contrast, note the low rate of 14 per cent childless among white women still living with their first husband. White women living with their husbands

Table 6. Per cent childless among ever-married women 15 to 44 years old, standardized for age, by size of place: April 1952. (The standard is the distribution by age of all ever-married women in the United States in 1952.)

AREA	PER CENT CHILDLESS
United States	20.7
Urban	22.8
In Urbanized Areas	22.9
Areas of 3,000,000 or More	26.1
1,000,000 to 3,000,000	25.4
250,000 to 1,000,000	21.3
Less Than 250,000	18.7
Other Urban Areas	22.1
Places of 25,000 or More	23.3
2,500 to 25,000	21.4
Rural Nonfarm	17.9
Rural Farm	13.6

SOURCE: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 46, December 31, 1953, Table 4.

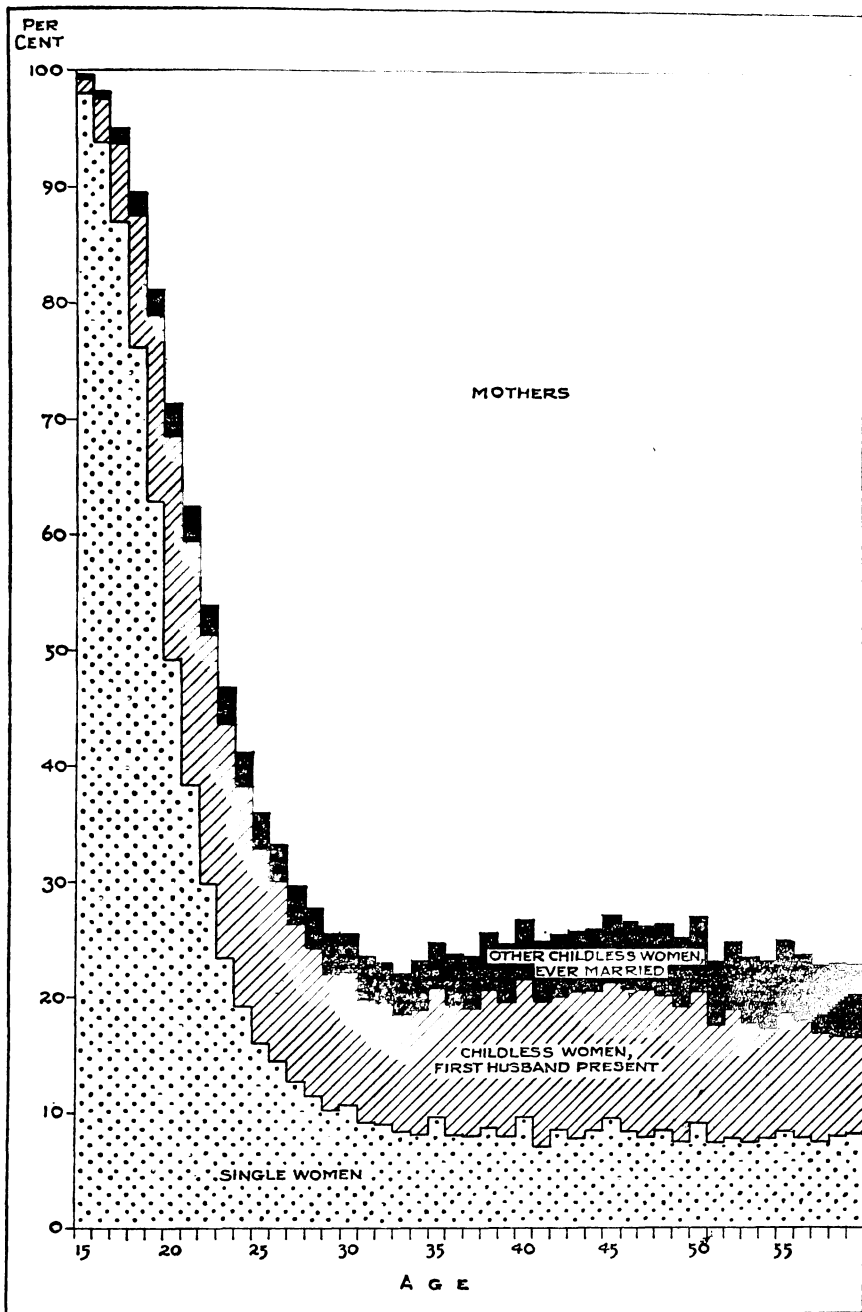


Fig. 3. Distribution of white women 15-59 years old by marital status and childlessness, by single years of age, for the United States: 1950. SOURCE. 1950 CENSUS OF POPULATION, Vol. IV, Special Reports, Part 5, Chapter C, Tables 8 and 9.

in remarriages also had a quite low childlessness rate, 18 per cent, suggesting that stable marriages, even though not initial marriages, are consistent with relatively low rates of childlessness.

Nonwhite women of each marital status had quite large proportions childless, both nationally and in nonfarm areas. The extreme rate of 43 per cent childless for urban divorced nonwhite women is noteworthy. On the other hand, it is interesting that in rural-farm areas only about 13 per cent of the nonwhite women living with their husband in first marriages are childless. This low percentage is evidence that there

Table 7. Per cent childless among white and nonwhite women 30 to 34 years old, by detailed marital status, for the United States, urban and rural: 1950. (Data based on 2.4 per cent sample. Per cent not shown where base is less than 4,000.)

COLOR AND MARITAL STATUS	NUMBER OF WOMEN	PER CENT CHILDLESS			
		United States	Urban	Rural Nonfarm	Rural Farm
White	5,276,280	23.5	26.5	17.9	15.7
Single	485,610	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)
Married	4,581,660	15.2	17.0	12.7	9.9
Husband Present	4,441,710	14.9	16.6	12.4	9.8
Married Once	3,910,860	14.4	16.1	12.1	9.6
Married More Than Once	530,850	18.0	20.1	14.4	11.5
Husband Absent	139,950	26.5	27.7	25.0	18.1
Separated	75,360	20.1	20.1	18.5	15.0
Other	64,590	33.9	36.8	30.0	20.9
Widowed	66,870	20.8	23.9	14.3	10.7
Divorced	142,140	30.9	32.9	24.3	17.0
Nonwhite	616,440	36.1	40.7	28.7	19.8
Single	52,410	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)
Married	515,070	29.4	34.0	22.1	14.5
Husband Present	422,790	28.8	34.2	20.6	14.0
Married Once	325,980	28.7	34.5	20.7	13.2
Married More Than Once	96,810	29.0	33.0	20.4	17.4
Husband Absent	92,280	32.1	33.3	30.1	20.6
Separated	76,110	30.7	31.9	26.6	22.4
Other	16,170	38.6	40.9	—	—
Widowed	23,790	33.8	36.8	—	—
Divorced	25,170	43.0	46.1	—	—

¹ For purposes of this table, single women are assumed to be childless.

SOURCE: 1950 CENSUS OF POPULATION, Vol. IV, Special Reports, Part 5, Chapter C, Tables 16 and 17.

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is not a high incidence of sterility among nonwhites in farm areas.

Age at First Marriage. The proportion of women who remain childless increases with age at marriage, as may be noted from the data in Table 8. Among women married 10 years or more in 1950, only 6.3 per cent of those who married at age 14 to 16 years were childless. Some corresponding figures are 11.0 per cent for marriages at age 20, 22.8 per cent for marriages at age 25 to 29, and 55.4 per cent for marriages at age

Table 8. Per cent childless among women 14 to 59 years old married once and husband present by selected ages at marriage, duration of marriage, and color, for the United States, farm and nonfarm: 1950. (Data based on 0.8 per cent sample. Per cent not shown where base is less than 12,000.)

AREA, COLOR, AND YEARS MARRIED	AGE OF WOMEN AT FIRST MARRIAGE—YEARS							MEDIAN AGE AT MARRIAGE—YEARS	
	Total, 14 to 59	14 to 16	18	20	22	25 to 29	35 to 39	Childless Women	Total Women
<i>United States</i>									
<i>Total</i>									
Married Less Than 2 Years	73.1	67.9	71.6	73.6	73.6	75.3	73.2	20.7	20.6
2 to 4 Years	30.8	19.6	23.7	28.8	32.1	36.3	63.2	21.6	20.8
5 to 9 Years	18.1	9.5	10.1	13.2	16.1	24.5	61.0	23.6	21.1
10 Years or More	14.2	6.3	7.4	11.0	13.1	22.8	55.4	23.5	20.9
<i>Nonwhite</i>									
Married Less Than 2 Years	58.9	56.3	59.0	56.7	—	66.2	—	20.6	20.4
2 to 4 Years	33.4	16.3	23.2	31.7	33.1	50.0	53.5	22.0	20.2
5 to 9 Years	29.2	10.9	14.4	27.8	33.7	48.4	48.6	23.4	20.5
10 Years or More	22.5	12.5	14.5	22.7	22.9	37.8	45.5	22.0	19.8
<i>Urban and Rural Nonfarm</i>									
<i>Total</i>									
Married Less Than 2 Years	74.0	68.1	72.0	73.0	74.2	76.5	74.7	20.9	20.8
10 Years or More	15.0	6.9	7.7	11.5	13.8	23.6	56.6	23.6	21.0
<i>Nonwhite</i>									
Married Less Than 2 Years	59.5	—	58.5	—	—	67.4	—	21.0	20.6
10 Years or More	26.3	15.3	16.7	26.5	25.7	42.5	51.9	22.0	20.0
<i>Rural Farm</i>									
<i>Total</i>									
Married Less Than 2 Years	66.7	67.3	69.8	79.2	—	62.5	—	19.3	19.4
10 Years or More	9.8	4.3	6.1	8.5	9.9	17.2	48.6	22.7	20.1
<i>Nonwhite</i>									
10 Years or More	10.1	5.5	8.4	9.5	12.9	18.0	—	21.8	19.3

SOURCE: 1950 CENSUS OF POPULATION, Vol. IV, Special Reports, Part 2, Chapter E, Table 4.

35 to 39 years. Turning to marriages of less than two years duration, some persons may be surprised to find that the majority of the women reporting very young marriages have not yet become mothers. Among women married before the age of 17, 20 per cent were reported as still childless after having been married for two to four years.

The data in Table 8 indicate consistently that age at marriage is a very strong factor in the eventual per cent childless but much less so with respect to childlessness in the early years of marriage. For instance, women who marry in their twenties are more likely to be childless in the first two years of married life than the women who marry in their thirties. But only about half of the women who marry in their late thirties remain childless.

If women in successive stages of marriage are compared, it can be seen that the women who are childless have a higher median age at marriage than other women. Among the women who had been married 10 years or more in 1950, the median age at marriage, for the currently childless women was about

Table 9. Per cent childless among white and nonwhite women 15 to 44 years old married once and husband present by years married, for the United States: 1950. (Data based on 2.4 per cent sample.)

YEARS MARRIED	WHITE		NONWHITE	
	Number of Women	Per Cent Childless	Number of Women	Per Cent Childless
Less Than 1 Year	693,480	90.7	68,460	73.4
1 Year	679,950	60.8	68,730	45.0
2 Years	1,118,040	41.4	120,750	37.6
3 Years	1,287,960	28.3	130,380	34.1
4 Years	1,199,010	22.5	114,390	29.8
5 Years	940,740	20.5	94,920	33.2
6 Years	791,370	17.3	85,200	30.9
7 Years	853,650	15.5	76,380	27.8
8 Years	1,006,440	15.2	82,380	28.1
9 Years	892,680	12.2	65,310	24.7
10 to 14 Years	3,957,060	13.1	326,850	26.6
15 To 19 Years	2,783,490	11.4	226,470	18.6
20 Years or More	2,331,240	9.4	214,440	16.9

SOURCE: 1950 CENSUS OF POPULATION, Vol. IV, Special Reports, Part 5, Chapter C, Tables 18 and 19.

2½ years older than that for all women, according to the last two columns in Table 8.

Though the lifetime proportion childless is twice as high for

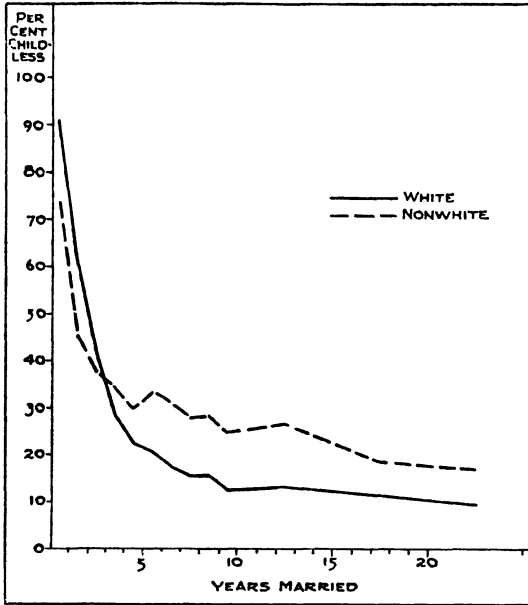


Fig. 4. Comparison of the per cent childless by years married, for white and nonwhite women 15-44 years old, married once and husband present, for the United States: 1950. SOURCE: Table 9.

nonwhite as for white women, the nonwhite women have consistently much smaller percentages of childlessness in the first two years of marriage than do the white women. Moreover, on rural farms, nonwhite women differ very little from the white women with respect to the per cent childless after at least 10 years of marriage.

Greater detail on duration of marriage is shown in Table 9 and Figure 4 for white and

nonwhite women at the time of the 1950 Census. The data indicate that smaller proportions of nonwhites than whites are childless in the first two years of marriage, and that the reverse holds true after the second year of marriage.

Attention is drawn especially to the first row of figures in Table 9. The numbers indicate that 90.7 per cent of the whites and 73.4 per cent of the nonwhites in the first year of marriage are childless. These figures should be interpreted in the light of the fact that about 75 per cent of the women in the first year of marriage have been married for less than nine months and many of the remaining 25 per cent have not had a child.

Data on childlessness among remarried women by duration of

marriage are presented in Table 10. The median age of women at remarriage tends to be approximately age 30. About three-tenths were childless among women who remarried at age 30 to 34 years and who were in the first two years of remarriage in 1950. Of the seven-tenths who had children, probably many were women whose children were born during a previous marriage. The rate of three-tenths childless among recently remarried women is fairly high, however, and may indicate that childless women with broken marriages are more likely to be selected as marriage partners than mothers with broken marriages, even though the mothers may have more compelling economic reasons to remarry.

Evidently not many women who had no children in their first marriage have any in their second marriage unless they remarry while still relatively young. Among that half of the women who remarried at age 30 and over, the per cent childless does not decrease much as the duration of remarriage lengthens, whereas the few women who remarry before they are 25 do have a considerable decrease in childlessness with

Table 10. Per cent childless among women 14 to 59 years old married more than once and husband present, by selected ages at current marriage and duration of marriage, for the United States, total and rural farm: 1950. (Data based on 2.4 per cent sample. Per cent not shown where base is less than 4,000.)

AREA AND YEARS IN REMARRIAGE	AGE OF WOMAN AT REMARRIAGE—YEARS							MEDIAN AGE AT REMARRIAGE—YEARS	
	Total, 14 to 59	14 to 19	20 to 24	25 to 29	30 to 34	35 to 39	40 to 44	Childless Women	Total Women
<i>United States</i>									
<i>Remarried</i>									
Less Than 2 Years	33.8	55.2	41.9	33.7	30.0	30.2	28.1	28.1	30.7
2 to 4 Years	24.0	21.6	21.5	21.6	26.9	28.6	28.4	30.2	28.9
5 to 9 Years	22.2	13.9	16.5	20.5	26.3	27.3	27.0	32.3	30.0
10 Years or More	18.7	10.0	13.9	20.9	25.2	25.2	24.2	28.3	25.9
<i>Rural Farm</i>									
<i>Remarried</i>									
Less Than 2 Years	29.5	56.6	37.1	23.1	26.2	14.9	—	25.0	29.3
10 Years or More	12.0	5.4	10.0	15.2	15.1	19.2	16.4	27.4	24.3

SOURCE: 1950 CENSUS OF POPULATION, Vol. IV, Special Reports, Part 2, Chapter E, Table 8.

advancing duration of remarriage. It must be remembered, of course, that the data in Table 10 to which the discussion refers are cross-sectional rather than longitudinal for a cohort of women passing through life.

We shall not discuss childlessness among widowed women beyond noting that relatively few women become widows before the end of the childbearing period. Table 7 presented data on childlessness among widows 30 to 34 years old.

A much larger proportion of women are separated or divorced than are widowed during the childbearing ages. Illustrative data on childlessness among separated and divorced women are presented in Table 11. It should be noted that these data reflect the marital status at the survey date and exclude women who have had their marriages reconciled or who have remarried. The table shows a decrease in per cent childless among separated and divorced women as the duration of separation or divorce lengthens. This decrease should be considered as further evidence of the greater likelihood that childless women will remarry or become reconciled with their

Table 11. Per cent childless among separated and divorced women 14 to 59 years old by selected ages at separation or divorce and duration of separation or divorce, for the United States: 1950. (Data based on 2.4 per cent sample.)

MARITAL STATUS AND DURATION	AGE OF WOMAN AT SEPARATION OR DIVORCE—YEARS				MEDIAN AGE AT SEPARATION OR DIVORCE—YEARS	
	Total, 14 to 59	14 to 19	25 to 29	40 to 44	Childless Women	Total Women
<i>Separated</i>						
Less Than 2 Years	30.5	43.5	30.5	26.0	26.6	27.8
2 To 4 Years	28.5	29.1	28.0	28.3	29.2	29.8
5 To 9 Years	25.7	22.9	26.1	28.4	30.7	30.9
10 Years or More	20.9	14.3	22.4	23.5	29.2	27.8
<i>Divorced</i>						
Less Than 2 Years	32.7	52.8	32.1	27.8	28.2	30.2
2 To 4 Years	32.1	38.7	34.8	29.5	30.4	31.8
5 To 9 Years	31.7	33.2	33.6	28.3	32.5	33.4
10 Years or More	29.7	24.0	32.4	24.8	29.1	29.7

SOURCE: 1950 CENSUS OF POPULATION, Vol. IV, Special Reports, Part 2, Chapter E, Tables 18 and 23.

first husband. The fairly large proportions childless among recently separated or divorced women is in accord with the hypothesis that children help to preserve the marriage.

Timing of First Births. Inasmuch as data on birth of a first child represent changes from a childless status, it seems pertinent to give a few figures on the spacing of first births. Table 12 presents illustrative data of this type from the 1950 Census for a cohort of women. The group of women was married at age 20 in 1932, a depression year. The subsequent fertility experience of this cohort is not typical of women who married in more prosperous

times, as will be pointed out below, but from the 1960 Census data it will be possible to show in a similar manner the spacing intervals for women who married at a young age shortly after 1940. The spacing data in Table 12 were derived by subtracting the age of the first child from the number of years the mother had been married. The results comprise a series of overlapping intervals as shown in the table but it can be shown that there is concentration of population at the mid-points of each two-year interval and that the extreme limits of each range contain few women.

The mothers who married at age 20 in 1932 had a median spacing of about 2.1 years between marriage and the birth of

Table 12. Spacing between marriage and birth of the first child, for women 38 years old in 1950 who were married at age 20, and who in 1950 had 1 to 5 children ever born, first husband and all children present in the household, for the United States. (Data based on 1 per cent sample.)

Number of Women	52,300
Per Cent	100.0
<i>Interval Between Marriage and Birth of First Child¹</i>	
0.0 to 0.9 Years	3.8
0.0 to 1.9 Years	30.2
1.0 to 2.9 Years	25.0
2.0 to 3.9 Years	9.9
3.0 to 4.9 Years	4.6
4.0 to 9.9 Years	18.2
9.0 to 18.9 Years	8.2
Median Spacing (Years)	2.1 ²

SOURCE: Grabill, Kiser, and Whelpton: THE FERTILITY OF AMERICAN WOMEN. Census Monograph Series. New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1958, Table 110.

¹ For explanation of overlapping intervals, see text.

² Median computed as though the successive intervals were 0.0 to 0.4 years, 0.5 years to 1.4 years, 1.5 years to 2.4 years, etc. That is, the overlapping portions of the successive intervals were split between the intervals.

the first child; other data, from April 1954, Current Population Survey not shown here, indicate that a median spacing interval of about 1.5 years is more typical in prosperous times. The data in this table indicate that it is necessary to follow the cohort for several years after marriage before as many as three-fourths of the first births are accounted for. Although the data imply that less than half of the first births occur about a year after the marriage, demographers have nonetheless found a very high correlation between annual vital statistics of first births and annual marriages with a lag of one year.

As an interesting sidelight, Table 12 indicates that only about 8 per cent of the mothers in the cohort had their first child after the ninth or tenth year of marriage. This small proportion supports the previous statement that the per cent of women who are childless declines quite slowly after about age 30.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS

Educational Attainment of Women. It is well known that there is an inverse relation between the educational attainment of women and their fertility. Hence, one would expect women of higher education to have relatively more childlessness, as is in fact the case. Relatively fewer of the well-educated women marry, although the differences are small below the level of 4 years of college. The average age at marriage increases with advancing education, but, again the differences usually are small and hence not a major factor in the degree of eventual childlessness. A very important reason for the observed differences in rates of childlessness is the fact that a larger proportion of the people with higher education plan the number and spacing of their children, as shown by the Indianapolis Study and other studies. As may be seen from the data in the top half of Table 13, and in Figure 5, an increasing proportion of the married couples with successively higher levels of education are childless in the first two years of marriage. There are some exceptions, however; thus, there is a tendency for women who completed only 1 to 3 years of high

school to have a smaller per cent childless in the early years of marriage than women who completed only 7 or 8 years of school.

The lower half of the table groups data into blocks by similar

Table 13. Per cent childless among white women 15 to 44 years old married once and husband present, by years of school completed, age, and duration of marriage, for the United States: 1950. (Data based on 1 per cent sample. Per cent not shown where base is less than 10,000.)

AGE OF WOMAN AND YEARS MARRIED	NUMBER OF WIVES (000's)	TOTAL	ELEMENTARY		HIGH SCHOOL		COLLEGE	
			0 to 6 Years	7 and 8 Years	1 to 3 Years	4 Years	1 to 3 Years	4 or More
<i>15 to 44 Years Old</i>								
<i>Married</i>								
Less Than 1 Year	689	91.0	83.2	83.9	88.5	93.4	94.8	96.2
1 Year	684	61.5	53.0	54.6	53.6	64.8	68.4	75.0
2 Years	1,111	41.5	33.0	36.2	34.7	44.1	46.1	55.0
3 Years	1,290	28.4	23.4	23.7	25.1	30.1	31.9	36.4
4 Years	1,199	22.5	17.6	20.9	19.9	23.3	24.4	31.3
5 Years	942	20.4	23.1	20.2	15.8	19.8	24.4	29.9
6 Years	801	17.9	18.8	18.3	16.7	16.4	20.7	22.7
7 Years	859	15.3	13.8	14.7	13.4	15.8	16.1	18.2
8 Years	1,009	15.3	13.3	14.9	14.5	15.7	13.9	17.3
9 Years	897	12.5	11.7	12.2	10.9	12.9	13.4	14.7
10 to 14 Years	3,965	12.9	10.4	12.7	11.4	13.7	14.7	14.7
15 to 19 Years	2,807	11.5	7.0	10.2	10.0	13.3	14.6	15.0
20 Years or More	2,331	9.5	6.9	8.0	8.8	11.5	12.8	17.2
<i>Age, Years Married</i>								
25 to 29, 10 to 14	647	6.4	5.1	4.8	5.2	9.2	10.9	—
30 to 34, 15 to 19	527	5.4	3.9	4.4	4.6	6.7	9.7	—
35 to 39, 20 or More	522	6.7	4.5	5.3	5.8	9.3	11.5	—
25 to 29, 5 to 9	2,141	13.0	13.5	10.6	11.2	12.9	15.5	18.4
30 to 34, 10 to 14	1,813	9.1	7.0	9.4	8.1	9.6	9.6	8.9
35 to 39, 15 to 19	1,468	10.1	6.4	8.9	10.1	10.7	12.5	11.8
40 to 44, 20 or More	1,781	10.3	7.6	8.9	9.9	11.9	12.8	17.1
25 to 29, 0 to 4	1,308	38.3	31.7	34.6	34.6	38.5	39.5	46.7
30 to 34, 5 to 9	1,177	17.2	18.9	19.3	18.2	17.2	14.6	14.3
35 to 39, 10 to 14	1,109	17.1	16.6	17.4	17.9	18.1	15.6	12.8
40 to 44, 15 to 19	793	18.2	12.3	18.1	16.0	21.3	17.4	17.4
30 to 34, 0 to 4	388	43.1	34.0	41.3	43.0	45.9	40.2	41.2
35 to 39, 5 to 9	387	29.9	32.1	32.0	33.5	29.7	24.1	27.0
40 to 44, 10 to 14	374	29.9	27.0	30.9	33.4	29.9	27.0	26.4
35 to 39, 0 to 4	154	56.5	46.6	56.7	54.0	60.0	52.9	60.1
40 to 44, 5 to 9	135	47.6	49.1	48.9	46.4	47.2	47.1	50.6
40 to 44, 0 to 4	67	65.7	—	64.0	61.3	71.8	—	—

SOURCE: 1950 CENSUS OF POPULATION, Series PC-14, No. 22, September 7, 1956, Table 1.

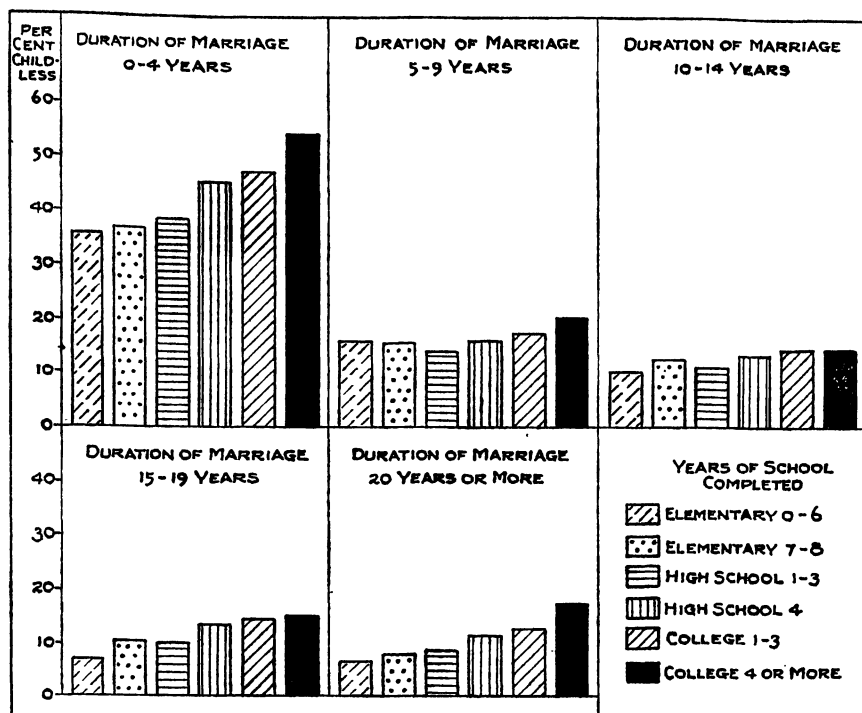


Fig. 5. Per cent childless among white women 15-44 years old, married once and husband present, by duration of marriage and years of school completed, for the United States: 1950. SOURCE: 1950 CENSUS OF POPULATION, Series PC-14, No. 22, September 7, 1956, Table 1.

age at marriage as may be seen if one computes the difference between age at census and years married. The arrangement is suggestive of cohort experience at successive marriage durations, though the 1950 Census data are cross-sectional in nature. The effect of a boom in first births is evident in the data for women 30 to 34 years old, married 10 to 14 years, notably among women with a college education. The same phenomenon, in lesser degree, appears in the data for women 35 to 39 years old, also married 10 to 14 years. The fact that these women were married in the period from 1935 to 1940 means that their low proportion childless reflects birth experience, in part, during the economic depression and in part, during wartime and postwar years. Their husbands were in the upper age range for military service at the time of the outbreak of war.

Table 14. Per cent childless among white women 15 to 44 years old married once and husband present by age of woman, duration of marriage, and major occupation group of husband in experienced civilian labor force, for the United States: 1950. (Data based on 1 per cent sample.)

YEARS MARRIED	TOTAL	OCCUPATION OF HUSBAND											
		Professional and Technical	Managers, Officials, and Proprietors	Clerical, Sales	Craftsmen and Foremen	Operatives	Service and Household Workers	Laborers Except Farm and Mine	Farmers and Farm Managers	Farm Laborers and Foremen			
<i>Married</i>													
Less Than 1 Year	91.0	93.8	93.5	92.6	90.2	90.7	94.9	87.8	89.7	89.1			
1 Year	61.5	70.6	65.2	67.3	59.2	55.7	64.9	54.2	60.4	58.0			
2 Years	41.5	49.2	45.0	44.2	43.0	38.7	40.5	34.4	35.5	31.9			
3 Years	28.4	34.9	30.8	32.9	30.3	24.8	27.9	24.1	20.0	19.0			
4 Years	22.5	28.2	24.5	25.3	21.7	20.3	25.6	17.7	16.6	18.4			
5 Years	20.4	23.7	21.9	23.5	21.0	16.7	18.0	16.4	15.1	17.0			
6 Years	17.9	16.5	19.9	18.8	16.8	17.8	15.4	18.2	15.5	14.0			
7 Years	15.3	15.7	17.6	16.7	15.5	14.2	13.8	14.6	12.2	10.8			
8 Years	15.3	16.3	18.4	18.5	13.7	12.6	19.8	15.9	9.7	11.5			
9 Years	12.5	13.1	14.5	13.2	12.1	11.1	16.9	9.6	8.9	11.7			
10 to 14 Years	12.9	14.5	13.5	15.0	12.1	11.5	15.9	12.1	10.1	9.3			
15 to 19 Years	11.5	14.7	12.8	13.6	11.2	10.3	13.0	7.7	7.9	7.3			
20 Years or More	9.5	12.8	10.7	12.8	8.8	8.2	10.1	6.6	7.4	5.4			

SOURCE: 1950 CENSUS OF POPULATION, Series PC-14, No. 22, September 7, 1956, Table 2.

In the third and fourth blocks of the table (13), which are for the minority who married at a relatively advanced age, one may note a tendency for a smaller proportion childless among the women with some college education than among the women with little education.

Major Occupation Group of Husband. Data on childlessness by occupation are presented in Table 14. According to some sociologists, occupation is more indicative of "the style of life" than is education or income. If this is the case, then many major occupation groups reflect quite similar "styles of life" in respect to childlessness. It is difficult to judge from the data in Table 14 which of the three "white collar" groups (professional, managerial, and clerical-sales) has the highest proportion childless as there are numerous exceptions. A tally shows that the professional group has the highest per cent childless among white collar workers in 7 out of 14 of the marriage duration intervals shown in the table, with 5 of the 7 for the first five years of marriage. The clerical and sales group tends to rank second, and the managerial and proprietary group third. One of the "blue collar" occupations—the service and household workers group—has as high a proportion childless as the white collar groups but most of the "blue collar" groups (craftsmen, operatives, and laborers) have a small proportion childless. At the other end of the scale of per cent childless, the nonfarm laborers, the farm laborers, or the farmers have the lowest per cent childless for one duration group or another.

Labor Force Status of Women. Women who work outside the home tend to be those who have no children of preschool age but half of the married women who work have no children under 18 in the home and four out of every ten have no children of any age. Many of the working wives, of course, have not yet started family building. But most of the women who will ever have a child will have done so by their early thirties. In this context, an example of the selectivity of completely childless women 30 to 34 years old for the labor force participa-

MARITAL STATUS AND LABOR FORCE STATUS	WHITE		NONWHITE	
	Number	Per Cent Childless	Number	Per Cent Childless
All Women	5,276,280	23.5	616,440	36.1
Labor Force	1,489,290	50.6	287,370	47.6
Not in Labor Force	3,786,990	12.9	329,070	26.0
Married Once, Husband Present	3,910,860	14.4	325,980	28.7
Labor Force	756,270	34.6	120,840	43.0
Not in Labor Force	3,154,590	9.6	205,140	20.2

SOURCE: 1950 CENSUS OF POPULATION, Vol. IV, Special Reports, Part 5, Chapter C, Tables 24, 25, 26, and 27.

Table 15. Per cent childless among white and nonwhite women 30 to 34 years old by labor force status, by marital status, for the United States: 1950. (Data based on 2.4 per cent sample.)

tion is given in Table 15. Thus, about 35 per cent of white wives 30 to 34 years old in the labor force have never had a child, as compared with 10 per cent among wives not in the labor force.

Income. The Census Bureau's only data on childlessness by income of the husband come from the April 1952 Current Population Survey. As may be noted from Table 16, the proportion of wives who are childless is relatively high in the low-income groups, whereas the opposite situation might be expected from the traditional pattern of highest fertility among the poor. Several explanations for the situation may be offered. A part of the high proportion childless at low income levels comes from a concentration of nonwhite husbands in the lower end of the income distribution. As pointed out above, the proportion childless is about twice

Table 16. Per cent childless among women 15 to 44 years old married and husband present, standardized for age, by income of husband, for urban and rural nonfarm areas: April 1952.

Total	20.8
Under \$1,000	26.0
\$1,000 to \$1,999	28.9
\$2,000 to \$2,999	23.1
\$3,000 to \$3,999	20.0
\$4,000 to \$4,999	17.7
\$5,000 to \$6,999	14.6
\$7,000 and Over	18.5

SOURCE: Bureau of the Census, CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS, Series P-20, No. 46, "Fertility of the Population: April 1952," December 31, 1952, Table 3.

as high among nonwhite as among white women. Another important consideration is the fact that wives of men with low incomes are the most likely to be working outside the home. This explanation is consistent with the evidence just given that women in the labor force have a much higher rate of childlessness than other women. At the other end of the income scale, however, it is noteworthy that the per cent childless tends to be a little larger for women with husbands in the highest bracket than for those in adjacent brackets. This is not in line with the J-shape curve of fertility in relation to economic status found in some other studies.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the changing levels and differential patterns of childlessness are matters of much concern to students of demographic and medical problems. Rates of childlessness rose from about 8 per cent among ever-married women who were in the midst of childbearing nearly a century ago to a peak of 20 per cent for those in the same period of life during the depression years of the 1930's. For women who went through the corresponding period of life during World War II and the early postwar years, the eventual level of childlessness will almost undoubtedly fall again below 10 per cent. (An additional 5 to 8 per cent will never marry.) Thus, the replacement of the population is being shared by a larger proportion of the women than a decade or two ago.

Rates of childlessness were found to be largest among urban nonwhite women, among married women living apart from their husbands, among those whose marriages occur above the average age, among women with broken marriages who subsequently remarry, and among those who delay childbearing during the first ten years of marriage.

When childlessness is studied by social and economic characteristics some of the relationships just listed tend to obscure the picture. With some reservations, however, it may be said that rates of childlessness are somewhat above average for col-

lege-educated women, women whose husbands are in the white collar occupations, women who are in the labor force, and women whose husbands are in the lower income levels. The data suggest the hypothesis that women are more likely to be childless if their husbands have less income than others in the same occupation group, though this hypothesis was not specifically tested.

In conclusion, childlessness, as a demographic phenomenon, is the lower limit in the continuum of parity. Other meaningful analyses can be made, of course, in terms of any specific number of births, from the smallest to the largest. In this context, couples with only one child ever born may well be found to have much the same characteristics as those with no children. To the extent that this is the case, childless wives are representative of all wives of low parity.