MARRIAGE INSTABILITY: VARIATIONS BY SIZE OF PLACE AND REGION

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THIS study makes use of some of the first results that were tabulated from the 1960 Census to analyze the distribution of persons who had marriages that were disrupted by separation or divorce or who, though young, were not living with both parents. The purpose of the study is to throw light on variations by size of place and region with respect to three measures of marriage instability: a separation ratio, a divorce ratio, and the per cent of young children not living with both parents.

The major hypothesis under examination is that all of these measures, which reflect instability in marriage, tend to show more variation between large and small places of residence than among the four census regions. The paper will discuss, first, the levels of the three measures for the country as a whole and for the several sizes of place within each region and, second, the results of an analysis of variance performed on the three measures by size of place and region.

Scope and Definitions. Because of wide differences expected for white and nonwhite groups, the statistics for the two color groups are compared. At the time this paper was prepared (spring of 1962), data from the 1960 Census were not available on martial status by age. As an alternative, separation and divorce ratios were computed with the total number of married women (14 years old and over) as the base; by this device, distortions in a given type of area because of a large proportion of young (generally single) persons or of old (gen-

erally widowed) persons were minimized. The analysis is limited to women; the findings might be somewhat different for men, among whom there are substantially fewer persons reported as separated or divorced.

By census definition, a separated woman is a married woman who is living apart from her husband because of marital discord; some of these persons have legal separations, some are in the process of obtaining a divorce, and some have been deserted by their husband (or vice versa) with no intention of obtaining a divorce. Moreover, a substantial proportion of unwed parents, especially unwed mothers, are evidently misreported as separated. By divorced is meant a person who is divorced— and not remarried—at the time of the study (here, at the time of the 1960 Census).

The "separation ratio" (separated women divided by total married women, including separated women) is actually a rate, in the sense that all those at risk of being separated are in the base. The "divorce ratio" (divorced women divided by total married women, including separated women) is not a rate in the sense that divorced women (who are only about 4 per cent as numerous as married women) are patently at risk of being

Table 1. Disrupted marriage ratios (separated and divorced females per 1,000 married females), by color, for the United States: 1960.

MARITAL STATUS AND RATIO	UNITED STATES	WHITE	NONWHITE
Numbers of Women			
1. Separated and Divorced Women	3,145,508	2,327,841	817,667
2. Separated Women	1,306,176	735,813	570,363
3. Divorced Women	1,839,332	1,592,028	247,304
4. Married Women (Incl. Separated)	42,749,302	38,628,160	4,121,142
Ratios Per 1,000 Married Women			
5. Disrupted marriage ratio	74	60	198
6. Separation ratio	31	19	138
7. Divorce ratio	43	41	60

Note: Line 5 is ratio of line 1 to line 4 times 1,000.
Line 6 is ratio of line 2 to line 4 times 1,000.
Line 7 is ratio of line 3 to line 4 times 1,000.
    Source: *U. S. Census of Population: 1960, General Population Characteristics,* Final Report PC(1)-1B (U. S. Summary).

currently divorced but are not in the base. However, by using married women as the base for both ratios, the two could be added together to obtain a "disrupted marriage ratio."[1]

The "per cent of children under 18 years old *not living* with both parents" was computed in two steps: (a) The number of single (never-married) children under 18 *living* in a house or apartment with their father and mother (by birth, marriage or adoption) was expressed as a per cent of all children under 18;[2] and (b) the resulting per cent was subtracted from 100.0 per cent. Thus, the measure used here includes the very small number of persons under 18 who had married, as is explained in more detail below in Footnote 4.

Disrupted Marriage Ratios. The disrupted marriage ratio for 1960 amounted to 74 per 1,000 married women. (Table 1.) This figure represents the sum of the separation ratio, 31 per 1,000, and the divorce ratio, 43 per 1,000. It means that at the time of the census about one out of every 14 of the women had their marriages currently disrupted by separation or divorce, with somewhat more of the marriage disruptions resulting from divorce than separation.[3]

[1] The separation, divorce, and disrupted marriage ratios quoted here were computed on the basis of complete-count data from the 1960 Census, published in the several state and United States "B" parts of Volume I, *Characteristics of the Population*, known as the Series PC(1)-B reports. (See Appendix Table A.)

[2] The per cent of children under 18 living with both parents was based on 25-per cent sample data from the census, published in the "C" parts of the source cited above, known as the Series PC(1)-C reports. (See Appendix Table B.)

[3] This ratio, as indicated, relates only to women whose marriages were in a state of disruption by separation or divorce at the time of the 1960 Census. It should not be confused with the per cent of women who ever obtain a divorce during their lifetime. Women who ever obtain a divorce include (a) those with divorces currently, (b) those additional women with previous divorces but now married or widowed, and (c) those additional women who will obtain a divorce for the first time in the future. A rough estimate of the proportion of women who ever obtain a divorce is about one in four. This estimate is based on the following observations: (1) During the last several years, about one-fourth of the persons who were entering marriage were remarrying; hence, it is assumed, on the average, about one-fourth of those who marry for the first time will eventually remarry; (2) of those remarrying, about two out of every three had the marital status "divorced" immediately prior to remarriage; hence, one-sixth of those who married were divorced persons; (3) for every two divorced women who remarry, one other divorced woman remains unmarried. From these observations, it is reasoned that three-halves as many women obtain divorces as the number who remarried after obtaining a divorce and that one-fourth (three-halves of the one-sixth mentioned above) of those who marry will eventually obtain a divorce.

These totals, however, hide some very wide differences by color, size of place and region. The most conspicuous differences are those by color. Thus, the disrupted marriage ratio for white women was 60 per 1,000 married women, whereas that for non-white women was 198 or over 3 times as large. Moreover, two-thirds of the current disruptions in white marriages were in the form of divorce, but two-thirds of those for nonwhite marriages were in the form of separation. This pattern of difference by color tends to be found more or less uniformly from one type of area to another. Only in the West, where the majority of nonwhite women are not Negroes, is there a reversal of the pattern. (Table 2.)

The figures by region provide evidence that marriage instability among white women is more prevalent in the West than elsewhere in the nation, but among nonwhite women it is more extensive in the North than in the South or West. The disrupted marriage ratio for white women was in the 50's in the North and South, 84 in the West. For nonwhite women, it ranged from 158 in the West to 241 in the Northeast.

In the classification by size of place, the disrupted marriage

Table 2. Disrupted marriage ratios, by color, for regions: 1960.

Ratio and Color	Northeast	North Central	South	West
Total				
Disrupted Marriage Ratio	69	63	80	89
Separation Ratio	37	21	38	24
Divorce Ratio	32	42	42	65
White				
Disrupted Marriage Ratio	57	52	59	84
Separation Ratio	26	13	19	20
Divorce Ratio	31	39	40	64
Nonwhite				
Disrupted Marriage Ratio	241	237	180	158
Separation Ratio	192	146	131	77
Divorce Ratio	49	91	49	81

Source: Same as Table 1, Final Reports PC(1)-1 to 52B (State reports and U. S. Summary). For bases, see Appendix Table A.

ratio for white women ranged from a high of 91 per 1,000 married women in the central cities of urbanized areas to a low of only 31 for those in small rural places (of fewer than 1,000 inhabitants) or on rural farms. (Table 3.) For nonwhite women, the corresponding ratios were 240 and 105. This positive relation between size of place and disrupted marriage ratio was consistent except that the ratio for women in suburban areas (with mainly single-family living quarters in the urban fringe surrounding central cities of urbanized areas) was relatively low—between that for the smallest size of urban places and rural-nonfarm areas. The same pattern also applied to the separation and divorce ratios considered separately. Among white women, the divorce ratio was generally two to three times that for the separation ratio in each size of place. (Table 4.) On the other hand, among nonwhite women, the separation ratio was generally two to three times that for the divorce ratio in each size of place.

Children Not Living with Both Parents. In the United States as a whole, there were 64.3 million children under 18 years of age in 1960. (Table 5.) Of these, 55.8 million were

Table 3. Disrupted marriage ratios, by color, for the United States, by size of place: 1960.

RATIO AND COLOR	URBANIZED AREAS		OTHER URBAN		RURAL	
	Central Cities	Urban Fringe	Places of 10,000+	2,500 to 10,000	1,000 to 2,500	Other Rural
Total						
Disrupted Marriage Ratio	115	57	83	66	54	37
Separation Ratio	50	20	32	26	21	17
Divorce Ratio	65	37	51	40	33	20
White						
Disrupted Marriage Ratio	91	53	71	57	47	31
Separation Ratio	28	16	21	18	15	11
Divorce Ratio	63	37	50	39	32	20
Nonwhite						
Disrupted Marriage Ratio	240	179	210	188	161	105
Separation Ratio	163	121	147	137	120	82
Divorce Ratio	77	58	63	51	41	23

Source: Same as Table 1, Final Reports PC(1)-1 to 52B (State reports and U. S. Summary). For bases, see Appendix Table A.

single and living with both of their parents. That is, seven out of every eight dependent-age children were still unmarried and living in their parental homes. Nearly all of the remaining 8.5 million, or 13 per cent of the persons under 18, were not living with both parents. In view of the focus in this study on separation and divorce, it is noteworthy that for the country as a whole about 3.3 million, or four out of every ten, of the 8.5 million children not living with both parents had one parent who was reported either as currently separated or divorced.[4]

Table 4. Separation and divorce ratios, by color, for regions, by size of place: 1960.

RATIO, COLOR, AND REGION	TOTAL	URBANIZED AREAS		OTHER URBAN		RURAL	
		Central Cities	Urban Fringe	Places of 10,000+	2,500 to 10,000	1,000 to 2,500	Other Rural
Separation Ratio							
White							
United States	19	28	16	21	18	15	11
Northeast	26	37	19	31	24	20	15
North Central	13	20	10	15	12	10	7
South	19	26	16	23	19	18	13
West	20	27	20	19	19	16	11
Nonwhite							
United States	138	163	121	147	137	120	82
Northeast	192	207	157	150*	125*	100*	103*
North Central	146	157	115	101*	105*	89*	79*
South	131	161	123	164	148	134	86
West	77	97	74	47*	37*	33*	36
Divorce Ratio							
White							
United States	41	63	37	50	39	32	20
Northeast	31	40	24	40	32	28	20
North Central	39	64	32	51	40	30	17
South	40	68	39	50	39	34	20
West	64	96	61	58	48	39	28
Nonwhite							
United States	60	77	58	63	51	41	23
Northeast	49	50	51	47*	36*	35*	31*
North Central	91	96	78	89*	73*	67*	48*
South	49	71	45	62	51	41	20
West	81	105	70	54*	45*	27*	34

* Base less than 50,000 married women.
Source: Same as table 3.

[4] See U. S. Bureau of the Census: Family Characteristics of Persons: March,

Area	Total	White	Nonwhite
United States			
Total Children Under 18 Years of Age	64,309,881	55,586,284	8,723,597
Living with Both Parents[1]	55,829,351	50,049,638	5,779,713
Not Living with Both Parents[2]	8,480,530	5,536,646	2,943,884
Per Cent Not Living with Both Parents	13.2	10.0	33.7
Region			
Per Cent Not Living with Both Parents:			
Northeast	11.4	9.3	35.5
North Central	10.1	8.1	33.5
South	17.6	11.8	35.1
West	12.5	11.4	24.4
Urban-Rural Residence			
Per Cent Not Living with Both Parents:			
Urban	13.8	10.3	35.1
Rural Nonfarm	12.8	10.1	32.7
Rural Farm	9.8	6.6	26.5

[1] Excludes the small number (about one-quarter of a million) of persons under 18 who have ever married.
[2] Includes those ever married, some of whom are living with both parents.
Source: *U. S. Census of Population: 1960, General Social and Economic Characteristics*, Final Report (PC(1)-1C (U. S. Summary).

Table 5. Per cent of children under 18 years of age not living with both parents, by color, for the United States, by regions and by urban-rural residence: 1960.

It is assumed here that places where the per cent of children not living with both parents is unusually high tend also to

1959, CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS, (Series P-20, No. 112) pp. 1 and 2 and Tables C and 2. In the absence of detailed figures from the 1960 Census, statistics from the report cited here and other reports based on the CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY indicate the following approximate distribution of the 8.5 million: Only about 280,000 had ever married; of those who were still single, 2.0 million were living with a separated parent, 1.3 million with a divorced parent, 1.9 million with a widowed parent, 1.4 million with a married (but not separated) parent whose spouse was absent, 1.7 million with relatives but neither parent, and one-half million with nonrelatives, in an institution, or alone.

In addition to the 3.3 million children under 18 living with a parent who was currently separated or divorced, it is estimated that roughly an additional 5 million children under 18 were living with a parent who had been previously divorced but had meantime remarried, so that the children were living with a parent by birth and a stepparent. This estimate is based on other data from the CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY on once-married and remarried parents and their children (Series P-20, No. 21) and on previous marital status of persons who remarry (published by the National Office of Vital Statistics in *Vital Statistics—Special Reports* Vol. 45, No. 12, Table 21, and in Paul C. Glick, American Families, *op. cit.*, Table 96). Thus, an estimated 8 million of the 64 million under 18 in 1960 were living with parents who were separated or divorced or who had been previously divorced.

REGION	URBAN, TOTAL	URBANIZED AREAS		OTHER URBAN		RURAL	
		Central Cities	Urban Fringe	Places of 10,000+	2,500 to 10,000	Nonfarm	Farm
United States	13.8	17.1	8.8	14.8	14.1	12.8	9.8
Northeast	12.0	16.1	7.7	12.4	10.4	9.3	7.4
North Central	11.5	15.6	6.9	10.9	10.0	8.6	4.8
South	18.3	20.6	10.1	20.1	19.4	17.2	15.1
West	13.2	15.9	10.9	12.5	12.2	11.5	6.6

Note: See footnotes on Table 5. Statistics not available by color, by size of urban place.
Source: Same as Table 5.

Table 6. Per cent of children under 18 years of age not living with both parents, for the United States and regions, by size of place: 1960.

have a high per cent of children with separated or divorced parents.

As was shown for disrupted marriages, the differences with respect to color were the most striking feature in the analysis of children not living with both parents. The proportion of such children in the nonwhite population, 34 per cent, was nearly three and one-half times as large as that for the white population, 10 per cent. In the detailed figures by region and urban-rural residence, the proportions of children not living with both parents ranged from two to four times as high for the nonwhite children as for the white. (Tables 6 and 7.) The classification of these children by size of place within the urban population was available only for the total of all races combined. Here, as with the disrupted marriage ratios, the highest proportion of children not living with both parents was found

Table 7. Per cent of children under 18 years of age not living with both parents, by color, for regions, by urban-rural residence: 1960.

REGION	WHITE			NONWHITE		
	Urban	Rural Nonfarm	Rural Farm	Urban	Rural Nonfarm	Rural Farm
United States	10.3	10.1	6.6	35.1	32.7	26.5
Northeast	9.5	8.8	7.4	35.1	34.2*	17.8*
North Central	8.7	8.1	4.6	33.7	32.6*	26.0*
South	12.0	12.1	9.3	37.3	33.8	27.0
West	12.0	10.4	5.9	25.3	22.2	15.8*

* Base less than 100,000 children under 18 years of age. (See Appendix Table B.)
Source: Same as Table 5, Final Reports PC(1)-1 to 52C (State reports and U. S. Summary).

in the central cities of urbanized areas; the smallest propor-
tion was found on rural farms. Intermediate sizes of place
likewise showed this generally negative relationship in every
region, but once again the suburban areas, that is, the urban
fringe of urbanized areas, was an exception to the rule; the
proportion of children in the fringe who were not living with
both parents was as low as, or lower than, that for rural areas
in each region.

Analysis of Variance. The question originally posed was:
Are variations in the three measures of marriage instability
that are shown here larger when the measures are classified
by size of place than when classified by region? The evidence
thus far presented indicates that size of place tends to be more
fundamental, yet it does not provide a summary measure that
reveals by how much the size-of-place factor is superior to
region in this analysis. Moreover, there are deviations which
complicate the patterns. To throw more light on these aspects
of the subject, analysis of variance was performed for each
measure, separately by color.[5] The results of this analysis are
summarized in Table 8 and are as follows:

> 1. For white women, the total variance of the separation
> ratios was much smaller than that of the divorce ratios. This
> finding implies that the white separation ratios were more uni-
> formly distributed among the several subclasses of communi-
> ties by region and size of place than were the white divorce
> ratios, on the average. On the other hand, the total variances
> for nonwhite women suggest that the nonwhite divorce ratios

[5] This step involved the following computations, as illustrated for the separation
ratios: Find the deviation of each separation ratio (by region crossed by size of
place) from the separation ratio (1) for the *United States as a whole;* square these
deviations, to accentuate the importance of the widely deviant ratios and to eliminate
negative values; weight each squared deviation by an appropriate base (the number
of married females) and sum the weighted (squared) deviations over all rows and
columns. Repeat this operation two more times, using deviations of each ratio (by
region crossed by size of place) from the separation ratio (2) for the *region as a
whole* and from that (3) for the *size of place as a whole* (i.e., for all regions com-
bined). Next, subtract the second and third types of weighted variance from the
total weighted variance to determine the interaction factor. Finally, divide the inter-
action factor equally between the second and third types of weighted variance.

The same type of method was used with the divorce ratios and with the percen-
tages of children not living with both parents.

AREA	SEPARATION RATIO		DIVORCE RATIO		PER CENT OF CHILDREN NOT LIVING WITH BOTH PARENTS	
	White	Nonwhite	White	Nonwhite	White	Nonwhite
Total Variance	256	774	1,629	274	1,994	1,741
By Size of Place[1]	163	413	1,111	167	486	695
By Region[1]	93	361	518	107	1,508	1,046
Per Cent: Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
By Size of Place	64	53	68	61	24	40
By Region	36	47	32	39	76	60

[1] Adjusted, to distribute interaction factor equally between the two variables, size of place and region.
    Source: Same as Tables 2 and 7.

Table 8. Analysis of variance (of separation and divorce ratios and of per cent of children under 18 years of age not living with both parents), by size of place and region, by color, for the United States: 1960.

were more uniformly distributed than were the nonwhite separation ratios. The total variances of the per cent of children not living with both parents appear to be relatively high for both white and nonwhite children, thereby suggesting relatively little uniformity.[6]

2. The pattern of variances ranged from a consistent confirmation of the original hypothesis with respect to divorce ratios to a negation of the hypothesis with respect to children not living with both parents.

a. The variance of the divorce ratios, for both white and nonwhite women, was about twice as large by size of place as by region. This means that size of place is a better factor for explaining variation in divorce ratios than is region.[7]

b. Likewise, the variance of the separation ratios for white women was about twice as large by size of place as by region. However, there was little difference between the two area classifications in the variance of separation ratios for non-

[6] Caution should be exercised in the interpretation of differences between the absolute levels of total variances for one of the three measures as compared with those for another, or for white women as compared with nonwhite women, because the absolute size of the measures and of the weights have not been adjusted to common bases by standardization.

[7] This finding does not necessarily imply a cause and effect relationship between type of community of present residence and marriage instability, because many persons move to another size of community—or even to a different region—when their marriage is about to be, or has been, dissolved. In particular, it must be true that many of the farm women move to a village or city if their marriages are disrupted by separation or divorce and take their children, if any, with them.

white women; this virtual lack of difference can be traced to the fact that nonwhite women in the West (the majority of whom are Orientals and Indians) had much lower separation rates than nonwhite women (mostly Negroes) in other regions and thereby contributed a substantial amount of variance on the region classification.

c. By contrast, the variance, for both white and nonwhite groups, in per cent of children not living with both parents was larger by region than by urban-rural residence.

3. The main sources of variance in the separation and divorce ratios were the generally high ratios prevailing in central cities and low ratios in rural areas. Especially important in accounting for this general tendency are the substantial variances contributed by high ratios for nonwhite women in central cities of the North and South and by low ratios for both white and nonwhite women in rural areas.

4. Noteworthy deviations from the general tendency just stated were the substantial variances contributed by low divorce ratios in urbanized areas of the Northeast, where there are heavy concentrations of certain ethnic groups with low divorce proclivities and where the divorce laws are among the strictest in the nation, and by low separation ratios for nonwhite women in the large central cities of urbanized areas in the West (including Alaska and Hawaii, where the majority of persons in the nonwhite races are not Negroes).

5. The variance in per cent of children not living with both parents formed quite different patterns for white groups than for nonwhite groups. The largest variances—hence, the greatest tendencies to deviate from the expected percentages—for white children were for the low percentages throughout the North and on farms (except in the South), and for the high percentages throughout the South and in the nonfarm areas of the West. For nonwhite children not living with both parents, the largest variances were for the low percentages in the urban West and on farms in the South, and for the high percentage in the urban South.

Conclusion. The hypothesis that marriage disruption tends to be more closely related to size of place than to region of residence has been only partly supported by the evidence pre-

sented. The analysis of marriage disruption ratios could be made only for white and nonwhite persons; if it could have been made for white and Negro women, the findings probably would have been more orderly and consistent with the hypothesis— particularly for the West. Moreover, other irregularities in the pattern of these ratios were found in suburban areas, and in the Northeastern urbanized areas where there are concentrations of certain ethnic groups with low divorce rates. The effects of these ethnic distributions may also account, at least in part, for the failure of the per cent of children not living with both parents to conform to the expected pattern. In addition, the distribution of children not living with both parents may have been affected substantially by differences among the types of community with respect to the proportion of such children who were orphans, part orphans, or children left in the care of relatives while the mother moved elsewhere to obtain employment.[8]

Various sources of irregularity in the patterns can be studied in greater detail when the Volume II reports of the 1960 Census of Population become available. In the meantime, the statistics already available can be used quite effectively for analyses of marriage patterns in counties and cities, but with greater effect if the ethnic variables and age are controlled by one method or another. Thus, counties and cities can be classified according to the proportion of Negroes among the nonwhite population and of persons of relevant foreign stocks in the white population as a first step in the calculations. Further stratification by average age of married women might help explain some of the variance, particularly the low disruption rates in the urban fringe. Presumably the smaller and more homogeneous the areas for which the analysis can be carried out, the more meaningful the general patterns are likely to be.[9]

[8] The fact that there were only three available size-of-place categories for per cent of children not living with both parents but six somewhat differently organized ones for the separation and divorce ratios may also have been a contributing factor.

[9] For a recent study of social and economic factors related to the instability of marriage, see Hillman, Karen G.: Marital Instability and Its Relation to Education, Income and Occupation: An Analysis Based on Census Data, *in* Winch, Robert F., McGinnis, Robert and Barringer, Herbert R.: SELECTED STUDIES IN MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY (Revised Ed.). New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962, pp. 603–608.

Appendix Table A. Married women, by color, for the United States and regions, by size of place: 1960. (Numbers in thousands.)

COLOR AND REGION	TOTAL	URBANIZED AREAS		OTHER URBAN		RURAL	
		Central Cities	Urban Fringe	Places of 10,000+	2,500 to 10,000	1,000 to 2,500	Other Rural
White							
United States	38,628	11,513	8,985	3,499	2,974	1,492	10,166
Northeast	10,126	3,594	3,226	640	569	290	1,806
North Central	11,604	3,299	2,372	1,142	952	539	3,300
South	10,695	2,712	1,504	1,116	997	470	3,897
West	6,205	1,907	1,882	601	456	194	1,164
Nonwhite							
United States	4,121	2,226	367	322	224	95	887
Northeast	703	540	106	21	8	3	24
North Central	758	608	68	33	12	4	34
South	2,210	826	119	241	188	78	758
West	450	252	74	27	16	9	71

Source: Same as Table 2.

Appendix Table B. Persons under 18 years of age, by color, for the United States and regions, by urban-rural residence: 1960. (Numbers in thousands.)

COLOR AND REGION	TOTAL	URBAN	RURAL NONFARM	RURAL FARM
White				
United States	55,586	37,200	13,938	4,448
Northeast	13,574	10,338	2,901	336
North Central	17,117	11,022	4,023	2,072
South	15,635	8,827	5,219	1,588
West	9,260	7,012	1,796	452
Nonwhite				
United States	8,724	6,001	1,889	834
Northeast	1,164	1,107	54	3
North Central	1,483	1,393	75	15
South	5,159	2,795	1,581	783
West	918	705	179	34

Source: Same as Table 7.