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EXPLORING THE DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Doris P. Slesinger

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN~MADISON

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Abstract

The household composition of 123 Wisconsin mothers from urban and rural areas who gave birth in 1974 is analyzed with respect to changing family members, female headship and marital status over a 17-month period. One-third of the households changed household types as measured by presence or absence of male partner and/or extended family members. One-third of the women headed households, but only two-thirds remained heads over the time period. The marital category "separated" was least stable, suggesting some ambiguity in self-definition. Poverty status and mother's education were background characteristics most strongly related to household composition changes.

Exploring the Dynamic Relationship between Family and
Household Composition

Purpose

A cross-sectional picture of a population, such as a census, is a
snapshot representation of the structure of a population at one point in
time. Using the "household" and those members living in a household who
make up the "family" as the object of investigation, this paper examines
what lies behind the cross-sectional picture by investigating the
composition of the initial household unit over time, using data from a
prospective study. According to standard definitions of the Census, a
household includes all persons who occupy a housing unit and live and
eat together; and a family consists of two or more persons related to
each other by blood, marriage, or adoption who live together (U.S.
Bureau of Census, 1972:App. 11-14). These definitions have thus ·
excluded those members of households who consider themselves part of a
family, but who are not related by blood, marriage, or adoption.

Glick and Norton (1977:32-35) estimate that in March 1977 about two
million persons "maintained living quarters which they shared at the
time with an unrelated adult of the opposite sex." In one out of three
of these "unmarried couple" households, the woman and an unrelated man
lived together; in one of of five of them, one or more children were
present. These types of households are on the increase. As measured in
the 1960 Census, there were 900,000 adults in such households; by 1970,
one million. But by 1977, an additional 900,000 adults were living in

such households--a 90 percent increase since 1970. There appears to be evidence that these arrangements are relatively short-lived, but no data are available as to the distribution of the length of such unions.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the makeup of a sample of household units over a 17 month period, a sizable proportion of which contain members "living together," and to discuss possible sources of error in the concept and measurement of "family." The following questions are addressed: What is the stability of such units over time? How stable are female-headed households over time? What are the relationships of members who live in these households to the female head? What stability exists in reported marital status by such units over time? And finally, are there sociodemographic correlates of such units?

Study Population

Sample

An opportunity to examine the relationship between household units and family members in those units over a period of time was provided by a study conducted by the author in urban and rural Wisconsin in 1974-1976. A group of women who gave birth in June through December of 1974 were followed for a period of about 17 months. The mothers were interviewed by public health nurses in their homes at three time points, when their infants were approximately 3 months (Time 1), 12 months (Time 2), and 20 months (Time 3). At each interview, all of the household members were listed by age and relationship to the respondent.

The sample was a purposive, rather than a random one--for investi-
gating a fairly uncommon event: inadequate mothering. Therefore, this
analysis cannot describe a population representative of a specific
group, but rather attempts to look within this population as a microcosm
of society, illustrating changes occurring daily in our society which
are not captured by cross-sectional studies.

The original sample consisted of 148 families. Of these, 16 moved
out of the study area during the period of study, 3 refused to continue
with the second or third interview, and in one family, the study infant
died. Five additional families were omitted from this analysis because
the infants were not cared for by their biological mothers after Time 1,
but, instead, by "surrogate mothers." Thus 123 mothers and babies
were followed for 17 months; 84 lived in a metropolitan area and 39 in
rural counties. Seventy percent of the metropolitan group was black;
and about two-thirds of the group were in poverty, as measured by the
Social Security Index of Income, family size, and farm or nonfarm
residence (Community Services Administration, 1975). Other socio-
demographic characteristics of the mothers by race are presented in the
Appendix.

Results

Family and Household Composition

For the purpose of this paper, the households are categorized into
four distinct and mutually exclusive groups:

(1) Study mother living alone with her child or children ($\overset{\text{o}}{+}$Ch).

(2)   Study mother, her child or children, and husband or male
partner ($♀Ch♂$).

(3)   Study mother, her child or children, and extended family
members ($♀ChX$).[1]/

(4)   Study mother, her child or children, husband or male
partner, and extended family members ($♀ChX♂$).

A comparison of the household composition by these classifications
at Times 1, 2, and 3 indicates that none of the figures are signifi-
cantly different from one period of time to another (see Table 1).

Yet, in this data set, it is possible to examine the consistency
with which the families remained in the same categories over this time
period (see Table 2). Overall, about two-thirds of the families
remained in the same classification of household over the 17 month
period. The most stable and by far the most frequent unit was the
traditional one of mother, child(ren), and male partner; 83 percent of
the families remained in this group. Next in stability was the mother,
child(ren), and extended family group; 62 percent remained in this
group. However, just over half of the units of mother and child(ren)
alone remained stable; and only 25 percent of the families with mother,
child(ren), male partner, and extended family stayed in the same
category.

To examine the movement of these units, a careful analysis of all
families that changed classification was performed. Table 3 lists all
households that changed categories, grouping them by type of category at
Time 1. The first group contains 13 families that changed status from
mother living alone with child or children ($♀Ch$) at Time 1. By Time 2,

Table 1

Household Composition of Mothers when their
Infants were 3, 12 and 20 Months Old

N=123

	Time 1 (%)	Time 2 (%)	Time 3 (%)
Mother, child(ren) alone	24.4	27.6	26.0
Mother, child(ren), male partner	47.2	47.2	53.6
Mother, child(ren), extended family	19.5	17.9	15.5
Mother, child(ren), male partner, extended family	8.9	7.3	4.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2

Proportion of Households Remaining Stable
Over 17 Month Time Frame

	Time 1 (N)	Same at All Three Interviews (N)	Proportion Remaining Stable (%)
Mother, child(ren) alone	30	17	56.7
Mother, child(ren), male partner	58	48	82.8
Mother, child(ren), extended family	24	15	62.5
Mother, child(ren), male partner, extended family	11	3	27.3
Total	123	83	67.4

Table 3

Classification of Families Who Changed Categories of Household Composition

Total in Category at Time 1	Number Who Left Category	Household Composition:			Number of Cases	Time 1 Category
		Time 1	Time 2	Time 3		
30	13					**Mother, child(ren) alone (♀Ch)**
		♀Ch	♀Ch♂	♀Ch♂	2	1 Husband moved in (Time 2 and 3)
						1 Male partner moved in (Time 2 and 3)
		♀Ch	♀Ch♂	♀Ch	1	1 Male partner moved in (Time 2), left (Time 3)
		♀Ch	♀Ch♂	♀ChX	1	1 Male partner moved in (Time 2), left, and sister moved in (Time 3)
		♀Ch	♀Ch	♀Ch♂	5	3 Husband moved in (Time 3)
						1 Male partner moved in (Time 3)
						1 Male partner and his 5 children moved in (Time 3)
		♀Ch	♀Ch	♀ChX	1	1 Brother moved in (Time 3)
		♀Ch	♀ChX	♀Ch	2	1 Sister moved in (Time 2) and out (Time 3)
						1 Moved in with parents (Time 2), back into own apartment (Time 3)
		♀Ch	♀ChX	♀ChX	1	1 Moved in with parents (Time 2 and 3)
58	10					**Mother, child(ren), male partner (♀Ch♂)**
		♀Ch♂	♀Ch	♀Ch♂	1	1 Male partner left (Time 2), husband joined family (Time 3)
		♀Ch♂	♀Ch	♀Ch	3	2 Husband left (Time 2 and 3)
						1 Male partner left (Time 2 and 3)
		♀Ch♂	♀Ch♂X	♀Ch♂	2	1 Extended moved in (Time 2), then out (Time 3)
						1 Family moved in with extended (Time 2), then back alone (Time 3)
		♀Ch♂	♀Ch♂X	♀Ch♂X	2	1 Family moved in with in-laws (Time 2), got own place (Time 3), but sister and twin babies moved in with them
						1 Sister and baby moved in (Time 2 and 3)
		♀Ch♂	♀Ch♂X	♀ChX	1	1 Moved into parents' home (Time 2), husband left (Time 3) and study mother stayed with her parents
		♀Ch♂	♀ChX	♀Ch♂X	1	1 Divorced husband and moved into brother-in-law's home and took care of his children (Time 2); remarried husband, moved into own place; father-in-law, another brother-in-law and his girlfriend moved in (Time 3)

Table 3 continued...

Total in Category at Time 1	Number Who Left Category	Household Composition: Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Number of Cases	Time 1 Category
24	9					**Mother, child(ren), extended family ($\female$ChX)**
		$\female$ChX	$\female$Ch$\male$	$\female$Ch$\male$	1	1 Lived with stepsister and her child (Time 1), moved in with boyfriend (Time 2 and 3)
		$\female$ChX	$\female$Ch	$\female$Ch$\male$	1	1 Lived with brother (Time 1), brother moved out (Time 2), boyfriend moved in (Time 3)
		$\female$ChX	$\female$Ch	$\female$Ch	5	3 Lived with mother and siblings (Time 1), moved into own apartment (Time 2 and 3) 1 Lived with sister and her baby (Time 1), moved into own apartment (Time 2 and 3) 1 Brother lived in household (Time 1), brother moved out (Time 2 and 3)
		$\female$ChX	$\female$ChX	$\female$Ch	2	1 Lived with parents and 5 siblings, 3 nephews and nieces (Time 1 and 2), moved out to own apartment (Time 3) 1 Lived with foster mother, 4 foster siblings, 1 brother (Time 1 and 2), moved out to rooming house (Time 3)
11	8					**Mother, child(ren), male partner, extended family ($\female$Ch$\male$X)**
		$\female$Ch$\male$X	$\female$Ch$\male$	$\female$Ch$\male$	5	1 Lived with husband and cousin (Time 1), cousin moved out (Time 2 and 3) 1 Lived with husband and mother (Time 1), mother moved out (Time 2 and 3) 1 Lived with husband, 4 stepchildren and 2 step-grandchildren, 6 own children (Time 1), stepdaughter and 2 step-grandchildren moved out (Time 2 and 3) 1 Lived with husband and in-laws (Time 1), moved out with husband to mobile home (Time 2 and 3) 1 Lived with husband, mother and sister (Time 1), mother died and moved with husband to new home (Time 2 and 3)
		$\female$Ch$\male$X	$\female$Ch$\male$X	$\female$Ch$\male$	1	1 Lived with husband and mother-in-law (Time 1 and 2), moved to own apartment with husband (Time 3)
		$\female$Ch$\male$X	$\female$Ch$\male$X	$\female$Ch	1	1 Lived with husband, parents, siblings (Time 1), moved with husband to sister's home (Time 2), husband left family and mother and children moved to own home (Time 3)
		$\female$Ch$\male$X	$\female$ChX	$\female$Ch	1	1 Lived with boyfriend's family (great-grandmother, mother, 7 siblings) (Time 1); moved into sister's home with baby (Time 2); moved into own apartment (Time 3)

four families gained an adult male in the house. Two of these lost him

by Time 3: one family went back to living alone and the other was

joined by the mother's sister. Five additional families gained a male

adult by Time 3: three of the males were husbands, and two were

friends. Of the remaining four families, two moved in with parents at

Time 2, but one was back alone by Time 3, and in two cases, siblings

joined the mother's household.

The second group consists of the mother, child(ren), and male

partner ($\female$Cho$\male$). Ten out of 58 families changed their status. Six of

these ten involved interaction with extended kin by Time 2: four moved

in with relatives and two had siblings join their household; one who

moved in with relatives and one whose relatives joined them returned to

their independent status by Time 3 and four stayed with their kin. Four

of the original ten lost their male partner: two were husbands and two

were male friends; one mother was divorced at Time 2, but remarried the

same man by Time 3.

The reader can examine the third and fourth groups of families in

similar detail, noting the variety of change in household members. This

detailed description has one primary purpose--to indicate how variable

the household composition is from one time to another in the lives of

mothers of young infants. Relationships with relatives appear to be

fluid in this sample.

Female Headship

Much has been written about increasing numbers of female-headed

households in contemporary society. Accompanying this fact are the

implicit assumptions that the women live alone with dependents, and that the increasing number means that the pool is getting larger. In response to the first assumption, that most female heads live alone with their dependent children, families with female heads have been classified by family type in Table 4. At Time 1, 47 households had female heads (38.2%); of these, 30 female heads (63.8%) lived alone. This dropped slightly, to 25 out of 46 at Time 2 (54.3%), and 24 out of 41 (58.5%) at Time 3. Thus, at any one point in time, about 60 percent of female heads do in fact live alone with their children, but the other 40 percent of female heads have other adults in the household. Table 4 also shows that there are female heads in every family type, including those with an adult male in the house; and that there is only a modest amount of change in female headship over this time period. However, in data not shown here, there is considerable change in headship within each family. For example, in the relatively stable unit--mother, child(ren), male partner--out of 58 households, 11 changed heads during this period. And in the 30 families of mother and child(ren) alone, 10 changed heads over the 17 month period.

Table 5 is arranged to address the question of how long female heads of families at Time 1 remained heads over the 17 month period examined here. It reveals that of the 47 women who were female heads at Time 1, only 30 (63.8%) were still heads 17 months later. But comparing this to Time 3 in Table 4, it is evident that the number of female heads in total did not decline by one-third. Instead, the households were occasionally headed by women other than the study mother, e.g. her

Table 4

Female Headship by Family Types

	Total N at Time 1	Female Heads at:					
		Time 1		Time 2		Time 3	
		(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Mother and child(ren) alone	30	30	100.0	25	83.3	24	80.0
Mother, child(ren), male partner	58	3	5.2	6	10.3	3	5.2
Mother, child(ren), extended family	24	13	54.2	13	54.2	12	50.0
Mother, child(ren), male partner, extended family	11	1	9.1	2	18.2	2	18.2
Total	123	47	38.2	46	37.4	41	33.3

Table 5

Length of Time Females Remained Heads by Family Type

	Number of Female Heads at Time 1	Remained at Time 2	Remained at Time 3
	t	t+9 months	t+17 months
Mother and child(ren) alone	30	24	20
Mother, child(ren), male partner	3	0	0
Mother, child(ren), extended family	13	12	9
Mother, child(ren), male partner, extended family	1	1	1
Total	47	37	30

mother, foster mother, or older sister. It is also noteworthy that these changes occur fairly rapidly, for the period under investigation here is less than a year and a half.

Marital Status

Finally, a more traditional approach can be taken with these families. The women were asked their marital status at each interview. Table 6 shows the proportion remaining in the same marital classification over the period of the study. Only a few women (13) actually changed their marital status over this period. However, there were 9 different patterns for the 13 women who changed status:

```
2 married    →  separated
2 separated  →  married
2 divorced   →  married
1 single     →  married
1 divorced   →  separated*
1 separated  →  single*
1 separated  →  divorced
1 single     →  separated   →  married*
1 married    →  divorced    →  married*
```

(Those marked with (*) are status changes that appear inaccurate as reported.)

Often when their living arrangements changed, the women would report a different marital status. Sometimes they would tell the public health nurse at the second or third interview that at the first interview they didn't feel they trusted or knew her well enough to tell her the truth. Other women appeared to be completely disinterested as to whether they reported single or separated. It is likely that some who

Table 6

Proportion of Households Remaining Stable in
Marital Status over 17 Month Time Frame

	Time 1 (N)	Same at All Three Interviews (N)	Proportion Remaining Stable (%)
Married	62	58	93.5
Separated	8	4	50.0
Divorced	7	4	57.1
Single	46	44	95.6
Total	123	110	89.4

reported separated were being accurate for their current status, but they had never married the man they had been living with. Thus, at the first interview they felt separated, however as time passed, they no longer felt separated so they reported they were single.

To summarize, about 90 percent of the 123 women remained in the marital status they specified in the first interview during the whole 17 month period. Of the 13 women who changed status, 8 reported changes that are consistent with the standard definitions of these statuses; that is, they changed, for example, from single to married, separated to divorced, separated to married, or married to separated. However, five women (four percent of the sample) gave responses that were puzzling. In studies, researchers often assume that these cases are mis-reported, mis-coded, or mis-punched, but at the least, do not represent the actual situation. Upon closer inspection, it appears that in four cases this is due to a fuzzy interpretation of "separated."

The first case, "divorced" to "separated," involved a 24 year old woman with five children who was living on welfare payments. First she reported herself as divorced; but for the second and third interview, she was living with a new male friend and reported herself as separated. In all likelihood she had never been married. Another woman, who changed from "separated" to "single," was 24, living with her two children, and receiving welfare. At the third interview she changed her status to single, perhaps because she no longer "felt" separated. One of the women who reported a change from "separated" to "married," had been separated from her male friend at Time 1, but then married another

man at Time 3. The woman who reported "single → separated → married" has an interesting history. At Time 1 she was living with her seven children and male friend, who was father of the study child. She was on welfare, and secretive about the man. She had married between Time 1 and 2 but things did not work out, and by Time 2 he was not in the household, so she reported ¡herself as separated. However, at Time 3 he was back in the household, so she reported herself married. The final case, "married → divorced → married," involved an 18 year old woman who was living with a male partner at Time 1, but had not been married previously. He apparently "ran around and drank," and between Time 1 and 2 she kicked him out of the house. However, he was "saved," i.e., found religion, and they became legally married between the second and third interview.

Sociodemographic Correlates of Household Stability

In order to find out some of the characteristics of the mothers who were likely to live in less stable households, each family was classified as either having a stable household composition or a changing one. If a mother changed in classification from one category to another over the three time periods, she was classified as "changing." Table 7 presents separately for whites and nonwhites the proportion of mothers who changed categories by age, educational level, rural-urban residence, poverty status and the parity of the study baby.

Nonwhite mothers had somewhat higher proportions of changing household composition than whites (40.7 percent compared with 26.6 percent), although the difference was not statistically significant.

As shown in Table 7, three variables appear to have statistically significant relationships to changing household composition: mother's age, education, and poverty status. The group with highest change is the 20 to 24 year old nonwhite group, with two-thirds of that group changing the composition of their households over the 17 month period. The pattern appears to be somewhat different in the white households, with the youngest mothers, i.e., those under 20, more likely to have changing households.

Mothers who have attained higher educational levels have more stable households in both the white and nonwhite groups, and the difference is statistically significant for the total group. The same pattern is shown for poverty status, with both white and nonwhite mothers at or above the poverty level having more stable households than those below the poverty level. Again, the difference is statistically significant for the total group.

Because of the small number of cases, it is not possible to isolate the effect of poverty status and evaluate the impact of education or race separately. But because the pattern of the relationship between stability of household and both poverty level and educational level is so consistent, and because the nonwhite group has a higher proportion of women who are both poor and not high school graduates, it is likely that there is little difference in household stability for this sample of families that can be attributed to white or nonwhite status.

Table 7

Proportion of Mothers with Changing Household Composition
Over 17 Month Time Frame

	White		Nonwhite		Total Group	
	Percentage who Changed	Total N	Percentage who Changed	Total N	Percentage who Changed	Total N
Age						
13-19	41.2	17	26.1	23	32.5	40
20-24	28.6	28	66.7	21	44.9	49
25-45	26.6	19	26.7	15	17.6	34
			$\chi^2 = 9.13$		$\chi^2 = 6.73$	
			$p \leq .01$		$p \leq .05$	
Education						
Less than HS graduate	37.5	32	43.2	44	40.8	76
HS graduate or more	15.6	32	33.3	15	21.3	47
	$\chi^2 = 2.88$				$\chi^2 = 4.14$	
	$p \leq .10$				$p \leq .05$	
Rural-Urban Residence						
Milwaukee	32.0	25	40.7	59	38.1	84
Other	23.1	39		0	23.1	39
Poverty Status						
Below poverty level	34.5	29	47.7	44	42.5	73
At or above poverty	20.0	35	25.0	12	21.3	47
Missing				3		3
					$\chi^2 = 4.80$	
					$p \leq .05$	
Parity of Study Baby						
1	37.0	27	33.3	18	35.6	45
2	21.4	14	35.3	17	29.0	31
3+	17.4	23	50.0	24	34.0	47
Total	26.6	64	40.7	59	33.3	123

Summary

This paper has examined in detail three different classifications of data often used by demographers and others in a standard census undertaking: household composition, female headship, and marital status. All three areas were examined with respect to stability over time. Approximately the same proportional distribution of mothers for each variable at each time point was found. However, tracing each mother over the time period revealed considerable instability.

Household Composition

At any one time in this sample of 123 families, about one out of four families consisted of mother and child(ren) living alone, two out of four consisted of mother, child(ren) and male partner, and the other 25 percent involved extended family. However, the same families did not remain in the same grouping. In the entire sample, about two out of three remained with the same family composition over the 17 month period of investigation; the other third appeared to be somewhat fluid. Ranking the household types from most to least stable, the grouping of mother, child(ren) and male partner was most likely to remain constant, followed by mother and child(ren) living with extended family. Third was mother and child(ren) living alone, and the least stable were units composed of mother, child(ren), male partner, and extended family. No generalizations seem to be appropriate as to the patterns of the changes.

Female Headship

In this sample, about one-third of the households were classified
as female-headed. About two-thirds of this group consisted of mothers
living alone with their child(ren); the remaining third had other adults
in the household. In the latter case, of course, the study mother was
not necessarily the female head. It might have been her mother, mother-
in-law, sister, or other relative. Looking at the likelihood of women
in this group remaining as female heads, it was noted that only 30 of
the original 47 households still had a female head by the end of the 17
month period.

Marital Status

Only 10 percent of this sample reported a change in marital status
over the 17 month period. Of these 13 cases, however, 9 different
patterns were reported. Five of these patterns were legally impossible
to experience, e.g., separated → single. When examining the household
relationships of specific cases, the problems appeared to be mostly with
the "separated" category. Respondents often did not consider separation
as a state that had to follow a legal marriage. It was more a reporting
of the feeling-state of a relationship rather than an official classifi-
cation of marital status.

Demographic Correlates

Finally, the changing or unchanging status of each family was
examined with respect to a number of sociodemographic characteristics,
including mother's age, education, and race, the rural-urban classifica-
tion of her residence, the parity of the study baby, and the poverty

level of the family. Education and poverty status of the mother were most highly related to change status, followed by age of the mother in the nonwhite group. Mothers with highest proportions of change had not graduated from high school, were below poverty level, and, for nonwhites, were in the 20 to 24 year old age range. For whites they were in the youngest age group, i.e., 19 or younger.

Discussion

This paper presents evidence to suggest that researchers must be wary of using census or cross-sectional data to analyze certain types of research questions. It does not suggest that a census does not catch a representative sample of a population at one point in time, but rather that the status as measured at that point may not remain stable over a reasonable length of time.

Ross and Sawhill (1975) suggest that the female-headed household is for the most part a temporary unit which frequently changes into a different household category; that is, if a woman divorces and forms her own unit, she is not likely to remain in a female-headed household for the remainder of her life--because either she will remarry or move in with others, or her child or children will leave her home. It is a "time of transition."

A second point concerns the standard definition of "family." What the Census may define as "family" appears to be reasonable for this sample because it is basically a sample of mothers who had recently given birth and who were living with their babies. Therefore the unit

always consisted of two or more persons related by blood. However, in one out of ten households there was an unrelated male adult who was considered part of the family by the respondent. The Census does not include these men in its definition, but classifies them as "secondary" individuals.

A third point revolves around the term "separated," which may need some special investigation to determine how it is defined in the minds of respondents. In the present study, respondents were more likely to consider it a feeling-state about a relationship rather than a legal status. Although very few in the sample reported being in this category (7%), it was the main source of seemingly inappropriate reporting.

Significantly, the latter point is supported by the amount of inconsistency reported in the Current Population Survey Match Survey for the 1970 Census. In this report, in the tables of "indexes of inconsistency" in marital status, the category "separated" always reached the highest levels of inconsistency reported. For example, only 58.2 percent of the males and 72.2 percent of the females reported they were separated on both the self-reported U.S. Census form and to an interviewer for the Current Population Survey (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975).

Those who use female-headed households as a special group for analysis should be apprised not only of the changeability of this group (Ross and Sawhill, 1975), but also that households headed by females may have adult males in them. One should not assume that these women live in households without adult males, nor that their children have no male

role-models. Support for this point is found in an in-depth study of young adult black males in St. Louis, where over 60 percent of the men said that they had come from "broken homes." Yet, as the author notes, these men grew up in homes with one or the other natural parent, often in arrangements that included relatives. It was often the maternal extended family that was a source of support, and this extended family "typically included adults of both sexes" (Ratcliff, 1977:57).

Finally, in looking at the few longitudinal studies based on a national population in which household composition is considered an important factor, one additional point is evident. New lines of research have indicated that changing household composition affects and is affected by other characteristics under study. Morgan and his colleagues (1974; Duncan and Morgan, 1976) clearly demonstrate the large family compositional changes over the seven years under investigation, and the often devastating income effects on the unit because of these changes. For example, divorce, which creates a new female-headed household, often also creates a household in poverty; or a young adult marrying and leaving the parental home may convert one household with a substantial income into two units with two very modest incomes. Interaction between changing family composition and income was also clearly expounded by the authors of the Seattle-Denver Income Maintenance Experiment report. The authors comment that cross-sectional analysis using current marital status obscures the causal effect of marital status on income. Rapid changes in marital status may have drastic effects on earned income (Hannan et al., 1976:7).

In conclusion, this microanalysis of some family and household units clearly demonstrates the dynamic relationship between these concepts, and the fluidity present in our society today. Since this area of investigation has been neglected to date, it is not possible to comment on whether there is greater fluidity today than in the past.

It should be noted that this sample of families is not representative of counter-culture groups such as group families or communes. The households represented here are a relatively on-going, albeit small, part of the general population, and their life style has been over-shadowed by the vast numbers of people who live in the more traditional family units. Clearly it is imperative to investigate these dynamic familial and household relationships in a representative sample of the population. The patterns and dynamics that were uncovered in this small sample of mostly poverty mothers cannot be considered "typical" of any group. Yet these fluid relationships exist, and it is essential to examine them in future longitudinal research.

Appendix

Background Characteristics of Mothers by Race

	White (N=64)		Nonwhite (N=59)		Total (N=123)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Education						
Grades 1-8	6	9.4	7	11.9	13	10.6
Grades 9-11	26	40.6	37	62.7	63	51.2
HS graduate	24	37.5	13	22.0	37	30.1
College	8	12.5	2	3.4	10	8.1
Rural/Urban Residence						
Rural farm	6	9.4	0	--	6	4.9
Rural nonfarm	29	45.3	0	--	29	23.6
City, 2500+	4	6.2	0	--	4	3.2
Milwaukee	25	39.1	59	100.0	84	68.3
Poverty Status[a]						
Less than 75%	19	29.7	24	40.7	43	35.0
Less than 100%	9	14.1	18	30.5	27	22.0
Less than 125%	8	12.5	6	10.2	14	11.4
125% or more	28	43.8	11	18.6	39	31.7
Parity						
One	27	42.2	18	30.5	45	36.6
Two	14	21.9	17	28.8	31	25.2
Three	9	14.1	6	10.2	15	12.2
Four-five	8	12.5	9	15.3	17	13.8
Six-ten	6	9.4	9	15.3	15	12.2
Age						
13-17	6	9.4	10	16.9	16	13.0
18-19	11	17.2	13	22.0	24	19.5
20-24	21	35.6	28	43.7	49	39.9
25-29	10	17.0	8	12.5	18	14.6
30-34	6	9.4	2	3.4	8	6.5
35-39	4	6.2	2	3.4	6	4.9
40-45	1	1.6	1	1.7	2	1.6
Household Income						
$2,999 or less	11	17.2	14	23.7	25	20.3
$3,000-4,999	14	21.9	15	25.4	29	23.6
$5,000-6,999	18	28.1	11	18.6	29	23.6
$7,000-9,999	11	17.2	12	20.3	23	18.7
$10,000 or more	10	15.6	6	10.2	16	13.0
Missing	0	--	1	1.7	1	0.8
Marital Status						
Married	49	76.6	13	22.0	62	50.4
Separated	1	1.6	7	11.8	8	6.5
Divorced	5	7.8	2	3.4	7	5.7
Single	9	14.1	37	62.7	46	37.4

[a]Using guidelines from Community Services Administration, 1975.

Footnotes

[1]Extended family is defined as any relative of the study mother or her male partner.

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