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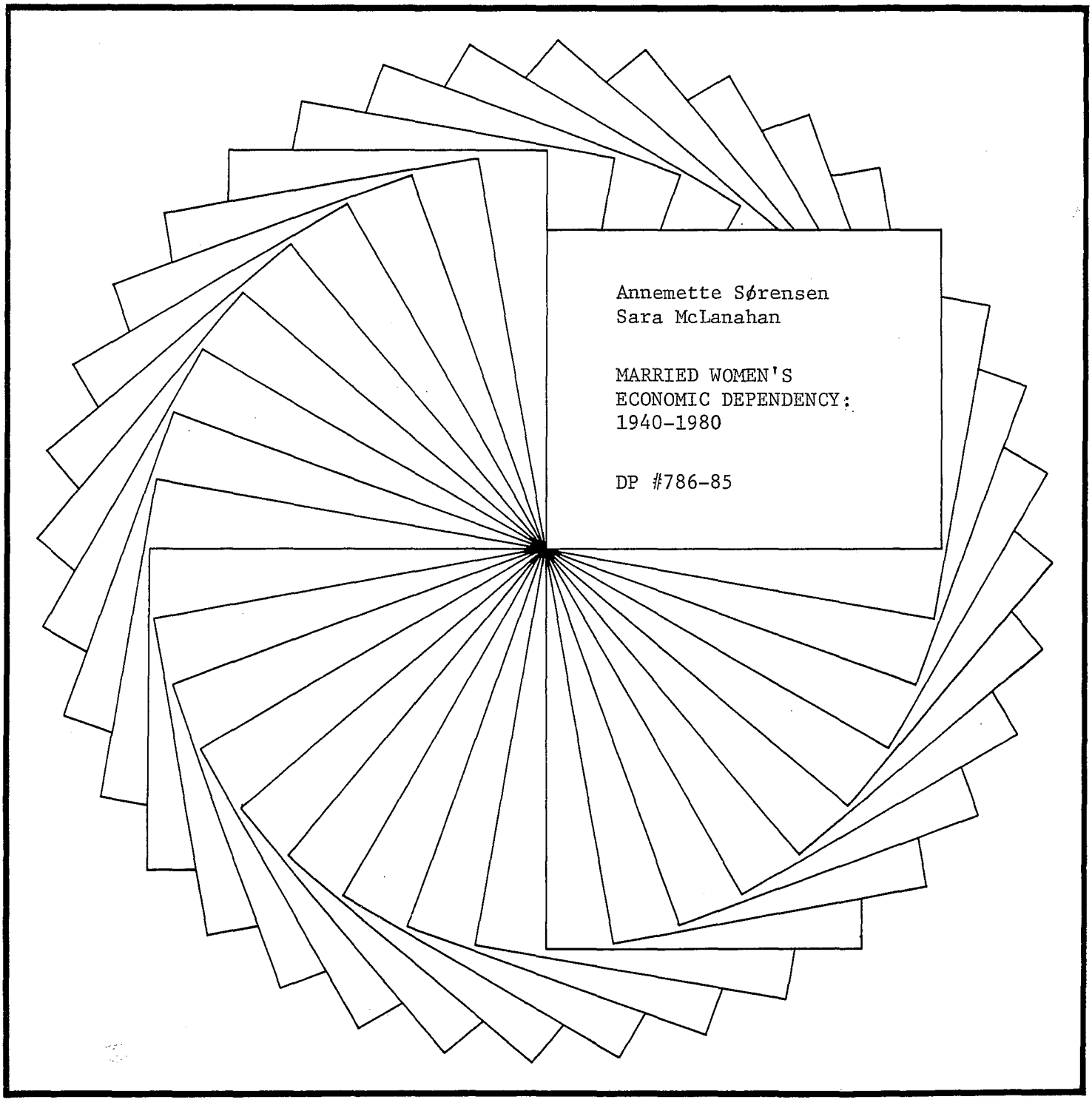

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ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY:
1940-1980

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Abstract

This paper examines the change in the extent to which married women were economically dependent on their husbands over the period from 1940 to 1980. Economic dependency is operationalized as the relative contribution made by the wife to the couple's total income.

It is found that the situation in 1980 is greatly different from the situation in 1940, when the vast majority of married women were completely dependent on their spouses for economic support. Today wives who are completely dependent constitute a distinct minority, and the mean level of dependency is much lower than it was forty years ago.

Minority women have been less dependent than white women throughout this period, and the difference appears to be widening. Married women become less dependent as they grow older, owing in part to the social security benefits that accrue to them whether they were in the workforce or not.

A multivariate analysis pinpoints the source of most marital dependency to be the labor supply of married women. They contribute less than do their spouses to the family income because they spend less time in the labor force. Gender differences in wages appear to play a role, particularly in explaining the dependency of minority women in 1960 and 1970.

MARRIED WOMEN'S ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY: 1940-1980

"..it has proved oppressive for women living with men they have to depend upon [financially], and disastrous for the interests of all women." (Barrett, 1980, p. 219)

"The power of woman is her dependence, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection." (Pastoral letter, 19th Century; cited in Freeman, 1984, p. 534)

INTRODUCTION

Married women's economic dependency is an issue over which there is considerable disagreement. Feminist theorists concerned with the development and perpetuation of gender inequality see dependency as one of the central mechanisms by which women's subordinate position in society is maintained (Hartman, 1976; Barrett, 1980; Brenner and Ramas, 1984; Smith, 1984). Economic theory takes the opposite position, viewing married women's dependency as the natural outcome of rational decisions made by husbands and wives (Becker, 1985). Whereas the feminist perspective sees dependency as the root of all evil, the economic view treats dependency as beneficial or at least benign. For some, independence, the converse of dependency, is actually viewed as having detrimental effects inasmuch as it is associated with higher marital instability and lower fertility. Somewhat surprisingly, sociologists have had relatively little to say about women's dependency on men, although wives' financial contribution to family income (which directly determines their economic dependency) has been of interest to some (Oppenheimer, 1977; Rainwater, 1979). The focus in these studies, however, has been on the woman's contribution to the family's standard of living and on the consequences

for the family of her participation in paid work. Alternatively, a focus on economic dependency directs our attention to the woman herself and to the consequences of her contribution, or noncontribution, for her own economic situation and stability.

The notion of dependency underlies one of the fundamental assumptions of stratification theory; namely, that the family is the unit of stratification and, therefore, that rewards accruing from the family's position in the stratification hierarchy benefit ALL family members equally (Goldthorpe, 1983; Lockwood, forthcoming). Using economic rewards as an example, married couples are assumed to combine their individual incomes into a single family resource that is shared equally by husband and wife. Thus it is assumed that the economic status of spouses is the same; there is no inequality between men and women as long as they are married. Given this assumption and given the prevailing division of labor within the family, it also follows that the condition for this equality between husbands and wives is the economic dependency of married women. That is, husbands and wives are economic equals only if there is a transfer from the husband to the wife large enough to provide her with equivalent economic resources. This transfer is the source of her dependence. The larger the transfer relative to her own contribution to family resources, the greater is her dependence on her spouse.

The economic dependency of married women is a function of several factors: the wife's relative contribution to the couple's labor supply, her relative earnings capacity (based on differences in human capital and opportunities in the labor market), and husband-wife differences in economic resources other than earnings. Variations in labor supply and

income, in turn, are a reflection of the division of labor within the family. Consequently, they are closely related to the maternal responsibilities of the wife and vary considerably over the life course.

Although equal sharing of family resources may be a reasonable assumption, and although the division of labor within the family may be rational at least in the short run from the family's point of view, we believe that the economic dependency that results from this rationality is problematic for married women. Moreover, we concur to a great extent with those who view economic dependency as problematic, not only for married women but for all women. At the same time we would emphasize the importance of understanding the ambivalence attached to any kind of dependency (Starr, 1982). Clearly, there are benefits associated with the economic gains from marriage, and there is no doubt that many women take pleasure in the traditional division of labor and the feeling of being taken care of and protected against the vicissitudes of the world.

Such benefits notwithstanding, the costs associated with dependency may be substantial. First, dependency is an important vehicle for the maintenance of women's subordinate position in the labor market, since it becomes the rationale for individual women to make decisions that impede their labor market careers and it enables institutions to justify paying higher wages to males. Second, it has consequences for women's status within marriage: power differentials between husbands and wives are directly related to differences in contributions to family income (Hood, 1983); women who are not completely dependent on their spouses are significantly better off in terms of health and psychological well-being

(Bernard, 1972; Birnbaum, 1975); and there is some evidence that family violence might be reduced, or at least better controlled, if women were less dependent on their spouses (Russell, 1982; Schwendinger and Schwendinger, 1983). Finally, women's income stability over the life course may be greatly affected by economic dependency in marriage. The greater a woman's dependency, the greater her potential loss of income should she lose her spouse through premature death or divorce. Since divorce and separation have become increasingly common and since economic equality for women is conditional on staying married, the risk of future loss in economic status would appear to be an important component of women's life chances. The gains women may reap from their dependence on men in marriage carry a price in the form of increased economic vulnerability. By virtue of their economic dependency, women are exposed to far greater risks of poverty and oscillations in social status than are men. In sum, we argue that an examination of the economic dependency of married women is essential for our understanding of women's position in society and of stratification systems and their consequences for individual life chances.[1]

The purpose of the analysis presented below is to begin an exploration of this aspect of the American stratification system by examining the extent to which married women are economically dependent on their husbands and how their dependency has changed over time. We begin by describing historical trends in wives' dependency from 1940 to 1980.

We expect that the degree of dependency has been mitigated by the increase in married women's labor force participation during these 40 years. The question is, how much? Variations in economic dependency over the life course or by age should also reflect changes in women's labor supply, which are closely related to maternal responsibilities. We expect married women to work less and therefore to be more dependent when their children are young. We also expect the relative contribution of wives to be somewhat greater during the later years, when couples rely more heavily on unearned income such as Social Security, which tends to be more equally distributed between spouses. Wives who have made no contribution to Social Security, or whose contribution entitles them to less than the minimum benefit provided to full-time housewives, receive a pension equal to one-half of their spouse's benefit. Other women, who have worked more hours and/or more years, receive an even greater pension. Although one might argue that Social Security benefits stemming from the husband's lifetime contributions should not be counted as the wife's income, we disagree for the following reasons: first, Social Security payments are made directly to the wife; second, they are not controlled by the spouse nor paid at his discretion; and finally they are not dependent on his presence--they will continue, without reduction, should the husband die or the couple divorce. For these reasons we treat Social Security benefits as belonging to the wife and as part of her personal income.

Following the description of trends and life-course variations in economic dependency, we analyze the sources of individual-level

variations, particularly the relative importance of wages and changes in labor supply over time.

Ideally, the assessment of trends in economic dependency should take into account economic resources in the form of assets as well as income. Unfortunately, the census data used here only permit an examination of married women's income dependency, i.e., the extent to which their incomes are derived from their spouses. In general, if resources other than income (e.g., a house) are owned jointly by husband and wife, our measure of dependency will be too high. This would be true only if assets are owned jointly or equally or if women exercise more control over assets than men do. We use the term economic dependency and income dependency synonymously, although we realize that the latter may give a somewhat exaggerated estimate of the former.

A wife's economic dependency is determined by her relative contribution to the couple's income. Stated another way, it measures the extent to which her standard of living is derived from a transfer of income from her husband. The economic dependency of the wife is defined as the difference between the husband and wife's relative contributions to their combined income:

$$DEP = INCH/(INCH + INCW) - INCW/(INCH + INCW),$$

where INCH and INCW are the husband and wife's income from all sources.[2] If the wife is completely dependent on her spouse, DEP is 1, if the husband is completely dependent, DEP is -1, and if there is no economic dependence, DEP takes the value of zero. The interpretation of the measure of economic dependency is straightforward. A value of .4 means

that the wife derives 40% of her share of the couple's combined income from her spouse. A negative value means that the husband is dependent on his wife for economic support.

THE DATA

The data are taken from the Public Use Samples from the decennial U.S. censuses in 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980. For each year, random samples of white and nonwhite married couples (spouse present) were selected. For each couple we have data pertaining to each spouse (age, sources of income, and labor supply) as well as data pertaining to the couple (household composition, place of residence, and type of residence).

The data on income are essential to the analysis of economic dependency. In each census, income data were obtained for the year preceding the census (i.e., 1939, 1949, 1959, 1969, and 1979). The questions asked about income varied somewhat from year to year, and it was not possible to get information about the income of both husband and wife in the 1950 census. The most detailed income data were obtained in 1980, and these are used as a standard for comparison.

For 1980, data are available on both the husband and wife's income in 1979. Each spouse's income is broken down into the following sources: earnings from wages, self-employment and farming, interest and dividends, social security income, income from welfare benefits, and income from other sources. Most of this information is also available for 1970. In 1960, however, unearned income is combined into one category. Apart from these small differences in the detail with which the sources of income

are given, the income data from 1960 to 1980 are comparable and there are no special problems to deal with. Unfortunately that is not the case for 1940 and 1950.

For 1940, only income derived from wages or salary is available. The self-employed were only asked whether they had an income of $50 or more during the previous year. For this reason, the estimates of economic dependency in 1940 are based on those couples who report that neither spouse is self-employed. This raises the possibility of biased estimates, for it is likely that couples consisting of at least one spouse who is self-employed are a selective sample of all couples and probably one in which the economic dependency of the wives is somewhat greater.

To assess the extent of bias in the 1940 estimates, we have calculated similar estimates for 1960-1980. A comparison of these with the estimates based on data for all couples suggests that economic dependency is indeed somewhat underestimated if it is based only on couples among whom there are no self-employed workers. The data also suggest that the 1940 estimates may be more biased for nonwhite women than for white women.

For 1950 the income data present a different set of problems. It is impossible to obtain income data for both the husband and the wife, and income and total family income are available only for male heads of households. The implications of this are twofold: first, it is necessary to work with income data for husbands and their families, and second, wife's income must be estimated, since it was not asked directly. The difference between total family income and husband's income is a good estimate of the wife's income if there are no other income producers in

the family. Therefore, we have restricted the sample for 1950 to couples living alone or with children under 18 years old. This restriction excludes 29% of the white couples and 39% of the nonwhite couples.

It is very likely that this restriction affects the estimate of economic dependency. To assess the severity of the bias, we calculated economic dependency in 1960 for women living only with their spouse or with spouse and children under 18. A comparison between these estimates and those based on the full sample of married couples in 1960 shows that there is a slight downward bias in the estimate based on the selective sample. It also shows that the bias is greatest for white women aged 70 or older and for nonwhite women aged 60 and older. In sum, the estimates of economic dependency for both 1940 and 1950 are probably biased downward, which means that the change from 1940 to 1980 will be somewhat underestimated.

TRENDS IN MARRIED WOMEN'S ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY: 1940-1980

There has been a dramatic and very substantial increase since 1940 in the likelihood that married women will make a financial contribution to the couple's income (see Table 1). In 1940 approximately 84% of white married women and 69% of nonwhite married women made no contribution at all to family income. In 1960 just over half of the white women and just under half of the nonwhite women made no contribution. By 1980 the proportion of noncontributors had declined even further; only 31% of the white and 27% of the nonwhite women were completely dependent on their husbands for economic support. This represents a conservative estimate of the trend, since the estimates for 1940 are biased downward.

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Table 1

Economic Dependency of Nonwhite and White Married Women, 1940-1980

Married Women	1940[a]		1950[b]		1960		1970		1980	
	NW	W	NW	W	NW	W	NW	W	NW	W
100% dependent on spouse	69%	84%	71%	76%	46%	55%	35%	43%	27%	31%
100% supporting spouse	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
Not dependent[c]	6	5	6	6	12	9	17	11	23	15
Mean dependency score	.76	.86	.80	.84	.66	.74	.54	.66	.44	.58

[a]The figures for 1940 are based on wage and salary earners only.

[b]The figures for 1950 are based on data for couples living alone or with children under 18 years old.

[c]Women in this category have dependency scores between -.2 and .2, meaning that they contribute between 40 and 60% of the couple's income.

Concurrent with the decline in the proportion of married women who are completely dependent, we see an increase in the proportion of women who are economically independent of their spouses. In 1960 one out of ten married women made contributions to family income that were very close to that of their spouses. By 1980, this had increased to one out of four nonwhite women and to almost one out of six white women. Very few married women contribute all of the couple's income and this has not changed over time.

The trend in the average level of economic dependency is clear; there has been a very substantial reduction in dependency for both white and nonwhite women. In 1940, white married women, on average, had to rely on their husbands to provide 86% of their economic support. By 1980, their dependency had been reduced to 58%. Nonwhite women are consistently less dependent than white women, and the difference between white and nonwhite women appears to be increasing over time, with nonwhite women moving towards independence at a faster rate than white women. From 1960 to 1980 the dependency of nonwhite women was reduced by a third (from 66 to 44%) whereas the dependency of white women was reduced by about 20%.

The difference between the dependency of white and minority women points to one of the ironies about gender inequality in American society. While we have interpreted this difference as showing that minority women and their spouses are closer to a state of equality, it might also be viewed as evidence that minority women have less opportunity to find a marriage partner who can raise their economic status substantially above that which they can provide for themselves. This is just one example of

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the dictum that independence and equality for women may come at the price of relative poverty.

As expected, there is some variation in women's economic dependency over the life course. The single most important observation is that older women are significantly less dependent on their spouses for economic support than younger women. We cannot estimate dependency for older women in 1940, but from 1950 onwards the data strongly support this conclusion (Tables 2 and 3). This provides initial confirmation for the hypothesis that gender differences in unearned income are smaller than gender differences in earnings. Second, the age pattern for nonwhite women in all years is one of decreasing dependency, whereas for white women the 30-39 year-old women seem to be more dependent than older and younger women.

It is difficult to explain these changes over time and with age without introducing more detailed information. Therefore, in the following analyses we focus specifically on the 1960 to 1980 period, for which we have information on labor supply, unearned income, and personal characteristics. This information allows to the examine the relative importance of these factors in explaining the decline in economic dependency and the life-course variations that we have just described. First we examine the role of labor supply and then we proceed to a multivariate analysis of the determinants of economic dependency.

DETERMINANTS OF ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY: 1960-1980

There is no doubt that husband-wife differences in labor supply are one of the main determinants of economic interdependence. Indeed, under

Table 2

Age Variations in Nonwhite Wives' Economic Dependency, 1940-1980

Age of Wife	Economic Dependency Score				
	1940[a]	1950[b]	1960	1970	1980
< 20	.80	.92	.74	.68	.64
20-29	.80	.84	.72	.54	.46
30-39	.72	.80	.68	.54	.44
40-49	.74	.76	.62	.54	.44
50-59	.72	.74	.64	.54	.48
60-69	-	.76	.56	.50	.40
70+	-	.54	.36	.42	.32
All nonwhite wives	.76	.80	.66	.54	.44

[a]The figures for 1940 are based on wage and salary earners only. The number of observations for women over 60 are too small to warrant calculation of the two measures.

[b]The figures for 1950 are based on data for couples living alone or only with children under 18 years old.

Table 3

Age Variations in White Wives' Economic Dependency, 1940-1980

Age of Wife	Economic Dependency Score				
	1940[a]	1950[b]	1960	1970	1980
< 20	.86	.84	.72	.68	.60
20-29	.86	.84	.76	.66	.52
30-39	.84	.86	.80	.74	.64
40-49	.88	.84	.72	.68	.62
50-59	.92	.88	.68	.64	.62
60-69	-	.82	.68	.60	.50
70+	-	.68	.62	.52	.44
All white wives	.86	.84	.74	.66	.58

[a]The figures for 1940 are based on wage and salary earners only. The number of observations for women over 60 is too small to warrant calculation of the two measures.

[b]The figures for 1950 are based on data for couples living alone or only with children under 18 years old.

certain conditions the sexual division of labor might explain all of the variation in married women's economic dependency. This would be so if spouses were alike with respect to their human capital and if women received the same returns to human capital as men (i.e., if there were no employment or wage discrimination against women in the marketplace). In this case, wives' economic dependency would be a linear function of their relative contribution to the couple's combined labor supply. Assuming that family income came entirely from earnings, women who worked in paid jobs as many hours as their spouses would be economically independent. Similarly, women who worked half as much as their husbands would be dependent on their spouses for 34% of their economic resources. In a recent article, Joan Smith suggests that because of the rapid increase in married women's labor supply in recent decades, women's economic dependency today is solely a function of unequal wages paid to men and women (Smith, 1984). If that is true, labor supply factors should account for less of the variation in dependency in 1980 than they did in 1960.

In an attempt to test this hypothesis, we used data on labor supply of husbands and wives to estimate what women's economic dependency would have been if spouses received equal pay for their labor.[3] We then compared the expected dependency with the observed dependency and used the difference as a measure of the importance of factors OTHER THAN labor supply, the most important being unequal returns to working and differences in nonearned income. According to Tables 4 and 5, the difference between the observed and estimated dependency scores is rather small and appears to be declining over time. In 1960 the mean dependency for minority women was 66%. Based on the wives' contribution to the couples'

Table 4

Age Variations in Observed and Expected[a] Economic Dependency Based on Married Women's Relative Contribution to the Couple's Labor Supply, Nonwhite Women, 1960-1980

Age of Wife	1960		1970		1980	
	Observed Dependency	Expected Dependency	Observed Dependency	Expected Dependency	Observed Dependency	Expected Dependency
< 19	.74	.66	.68	.60	.64	.56
20-29	.72	.60	.54	.42	.46	.40
30-39	.68	.54	.54	.40	.44	.36
40-49	.62	.44	.54	.40	.44	.34
50-59	.64	.46	.54	.38	.48	.38
60-69	.56	.52	.50	.52	.60	.58
70+	.36	.82	.42	.82	.32	.90
All nonwhite women	.66	.54	.54	.42	.44	.42

[a]Expected dependency is calculated as 1 - 2X LSCONT, where LSCONT is the ratio of the wife's labor supply to the couple's combined labor supply. This is what the wife's dependency would be if spouses have equal wage rates and if spouses contribute equally to income from sources other than earnings.

Table 5

Age Variations in Observed and Expected[a] Economic Dependency Based on Married Women's Relative Contribution to the Couple's Labor Supply, White Women, 1960-1980

Age of Wife	1960		1970		1980	
	Observed Dependency	Expected Dependency	Observed Dependency	Expected Dependency	Observed Dependency	Expected Dependency
< 19	.72	.56	.63	.58	.60	.56
20-29	.76	.68	.66	.54	.52	.44
30-39	.80	.74	.74	.64	.64	.54
40-49	.72	.62	.68	.54	.62	.48
50-59	.68	.58	.64	.52	.62	.50
60-69	.68	.76	.60	.66	.50	.66
70+	.62	.96	.52	.88	.44	.94
All white women	.74	.68	.66	.58	.58	.54

[a]Expected dependency is calculated as 1 - 2X LSCONT, where LSCONT is the ratio of the wife's labor supply to the couple's combined labor supply. This is what the wife's dependency would be if spouses have equal wage rates and if spouses contribute equally to income from sources other than earnings.

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labor supply, we would have expected a dependency of about 54%. By 1980, the difference had almost disappeared. Assuming equal wage rates for spouses and equal contributions to unearned income, the labor supply ratio predicts almost perfectly the observed level of dependency. For white women, the trend is similar.

There are two ways in which the observed dependency might deviate from the estimates based on labor supply. First, if husbands receive greater monetary returns to their labor, the observed dependency of wives would be greater than the expected dependency among couples who rely primarily on earnings. Second, if women's contributions to unearned income are larger than their contributions to earned income, our estimates would overstate the actual dependency of wives. There are, of course, substantial age variations in the relative importance of earned versus nonearned income, and we would expect earned income to be dominant for young and middle-aged women and unearned income to be dominant for older women. This pattern is apparent in Tables 4 and 5. The expected economic dependency is substantially lower than the observed dependency for women under 50 years old, whereas it is too high for the women over 70. There is a tendency for the deviations to be greater for minority women under 60 in 1960 and 1970 (but not in 1980), which suggests that a larger portion of minority women's economic dependency has been due to inequality in returns to labor supply than is the case for whites. This is somewhat surprising in light of the fact that for several decades the gender gap in hourly earnings has been smaller for minorities than for whites.

The hypothesis that unequal wages are becoming more important as determinants of economic dependency cannot be substantiated by the

results presented here. If anything, the opposite seems to be true. There has been a small decrease in the portion of dependency that can be attributed to unequal wage rates and unearned income, which means that by 1980 a larger part of the variation in dependency must be due to spouse differences in hours worked. Wives' dependency has decreased in part because their labor supply has increased relative to that of their husbands and in part because they are better rewarded for their market work. At the same time, unearned income has become increasingly important and has further reduced economic dependency, especially among older married women. Although women's dependency would be reduced much further if their labor supply were equal to that of their husbands, this does not mean that women would become INDEPENDENT, as evidenced by the gap between observed dependency and predicted dependency based on equal returns to work.

In the next step of the analysis we asked what accounts for variations in economic dependency among married women. As discussed above, this variation is strongly affected by the division of labor in the family and the relative importance of unearned income to total family income. Other sources of dependency may also be important. First, spouses are not completely homogamous with respect to characteristics such as educational attainment, vocational training, and labor force experience. To the extent that husbands' human capital exceeds that of wives, married women would be economically dependent on their spouses, even if both worked equally long hours in the marketplace. Second, women, on average, do not receive the same financial returns to their human capital as men do (Treiman and Hartman, 1980; Corcoran, Duncan and

Ponza, 1984), which means that even among couples who have the same earning power and who work the same number of hours, wives may still be economically dependent on their husbands. Realistically, we should expect the explanatory power of labor supply factors to be smaller than it would be under conditions of gender equality in returns to human capital and spousal equality in human capital.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

The multivariate analysis presented below is motivated by three concerns. The first is to examine the effects on dependency of labor supply factors, sources of income, and indicators of homogamy in human capital. The second is to explain life-course variations in dependency. If familial responsibilities and constraints are the cause of variation in dependency, we should expect much of the variation to disappear once we control for the major consequence of familial constraints; namely, the reduction in women's market work. Another contributing factor might be the relative importance of income from sources other than earnings, which of course increases dramatically with age.

The third major concern in the analysis is to decompose the change in economic dependency from 1960 to 1980 into a component due to changes in women's relative contribution to labor supply (i.e., changes in the sexual division of labor) and a component due to changes in the proportion of family income coming from unearned sources. Both components have increased over time; the question is whether they can account for the large reduction in dependency since 1960.

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A Model of Economic Dependency

Our model of economic dependency reflects rather closely the theoretical rationales outlined above. We use ordinary least squares regression to estimates the parameters of the explanatory variables. The dependent variable is a ratio variable ranging from -1 to +1. While ratio variables should be used with caution in regression analysis, we believe the use of a ratio is justified in this case. The dependent variable is truly a ratio variable; there is no other way of operationalizing economic dependency. As will be clear from the analysis that follows, the ratio variable complicates the interpretation of the meaning of the parameters. However, this is not a complication on a statistical level, as we have no reason to believe that any of the variables included in the regression models have built-in associations with the dependent variable favoring one association over another (Long, 1979).

The variables used as covariates are briefly described in Table 6. LSCONT is the ratio of the wife's estimated labor supply last year (in hours) to the couple's combined labor supply. The extent to which the couple relies on unearned income is captured by the variable PUNEARN, calculated as the proportion of total income that comes from sources other than earnings. In addition to these two variables and age of the woman, our model includes indicators of homogamy in the marriage. The variable EDDIF measures the difference between husband's and wife's years of schooling, which is expected to have a positive effect on the wife's dependency, since women married to men with more schooling than themselves have lower earnings capacity than their spouses. Another important variable is difference in labor force experience of the spouses for

Table 6

Description of Variables Used in Regression Analyses,
Means (Standard Deviations in Parentheses)

Variable	1960		1970		1980	
	Nonwhite	White	Nonwhite	White	Nonwhite	White
Age Dummies						
under 20	.021 (.166)	.022 (.146)	.028 (.164)	.018 (.134)	.016 (.126)	.013 (.115)
20-29	.232 (.422)	.192 (.394)	.243 (.429)	.209 (.407)	.254 (.436)	.202 (.401)
30-39	.290 (.454)	.267 (.443)	.241 (.428)	.212 (.409)	.275 (.446)	.230 (.421)
40-49	.223 (.416)	.219 (.414)	.222 (.416)	.216 (.412)	.185 (.388)	.183 (.387)
50-59	.139 (.346)	.168 (.374)	.150 (.357)	.185 (.388)	.153 (.360)	.177 (.381)
60-69	.065 (.246)	.096 (.295)	.084 (.278)	.109 (.312)	.082 (.274)	.128 (.335)
Indicators of Homogamy						
EDDIF	-1.022 (3.516)	-.148 (2.871)	-.881 (3.486)	.019 (2.862)	-.278 (3.483)	.244 (2.761)
AGEDIF	4.068 (6.657)	3.310 (5.107)	3.626 (6.860)	3.052 (5.229)	3.227 (5.822)	2.827 (4.683)
CHILDW	2.922 (2.828)	2.381 (1.957)	2.981 (2.758)	2.410 (1.937)	2.679 (2.353)	2.293 (1.773)
Other Independent Variables						
College	.035 (.183)	.057 (.232)	.066 (.249)	.082 (.275)	.113 (.317)	.119 (.324)
LSCONT	.234 (.325)	.159 (.271)	.287 (.332)	.206 (.297)	.293 (.298)	.228 (.274)
PUNEARN	.119 (.279)	.127 (.284)	.126 (.299)	.141 (.299)	.179 (.337)	.218 (.358)
Dependent Variable						
DEP	.660 (.461)	.734 (.415)	.540 (.485)	.665 (.430)	.446 (.505)	.576 (.444)

Note: EDDIF is the difference between husband and wife in years of schooling; AGEDIF is difference in age between husband and wife; CHILDW is number of children ever born to wife; College takes on the value of 1 if wife has 17 or more years of schooling; LSCONT is the ratio of wife's labor supply to the couple's combined labor supply; PUNEARN is the proportion of the couple's income that is derived from sources other than earnings.

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which, unfortunately, we have very crude measures. To measure labor force experience we use the variable AGEDIF, which measures age differences between husbands and wives. We expect this variable to have a positive effect on dependency, since women married to men older than themselves are likely to have less labor force experience relative to their spouse than women married to men of the same age. Number of children, CHILDW, is another variable which measures differential labor force experience. Women with many children are expected to have less labor force experience relative to their husbands than women with fewer children, and therefore CHILDW should have a positive effect on women's dependency.

The final variable in the model is a measure of the wife's educational attainment. If she has at least 17 years of formal schooling (including kindergarten) the variable COLLEGE takes on the value 1, otherwise it is zero. We expect this variable to have a negative effect on economic dependency, even after we control for the labor supply factor. There is some evidence that gender differences in wages are somewhat smaller for highly educated women, which means that college-educated women get a higher return to their work effort than other women, not only in terms of actual earnings but also relative to the earnings of their spouses. Another reason for including this variable in the model is that it may be a reasonably good indicator of selective labor force participation. College-educated women are most likely to be able to choose whether or not to be employed. This means that highly educated women who enter the labor force are either those who have husbands with relatively low incomes or those who can command high wages such that the opportunity costs of staying out of the labor market become too high.

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There are several noteworthy results from the regression analysis of economic dependency (Tables 7 and 8). First the findings show that the effects of spousal homogamy are small and substantively trivial, which is probably due to the poor quality of the indicators. Differences in age and educational attainment have very small and often insignificant effects on wife's dependency, and number of children born to the wife has a small positive effect. The coefficient for College is negative, as expected, which means that women with at least 17 years of schooling are less dependent on their spouses, even after controlling for labor supply. In 1960 and 1970 the college effect is substantially larger for nonwhite women, but by 1980 the effects are fairly similar (and smaller) for both races. Unearned income has a substantial negative effect on economic dependency, which is consistent with the earlier results. Women under 70 are significantly more dependent on their spouses than women who are 70 or older. Age differentials in labor supply and unearned income explain a large part of the age variation in economic dependency, but clearly not all of it.

The effect of the wife's contribution to the couple's labor supply is quite substantial, as expected, and accounts for a large part of the variance in economic dependency. This effect is a measure of the "payoff" for married women to their labor supply effort. The closer the parameter is to zero, the smaller the payoff in terms of reducing dependency. We can see that the average return to labor supply for white women decreased slightly from 1960 to 1970, and then increased in 1980 to a level somewhat above the 1960 level. For nonwhite women we observe a steady and quite substantial increase in the return to their relative

Table 7

Determinants of Nonwhite Married Women's Economic Dependency, 1960-1980, OLS Regressions

Variable	1960		1970		1980	
	b	S.E.	b	S.E.	b	S.E.
Constant	0.504	(.032)	0.676	(.027)	0.607	(.022)
< 20 years	0.380	(.041)	0.180	(.037)	0.297	(.034)
20-29	0.394	(.033)	0.151	(.028)	0.223	(.022)
30-39	0.375	(.033)	0.150	(.028)	0.229	(.022)
40-49	0.356	(.033)	0.158	(.028)	0.249	(.022)
50-59	0.371	(.033)	0.192	(.028)	0.311	(.022)
60-69	0.290	(.033)	0.162	(.028)	0.192	(.022)
College	-0.296	(.024)	-0.193	(.017)	-0.087	(.011)
EDDIF	-0.0002	(.001)	-0.006	(.001)	0.008	(.001)
AGEDIF	0.001	(.001)	0.005	(.001)	0.004	(.001)
CHILDW	0.007	(.002)	0.004	(.002)	0.002	(.002)
LSCONT	-0.886	(.013)	-0.948	(.013)	-1.223	(.012)
PUNEARN	-0.110	(.019)	-0.234	(.017)	-0.238	(.013)
R^2	.442		.445		.522	

Note: See Table 6 for definitions of variables.

Table 8

Determinants of White Married Women's Economic Dependency, 1960-1980, OLS Regressions

Variable	1960		1970		1980	
	b	S.E.	b	S.E.	b	S.E.
Constant	0.765	(.022)	0.735	(.020)	0.611	(.018)
< 20 years	0.187	(.032)	0.164	(.032)	0.227	(.033)
20-29	0.154	(.023)	0.146	(.021)	0.227	(.019)
30-39	0.164	(.022)	0.175	(.021)	0.261	(.019)
40-49	0.153	(.023)	0.158	(.021)	0.273	(.019)
50-59	0.143	(.022)	0.164	(.020)	0.292	(.018)
60-69	0.116	(.021)	0.121	(.019)	0.168	(.016)
College	-0.111	(.015)	-0.095	(.012)	-0.069	(.010)
EDDIF	0.006	(.001)	0.008	(.001)	0.010	(.001)
AGEDIF	0.002	(.001)	0.0008	(.001)	0.003	(.001)
CHILDW	0.008	(.002)	0.010	(.002)	0.015	(.002)
LSCONT	-1.076	(.013)	-1.009	(.011)	-1.161	(.012)
PUNEARN	-0.190	(.016)	-0.213	(.016)	-0.185	(.014)
R^2	.526		.523		.532	

Note: See Table 6 for definitions of variables.

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contribution to labor supply. The 1980 coefficient is more than 25% above the 1960 level. Thus while nonwhite wives had a much lower return in terms of reduced dependency to labor supply than white wives in 1960, by 1980 they had a higher one.

There are several possible explanations for the changing effects of both relative labor supply and having a college degree. The model presented here does not permit us to distinguish among these different explanations, but they are discussed briefly in order to highlight the caution that must be exercized in interpreting these results. The differences in the returns to labor supply as well as the negative effect of having a college degree should be seen as a result of spousal differentials in remuneration of market work. It is tempting to interpret such differences between spouses as resulting exclusively from women's inability to earn as much as men in the marketplace. This is, however, only one of several possible explanations. There are at least two different processes at work; namely, gender differentials in wages generated by market forces, and the selection of married women into market work. If women are paid less than men because of discrimination, it follows that married women will have to work more hours than their spouses to contribute equally to family income. If this is the force at work, we should interpret an increase in the effect of the labor supply ratio as a sign of a reduction of gender differentials in wages. The increase over time in nonwhite women's return to their labor supply ratio is consistent with this type of explanation. The difference we observe between white and nonwhite women in 1960 might be taken to mean that white women earned more relative to white men than nonwhite women relative to nonwhite men.

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This is a conclusion which fits poorly with the fact that gender differentials in hourly earnings were larger for white women in 1960 than they were for minority women. It is likely then that other forces are at work here.

One possible explanation for the race difference that we observe in 1960 is the selection of married women into market work. It is likely that white women who were employed in 1960 were women whose opportunity costs of not working were high, that is, these women represent a special subgroup of married women who commanded wages that were high relative to their husbands. Married women with lower wage rates simply did not work. For nonwhite women the same principle was at work, but because of the generally lower level of earnings of nonwhite men, a larger proportion of wives were forced to hold jobs despite dismal wages. On average, nonwhite women would have a lower return to their labor supply ratio because a larger proportion of them worked for very low wages. The decrease in the effect of labor supply for white women from 1960 to 1970 also may be explained this way. More married women became employed, including those who had to work for low wages, and therefore the average return to work declined.

The regression analysis demonstrates that the two major determinants of married women's economic dependency are the relative contribution of each spouse to the couple's combined labor supply and the relative importance of unearned income to total family income. Married women's labor supply relative to their husbands' increased substantially between 1960 and 1980; for nonwhite women the ratio increased from .234 to .293, and for white women it increased from .159 to .228. Married couples also

relied much less on earnings in 1980 than they did in 1960. The critical question here is whether these changes are sufficient to explain the decrease in economic dependency over the same time period. This hypothesis is tested by decomposing the observed change into a component due to the change in the labor supply ratio and a component due to the change in the relative importance of unearned income. The results of this decomposition are reported in Table 9.

According to Table 9, a substantial part of the change in white women's economic dependency can be ascribed to their increased labor supply vis-à-vis their husbands. For white women more than half of the change from 1960 to 1980 can be accounted for by shifts in the number of hours worked by each spouse. For nonwhite women a smaller portion of the change is due to shifts in labor supply, about 42% between 1960 and 1970 and about 34% between 1960 and 1980. For minority women, increases in returns to labor supply appear to have been just as important as shifts in labor supply (see Table 7). For both races, increases in the relative importance of unearned income to total family income accounts for very little of the decline in dependency.

CONCLUSION

We began the exploration of married women's economic dependency with a crude description of the extent to which dependency is a characteristic of married women's lives. We found that in 1940 the vast majority of married women were completely dependent on their spouses for economic support and that the mean level of dependency was consequently very high.

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Table 9

Decomposition of Change in Married Women's Economic Dependency, 1960-1980

	Nonwhite Women	White Women
1960-1970		
Observed Change	-.120	-.069
Change due to LSCONT	-.050	-.047
as % of observed change	42%	68%
Change due to PUNEARN	-.002	-.003
as % of observed change	2%	4%
1960-1980		
Observed Change	-.214	-.158
Change due to LSCONT	-.072	-.080
as % of observed change	34%	51%
Change due to PUNEARN	-.014	-.014
as % of observed change	7%	9%

The situation is remarkably different in 1980, the last year for which we have data. Today, wives who are completely dependent constitute a distinct minority, and the mean level of dependency is much lower than it was forty years earlier. In 1980, minority women on average get about 44% of their economic resources from their spouse, about 42% less than the 1940 figure. White women are somewhat more dependent than nonwhites in 1980, having experienced a 33% decline since 1940.

Minority women have been less dependent than white women throughout this period, and the difference appears to have widened. The relative equality that minority women enjoy vis-à-vis their spouses is encouraging in many ways for the women. However, it is important to realize that it is an equality that is grounded in the relatively disadvantaged position of minority men in American society rather than an equality that reflects a society in which minority women have gained parity with all men.

Since married women's dependency is so clearly tied to their familial responsibilities, we expected to find a strong life-course variation in degree of dependency. We found only small variations in dependency among women under 60 years old and very few changes in life-course variation over time. This was surprising in light of the dramatic transformation of married women's labor force participation. The most significant life-course finding was that older married women, especially those over 70, were substantially less dependent on their spouses than women of other ages. This reflects the fact that older couples rely primarily on Social Security and other unearned income, which is more evenly distributed between spouses. The rule that Social Security payments go directly to the wife even if her spouse has made all or most of the contributions is the

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primary reason for older women's lower economic dependency. We should also note that relatively few women over 70 are married, and therefore the absence of dependency among this group affects only a small proportion of all women.

To determine the sources of dependency, we focused on the period from 1960 to 1980. We examined the role of women's relative contribution to the couple's labor supply and found, as expected, that this was the major source of economic dependence and independence. We estimated what the dependency of married women would have been if spouses received equal returns to hours worked. This allowed us to determine how much of the observed dependency was due to factors other than labor supply. Overall, we found that most of the economic dependency of married women could be explained by the fact that wives spend fewer hours in paid employment than their husbands, a fact that has become increasingly important over time. The analysis also suggested that gender differences in returns to work accounted for a substantial portion of minority women's dependency in 1960 and 1970.

The descriptive findings were supported by the results of the multivariate analysis. Here we found that the effect of wives' relative contributions to couples' labor supply was lower for nonwhite women than for white women in 1960 and 1970 and higher in 1980. In general, this means that in 1960 and 1970 minority women had to work longer hours (relative to their spouses) than white women to achieve financial independence from their spouses. By 1980, the situation was reversed.

Two other outcomes of the multivariate analysis bear repeating: college-educated women are less dependent than others, even after

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controlling for labor supply, age, and various indicators of spousal homogamy on human capital factors; and older wives who depend primarily on unearned income are less dependent than other married women on their spouses.

A decomposition of the changes in dependency since 1960 showed that more than half of the decline among white women was due to increases in labor supply, whereas for minority women work accounted for about a third of the decline. This leaves unexplained a rather large portion of the trend in economic dependency. Our results suggest that some of this unexplained trend is due to a decline in gender differences in returns to work, especially among minority women. For both races, women's remuneration for hours worked was closer to that of their spouses in 1980 than it had been ten or twenty years earlier.

Notes

[1]At this point we want to emphasize a distinction between current economic dependency and "economic vulnerability," the expected change in economic resources resulting from the dissolution of a marriage. The former is a measure of the extent to which a woman's current economic resources are provided as transfers from her spouse; the latter takes into account the transfers that may be coming from a spouse after a marital dissolution, such as alimony, child support, and pensions, transfers from the government in the form of welfare payments and food stamps, and changes in the woman's own earnings resulting from changes in her labor supply. It is the first of these constructs that concerns us here, and this is what we mean by economic dependency. The two are most likely related to each other, and indeed that is one important reason for our interest in economic dependency. But little empirical work has been done on the exact nature of this relationship. Economic dependency in marriage is not necessarily a very good indicator of the economic loss that a woman would experience following a marital dissolution. Under certain conditions, there would be no relationship between the two; this would be the case if the husband by law or custom were required to support his wife at the same level after a divorce as he did during the marriage, or if married women were guaranteed that they could replace transfers from their husbands with their own earnings. Clearly, political efforts to ensure the right to child support, and alimony, and the struggle for equal division of marital property are attempts to reduce the future economic consequences of women's economic dependency in

marriage. In future work we shall examine the relationship between dependency and economic vulnerability, but in this paper we are concerned exclusively with economic dependency.

[2]There is a linear relationship between dependency and the wife's relative contribution to family income: DEP = 1 - 2 x [INCW/(INCH + INCW)].

[3]For 1980 labor supply is estimated by multiplying "usual hours per week worked in 1979" by "number of weeks worked in 1979." For 1960 and 1970 usual hours per week worked in the previous year was not available. This was approximated by using "number of hours worked last week" in its place. This involved the assumption that the number of hours worked in the previous week was representative of the number of hours worked generally. In addition a further adjustment was made when the wife had worked the previous year but had worked no hours the previous week. Here, the mean value of "hours worked last week" for women in employment with the same "number of weeks worked last year" was assigned in the computation of labor supply.

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