

Historical Changes in Stay-at-Home Mothers: 1969 to 2009

by

Rose M. Kreider and Diana B. Elliott
Fertility and Family Statistics Branch
US Census Bureau

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INTRODUCTION

For decades, the “stay-at-home mother” has been a recognized phenomenon. The stay-at-home mother has often been held up as the epitome of motherhood—staying out of the formal labor force to raise her children while her husband worked full time to support the family. As women with children joined the formal labor force in greater numbers throughout the mid 20th century, the proportion of mothers who were out of the labor force caring for their children while their husbands were in the labor force decreased. As this behavior became less normative, did the composition of this group change? In this paper, we explore the decrease in the proportion of married mothers with children under 15 in married couple households who stayed home, and whether the demographic characteristics of this increasingly select group of women also changed.

This paper explores the following questions for married couple households:

1. How has the proportion of married mothers with children under 15 who were stay-at-home mothers changed since 1969?
2. With a lower proportion of married women with children staying home in recent years, how do they differ from their non-stay-at-home counterparts?
3. Has the composition of this group changed over the last 40 years?

BACKGROUND

It has been argued that the concept of stay-at-home mothers is a 20th century phenomenon that reached its apex during the post-World War II period as a result of multiple social forces (May 1988). Economic prosperity during the period following World War II (1949 to 1973) resulted in the wages of many married men being more than adequate to support a family (Levy

1998). Cultural values of this generation of married men and women also reflected a more family-oriented focus (Elder 1999). But perhaps most importantly during this era, the limited employment opportunities following the war, the emphasis on putting qualified men in such positions rather than the women that had filled them during wartime, and subsequent renewed distinctions made between work and family as separate and gendered spheres relegated women to the home (Kanter 1977; Oppenheimer 1970).

This is not to say, however, that the stay-at-home mother of the 1950s and early 1960s was a universal experience. There is evidence that married black women have always been employed outside of the home in large numbers (Landry 2000). Even black mothers with young children were in the work force following World War II (Thistle 2006), when many of their white counterparts had withdrawn from the labor force. The post-World War II boom in stay-at-home mothers may have also been a class-based phenomenon, because not all families had the luxury of having a mother who was able to stay at home (Thistle 2006). Regardless of class background, the mass-marketing of household appliances following World War II enabled more women to enter the work force because less time had to be devoted to housework (Thistle 2006). Such evidence suggests that even during the apparent apex of stay-at-home motherhood, it was not as universal an experience as historical anecdotes suggest.

Cultural shifts also occurred during the 1960s that heralded great change for the notion of work and family, and consequently the notion of stay-at-home motherhood. Gone was the expectation that women of a certain background and class would stay at home to raise children, and in its place was a greater gender egalitarianism (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001), such that there is now more acceptance of women raising children and working outside of the home

concurrently. Consequently, over the past 40 years, women's employment outside of the home has been steadily on the rise, especially among women with young children (Casper and Bianchi 2002). Perhaps not surprisingly, men's real wages during the last 40 years have experienced a steady decline (Levy 1995; Oppenheimer et al 1997) such that women's wages in paid work are an increasing component of family income.

Despite the historical shifts over the past 40 years that suggest greater acceptance of women working outside of the home and raising children, there is still some debate about the characteristics of stay-at-home mothers. The opt-out revolution, so popularized in the media, has argued that there have been a growing number of women who have abandoned the high pressure sphere of paid work in favor of staying at home to raise their children (Belkin 2003). The opt-out revolution proponents have also claimed that this has particularly been a *choice* among highly educated and highly successful professional women (Belkin 2003). Recent sociological evidence has since shown that highly successful professional women who leave the work world to become stay-at-home mothers are not necessarily leaving by choice but are reaching career impasses because of the struggles to have both a career and a family (Stone 2007). Scholars suggest that the proportion of women who stay at home who are professionals has been overstated in the media (Goldin 2006). Recent data show the composition of stay-at-home mothers as a group is tilted more toward those with lower levels of educational attainment, the foreign-born, Hispanic women, and younger women with young children than the media portray (Kreider and Elliott 2009).

Such cultural and historical changes over the last 40 years suggest that not only has the proportion of stay-at-home mothers changed, but *who* they are has also changed. Presently, there

is a void in our knowledge about stay-at-home motherhood as a late 20th and early 21st century phenomenon. This paper fills an important gap in our historical and present-day knowledge about the interaction of gender, work, and family; by determining how stay-at-home mothers have changed over time, both in proportion and composition, relative to their non-stay-at-home counterparts.

DATA and METHODS

To explore the proportional and compositional changes in stay-at-home mothers relative to their non-stay-at-home counterparts, we use the March supplement of Current Population Survey data from 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999 and 2009. In order to compare with ease across the entire time frame, our sample constitutes married couples that include the householder, and have their own children under 15 present in the household. The dependent variable in this paper is whether or not a woman is a stay-at-home mother, defined as those wives who report being out of the labor force all last year while their husbands report being in the labor force all last year (50 or more weeks).¹

To explain changes in the proportion and composition of the population of stay-at-home mothers, demographic, socioeconomic, and family-based explanatory variables are included in the analyses. We first explore the proportional changes in these variables for stay-at-home mothers compared to other mothers for each decade in a descriptive table.² We then explore how well the explanatory variables predict the likelihood of being a stay-at-home mother, first in main

¹ Subfamilies are not included in this analysis because of the comparability issues in earlier decades of CPS data files.

² “Other mothers” are those who are married, with a child under 15 in the household, but do not fit our “stay-at-home” definition. So, they may work part time or full time, or their husbands may be out of the labor force part or all of the year, for example.

effects logistic regression models for all women from 1969 to 2009 and from 1979 to 2009, and then by introducing interactions by year of the survey in the logistic regression models to understand whether the likelihood of being a stay-at-home mother has changed over time for particular groups.

The demographic explanatory variables we include in our analyses are age, race, and Hispanic origin. For age, we created categories of 15 to 24, 25 to 34, and 35 to 44, and 45 years and older. The race and Hispanic origin variables have changed in data collection and categorization over the last 40 years, which had to be accounted for in this paper. In 1969 and 1979, the race categories collected on the CPS were White, Negro, and Other. The categories for the race variable changed in 1989 to include White, Black, American Indian and Alaska native, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Other. By 2009, respondents could mark more than one race.

In this paper, the race categories are limited to White alone, Black alone, and Other. The less refined race categories of 1969 and 1979 dictated collapsing the later years' detailed categories of Asian and Pacific Islander alone, all multiracial people, and single race American Indian and Alaska natives into the Other category in order to have comparability over time. Because Hispanic origin was not available in 1969, we run two separate logistic regression models in this paper: one model (1969-2009) that excludes Hispanic origin and a second model (1979-2009) that includes Hispanic origin as a category mutually exclusive to race.³ We also examine whether the women are Hispanic and foreign born, but because nativity was not asked

³ In 1979, 1989 and 1999, a category of "missing" was included on the Hispanic origin variable. We have included women with missing data for this variable with the non-Hispanic population, since they were 3 percent of the sample in 1979, 1 percent of the sample in 1989, and .6 percent of the sample in 1999. In 2009, the variable was fully allocated, so there is no "missing" category.

on the CPS until 1994, we are limited to looking at this only in the descriptive table for 1999 and 2009.

The socioeconomic explanatory variables we include in the models are the educational attainment of the mother, and whether the couple has the same educational attainment or one spouse has more education than the other. Although the collection of educational attainment has changed over time in CPS, we were able to recode the categories that were collected back into the same broad educational groups. The educational categories in this paper include: less than high school; high school degree; some college; and Bachelor's degree or more. To evaluate whether one spouse had more education than the other, the same categories were also used to compare educational levels between the spouses.

Finally, we include family-based explanatory variables in our models to understand the effects of family and household composition on whether a woman stays at home or not. One variable we include is whether or not there are female adult relatives age 15 and older residing in the same household. Another variable we include is the presence of zero, one, or two or more children under the age of 5 in the household to understand if mothers stay at home or not.

FINDINGS

Changes in the proportion of married mothers with children under 15 in married couple households who were “stay at home” mothers, 1969-2009

In 1969, 44 percent of married mothers with children under 15 were stay-at-home mothers (Table 1).⁴ By 1979, this had decreased to 34 percent. Still, two thirds of married

⁴ All comparative statements in this presentation have undergone statistical testing, and unless otherwise noted, all comparisons are statistically significant at the 10 percent significance level. The data are subject to error arising from a variety of sources, including sampling error, nonsampling error, and model error. Further information about the source and accuracy of the estimates is available at

mothers with children under 15 were in the labor force working either part time or full time while raising their children. Even for mothers who spend some years out of the labor force while raising their children, only a small minority do not work at least part time in the labor force at some point before their children become adults (Casper and Bianchi 2002).

In 1989, 25 percent of married mothers with children under 15 were stay-at-home mothers. In comparison with the larger declines earlier in the 20th century, this proportion stayed fairly constant for the next 20 years, at 24 percent in 1999 and 26 percent in 2009. In the mid 2000s, much was made of the small increase in the percentage of stay-at-home mothers. Seen in historical context, this sense of there being an increase may be as much about a less frequent phenomenon being recognized more because non-standard behavior stands out, than it is about an actual increase in the behavior.⁵

The number of stay-at-home mothers has decreased significantly, from 9.8 million in 1969, to 7.2 million in 1979, to 5.2 million in 1999.⁶ By 2009, the number had increased to 5.7 million, however, this was still a relatively small change in the longer historical perspective, and nowhere near the numbers or percentage of married mothers who were stay-at-home mothers in 1969.

Changes in the characteristics of stay-at-home mothers, compared with their non stay-at-home counterparts

<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/p60_236sa.pdf>

⁵ Michael Rosenfeld explains this logic in his book *The Age of Independence* when discussing the popular media's attention to an "increase" in young adults living in their parents' home, another phenomenon that was prevalent earlier, but was far less prevalent at the end of the 20th century.

⁶ The estimate of 5.2 million stay-at-home mothers in 1999 does not differ statistically from the estimated 5.3 million in 1989.

The pool of married couples has become more select over time as well. So not only have stay-at-home mothers become a smaller and more select group, but married couples themselves are a different group than they were in 1969 when 44 percent of married couples with children under 15 included a mother who was out of the labor force. The median age at marriage for women was 20.8 years in 1969, compared with 25.9 in 2009, so married women overall were older, which may affect the distribution of other characteristics, particularly educational attainment.⁷ Similarly, the median age at first birth increased from 22.1 years in 1969 to about 25 years in 2007, the latest year available (NCHS, 1975; Hamilton, et al 2009).

Table 1 presents percentage distributions of stay-at-home mothers and other mothers across demographic characteristics of the women, such as their age, educational attainment, race and Hispanic origin, and nativity status. The increase in the age of married mothers is evident in Table 1 since the percentage of both stay-at-home mothers and other mothers who were age 15 to 24 decreased over time, while the percentage age 35 to 44 increased between 1969 and 2009.⁸ The percentage of both types of mothers who were age 45 and over decreased between 1969 and 1989, and then increased between 1989 and 2009.⁹

Women's educational attainment increased during the second half of the 20th century. Educational attainment rose for both stay-at-home and all other mothers as measured by those who had at least a bachelor's degree. The proportion of stay-at-home mothers with at least a

⁷ Please see historical table MS-2 on the U.S. Census Bureau website at: <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/ms2.xls>.

⁸ The percentage of stay-at-home mothers who were age 35 to 44 in 1969 and 1989 did not differ statistically.

⁹ The percentage of stay-at-home mothers who were age 45 and over in 1969 and 1979 did not differ statistically.

bachelor's degree rose between 1969 and 2009, from 8 percent to 31 percent. Similarly, the proportion of other mothers with a bachelor's degree or more increased from 9 percent in 1969 to 42 percent in 2009.¹⁰ Despite the media attention, on average stay-at-home mothers do not have higher levels of educational attainment compared with their counterparts.

The racial composition of mothers in the US has changed over the last 40 years, as White non-Hispanics have decreased as a percentage of the total population. This is reflected in Table 1, in the decline of the percentage of other mothers that are White from 89 percent in 1969 to 83 percent in 2009.¹¹ A decline is also noted for stay-at-home mothers, from 94 percent White in 1969 to 85 percent in 2009.

But perhaps the most interesting change is in the increase in the percentage of stay-at-home mothers who are Hispanic. CPS did not collect Hispanic origin in 1969, but the percentage of stay-at-home mothers who were Hispanic increased from 7 percent in 1979 to 27 percent in 2009. This compares with an increase from 6 percent in 1979 for other mothers, to 15 percent in 2009. So while the percent Hispanic differed by about 1.7 percentage points in 1979 for the two groups of mothers, there was a 11.6 percentage point gap between the two groups in 2009.

Also interesting to note is the change in the percentage of the mothers who are both Hispanic and foreign born.¹² In 1999, 8 percent of the other mothers were both Hispanic and foreign born, and this increased to 11 percent by 2009. Corresponding percentages for stay-at-

¹⁰ The percentage of stay-at-home mothers who had a bachelor's degree or more in 1989 does not differ statistically from the percentage for 1999.

¹¹ The percentage of other mothers who were White in 1969 did not differ statistically from the percentage in 1979.

¹² CPS did not collect nativity until 1994, so we have only two observations during the years we include.

home mothers were higher, and increased more, at 16 percent in 1999 and 23 percent in 2009. So the proportion of stay-at-home mothers who were Hispanic grew faster than it did for other mothers, so that stay-at-home mothers are increasingly Hispanic and foreign born. These women may bring with them a more traditional view of family, as well as having less education and possibly more limited job skills, so that staying out of the labor force while raising their children may be a result of both cultural and practical considerations. On the other hand, they may be more likely to be employed in jobs with fewer work-family benefits and flexibility, making them more likely to be pushed out of the labor force if they are unable to afford or arrange adequate child care (Williams 2006).

Table 1 also shows several characteristics of the mothers' households, including the difference in educational attainment between the woman and her husband, whether female adult relatives are in the household, and a distribution of the number of children under age 5. Since the earnings of the woman and her husband are inherently part of our definition of stay-at-home mothers, we use educational attainment as a proxy for human capital and earnings potential. Our assumption is that women who have higher earnings potential will be more likely to be in the labor force, especially if they have higher earnings potential than their husbands. Part of the family decision about which spouse is at home caring for children is likely to hinge on who can earn enough to support the family. In addition, women with higher earnings potential may be able to pay for child care that allows them to hold a part time or full time job.

Although in each decade, a higher proportion of stay-at-home mothers than other mothers had husbands with more education than themselves, in both groups, the proportion who had husbands with more education than themselves decreased between 1969 to 2009—from 30

percent to 22 percent for stay-at-home mothers, and from 24 percent to 16 percent for other mothers. Over half of each group of mothers had the *same* level of educational attainment as their husbands in each decade. For stay-at-home mothers, the decrease from 1969 to 2009 in couples in which the husband had more education than the wife (30 percent to 22 percent) was made up by an increase in the proportion in which both spouses had the same level of education (55 percent to 63 percent). For the other mothers, this same decrease in couples where the husband had more education (24 percent to 16 percent) was made up by an increase in the proportion where the wife had *more* education (20 percent to 27 percent). So these descriptive statistics support our hypothesis that women with higher educational attainment, and presumably higher earnings potential are more likely to be in the labor force.

We also show the percentage of the mothers who have a female adult relative at least 15 years old in the household. This could be the woman's daughter, her mother, or some other relative (sister, cousin, grandmother). Other researchers have hypothesized that the presence of other women in the household may be a measure of available child care, which would free up the mother to join the labor force (Short, Goldscheider, and Torr 2006). For both groups of mothers, we see a decrease in the proportion who had a female adult relative present, between 1969 and 2009; 19 percent to 15 percent for stay-at-home mothers and 22 percent to 17 percent for other mothers. Interestingly, there was a slight increase between 1989 and 2009 for both groups—from 13 percent to 15 percent for stay-at-home mothers and from 14 percent to 17 percent for the other mothers.¹³

¹³ The following estimates of the percentage with a female adult relative present did not differ significantly: 1989 and 1999 percentages for stay-at-home mothers and 1999 and 2009 percentages for other mothers.

While we expect that the presence of female adult relatives should be associated with a lower likelihood of being a stay-at-home mother, we expect that having children under age 5 would be associated with a higher likelihood of being a stay-at-home mother. Children under 5 generally do not attend school, although they may be in day care, and require constant supervision. Especially for mothers who have more than one child under 5, the cost of day care might be higher than she could support unless she has fairly high earnings. Many mothers spend a few years out of the labor force before their children enter the school system, so that we expect a higher proportion of mothers with young children to be stay-at-home mothers.

Table 1 shows the two groups of mothers by whether they had no children under 5 present, one child under 5, or two or more children under 5 in the household. The distributions differ between the two groups. While roughly 1 out of 5 stay-at-home mothers had two or more children under age 5 in the household, this was true for closer to 1 out of 10 for other mothers.¹⁴ Also, a higher percentage of the other mothers had no children under age 5—over half in each decade—compared with stay-at-home mothers. These descriptive statistics support our hypothesis that women with young children will be more likely to be stay-at-home mothers.

In summary, based on the descriptive statistics presented in Table 1, compared with 1969, stay-at-home mothers in 2009 are younger, less educated, less predominantly white non-Hispanic, and more likely to be Hispanic. Of course, changes in the composition of mothers in terms of age, education level and racial and ethnic makeup of the population also happened to the other married mothers who did not fit the stay-at-home definition. Consistent over the time

¹⁴ The percentages of stay-at-home mothers with two or more children under 5 for 1979 and 1999 differ statistically from 20 percent. The percentages of other mothers with two or more children under 5 for 1969, 1979, and 1989 differ statistically from 10 percent.

period from 1969 to 2009, stay-at-home mothers also have more children under 5 in the home than their non-stay-at-home counterparts. In the next section, we use a multivariate model to tease out which changes were simply those that happened to all married women, and which changes in the composition of stay-at-home mothers cannot be accounted for by rising ages at first marriage, increasing educational attainment, changing racial and ethnic distributions, and varying household and family composition in the overall population of married women with children under 15 in the US.

Multivariate models

In order to disentangle the portion of the changes in the composition of stay-at-home mothers that is due to changes that affected all mothers, and changes that reflect the ways in which the group of stay-at-home mothers diverged from changes that happened to all married mothers, we ran models predicting whether a woman was a stay-at-home mother, controlling for her characteristics, and the year of the observation. Controlling for year allowed us to see the effect of changes that were happening to all married women in that time period.

We ran logistic regression models predicting whether the woman was a stay-at-home mother. Table 2 shows results for two models that include only the main effects of the predictor variables. The first model includes 1969 through 2009, and has age, educational attainment, race, a husband-wife educational difference variable, presence of female adult relatives, and number of children under age 5 as control variables. Hispanic origin cannot be included since this was not collected until after 1970 in the CPS. The second model includes only 1979 through 2009, and the same predictor variables as Model 1, as well as Hispanic origin. Since the results are similar, we discuss these two models together.

As we saw in the descriptive table, the multivariate models show that a lower proportion of married mothers were stay-at-home mothers in later years, compared with 1969 (compared with 1979 in the second model). The odds ratio for 2009 is not as low as 1989 and 1999, however, indicating that there was a small increase in the proportion of women who were stay-at-home mothers at that time (Table 2).

Because women age 45 and over did not differ significantly from those age 35 to 44 after running our models, we grouped women age 35 and older into one excluded reference category. Both of the groups of younger women, age 15 to 24 and those age 25 to 34 were less likely than those 35 and over to be a stay-at-home mother. (Table 2).

Looking at educational attainment, women with less than a high school degree were more likely than those with a high school degree (the excluded reference category) to be a stay-at-home mother. However, women with some college or a Bachelor's degree were less likely than women with a high school degree to stay at home (Table 2). Again, this is additional evidence that women with less educational attainment are more likely to be stay-at-home mothers. Mothers who had husbands with more education than they had were 1.2 times more likely to stay at home compared with those who had a husband with the same educational level. Mothers with more education than their husbands had lower odds of being a stay-at-home mothers than those with the same education.

The race groups included in the model for 1969 to 2009 are White (the reference category), Black, and Other. Black women were about half as likely as White women to be a stay-at-home mother, while the odds for women of other races did not differ from those of White women. In the model that includes only 1979 to 2009, we include Hispanic origin as a category

which is mutually exclusive with race. So each woman is categorized as either White (reference), Black, Other, or Hispanic. Similar to the 1969 to 2009 model, the odds that Black women were stay-at-home mothers were 54 percent of those for White, non-Hispanic women. Hispanic women had higher odds (1.4 times) of being a stay-at-home mother than White non-Hispanic women, showing that overall, Hispanic women were more likely to be stay-at-home mothers than White, non-Hispanic women.

Household and family composition also predict whether a woman will stay at home or not. Results for the presence of female adult relatives were as expected, with mothers who had at least one other woman in the household having lower odds of being stay-at-home mothers. Furthermore, the presence and number of children under age 5 matters. Mothers who had one child under 5 in the household had odds 1.6 times as high as those who had no children under 5. Mothers with two or more children under 5 had odds that were 2.8 times higher than those who had no children this young.

In order to test whether the association between being a stay-at-home mother and the predictors changed across the years, we ran a second set of models that explore interactions between year of survey and the demographic, socioeconomic, and family-based characteristics (see Table 3). This will allow us to see if, for example, the association between having less than a high school degree and the likelihood of being a stay-at-home mother changed over time.¹⁵

There are three main interesting findings from the interactions effects in the models. First, the relationship between age and the odds of being a stay-at-home mother changed in 1989,

¹⁵ We ran models including an interaction term for presence of female adult relatives by year, but it was non-significant in all years, so we excluded it from these models. We also ran models separately with presence of adults relatives regardless of sex, and results were very similar to those for the presence of female adult relatives.

1999 and 2009 compared with 1969. In the earlier decades, younger mothers were less likely than those age 35 and over in 1969 to be a stay-at-home mother, but in 1989, 1999, and 2009, women age 15 to 24 were more likely than those age 35 and older in 1969 to be a stay-at-home mother. Given the increase in the median age at first marriage over this time period, the group of women age 15 to 24 who were married mothers was a far more select group in later decades than in 1969. So, while the main effect (shown in Table 2) showed that young women age 15 to 24 were less likely to be stay-at-home mothers than those age 35 and older, the interaction effects reveal that this relationship changed, so that although a smaller proportion of stay-at-home mothers are age 15 to 24 in later decades, women in this age group are more likely to be stay-at-home mothers now than older women were in 1969.

The second interaction effect to note in Model 1 is the change in the association between education and the odds of being a stay-at-home mother. The main effect (shown in Table 2) showed that compared with 1969, women with less than a high school degree were more likely to be a stay-at-home mother than women with a high school degree. The interaction effects for 1979 through 2009 show that this was accentuated in later decades. Women with less than a high school degree were even more likely than those with a high school degree to be a stay-at-home mother in later decades than in 1969. This is understandable considering the increase in educational attainment for all women during this time. As women gained more education and were able to get better jobs, they did so, and the opportunity cost of staying out of the labor force grew for those with more education, so that those with the least education are now the most likely to stay out of the labor force as stay-at-home mothers.¹⁶

¹⁶ Interaction terms for educational categories “some college” and “bachelor’s degree or more” were included in the model but are not shown on the table since they were non-significant.

Model 2 is similar to Model 1, except that it includes Hispanic as a race/ethnic category. The reference category for this variable is White, non-Hispanic women. The third interaction effect of note is seen in Model 2, which includes Hispanic. For 1989, 1999 and 2009, the odds that a Hispanic woman will be a stay-at-home mother are higher than the odds for white non-Hispanic women in 1979. The fact that the interaction effects are significant in these years may indicate that the composition of Hispanic mothers as a group may have shifted, resulting in them being more likely to be stay-at-home mothers in later decades. It is important to think about this finding in the context of immigration. Immigration from Latin America rose from 19 percent of the foreign born population in the U.S. in 1970, to 54 percent of the foreign born population in the U.S. in 2007 (Grieco 2010). Later waves of immigrants could have different skill sets or varying cultural preferences relative to earlier waves of immigrants that might affect the likelihood that married mothers stay at home with their children while their husbands are in the labor force.

Also notable are interaction effects for predictors which, despite being important in the main effects model (Table 2), were not predictive of changes in the composition of the stay-at-home mother population over time. One such example is the interaction terms for the number of children under 5. Model 1 shows that there were no significant differences in later survey years compared to 1969. This shows that stay at home mothers, *regardless of the survey year*, were more likely to stay at home if they had one or more children under age 5. Model 2 (1979-2009), which introduces Hispanic origin as an additional predictor, shows that mothers with one child under 5 and those with two or more children under 5 in 1989 were less likely than corresponding mothers in 1979 to be stay-at-home mothers. Perhaps more interestingly, the interaction terms

for mothers who had more education than their husbands were not significant in the 1969-2009 model, but in the 1979-2009 model which controls for Hispanic origin, odds for these women being stay-at-home mothers in 1999 and 2009 were lower than for corresponding women in 1979.

Conclusion

This paper describes the change over the last 40 years in the proportion of married mothers with children under 15 who were stay-at-home mothers--those who were out of the labor force during the last year while their husband worked at least 50 weeks in the last year. This proportion declined significantly from 44 percent of married mothers in 1969 to 26 percent in 2009. The data show a small increase in the percentage of married mothers with children under 15 who are stay-at-home mothers between 1999 (24 percent) and 2009 (26 percent), but the trend since 1969 shows a steep decline. The magnitude of the change in the last decade does not support an “opt-out revolution.”

An in-depth look at changes in the demographic characteristics of the stay-at-home mothers since 1969 shows that the opt out profile popularized by the media does not reflect the majority of stay-at-home mothers. While overall, young women age 15 to 24 were less likely to be a stay-at-home mother than those age 35 and over, this relationship changed in recent decades, so that in 2009, young women are more likely than women age 35 and over were in 1969 to be stay-at-home mothers. Hispanic women in 2009 were more likely than White non-Hispanic women to be staying at home, and this effect was stronger in more recent decades, suggesting there may have been shifts in the composition of the Hispanic population. Finally, family

compositional factors such as the presence of another female relative in the household and the number and age of children were consistently related to being a stay-at-home mother over these 40 years. The presence of a female adult relative was linked to a lower likelihood of being a stay-at-home mother, and this was universal across the 40-year time span. Similarly, having more than one child under 5 in the household was linked to a greater likelihood of staying at home, regardless of the year. The demands of raising multiple young children may create difficulties for women struggling to manage work and family demands simultaneously. Additionally, child care costs for two small children may be prohibitively expensive.

As other research has found, there is no opt-out revolution changing the landscape of stay-at-home motherhood. Rather these data suggest a “left out” group of married mothers who are young, Hispanic and have less than a high school education. Mothers with any of these characteristics may have more difficulty finding the kind of employment that would allow flexibility to both be in the paid labor force and to raise their young children.

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Appendix B. Data Access

Current Population Survey data are public use data and can be downloaded from the U.S. Census Bureau website at: <http://dataferrett.census.gov/> or <http://www.bls.census.gov/ferretftp.htm>

Table 1. Stay-At-Home Mothers Compared with Other Mothers in Married Couple Households with Children Under 15, Selected Years¹

Characteristic	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Other Mothers	Other Mothers	Other Mothers	Other Mothers
	1969	1979	1989	1999	2009	1969	1979	1989	1999	2009
Total (Number in thousands.)	9,802	7,236	5,330	5,218	5,652	12,556	14,151	16,404	16,958	16,284
Percent married couple holds w SAH mom	43.9	33.8	24.5	23.5	25.8	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Total (percent)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Age of mother										
15 to 24 years	12.7	11.2	9.4	7.1	5.8	15.1	12.9	7.7	5.3	3.7
25 to 34 years	41.2	46.2	48.9	39.7	36.7	37.3	45.6	46.5	35.6	32.8
35 to 44 years	33.1	30.4	34.3	44.0	42.2	33.1	32.0	39.5	47.3	45.4
45 years and over	13.0	12.3	7.5	9.2	15.3	14.4	9.5	6.3	11.8	18.2
Educational attainment of mother										
Less than high school	30.2	24.5	17.9	19.4	17.9	33.6	19.5	11.6	8.6	6.9
High school degree	50.7	47.8	43.6	44.7	26.0	46.6	48.6	45.5	31.4	22.7
Some college	11.2	16.4	20.2	18.8	25.1	10.8	16.8	21.2	29.3	28.9
Bachelor's degree or more	7.9	11.3	18.0	17.1	31.1	9.0	15.1	21.7	30.7	41.5
Race and Hispanic origin of mother										
White alone (White in yrs<2009)	94.2	92.7	91.1	90.1	84.9	88.7	88.5	86.6	85.4	83.2
White alone, non-Hispanic	NA	85.0	77.7	70.1	60.0	NA	82.4	78.3	74.0	69.1
Black alone (Black in yrs<2009)	4.8	4.9	4.8	3.6	5.3	10.1	8.9	8.9	8.9	8.4
Asian alone (Asian Pac Islander <2009)	NA	NA	3.1	5.6	7.6	NA	NA	3.7	5.0	6.5
Other race	1.0	2.4	1.0	0.6	2.2	1.2	2.7	0.8	0.8	1.9
Hispanic (any race) missing	NA	7.4	13.7	20.2	26.6	NA	5.8	8.4	11.8	15.0
Nativity of mother										
Foreign born	NA	3.1	1.0	1.0	NA	NA	2.7	1.0	0.5	NA
Hispanic and foreign born	not collected in CPS until 1994		NA	28.7	38.1	NA	NA	NA	17.6	23.6
			NA	16.4	22.6	NA	NA	NA	7.5	10.6

NA Not available.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999, 2009

Table 1 continued

Characteristic	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Other Mothers	Other Mothers	Other Mothers	Other Mothers
	1969	1979	1989	1999	2009	1969	1979	1989	1999	2009
Educational attainment spousal difference										
Husband has more education	30.4	34.3	31.6	29.9	22.1	24.1	27.4	25.8	20.0	16.1
Wife has more education	15.0	13.2	12.9	14.3	14.9	20.1	18.3	20.1	24.0	26.5
Spouses have same education	54.6	52.5	55.5	55.9	63.1	55.8	54.4	54.1	56.0	57.4
Female adult relatives age 15+ present										
	18.8	16.6	13.2	13.3	15.1	22.1	18.7	14.3	16.4	16.9
Number of children under age 5										
None	45.6	48.0	43.2	43.7	44.9	56.4	57.8	53.6	57.6	57.9
One	34.6	35.0	35.9	38.5	35.8	31.5	33.0	35.2	32.9	31.9
Two or more	19.8	17.0	20.8	17.8	19.3	12.0	9.2	11.2	9.5	10.2

NA Not available.

¹ Margins of error for estimates in Table 1 are available in Appendix Table A.

For more information about CPS, see the technical documentation accessible at: <http://www.census.gov/apsd/techdoc/cps/cps-main.html>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999, 2009

Table 2. Logistic Regression Results Predicting Who is a Stay-At-Home Mother 1969-2009

Predictor	Model 1 1969-2009				Model 2 1979-2009			
	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	Odds Ratio	Significance	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	Odds Ratio	Significance
Main Effects								
1979	-0.364	0.029	0.69	***	NA	NA	NA	NA
1989	-0.827	0.031	0.44	***	-0.469	0.032	0.63	***
1999	-0.823	0.032	0.44	***	-0.484	0.033	0.62	***
2009	-0.663	0.032	0.52	***	-0.343	0.034	0.71	***
Age 15 to 24	-0.555	0.041	0.57	***	-0.474	0.049	0.62	***
Age 25 to 34	-0.210	0.025	0.81	***	-0.203	0.028	0.82	***
Less than high school	0.238	0.027	1.27	***	0.390	0.035	1.48	***
Some college	-0.145	0.028	0.87	***	-0.104	0.031	0.90	***
Bachelors or higher	-0.379	0.030	0.68	***	-0.311	0.034	0.73	***
Black	-0.742	0.044	0.48	***	-0.622	0.052	0.54	***
Other	-0.061	0.050	0.94	n.s.	0.014	0.053	1.01	n.s.
Hispanic	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.350	0.036	1.42	***
He has more education	0.182	0.024	1.20	***	0.192	0.028	1.21	***
She has more education	-0.325	0.029	0.72	***	-0.366	0.033	0.69	***
Female adult relative present	-0.098	0.029	0.91	***	-0.106	0.034	0.90	**
One child under 5	0.479	0.025	1.62	***	0.455	0.029	1.58	***
Two plus children under 5	1.018	0.032	2.77	***	1.014	0.037	2.76	***
weighted sample size	109,592				87,234			
unweighted sample size	75,579				58,319			
-2 Log L	127,059				96,777			

Significance is noted as follows: +(<0.10), *(<0.05), **(<0.01), ***(<0.001).

For more information about CPS, see the technical documentation accessible at: <http://www.census.gov/apspd/techdoc/cps/cps-main.html>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999, 2009

Table 3. Logistic Regression Results Predicting Who is a Stay-At-Home Mother 1969-2009

Predictor	Model 1 1969-2009				Model 2 1979-2009			
	Parameter	Standard	Odds	Significance	Parameter	Standard	Odds	Significance
	Estimate	Error	Ratio		Estimate	Error	Ratio	
Main Effects								
1979	-0.496	0.063	0.61	***	NA	NA	NA	NA
1989	-1.041	0.068	0.35	***	-0.575	0.070	0.56	***
1999	-1.215	0.071	0.30	***	-0.774	0.074	0.46	***
2009	-0.840	0.072	0.43	***	-0.466	0.077	0.63	***
Age 15 to 24	-0.778	0.073	0.46	***	-0.887	0.084	0.41	***
Age 25 to 34	-0.288	0.050	0.75	***	-0.422	0.054	0.66	***
Less than high school	-0.216	0.048	0.81	***	0.246	0.057	1.28	***
Some college	-0.065	0.067	0.94	n.s.	-0.062	0.062	0.94	n.s.
Bachelors or higher	-0.266	0.076	0.77	***	-0.347	0.071	0.71	***
Black	-0.773	0.083	0.46	***	-0.625	0.093	0.54	***
Other	-0.324	0.192	0.72	+	-0.244	0.140	0.78	+
Hispanic	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.051	0.088	1.05	n.s.
He has more education	0.204	0.048	1.23	***	0.201	0.050	1.22	***
She has more education	-0.340	0.058	0.71	***	-0.196	0.065	0.82	**
Female adult relative present	-0.123	0.029	0.88	***	-0.125	0.034	0.88	***
One child under 5	0.534	0.052	1.71	***	0.568	0.057	1.76	***
Two plus children under 5	1.035	0.067	2.82	***	1.168	0.075	3.22	***
Interaction Effects								
age1524*1979	-0.110	0.111	0.90	n.s.	NA	NA	NA	NA
age1524*1989	0.486	0.122	1.63	***	0.598	0.129	1.82	***
age1524*1999	0.471	0.129	1.60	***	0.573	0.136	1.77	***
age1524*2009	0.675	0.136	1.96	***	0.777	0.143	2.17	***
age2534*1979	-0.134	0.073	0.87	+	NA	NA	NA	NA
age2534*1989	0.139	0.074	1.15	+	0.280	0.077	1.32	***
age2534*1999	0.151	0.075	1.16	*	0.278	0.078	1.32	***
age2534*2009	0.162	0.074	1.18	*	0.285	0.077	1.33	***
black*1979	0.143	0.124	1.15	n.s.	NA	NA	NA	NA
black*1989	0.103	0.133	1.11	n.s.	-0.004	0.140	1.00	n.s.
black*1999	-0.134	0.145	0.87	n.s.	-0.212	0.151	0.81	n.s.
black*2009	0.261	0.132	1.30	*	0.216	0.139	1.24	n.s.
other*1979	0.075	0.238	1.08	n.s.	NA	NA	NA	NA
other*1989	0.091	0.226	1.09	n.s.	0.054	0.184	1.06	n.s.
other*1999	0.318	0.217	1.37	n.s.	0.302	0.173	1.35	+
other*2009	0.441	0.210	1.55	*	0.442	0.163	1.56	**
hispanic*1989	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.243	0.117	1.28	*
hispanic*1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.303	0.113	1.35	**
hispanic*2009	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.381	0.109	1.46	***
less than high school*1979	0.468	0.073	1.60	***	NA	NA	NA	NA
less than high school*1989	0.731	0.082	2.08	***	0.187	0.091	1.21	*
less than high school*1999	0.938	0.088	2.55	***	0.331	0.098	1.39	***
less than high school*2009	0.928	0.092	2.53	***	0.287	0.101	1.33	**
he has more educ*1979	-0.005	0.069	0.99	n.s.	NA	NA	NA	NA
he has more educ*1989	-0.091	0.073	0.91	n.s.	-0.068	0.075	0.93	n.s.
he has more educ*1999	0.124	0.076	1.13	n.s.	0.163	0.077	1.18	*
he has more educ*2009	-0.159	0.079	0.85	*	-0.106	0.081	0.90	n.s.
she has more educ*1979	0.144	0.088	1.16	+	NA	NA	NA	NA
she has more educ*1989	0.001	0.092	1.00	n.s.	-0.148	0.096	0.86	n.s.
she has more educ*1999	-0.023	0.090	0.98	n.s.	-0.191	0.095	0.83	*
she has more educ*2009	-0.163	0.087	0.85	+	-0.343	0.091	0.71	***
one child under 5*1979	0.036	0.077	1.04	n.s.	NA	NA	NA	NA
one child under 5*1989	-0.202	0.078	0.82	**	-0.245	0.081	0.78	**
one child under 5*1999	-0.016	0.077	0.98	n.s.	-0.057	0.081	0.94	n.s.
one child under 5*2009	-0.097	0.077	0.91	n.s.	-0.138	0.080	0.87	+
two plus children under 5*1979	0.136	0.101	1.15	n.s.	NA	NA	NA	NA
two plus children under 5*1989	-0.089	0.100	0.92	n.s.	-0.232	0.105	0.79	*
two plus children under 5*1999	-0.030	0.102	0.97	n.s.	-0.168	0.108	0.85	n.s.
two plus children under 5*2009	-0.071	0.099	0.93	n.s.	-0.204	0.105	0.82	+
weighted sample size	109,592				87,234			
unweighted sample size	75,579				58,319			
-2 Log L	126,256				96,452			

Significance is noted as follows: +(<0.10), *(<0.05), **(<0.01), ***(<0.001).

Note: xsomec1g and xbchup are in the models, but are omitted from the table since they are NS in all years. NA Omitted category in this model, since only 1979 through 2009 observations are included.

For more information about CPS, see the technical documentation accessible at: <http://www.census.gov/apcd/techdoc/cps/cps-main.html>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999, 2009

Appendix Table A. Margins of Error for Table I

Characteristic	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Other Mothers	Other Mothers	Other Mothers	Other Mothers	
	1969	1979	1989	1999	2009	1969	1979	1989	1999	
Total (Number in thousands.)	202	174	173	169	125	227	241	297	298	209
Percent married couple holds w SAH mom	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.5	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Total (percent)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Age of mother										
15 to 24 years	0.7	0.8	1.0	0.8	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.2
25 to 34 years	1.0	1.2	1.6	1.6	1.1	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.6
35 to 44 years	1.0	1.1	1.6	1.6	1.1	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.7
45 years and over	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5
Educational attainment of mother										
Less than high school	0.6	0.8	1.3	1.2	1.1	0.5	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.7
High school degree	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.3	0.9	0.9	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.3
Some college	0.7	0.9	1.3	1.3	1.0	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.6
Bachelor's degree or more	0.6	0.8	1.3	1.2	1.1	0.5	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.7
Race and Hispanic origin of mother										
White alone (White in yrs<2009)	0.5	0.6	0.9	1.0	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5
White alone, non-Hispanic	NA	0.9	1.4	1.5	1.1	NA	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.6
Black alone(Black in yrs<2009)	0.4	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4
Asian alone(Asian Pac Islander <2009)	NA	NA	0.6	0.8	0.6	NA	NA	0.4	0.4	0.3
Other race										
Hispanic (any race) missing	NA	0.6	1.1	1.3	1.0	NA	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.5
Nativity of mother										
Foreign born	NA	NA	NA	1.5	1.1	NA	NA	NA	0.7	0.6
Hispanic and foreign born	NA	NA	NA	1.2	1.0	NA	NA	NA	0.5	0.4

NA Not available.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999, 2009

Table A continued

Characteristic	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Stay-At-Home Mothers	Other Mothers	Other Mothers	Other Mothers	Other Mothers
	1969	1979	1989	1999	2009	1969	1979	1989	1999	2009
Educational attainment spousal difference										
Husband has more education	1.0	1.2	1.5	1.5	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.5
Wife has more education	0.8	0.8	1.1	1.1	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.6
Spouses have same education	1.0	1.2	1.6	1.6	1.1	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.7
Female adult relatives age 15+ present										
	0.8	0.9	1.1	1.1	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.5
Number of children under age 5										
None	1.0	1.2	1.6	1.6	1.1	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.7
One	1.0	1.2	1.6	1.6	1.1	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.6
Two or more	0.8	0.9	1.3	1.3	0.9	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.4

NA Not available.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999, 2009