

This PDF is a selection from a published volume from the National Bureau of Economic Research

Volume Title: Demography and the Economy

Volume Author/Editor: John B. Shoven, editor

Volume Publisher: University of Chicago Press

Volume ISBN: 0-226-75472-3

ISBN13: 978-0-226-75472-7

Volume URL: <http://www.nber.org/books/shov08-1>

Conference Date: April 11-12, 2008

Publication Date: November 2010

Chapter Title: Comment on "Women's Education and Family Behavior: Trends in Marriage, Divorce and Fertility"

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Chapter URL: <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c8409>

Chapter pages in book: (140 - 142)

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Comment Enrico Moretti

This chapter is motivated by the observation that, over the past several decades, there has been a marked decline in the value of production efficiencies

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from marriage because of technological improvements and higher women's earnings. Higher earnings for women imply a higher opportunity cost for women who stay at home. The authors argue that this decline in the value of production efficiencies from marriage should have led to a significant decline in marriage rates, but the actual decline in marriage rates that we observe in the data is limited.

Motivated by the empirical puzzle, the chapter seeks to address three important questions:

1. What are the economic advantages of getting married?
2. Have these advantages changed over time?
3. Have these advantages changed differentially for high-income and low-income individuals?

The main contribution of this chapter is that it asks a series of ambitious and unexplored questions and provides a broad historical perspective on important demographic shifts. The thesis is that the economic benefits of marriage have changed significantly. In particular, there has been a shift away from *production-based* marriage to *consumption-based* marriage. The authors hypothesize that this shift is caused by significant increases in the benefits of shared public goods within marriage and by significant increases in consumption complementarities within marriage.

If this hypothesis is true, then there are several empirical patterns that we should observe in the data. First, marriage should become more common among those with more leisure time and more disposable income. Consistent with this hypothesis, the data indicates that while in the 1950s college-educated women had low marriage rates, today they have marriage rates near the average. Furthermore, there has been a marked shift toward late marriages and an increase in divorce rates, and these changes are larger for the college-educated.

A second implication of the shift away from *production-based* marriage to *consumption-based* marriage is that we should see measurable increases in the degree of assortative mating along education and racial lines. A third implication is that hours of work of members of the couple should become increasingly similar, in order to allow the consumption of shared public goods within marriage.

An appealing feature of the chapter is that it uses economic hypotheses to explain demographic changes. Moreover, it does not rely on ad hoc assumptions on changes in tastes to explain the demographic changes. In general, it is easy to use changes in tastes to explain virtually any demographic shift. While this approach may be valid in other contexts, it is rather unsatisfactory for this subject.

While the theoretical argument is intriguing and ambitious, some of the evidence is indirect and open to alternative interpretations. In my view, the argument proposed would benefit from more direct empirical tests. For

example, the authors could exploit exogenous geographical differences in the changes over time in women's wages and labor force participation. Exogenous shifts in the relative demand for female occupations have different impact on different states depending on the historical industrial mix. These shifts can be used to identify the effect of increases in women's earnings potential outside the household. Alternatively, the authors could exploit exogenous changes in the benefits of marriage that arise from differences across states in the changes over time in the price of small housing units relative to price of large units. Finally, the increased availability of the Time Use Survey may also provide a way to directly measure increases in consumption complementarities and increase in the benefits of shared public goods.

In conclusion, the question of whether there has been a shift from *production-based* marriage to *consumption-based* marriage is important, relevant, and understudied. This chapter has the merit of raising the question, and providing an intriguing narrative and some suggestive evidence. Given the relevance of the question, I hope that future research will be able to provide additional empirical tests of this hypothesis.