



## FEWER WOMEN TYING THE KNOT

### *More women delay or skip the altar for careers and cohabiting*

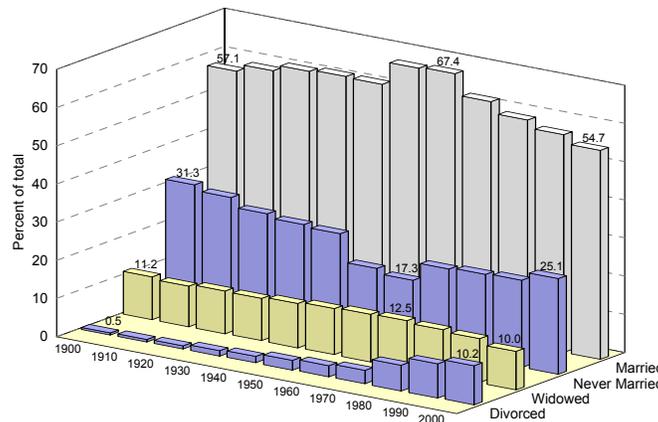
The days when most young women stepped off a high school or college graduation platform straight into marriage are waning. Women today are either postponing matrimony, taking advantage of career opportunities, or are shying away altogether from marriage and choosing instead to live with their partners. In fact, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the proportion of unmarried women of child bearing age (15-44) as a percentage of all women 15-44 is at the highest level ever – 49 percent.

As **Figure 1** indicates, only 31.3 percent of women 15-44 years if age and older in 1900 never married. The percentage of never married women fell steadily until the 1960s to a record low of 17.3 percent. Fully 67.4 percent of women chose to tie the knot in 1960, but with the advent of the sexual revolution, more women chose to remain single. For the first time in history, birth control was readily available to all American women – giving them the option to engage in sex outside of the bonds of marriage without tying them down to a husband and baby. Once they were given the option of delaying pregnancy, more women wanted a piece of the professional pie, choosing to climb the corporate ladder in lieu of raising a family.

Marriage rates soared when thousands of men returned home from World War II. At no other time in history have more women said “I do.” But with women’s

changing attitudes toward career and family, those numbers have fallen; 67.4 percent of women were married in 1960 compared to 54.7 percent in 2000. Consequently, the percentage of unmarried women rose the last three decades – from 38.1 percent in 1970 to 45.3 percent in 2000. Among black women the change was much higher than the average, rising from 45.9 percent in 1970 to 63.8 percent in 2000.

**Figure 1. –Marital Status of Women 15 Years of Age and Over: 1900 – 2000**



Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Current Population Reports, Series P20-537, "American Families and Living Arrangements: June 2001"* and earlier reports.

#### No-Fault Divorce

The sexual revolution also gave rise to no-fault divorce in the 1970s, which weakened the bonds of matrimony and made it easier to untie the knot. The proportion of currently divorced women had steadily grown from 0.5 percent in 1900 to 3.5 percent in 1970. But with no-fault divorce, that figure sharply accelerated – almost doubling within one decade – to 6.6 percent in 1980. In terms of actual numbers, there

were 2.7 million currently divorced women in 1970 while in 1980, there were 6 million divorced women. By 2000 the number of currently divorced women had risen to over 11 million, 10.2 percent of all women 15 years of age and over.

#### Cohabitation

The percentage of all women 15 and over who chose to live with their partners was well under one percent in 1960, about 440 thousand. In 2000, that rate has soared to more than 4 percent, so that in 2000 some 4.7 million women were cohabiting, nearly 11 times as many women as in 1960.