

## NEW FRONTIERS IN DEMOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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### RESUMEN

*La demografía trata tópicos relacionados con el destino humano: nacimiento, enfermedad, matrimonio, ocupación, y muerte. Por lo tanto los métodos de la demografía relacionan tasas globales a eventos principales en que casi no cuenta la decisión individual. El sicólogo social observa las regularidades en el comportamiento de la gente en diferentes condiciones sociales y elabora modelos a partir de la decisión individual. Desde que él mira los patrones independientemente del hecho, la clase de eventos no interesa, y tiende a concentrarse en eventos triviales que son motivo de investigación.*

*El hombre está en condiciones de mirar los eventos demográficos, no tanto como productos del destino, de acuerdo al grado de control que ejerce sobre su ambiente. Las condiciones sociales también le han dado más control al individuo, en muchos eventos sobre los cuales no lo tenía anteriormente; tales como la elección de su pareja de matrimonio, o una actividad ocupacional. De ahí que, con frecuencia los métodos clásicos de la demografía, son insuficientes para tratar datos demográficos y pueden ocurrir cambios abruptos por las decisiones caprichosas del individuo. Cuanto más afectadas resulten las tendencias demográficas por las decisiones del individuo, tanto más útiles son los métodos de la psicología social para entender los cambios en la composición de la población.*

*Cuanto más control individual se ejerza sobre la ocurrencia de ciertos eventos, tanto más sólidas son las posibilidades de la microdemografía de elaborar tendencias demográficas a partir de las decisiones individuales. Eventos tan disímiles como el control de las enfermedades infecciosas, de la polución atmosférica, el control de la natalidad, los derechos civiles y los cambios en el sistema educacional y la estructura ocupacional, han dado a los individuos más control sobre diferentes variables demográficas, y dieron importancia al estudio de las decisiones individuales con consecuencias demográficas, y determinaron esfuerzos conjuntos de demógrafos y psicólogos sociales.*

### SUMMARY

*The topics of demography are those of human fate: birth, illness, marriage, occupation, and death. The methods of demography therefore relate global rates to major events, submerging the individual decision. The social psychologist observes the regularities of people's behavior in different social conditions and builds models from individual decisions. Since he looks at patterns independent of the event, the kind of event does not matter, and he tends to concentrate on trivial events which are amenable to research.*

*To the degree that man has obtained control over his environment, he is able to look at demographic events as less than fate. Social conditions have also given more control to the individual over many events over which he had no control previously, such as choice of a marriage partner or an occupational career. Thus, the classical methods of demography are frequently insufficient to deal with demographic data, and abrupt changes may occur because of vagaries of individual decisions. The more the demographic trends can be affected by individual decisions, the more the methods of social psychology become useful in understanding changes in population composition.*

*The possibilities of micro-demography, of building up demographic trends from individual decisions, become stronger as more individual control can be exerted over the events. Such disparate events as control of infectious disease, air pollution, birth control, civil rights, and changes in the educational system and occupational structure have given individuals more control over different demographic variables, made the study of individual decisions with demographic consequences important, and led to joint efforts by demographers and social psychologists.*

### INTRODUCTION

The study of human life in its totality forms the background of the effort of a whole set of social sciences. However,

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each of these sciences specializes in some slice of human life, proposing a different partial model. Many of these models are more meaningful if placed in the context of a whole science of human lives. We can liken the relation of the whole human life to particular sciences to the figure-ground relation of perception, where outlook of a

particular science is highlighted. Backgrounds which give meaning to a figure are often taken for granted or forgotten. Thus, many social scientists tend to forget the place of their particular work within the total context of human life. It is the function of the background to locate the relative position of figures and to provide a contrast for them; to show what they can do and what they are lacking. By considering the several sciences in relation to human life, we may also discover their relations to each other and to the whole of human life and in this way make possible new methods for social studies of human lives. In many respects demography and social psychology represent two extremes, and so the two contrasting sciences (perhaps idealized) offer the most general framework for study. The difference can be polarized by two concepts—fate and control.

#### DEMOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Demography can be viewed as the science of fate. The demographer deals with such questions of fate as birth, death, illness, home, marriage, and occupation. As a matter of fact, in looking at the individual's concern with fate, we find exactly the topics with which demography deals. Further, the traditional demographer has dealt with this condition of human life in a fatalistic way. He prefers to look at trends, at rates, at the influence of long-time changes on these rates, and to make his results predictable without much regard for the individual. In dealing with rate and the events over which men traditionally have had little control, the classical model of man as a passive recipient is like that of a particle in the grip of physical, biological, and social forces.

The social psychologist proceeds in the opposite way. His unit of study is usually the individual, even if theory goes beyond strictly individual reactions. He is trying to construct the actions within a social system from the actions of the individual by observing the regularities of how people behave and feel in different social

conditions. Characteristically, he also considers people interchangeable. The demographic characteristics of the people whom he studies matter little. The experimental social psychologist, for instance, picks his subjects from student populations, assuming that the kind of facts which he studies can be exhibited in any population which he selects. Even where demographic characteristics are stated, such as sex or age, they usually are used just as an item of information without any necessary connection to the results. The social psychologist's model of man is that of a modifiable organism loosely connected to society. It is this connection which he intends to study. As a result, he finds it easy to rely on a few psychological traits, and he is often fascinated by a theory emphasizing psychological reductionism.

In general, the social psychologist's approach is different from that of the demographer. Although some of the events that the demographer studies could be built up from some individual decisions, this is not the way the demographer proceeds. He works with aggregates; these global measures show greater regularities and permit simpler models than will be built up from individual actions.

Thus, demography deals with the important events in human life—birth, marriage, place of living, ways of making a living, illness, and death—but disregards the individual, who lives through these events, as an important factor in his theories and research. The social psychologist looks for a general pattern of the action of individuals, especially vis-à-vis other people, during the course of his life. Since he looks for a pattern independent of the particular event, the kind of event does not matter. Thus, he tends to concentrate on trivial events which are easily manageable for research. If we set each model within the framework of the whole individual life, we can see how a combination of the two approaches can help us better to understand the human life course. Several recent trends especially

help in doing so; man's expanding control of his environment also tends to give him control of his "demographic fate." Correspondingly, theory and research in both fields have made an integration possible. We shall discuss some examples of the conditions which tend to balance demographic factors between fate and individual responsibility, control, and action.

#### FATE AND CONTROL IN LIFE EVENTS

*Mortality: Epidemics v. way of life.*—It is still true today, of course, that man cannot control the length of his life and decide what it will be. The changing pattern of causes of mortality, however, has given this question a decidedly new meaning. Traditionally, death for infants has been caused through the conditions surrounding natality; for adults, through infectious diseases; for women, in childbirth; and, for the aged in general, by reaction to a strenuous life. Infantile mortality, epidemics, and general infections which spread through lack of knowledge of hygienic precaution were uncontrollable by the individual, everybody in the population being at risk. Incidence appears a random event. As seen from the individual viewpoint, it seems like blind chance or fate.

The importance of these causes of death has been receding in recent years. Infant mortality has been reduced, and the proportion of the contribution of infectious diseases to mortality has been diminished, both by the control of epidemics and by the use of new drugs. Of the invasions by micro-organisms, only cancer remains an important factor. As a result, major contemporary causes of death have a different character. For the young and middle-aged groups, accidents and suicide rank as the most important causes, to be superseded by cardiac and other chronic conditions among older age groups. Prevention of these conditions is no longer a problem of protection from contagion but is rather a question of the way of life of the individual. Exposure to these conditions depends more on the way

a person organizes his life, what stresses he undergoes, how safely he drives, the risks he takes, and so forth. Even cure and prevention are no longer the province of an outside agent, such as a physician or sanitary engineer, alone. The agent has to talk to the person, and this interaction is important in convincing the individual that he is able to control the disease and, in many cases, that a change in values is necessary to reduce these factors which cause mortality. The confusing spread of plague or the curse of fate has given way to regimes controlling heart disease, arteriosclerosis, and accidents.

*Fertility: Fecundity v. planned parenthood.*—Birth is another classical instance of the action of fate. Like death, in a biological sense, it corresponds clearly to the working of chance and necessity. In animals, the season for procreation is well defined and assumes at the point the function of a strong biological drive, combining both the sex act and procreation itself. We find that one of the distinguishing features of the human is that he can separate enjoyment of the sex act from its procreative function. Still, in most human societies, fertility is a rather uncontrolled, fateful concomitant of the expression of sexual desires. Thus, the question of whether to have children and, if so, when and how many is not considered to be a matter of individual plan or decision but at best is a matter of hope and fear. The widespread use of contraception, however, has changed this point of view, even where contraception is not practiced. Study after study has revealed that men and women have a definite idea of the number of children that they want and that they are increasingly able to have these children when they want them. With the decrease in infant mortality, each birth becomes a definite commitment to raising a child to maturity. We find that fertility has become dependent on a conscious decision to have children, although, as in mortality, uncontrollable biological factors which cannot be con-

trolled at the present time still play a large role.

*Migration: Necessity v. selectivity.*—The third main factor in vital rates is the migration pattern. In contrast to the first two, it is not primarily biologically but always socially defined. Traditionally, it has been a factor associated with the social group and not the individual. Membership in a social group, tribe, nation, polis, or other territorial unit has been socially determined as an ascribed characteristic, and the migrant was not free to enter it. Migration thus became a fact of interaction between nations, either as aggressors and conquerors or as being aggressed against and moved and dispersed. The individual migrant, the trader, or other person who sought out a new city for economic gain was rarer. The shifts in this balance are hard to assess quantitatively over the years, but it seems that individual mobility is relatively on the increase. This is certainly true of migration within the borders of national states. Relative freedom of movement and ease of transportation make individual trial decisions and final decisions much easier; and economic opportunity and livability in a particular section of a country can be taken into account in making individual decisions of a place to live.

*Marital selection: Duty v. affiliation.*—Traditionally, marital selection has been controlled by kinship groups; the range of possible choice was very small. Further, many marital selection rules have been prescriptive as well as prohibitive; that is, people in certain relationships had to be married. Finally, the age of marriage frequently has been rigidly circumscribed; because of economic as well as social conditions, there was no choice of whether or not to get married. All these conditions have been changed. Even what is called the circle of eligibles defines only the preferred group from which to choose a mate and is not an exclusive rule. The circle itself is becoming larger and is no longer defined, except negatively, through kinship relations. Finally, it is at least

economically possible for both men and women to have a position in society and to support themselves without being married. Thus, a person increasingly can make an active decision about whether to get married as well as whom to marry. This fact has been shown in the lessening importance of social and residential propinquity and in the rise of several kinds of intermarriage.

*Occupational choice: Tradition v. interest.*—Social position has been long a determining factor in selection of occupation. Caste, family tradition, guild system, position within the family, and restriction on occupation and advancement have all made vocation a matter of fate. As in migration, membership in a social group no longer determines the action to be taken. Society presses for a higher standard of general education which ideally qualifies everybody for a variety of jobs and also equalizes their access to further specialized skills. There is still a relationship between social position and the level of occupational aspiration and achievement, but it is becoming less normative and more a deficiency to be overcome. In addition, the number of jobs at the same level leads to a multiplicity of possible choices which cannot be socially determined. Thus, increase in uniformity of upbringing, in contact, and in spatial mobility makes more vocational, as well as marital, choices possible and thus puts many of these into the realm of individual decisions.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC DECISIONS

The change toward greater individual control of so-called demographic variables is only partial and is uneven, but it shows the importance of both parts of the choice-fate division. Further, the importance of social events lies not so much in fact but in belief. In this regard, many studies have shown that people do believe that they can determine the size of their families, that sensible behavior can control morbidity and mortality, and that they have freedom of choice in jobs, in

residence, or in marriage. The sociologist has, of course, been able to show the structural constraints that still exist in society on these choices, and many of his studies of these events have been done as if they were studies of fate. The data still fit this approach reasonably well, and the techniques have been worked out and are readily available. With the evidence at hand, however, we can also accept choice as an important and increasing factor in demographic effects and consider, therefore, the possible intermeshing of social psychology and demography. Let us, for argument's sake, take the position that the increasing control of man over his environment will also include an appreciable control over demographic factors to such an extent that discontinuities depending on conscious decisions and planning will be a regular feature of the population curve.

In providing this explanation, one cannot simply switch to the opposite extreme of assuming that the only way to escape from fate is to make everything a personal responsibility and individual decision. Malthus can be considered an early proponent of this dichotomy in his claim that the only cure for population increase is individual moral constraint, which was impossible, and thus fate would run its inexorable course. Similar views sometimes persist in claims that individual choice would take over immediately if certain acts were only removed from the category of fate, no longer associated with impossible or strongly sanctioned activities. The social psychological definition of decision-making is a proper contrast to the demographic variables of fate.

Not every change of demographic position of an individual is, of course, the result of a definite decision. In many cases the outcome is so definitely given by the situation that we cannot speak meaningfully about a decision. In these conditions we assume continuity before and after the change and assess the kind of change from preceding independent variables in the traditional manner of demography.

Sometimes, however, we find abrupt changes which correspond to genuine decisions made by the actor in which the situation is definitely not determined by the demographic setting. It is in these situations that a social psychological theory of decision becomes relevant. We can now sketch some of the main features of such a definition.

*Necessary conditions.*—First, the actor must know that a decision can be made within a situation. For many of the conditions that we have discussed, limitations on conscious choice still exist; the decision must be known to be within these limits. That is, action must be known to be technically possible and ethically permissible. Second, the person must have the motivation and values to make a definite decision; for example, he must have a certain career orientation, have a certain residential preference, or be convinced of the value of a planned family. Third, he must have the psychological makeup and social environment which make it possible for him to act on his choice. Some psychodynamic conditions will practically force a person to engage in certain courses of action, and therefore, under such conditions, people are really not able to make a discontinuous decision. For example, decisions often can be perfectly predicted once a person's life history is known. Conversely, social conditions may be such that, although they allow the decision to be made, they make it impossible for the individual to act on it. For instance, some co-operation with the spouse is necessary if one is to make a decision regarding fertility.

It is possible to specify the minimum conditions which make for freedom of action in the above three spheres and to measure the strength of all three dimensions. We can determine the amount of motivation, of information, and of absence of inner compulsion and the presence of social action possibilities in order to see whether the person is able to make a decision which will have demographic consequences. If he is able to adopt a way

of life which decreases his chances of dying, does he regulate the fertility of his family or make a decision about migration, marriage, or occupational choice? Such knowledge and ability, however, do not necessarily make for acts or decisions. In fact, most social action programs try to promote a new way of life which would change one or several of these variables and thus cause a number of decisions and discontinuities in the social process. Even when they are successful, researchers on this topic frequently become little the wiser about the process of choice. Reformers are often forced to advocate a new method of social control, such as the prohibition of a dangerous habit. This supposedly removes the demographic consequences from the possibility of decision.

*Sufficient conditions.*—What is still missing is the ability to predict and describe the process of decision-making, that is, the sufficient conditions. One of the difficulties involved in defining the process is the high cost of decision-making as such. The realization that an important decision must be made exerts a great deal of pressure on both individuals and groups. Although psychic costs cannot be accurately assayed, they are, of necessity, bound to be high. Second, the fact that these decisions are possible in many aspects of life and are considered the individual's responsibility makes it difficult for him to feel that every aspect of his life is important enough to risk the high cost of decision-making. A person realizing how many important things he can do and ought to do will finally select only a few decisions to act on and will allow the rest to slide by default. Thus, another aspect has to be included in understanding the demographic decision. This factor may variously be called saliency of commitment, or non-rational decision-making. It is hard to understand, to study, and to control it because it is discontinuous and voluntaristic by nature. It is regular when seen from outside groups, but it is unpredictable both in observing an individual's life and within

the experience of the person himself. In the process of restructuring the field, control can be described by the conditions leading to it and the influences happening in conjunction with it. Any model of decision process dealing with control will have to consider carefully personal position, time perspective, space perspective, and definition of the self.

#### THE PLACE OF DECISIONS IN THE LIFE HISTORY

Many demographic conditions can be controlled at present by the person affected, but this does not imply that people want to control these events and actually do so. In fact, considerable frustration of both the researcher and the reformer has resulted from the fact that individuals cannot and will not pinpoint a particular instance of making a decision (and keeping to it). As stated above, the term demographic decision is to be restricted to those decisions which result in major changes in the life pattern. Thus, a definite decision to have a child, to adopt a diet in order to prolong one's life, or to change one's residence or occupation is a demographic decision. Viewed in this way, it is obvious that few such decisions are made during one lifetime and that the environmental and psychodynamic conditions often prevent a person from making such conscious, definite decisions. On the other hand, a series of minor decisions will lead to a slow drift, and the cumulation of these decisions can lead to smooth trends. The distribution of these decisions can be represented by the stochastic models of demography and macro-economics.

Many demographic decisions, though possible, are made by default and are consequently negative decisions. A person can, through his behavior, convert many demographic conditions from something which he can control into fate situations which he cannot control; that is, by *not* preventing the progress of chronic conditions, by *not* avoiding accidents, by *not* using contraception regularly, or by *not*

exerting his possibility of choice, a person may gradually be compelled to follow a certain route. Because of this, it is frequently difficult to pinpoint the onset of a certain decision. The individual's feeling that a direction has always been taken for longer than one can remember makes it impossible for him to talk about a period of decision. Such events as these are the data of simpler, more mechanical, models.

We have, then, non-decisions and theories about them. In this case, it is then appropriate to speak about necessity and the necessary sequence of transition, of a simple push-pull model of migration, or of an opportunity model of marital selection and occupational choice. These kinds of models have a fascinating simplicity and frequently apply to aggregates of phenomena or large groups of people. Their difficulty is in dealing with abrupt changes, predicting events for individuals and deviant groups, or in analyzing those other cases which depend to a greater extent on the more positive decisions. This negative aspect of demographic decisions also explains a difficulty in promoting any kind of demographic program. Many demographic decisions in which the effect only becomes visible in long range do involve a definite change, a sacrifice, or an extra effort. The person notices after a while that he has chosen a career, or that his health is going to improve or at least not deteriorate, or that his family life has become different because of conscious spacing of children. However, this kind of reinforcement is both late and rare, and it usually is associated with the absence of some other unpleasant conditions. Thus, this circumstance once again militates against making these decisions or keeping them once they have been made.

In the social-psychological study of demographic variables or in studying demographic decisions, we have to take two aspects into account. The decisions will still not be made by the individual alone but by him in the context of interpersonal relationships and the social structure. The absolute sway of the facts which

one cannot control either physically or socially becomes supplanted by a more flexible relationship. It is possible for persons to make a decision and to exert individual control, but they still must do it within the limits of the social framework and their own definition of the situation. Changes still occur within group contexts; people will be influenced by those they consider important if the reference group provides reinforcement which either facilitates or hinders decisions. However, the expansion of individual control brings alternatives into the individual life space when these options are not exercised. Thus, increase of individual control over alternatives poses an additional problem which might provide a fruitful field of research. We can speculate that it may well cause an increase in stress on the individual. This may be true even though the existence of this new alternative may give the individual new opportunities for self-expression and happiness.

It seems no accident that there has been opposition to each expansion of human choice over demographic variables, although the rationale may ostensibly have been for different reasons. The emotional charge on the question of birth control is still current. Further, measures of death control and mortality control, such as vaccination, quarantine, and fluoridation, arouse opposition, as has expansion of vocational choice, educational choice, or marital and residential choice at a different time and for different political reasons. Each of the above, of course, has offended different power groups, and these groups have generally been rational in their opposition. But, in looking at all these events, it is striking to note that the people who might have profited by the change have frequently not been vocal in support of it or even been united in opposition. It is as if to a certain degree they preferred certain frustration over an uncertain choice.

We can see, then, how the use of social psychology in conjunction with demography is important not only for de-

mography but social psychology as well. Consideration of choice points in individual lives gives us a link between social psychology and demography. It also provides us with the opportunity of studying the whole of human life within a larger context which is not dependent on life histories or clinical descriptions. Instead, the whole of human life becomes itself a unit in large-scale studies. This investigation of human lives as a unit can begin with a set of possible life decisions which are important to consider for general demographic development, selecting a sample of the various decision points within an individual's life span. Here we can investigate where the actual decisions have been made, as has been previously discussed, and whether they were totally predetermined by social contexts or personality disposition. At each decision point, or potential decision point, we can also investigate how much of the future

life span is taken into consideration and to what extent the social context is important. Finally, we can determine decisions made in the total life span, whether individuals form patterns for making a certain kind of decision, and, if so, how these patterns compare with those of other persons in the same social group. In this way, the study of human life can be carried back into the social context.

Studying human lives in their entirety over a considerable span is not a new idea. However, the available techniques have made the cost prohibitive. Generally, the investigator concentrates on a few cases or plans a longitudinal study which follows a group of persons over a number of years. In joining the techniques of the demographer and the social psychologist or by studying the balance between fate and control, we enable study of human life as a social science.