

Marital Choice and Quality of Relationships: A Research Note on Hypotheses and Sampling

KATHLEEN O'HIGGINS

The Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin

Abstract: The apparent rise in the number of breakdowns in marriage in Ireland is causing concern. Little or no research has been undertaken to enquire into causes of breakdown peculiar to Ireland. The existing literature is used here to formulate some hypotheses for the study of engagement and marriage in Ireland. The difficulties of choosing a random sample are discussed and one method of obtaining a sample is tested but found to be impractical.

I INTRODUCTION

This paper aims at formulating some hypotheses, based on the literature, for a future major study of engagement and marriage in Ireland. It is also aimed at testing methods of choosing a sample, since one of the main difficulties in undertaking a study of this nature is that no list or register exists from which a representative sample can be drawn. A small sample of engaged couples was drawn to test the feasibility of a particular method of sampling. The work is, therefore, exploratory and preliminary.

Before considering the literature or sampling, it is useful to discuss the framework in which a study of this nature is set. There is a deepening concern in the Republic of Ireland, in both Church and state circles, about the apparent rise in rates of marital disharmony. Evidence for this rise is taken to be the increasing number of separations, both formal and informal, and of applications for Roman Catholic Church annulments. Although this is not an entirely

satisfactory index of the rise in marital unhappiness, yet some importance or attention must attach to it. It may well be that marriages are as happy or unhappy as they ever were and the rise in the number of separations an index of something more apparent than real, or possibly a change in the way of dealing with problems that have always existed.

It is relevant to mention that in Ireland, as in most other industrialising societies, the role and function of marriage and the family appear to have been affected by recent rapid processes of modernisation, social change and economic development, new systems of values and changing behaviour in sexual and affective relationships. (See, for instance, Arensberg and Kimball, 1940; Humphreys, 1966 and most recently, Hannan and Katsiaouni, 1977.)

Church and state have responded to the apparent changes in different ways. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, has set up four regional tribunals to deal with applications for nullity decrees and its records had shown increasing number of applicants each year. This Church has set up a marriage guidance council. There is also a marriage guidance council, which was first organised as interdenominational, but has now become non-denominational. Both of these agencies also conduct pre-marriage counselling courses.

The state, however, has no such services. It could be argued that the reason for this is that since it recognises the Roman Catholic marriage ceremony as legally binding and does not have any legislation for divorce *a vinculo matrimonii*, it leaves the area of marital problems to the Church. However, this is not quite the case, as when marriage breaks down the civil and religious states become distinct. That is to say, whilst the state recognises the marriage of two Roman Catholics in a Roman Catholic Church as legally binding, it does not similarly recognise the annulment of that marriage by the Roman Catholic Church. The civil reliefs available are civil annulment for strictly laid down grounds (see Shatter, 1982) and legal separation (divorce *a mensa et toro*) which also has strict grounds. This latter is divorce but without the right of remarriage. No divorce with right of remarriage is available. Free civil legal aid in separation cases has been granted by the state only when forced upon it by a judgment of the Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg. Proposals for changes in the civil law of nullity were passed to the Law Reform Commission for study and recommendations in 1977. So far no changes have been made. A Constitutional amendment would be required to introduce divorce *a vinculo matrimonii* and it is believed in political circles that a referendum would result in a "no change" decision by the majority of the electorate. An all-party Committee of the Oireachtas has recently been set up to examine marriage and marriage breakdown. No details of the exact terms of reference have been published at time of writing.

Given the apparent concern about rising rates of marriage breakdown in Ireland, why is the study of *engagement* particularly important? From this

author's research in Ireland (O'Higgins, 1974) and from studies in other countries it would appear that the pre-marital expectations and factors present in the background and personalities of each of the couple have a distinct effect on the marriage. However, this conclusion derives from studies of married couples, and the number of pre-marital studies is very small, the most important being the definite study by Burgess and Wallin (1953). These authors comment:

Both the Burgess and Cottrell and Terman studies collected information from persons only after they were married. Therefore a crucial question applies to both of them as to all research in the prediction of marital success. This is whether the characteristics reported after marriage and found to be associated with the success or failure of married couples are actually predictive or instead are only a consequence of this success or failure (pp. 43/44).

Turning now to one of the two main aims of the paper, the formulation of hypotheses, it is proposed to look at three possible hypotheses, suggested by the literature. They are:

- (i) that *homogamy* operates in mate selection and the greater the degree of homogamy the more likely is there to be satisfaction with the relationship both pre- and post-marriage as defined on the two levels – subjects' own measures and researcher's measures;
- (ii) that there is a *process* by which the engagement relationship forms and grows;
- (iii) that the *quality of the relationship* is dependent on the existence of homogamy and on the process which formed the relationship.

These propositions each prompt certain questions:

(i) What is homogamy? We can say that a homogamous relationship exists when people with similar socio-demographic characteristics choose each other as mates. Such characteristics as age, education, social class by occupation, and religion would be the most obvious ones to be considered.

(ii) Several questions need to be asked to enable us to study the process of the formation of the engagement relationship. For instance, questions about previous relationships, the length of acquaintance with the fiancé(e), the length of engagement, and the reasons for choosing a given person as distinct from others.

(iii) On the question of how is it proposed to study the quality of the relationship, it is necessary at this point to define the relationship to which we refer. It is first a social relationship, although it is much more than that. Weber (1962) tells us that a social relationship is used to designate the situation where two or more persons are engaged in conduct wherein each takes

account of the behaviour of the other in a meaningful way and is therefore oriented in these terms. The social relationship thus consists of the probability that individuals will behave in some meaningful determinable way. It is completely irrelevant, says Weber, why such a probability exists, but where it does, there can be found a social relationship. He goes on to say that the defining criterion for a social relationship involves at least a minimum of mutual orientation of the conduct of each member to that of the other. Weber's definition does not stipulate the degree of solidarity prevailing among those engaged in the conduct of a social relationship. We can define the engagement, later spouse relationship, broadly based on Weber's definition of a social relationship, but going much further in that a formal commitment is made by both members to behave in such a manner towards each other as to ensure mutual satisfaction with the relationship. This relationship is more particularly, and for the purposes of our definition here, between a man and a woman, and is the monogamous marriage one. It is also an interpersonal sexual one and its quality may be described along a scale or continuum from low quality interaction, which is the level of interaction necessary to maintain the relationship at the least satisfactory level tolerable to both partners. This involves a level of mutual rewards at which the continuity of the relationship remains possible. At the other end of the scale or continuum will be high quality interaction where the relationship is most highly satisfactory to both parties. There is a high level of mutual reward at this end of the scale. We are focusing here on the Western style "love" relationship. Many other models exist in countries where "being in love" is not a necessary (or indeed regarded as a good) reason to marry.

The basic dependent variable in this study would be the quality of the relationship between the couple. This is defined first as the level of satisfaction reported by the subjects themselves about their own relationship. According to Landis and Landis (1968, p. 75) there is a very high association between subjects' pre-marital confidence in the future of the relationship and their later marital happiness. Most of those (96 per cent) who had had few doubts and felt very confident before marriage now rated their marriage as happy or very happy. Only 4 per cent of the ones who had no doubts ahead of time now rated their marriages as average or unhappy. On the other hand, of those who were a "little uncertain", 29 per cent now said their marriage was average or unhappy. Of the few who were "very uncertain" but married anyway, 50 per cent said their marriage was average or unhappy. Quality of relationship will also be assessed from the researcher's point of view. This will involve establishing, for instance, the degree of mutual empathy between the couple. Putting emphasis on a factor such as the degree of mutual empathy in particular rests on a view of interpersonal relationships which is based on symbolic interaction theory. Empathy from this perspective

is defined as taking the role of the other (See: Rose (Ed), 1962, p. 7.)

Having stated the purposes of this paper, discussed the rationale for the main study, suggested hypotheses and defined the concepts to be used, we now turn more closely to how our hypotheses can be specifically formulated.

II THE FORMULATION OF HYPOTHESES

As previously mentioned, the hypotheses which it is hoped to formulate are grounded in the literature. The first one to be considered is that homogamy operates in mate selection and that the greater the degree of homogamy, the more likely is there to be satisfaction with the relationship both pre- and post-marriage, as defined at two levels — subjects' own measures and researcher's measures.

Homogamy is generally regarded in sociology as a very potent factor in marital choice. Individuals tend to marry those of similar age, education, socio-economic status, race, religion, culture and so on. The pioneer study of Burgess and Cottrell (1939) and the research of Goode (1956) and Zimmerman (1956) have established the crucial importance of (a) homogeneity in the background and interests of the spouses, and (b) homogeneity in the network of affective affiliations surrounding marriage. Later studies confirm these findings. (See, for instance, Goode, 1965, p. 102; Blood and Wolfe, 1965, p. 257; Womble, 1966; Trost, 1967, pp. 739-755; Landis and Landis, 1968; Snyder, 1973, pp. 233-236 and O'Higgins, 1982).

Some studies have been done on the effect of age differences between spouses. Locke (1951, p. 103) for instance, states that where other things are equal, an approximate equality in age appears most conducive to good marital adjustment, but he hastens to add that research on the subject, including his own, is inadequate to draw any complete conclusions in this regard. Terman (1938, p. 156) found in his study that where a wife was from four to ten years older than the husband the happiness level was high. He was quick to point out that this might not be the result if everyone were to follow such a pattern. In their early pioneering work Burgess and Cottrell (1939) state: "When we summarise the findings regarding age differences, the popular romantic notion that for marital happiness the husband should be somewhat older than the wife, is not substantiated for the groups studied." This seems a reasonable finding since there is nowadays no other rationale for women necessarily to be younger than their husbands. Since fertility has declined and, with the advance in medical science, few women die in childbirth, a woman's age has less to do, for example, with her chances of bearing and rearing a child than heretofore. Other considerations do enter in, but the bearing of children is and was one of the most important aspects of marriage. (See, for instance, Thornton (1977, p. 538); Landis and Landis

(1968, p. 463 and p. 490); Goode (1965); Slater and Woodside (1951, p. 119); Benedict (1972.))

If one looks at the volume of research on the subject of age at marriage and its effect on the stability of marriage, one must come to the conclusion that people who marry at a relatively early age are exposed to a substantially higher risk of marital instability than are people who marry later in life.

Much has been written about the risk of breakdown of marriage where the couples are teenagers or in their very early twenties. "One of the few empirical issues in family sociology on which there is virtual unanimity is the existence of an inverse relationship between age at first marriage and probability of divorce", says Lee (1977, p. 493). His approach is that we do not know why couples who marry later have a better chance of marital stability than those who marry in their very early twenties, or particularly prior to age twenty. The inverse relationship, Lee says, "... does not 'prove' that those who marry young are 'too immature for marriage', unlikely to choose the 'right' spouse or marrying to 'spite their parents', or escape the anomie of adolescence". He argues that there may be other factors which are antecedent to marriage and divorce, i.e., low education, pre-marital pregnancy, poor relations with parents, and these variables are also inversely related to marital stability, so that the relationship between age at marriage and stability may be spurious.¹

Age at marriage therefore is important to its future success and although it could be argued that maturity is not always associated with age, it is nevertheless a reasonably good indicator. However, as Chester (1972) points out research has yet to break apart the correlates of youthful marriages, and determine the relative contribution of pregnancy status, low incomes, disrupted mate selection and other factors in addition to sheer age that combine to produce the association between age at marriage and marital instability.

We could find no studies which looked at the effect on the stability of marriage of differences between the education levels of husband and wife. All were concerned with the effect of the education level *per se* on the marriage. Glick (1957) of the (US) Bureau of the Census found a direct relationship between education and successful marriage. Goode (1965) found a concentration of divorce cases in the high-school and lesser educational categories. Baber (1953) argues that although educational categories and particularly co-education seem to be a definite help to marriage, this may be a secondary rather than a primary factor in selection. "Are college

1 Others who have found age at marriage important for the stability of marriage are Goode (1965, pp. 40-41); Locke (1951, pp. 101-102); Inglesberg (1968, pp. 776-782) and Dominian (1968, pp. 130-131). See also: Schoen (1975, pp. 548-588); Weed (1974, pp. 361-375); Bumpass and Sweet (1972, pp. 754-766) and Eekelaar (1971).

marriages more successful than the general run because of the education factor or because college brings together a highly selected group of young people from classes similar in intelligence and cultural background, which gives the young folk a wide, yet relatively safe, range of choice?", Baber asks and replies: ". . . probably both factors — educational and selective — are influential, but the relative weight of either factor cannot be determined yet."

As with the age variable, at the engagement stage it is not possible to examine the effect of either level of education or differences in education on the marriages of the couples, since the respondents are not yet married. What can be said at the engagement stage is whether or not the majority of the couples appeared to be homogamous on education level. Whether those whose education levels differ greatly from each other will be the ones most at risk after marriage is a question which can only be answered in correlating educational differences with the variables of age, social class and so on, and in follow-up studies.

We will now turn to socio-economic status in our examination of levels of homogamy; the measure used here is occupation. Hutchinson (1973, pp. 63-64) in his study of social status in Dublin, took as the measure the status origin of bride and groom, or inherited status, largely ignoring a subject's acquired status where this differed from that of his/her father. Hutchinson tells us there are two reasons for this. As far as the groom was concerned, it seemed unlikely that the status he had acquired by the time of his marriage, through his own employment, would be, in most cases, as socially relevant to that event as his social status by family of origin. The first employment of more than half of Hutchinson's sample was of a status lower than that inherited, though many were to attain higher status in the course of time. Hutchinson assumed brides to be dependent for their social status upon that of their fathers since, as he says, "only in recent times have women become regarded increasingly as capable of establishing independent status."

To both assumptions on which his procedure was based, Hutchinson went on to say, exceptions were manifest; but the general rule remains. For the purposes of this study we would wish to regard women as having independent occupational status, but, as this author discussed in some previous work (O'Higgins, 1982) the majority of females bunch into category 5 in the Census classification of occupations — that is Intermediate Non-Manual, mostly consisting of clerical and secretarial occupations. The need for a more refined scale is obvious, and with the reduction in sex-segregated occupations this may well solve itself in time. To enable us to overcome these two problems, to some extent anyhow, it might be useful to follow Hutchinson's assumptions and look at future fathers-in-law as well as fathers of the prospective grooms. A more balanced picture would probably emerge and

comparison with the Hutchinson data would be possible. Hutchinson's finding that the lower the occupation level of the man, the more likely he was to marry up, would also bear examination.

Religious belief and practice is alleged to be an important indicator of stability of marriage. This would appeal to commonsense since most religions stress the sanctity of marriage and its permanency, and those with strong religious convictions would be more likely to obey their church's teaching. However, Goode (1974, p. 38) ran into the "hen and egg" dilemma in his study of divorced women. He states: "We cannot, of course, know whether our Catholics are divorced because they did not usually attend Church as frequently as other Catholics, or whether they do not usually attend frequently because they are divorced." Because the majority of people in the Republic of Ireland are born into Roman Catholic families the concept of homogamy in religion of origin is not very relevant. However, it might be important to examine the level of practice of religion to see if couples had similar responses to their religion. A large difference in response might indicate as big a problem as difference in religious beliefs. These then would be the main measures of homogamy we would use — age, education, origin, and religious practice — to test the hypothesis that the couples were homogamous.

We turn now to the second hypothesis — that there is a process by which the relationship forms and grows.

Bolton (1961, pp. 234-240) has introduced some much-needed balance into the development of theories of mate selection. He argues that while both homogamy and complementarity theories have their uses, mate selection must be studied not only in terms of characteristics brought by the partners to the courtship situation, but also in terms of the process by which their relationship moves towards marriage.

Logically the first consideration here is where the couple initially met each other, and under what circumstances. This subject has fascinated both the general public and researchers. Slater and Woodside (1951, pp. 95-96) feel that meetings at mixed clubs and in the course of church and political activities are unusual and almost confined to the "white collar" class. Gorer, in his updated study, *Sex and Marriage in England Today* (1971, pp. 20-22) finds that the most usual place for husbands and wives to meet initially is at a dance.

Following on the question of where the couple met should be enquiries about the length of acquaintance and length of engagement.

In Ireland, since the mid-nineteenth century, there was a tradition of long courtships, and although this practice was criticised by many, researchers into happiness in marriage seem to agree that length of courtship is important and stress that short engagements and short acquaintances before marriage are far more likely than longer acquaintance to lead to an unsuccessful marriage.

However, it must also be noted that the mere length of acquaintance is irrelevant if the period is not used purposefully by the couple. This was borne out in the author's own study *Marital Desertion in Dublin* (1974) where some of the women interviewed had been dating their fiancés for longer than the marriage lasted; for instance, one courtship lasted eight years and the marriage two years. The woman, in this case, asserted that her husband was a different person than she had thought before marriage. This is a common finding and many researchers stress the importance of the use of the courtship. See, for instance, Landis and Landis (1968, pp. 217-218); Slater and Woodside (1951, p. 103); Eekelaar (1971, p. 36); Womble (1966, p. 55); Goode (1965, p. 80) and Cox (1973, pp. 274-285).

Goode (1965, p. 80) found that those who become engaged after a long period of acquaintance are also more likely to have a long engagement. He goes on to say: "Both long acquaintance and long engagements presumably affect the relationship . . . (a) by selecting those who are predisposed to stay married; (b) by weeding out the incompatibles; and (c) through the class-differential group and family pressures that are associated with long acquaintance and engagement." Goode compared his findings, that the shorter the acquaintance the more likely were his subjects to be divorced, with those of Terman (1938, p. 77) whose subjects were rating their marriages on a happiness scale. The expectation that Terman would find a higher number of the longer acquainted rating their marriage as above average on the happiness scale was borne out.

An interesting variable in the study of the process of the formation of the relationship is the reason for marriage. Bernard (1973), in her study of remarriage, comments that the professed reason for marriage is likely to be "We are in love". She says that this is part of the romantic myth of our culture. "Love is the conventional reason for getting married; it is simulated if not felt; it is the correct thing." Van den Haag (1974, p. 134) on this subject of why people marry says: "If someone asks, 'why do people marry?' he meets with indignation or astonishment. The question seems absurd, if not immoral; the desirability of marriage is regarded as unquestionable. Divorce, on the other hand, strikes us as a problem worthy of serious and therapeutic attention. Yet marriage precedes divorce and frequently causes it."

Burgess and Wallin (1953, p. 152) feel that there are two general conditions allied to increasing age and maturity which account for the durability of many of the relationships which lead to marriage. These can be broadly characterised as (a) awareness of the personality and social requirements in a marriage partner, and (b) readiness and desire for marriage. These are, of course, marriages where a degree of freedom of choice is given to people to find their marriage partners. This would be applicable to Irish society where

the choice is at least formally free.

Yet, on the other hand, Slater and Woodside (1951, p. 115) say that, judging by their sample, the majority of people getting married are led from one stage to the next by an inarticulate sexual urge, the claims of affection and social aspiration, along a path which is largely laid down by an age-old tradition.

Continuing on the reasons why people marry *per se*, Slater and Woodside (1951, pp. 116-117) see it that marriage promises satisfactions which carry much weight. The social prestige and approval are especially important to women. "According to psycho-analytic teaching" these authors go on to say, "the individual by marrying, achieves identification with his parents, as well as all the freedom and power that are associated in the mind of the child with their position."

Wittich (1975) commenting on the attraction of marriage contended that it was probably true to say that people are geared and directed towards marriage even to the extent that the glitter and rapture so idealised in the romance books and music of, say, the 1950s and 1960s, the films and plays, and the whole giant industry of literature, has served to generate a mass-market response to the marriage *option*. If one is to add to that onslaught of the media the role models and life options presented by parents, the education system, the church and other agencies of social regulation and control, then we can readily understand the weight of the marriage *imperative*.

Landis and Landis (1968, p. 80) feel that sometimes a crisis or serious problem may arise in an individual's life and he or she hopes marriage will be a way out. Some people in such situations do not want to look ahead and evaluate the chances for success in a marriage. "Clinging to the idea of marriage *per se*, they cannot face objectively anything that might prevent or postpone a marriage" (ibid). Marriage, we would argue, is very often less *to* someone than *for* something and a particular person is a means to an end which is attractive and desirable to both parties, and one aspect of this is Womble's (1966, p. 117) view that another facet of the indifferent attitude which some people have towards preparation for marriage relates to those who choose marriage rather than endure their present situation, whatever it is. A prime example of this, he says, is the desire to escape from loneliness, although avoidance of loneliness is never guaranteed by marriage. Slater and Woodside (1951, p. 120) found loneliness often given as a reason by both sexes for marriage.

On reasons for marriage, therefore, it would be necessary to establish the reason a particular individual had for marrying – whether it was the awareness and readiness Burgess and Wallin refer to or the marriage imperative Wittich described, or indeed the use of marriage as a way out of a difficult home situation which Landis and Landis cite as a reason for some marriages.

Did any of these reasons for marriage affect the process of the formation of the relationship which later affected the quality of that relationship? A high correlation might be found between, say, those marrying to avoid a difficult home situation and a poor quality relationship.

Another variable which must be included in studying the process of the formation of a relationship leading to marriage is propinquity. Studies carried out in the US over the past generation or more show that people are likely to have lived close to those they eventually marry. Goode (1965, p. 34) says that about half of urban marriages occur between men and women who live approximately one mile from one another. About one-fourth of the couples he studied lived within three blocks of one another. Bossard (1962) and Davie and Reeves (1972) all found that in urban areas, as Bossard puts it "... although Cupid has wings, apparently they are not adapted to long flights." Baber (1953, p. 88) argues that propinquity does not confine its influence to cities. In several studies in rural areas, propinquity was found to be influential in marriage selection, though the pattern could not easily be compared with those in urban studies.

Burgess and Wallin (1953, p. 88) state that there is no doubt that propinquity, defined as spatial proximity, operates in mate selection but would qualify this by saying that "... except in cases of the absence or scarcity of social contacts, propinquity may be regarded as a limiting rather than as a decisive influence in the choice of mates."

Among other studies which cite the operation of propinquity in choice of marriage mate are the early one of Strauss (1943) and the later one of Reeves-Kennedy (1972). Their findings, which seem to hold in all studies over a long period of time, indicate that segments of the population continue to find their mates through, or because of, residential propinquity — nearness. However, as Bell (1967, p. 140) points out, "... to say that people tend to marry those who live near them does not tell the whole story. In many cases, close residency is a reflection of other more important endogamous factors. Residential areas in and around cities tend to be homogeneous. The people who live in such areas are often alike in race, religion, ethnic background and the general socio-economic status." "It is possible," adds Bell, "that if neighbourhoods were more heterogeneous, high rates of residential propinquity in mate selection would be greatly reduced." Even in Ireland, where the huge urban conurbations of the United States, to which Bell refers, do not exist, there are, no doubt, difficulties of contact. All other things being equal, the person more difficult to contact might be often precluded after an initial meeting, unless there is an extremely strong attraction present from the beginning, strong enough to override the difficulties of contact.

The variables then which would be associated in formulating the second hypothesis — that there is a process by which a relationship is formed — would

involve meeting-place, length of acquaintance, length of courtship, length of engagement, desire for marriage, reason for marriage, and propinquity.

The third hypothesis brings in the dependent variable — quality of relationship. This third hypothesis states that the quality of the relationship is dependent on the operation of homogamy and on the process which formed the relationship. Whereas the discussion of hypotheses (i) and (ii) looked at *predictors* of quality of relationship, here we consider some of its main constituents.

Burgess and Wallin (1953, p. 286) have stressed that confidence that marriage will be a success is a measure of the overall strength of the relationship, of which degree of attachment is only one component. Normal caution, of course, does no harm; it is the ignoring of danger signals that causes the problem.

Fundamental to social interaction as we have seen, is role-taking or empathy. Nearly every possible social act involves this putting of oneself in the place of another or others in a social situation and then attempting to see the situation and one's role in it as the other person sees it. This structuring of the situation then becomes an important variable which helps to determine what action one will take in a particular situation. Because of this, the empathic process has a crucial influence on the outcome of any social interaction.

Several studies of empathy relevant to this investigation have been undertaken. One by Goodman and Ofshe (1968, pp. 602-603) on differences in levels of empathy between married couples, engaged couples, and strangers had one surprising result. Whereas the males showed the expected linear relationship between empathy and marital status (i.e., the engaged males ranked between the strangers and the husbands), for the females, however, the data were clearly discordant with the authors' expectations. The mean scores for wives revealed that they were less accurate at role-taking than were the engaged females. The authors suggested why this should be so and although they have not proved it, the explanation seems sound. They say that with the advent of marriage, the range of instrumental functions required of the male increases while there is often a simultaneous reduction in his expressive behaviour. This makes the learning of the male's role during this period more difficult for the female as compared to the previous period of engagement. Hannan and Katsiaouni (1977) in a study of farm families in Ireland considered empathy between husband and wife, measuring the extent of mutual empathy. In over one-sixth of the cases, families had a high, to very high, level of mutual helpfulness, co-operation, conviviality, gregariousness and interdependence within the family. In one-sixth of the families also, emotional integration was very low, while the remaining two-thirds were evenly divided between the two extremes. It was found that only 5 per cent

of the families were so well integrated that all six items were scored positively.

Mutuality of interests, which implies community of values, would be an area of enquiry in studying the quality of a relationship. Neuhaus and Neuhaus (1974, p. 8) point out that before marriage, some individuals may have found their major gratifications in sports, hobbies, etc., in which their spouses have no real interest. During the engagement and early marital period, the couple may find it necessary to revise their ideas and change their behaviour, so that they will be able to develop some shared mutual interests. These authors go on to say that couples often find this change a source of conflict and add: “. . . agreeing to maintain some separate activities is usually wise, and can involve as much (and often more) maturity as doing everything together.”

Whenever marital discord is discussed, the problem of excessive consumption of alcohol inevitably comes up as a factor. Straus (1959) discussed the personality type of the excessive drinker, saying that marriage would most likely prove intolerable to him or her, and consciously or unconsciously, he or she will seek its dissolution. Jackson (1969) cites the high divorce rate among alcoholics and says that the majority of women who find themselves married to alcoholics appear to divorce them.

While examining the effect of excessive consumption of alcohol on the quality of the relationship prior to marriage, the level of alcohol consumption by either or both members of the engaged couple would also need to be examined, as the onset of excessive drinking may not occur until after marriage, and then one would have to look for causes of this onset. On this point also we would add Straus' (1959) comment — “In each case one must look to refined levels of behaviour and realise that the relationship of excessive drinking to problems of marital association is almost invariably one of multiple joint causation and most rarely one of direct cause and effect”.

To assess the quality of the present relationship, it is perhaps necessary for a person to have had other relationships with which to compare it. Baber (1953, p. 138) discusses this point, as did Kirkpatrick and Caplow (1945) some years previously. Baber comments that “One who has gone with a number of attractive companions before making a final choice should be able, other factors being equal, to choose more wisely than one who acquires a ‘steady’ while very young and continues in this person’s company until old enough to marry.”

From another point of view one could argue that the acute painfulness of the experience of a broken love affair may foster a conscious or unconscious avoidance of the risk of its ever happening again. Burgess and Wallin (1953, pp. 185-186) feel also that the first love might continue to be cherished consciously or unconsciously. Either of these adjustments to the situation (avoidance or idealisation) might impair the capacity to participate anew in a

genuine unambivalent love relationship. In as much as such a relationship is regarded as essential for a completely satisfying companionship marriage, the possibility of achieving the latter may be denied persons who have suffered a broken love affair.

Burgess and Wallin (1953, pp. 181-182) found evidence that women are slightly more disposed than men to have doubts or regrets about the partnership to which they have committed themselves. This finding is consistent with the Kirkpatrick and Caplow (1945, p. 123) study where twice as many women as men said they had ended one affair because they (the women) became interested in other men.

Waller (1938, p. 353) distinguishes between destructive and productive quarrels in marriage. This distinction could also be applied to pre-marital relationships. Destructive quarrels, Waller feels, are directed at the whole person and "destroy the necessary rationalisation and fictions by which the person lives and the marriage persists" and they tend to be followed by more quarrels. Productive quarrels, on the other hand, lead to a redefinition of the situation by virtue of which the marriage is made stronger.

Landis and Landis (1968, p. 288) tell us that research on engaged couples has shown that couples who do not have arguments and quarrels are less likely to break their engagement. When couples insist that they have never disagreed, however, one is prompted to ask, if it is so, which of them is sacrificing their integrity on the altar of the other's demands. Coming to levels of agreement within marriage, Landis and Landis say that it is safe to assume that in all marriages, differences of opinion and potential conflict situations will arise in one or more of the areas requiring agreement or co-operation. This is normal. They and Waller agree that the quality of the couple's overall relationship will be determined by their ways of meeting these situations. How potential conflict situations are resolved is fundamental to the happiness of the marriage partners.

Another point here is that Slater and Woodside (1951) did not find husbands and wives mostly agreeing in what they say about their marriages. These authors are discussing mainly marriages where there is conflict, but we feel their comment is still true for most marriages and Marsden (1969) also asserts that there is the problem of getting reliable information about actual behaviour. Several studies have clearly demonstrated that couples do not agree about the nature and causes of their disagreements.

Following on from disagreements and quarrels is another factor sometimes associated with marriage breakdown, and consequently important in a study such as this — violence. The use of physical violence by a husband against his wife, or, less usually, by the wife against her husband, can constitute a problem where violence in the home is not a cultural norm for either party. Komarovskiy (1962, p. 191) finds that: "Physical aggression is more frequent

among the less educated." Toch (1972, p. 10) assumes that: "Physical force is a characteristic personal reaction, and is invoked by some people with the same consistency that persuasion, or retreat, self-insulation, or humour, or defiance, is employed by others." The use of violence then may be class-based since reactions such as persuasion, retreat or self-insulation probably require more sophistication than violence, which is usually an immediate or unthinking reaction to whatever annoyance is presented.

The variables, then, included here as constituents of the quality of the relationship would be confidence in the future of the relationship, levels of empathy, mutual interests, any problems with alcohol, other relationships, conflict and disagreements and violence. From the literature it would appear that those with a high level of empathy, some level of mutual interests, no problems about alcohol consumption, normal relationships with previous partners, constructive disagreements and no violence in their relationships would be the couples with high quality relationships. To turn then to our third hypothesis, we would say that these couples would also be those who had a high level of homogamy and would not have had a short acquaintance or engagement; that they would not be marrying, for instance, to avoid an unpleasant home situation, but would have a commitment to marriage, and to the person to whom they are engaged; and lastly that they would probably have lived fairly near one another.

III METHODOLOGY

In this section we discuss first the methodology to be used in finding a national sample of engaged couples for the main study, and second, the testing of the method in a pilot study.

For the purposes of this study an engaged couple will be defined as two persons of opposite sexes who have promised to marry each other and have already approached a minister of religion or a registrar in order to arrange their marriage. This latter part of the definition is necessary because of the intention of interviewing the same couples five years after marriage. Insistence on choosing only those absolutely decided to marry will maximise the number of respondents available for the second interview. It is appreciated that there may be a sample loss anyway so every effort has to be made to minimise this.

The difficulties of choosing a random sample of respondents where no list, register or frame exists are, of course, enormous. Several methods were considered, and bases mentioned, for instance, electoral wards in cities, district electoral divisions in rural areas. However, it seemed best to consult the register of marriages since registration districts appeared to be viable units, there being no way of identifying couples in any of the other units. Therefore, it was necessary to approach the Chief Registrar of Marriages,

who informed us that, for the most part, Registrars' districts were fairly close to parish boundaries — a number of parishes being in each registration district. This was important because we had continually to keep the parish as a unit in mind given that our definition stated that the couple must have approached a minister of religion.

The number of marriages in the year 1974 was eventually taken as the base figure from which to choose the sample. There were approximately 22,000 marriages celebrated in Ireland in 1974 and a sample of 600 couples was decided upon — a sample of roughly 2 per cent.

The number of marriages in each Registration District in Ireland was obtained from the Regional Health Boards. These were then listed in order of the number of marriages in each. There were 638 Registration Districts — the highest number of marriages being 656. In some Registration Districts, sixteen to be exact, there were no marriages during 1974. The cumulative total marriages were 22,294. It was decided to pull out sixty clusters of ten couples each. Stage 1 then was that each cluster is associated with $\frac{22294}{60}$ marriages; 372. For the cluster centre we took a random start in the range 1-372 and proceeded at intervals of 372. The random start was 51 and we then got 60 cluster centres at 51, 423, 795 and so on in the cumulative list or sum. Fifty-eight Registration Districts were selected, since two were large enough to have two units, thus making 60 units. Units of 10 marriages were decided upon as a reasonable number for each district, and for the two largest ones — in Dublin city in this instance — two units were selected, again on a random number basis. A minimum of 30 marriages per year in each Registration District was decided upon since it was proposed to interview during a four months period, i.e., one-third of the year, thus giving a unit of 10 from a district for that period. For the smaller Registration Districts (less than 30 marriages per year) areas below them on the list were added to make up the 30 from which to obtain a unit of 10.

Stage 2 involved breaking down the Registration Districts into parishes and checking the number of marriages in each parish. A proportionate number was given to each parish based on the number of marriages in 1974 and a division of the 10 marriages in the Registration District was made between the parishes on this proportionate basis. Having chosen the sample parishes in the sample Registration Districts, the Bishops of the Dioceses concerned would have to be requested to grant permission to approach the clergy in the sample parishes and, this being obtained, the parish clergy would be asked to explain the survey to couples about to be married and ask them to co-operate. The clergy would then be asked to pass on the names of the 10 couples in their parish agreeable to being interviewed for the study.

Turning to the pilot study then, it was envisaged that it would include respondents from both urban and rural areas. Fifty couples, that is 100

individuals, were to be interviewed. The rural areas selected for the pilot were in the dioceses of Killaloe, Limerick and Kerry. A letter was sent to the relevant parish priests, permission having been obtained from the Bishops, explaining the nature and purpose of the study. This was followed up by visits to these particular priests and a number of other priests who would be likely to be involved when the full study went into the field. In all, 25 priests were visited in the rural areas and their co-operation requested and obtained. This co-operation involved their informing any engaged couples, who approached them to arrange their marriages, about the study and requesting them to submit to an interview. Some priests required a great deal of explanation while others were clear and ready from the outset. It must be said that all of the priests were extremely interested and co-operative.

For the urban pilot, similar arrangements were made in that letters were sent to priests in relevant parishes. These letters again explained the survey and its objectives. Several priests were visited and the investigator is under the impression that those priests who requested a personal interview with her were anxious to speak face to face with the person in charge of the study. A number of interviews followed and it was hoped to continue in this way. However, sufficient numbers were not received and the investigator had to approach priests organising pre-marriage counselling courses to obtain respondents from these. This was possible because prior to drafting the questionnaire and obtaining a sample we had contacted the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council and the Marriage Counselling Service with a view to approaching some of the engaged couples attending pre-marriage courses. A number of couples from the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council courses were contacted in this way.

As can be seen from the above, the task of contact was long and arduous. The priests had to be convinced and they in turn had to convince the respondents. Mutually suitable interview dates and times had then to be arranged. It was made more complicated by some respondents preferring to be interviewed away from their homes. The presbytery or other alternative location had to be found in rural interviews.

At this pilot stage also, a test as to the best way of interviewing the couple – separately or together – was made. It was decided that if interviews were to be undertaken each member of the couple must be interviewed separately and if the questionnaire was to be completed by the subjects, they must do it individually without consultation. This was decided upon, having tested the interview method of both together, and seen how members of the couple referred and deferred to each other about replies. It was felt also that many items might not have been discussed or indeed certain matters might not have been revealed to each other. Therefore, a separate interview, where a person was assured of confidentiality, would probably reveal more

than where the person was present to whom, it could be presumed, one might wish to show the best side. As previously mentioned, several studies (for instance, Slater and Woodside and Marsden) comment on the problems of interviewing both members of the couple together.

To conclude on the problems of sampling, since Stage 2, tested in the pilot, proved too lengthy, arduous and cumbersome, an alternative method will have to be found. It was suggested that a sample be selected from those attending pre-marriage courses. From enquiries it was established that over one-third of all couples about to marry attend a pre-marriage course. Since the proportion attending is only one-third and this one-third may or may not be a highly select group, the implications for sample bias are obvious. Some other method of choosing a national sample, from which generalisations can be made, will have to be worked out.

We should note some problems in the composition of samples in completed studies of engaged or married couples. These are mainly in the United States and the chief criticism levelled against them is that their respondents have been, almost invariably, university students. We are well aware of the difficulties of sampling and also the financial constraints involved, but nevertheless the findings of these studies in general, i.e., that the social type which adjusts more readily to marriage is the socialised person, are based on socialisation within one class, namely, the middle class. Indices of socialisation evident in the data in these studies are maturity, educational opportunity and achievement, participation in religious activities (such as attending Sunday school and church), participation in social life as manifested by the number of friends, membership of organisations and residence in neighbourhoods of single-family dwelling type and these are all middle-class characteristics. The socialised person, as seen in these studies, is perhaps anyway characterised by traits of stability, conventionality and conformity. He/she has been moulded by, and has participated in, his/her social institutions. He/she is, therefore, well fitted by training and experience to make the adjustments required in marriage. Since statistics up to recently have shown that the lower the socio-economic status, the more likely is divorce to occur, these studies concentrated on what might be regarded as lower-risk groups.

There is now, however, some evidence of an increase in the rates of divorce among the middle class, relative to the rates in the lower socio-economic groups. For instance, Commaille, in his paper "Vers une nouvelle définition du divorce" (1978), comments on the rise in divorce rates among the middle class in France. He believes, and this could, no doubt, apply to most Western states, that the reason for this rise is that the attitudes of the middle class in family matters are the most permissive and reveal a much greater acceptance of the changes that are taking place, in, for example, concepts of marriage and of conjugal and parental roles. Commaille remarks

that work outside the home has increased for women in France at the greatest rate among middle class women (see, Thevenot, 1977). The most perceptible effect of this has been with regard to the family, (see, Tabard, 1974). Commaille goes on to say that the new model of the family is mainly a product of the middle class. So the reasons for the rise in divorce rates among the middle class may be quite different from the reasons for the higher divorce rates in the lower groups. We have argued that, up to now, since divorce rates were higher in the lower groups, it was not valid to produce results which confined themselves to samples of middle class respondents and drew inferences to the whole population. Based on Commaille's explanation for rising divorce rates among the middle classes, we would now argue that it is even more important to take samples from all classes since pressures in marriage may be totally different for different classes. In any future study of engagement or marriage this must be taken into account.

IV CONCLUSION

We have, in this paper, suggested some hypotheses which might be used in a study of engagement and a follow-up study of marriage in Ireland. These hypotheses are based on the literature, taking account of the main findings on the variables important in the choice of a partner, the building up of a relationship and the eventual quality of that relationship. Also discussed was the difficulty of choosing a sample for a study of engaged couples, for whom no sampling frame exists. A particular method of sampling was tried and found unsuitable because of its cumbersome nature.

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