AN EXERCISE ON HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION FOR USE IN COURSES IN HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHY

John Knodel

John Knodel is associate professor in the Department of Sociology and research associate at The Population Studies Center, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. He teaches a proseminar in historical demography to graduate students at the university.

The study of population history has been going on for centuries. The emergence of modern historical demography as a discipline in its own right, however, is much more recent and has largely been the result of the application of new or modified techniques to sources of data not originally intended for demographic analysis. Indeed, in some respects it seems fair to conclude that historical demography is defined as much by its methods and sources as by its area of substantive interest. Thus a major goal of any course in historical demography should be to convey a familiarity with its special sources and techniques of analysis. I attempt to achieve this goal in the course I teach by having students participate in exercises through which they apply some of the basic methods to actual data from the past. The exercises serve as a valuable complement to the rest of the course which consists of readings and lectures on substantive findings as well as on methods and sources. One such exercise, the subject of the present article, deals with analysis of household composition from listings of inhabitants. It is simple to administer and has been received enthusiastically by the students. The task of the exercise is to apply Peter Laslett’s household classification scheme to the listing of the inhabitants of the village of Ealing made in 1599.

Before describing the exercise in detail, a few words on the choice of the Ealing listing are in order. Actually, any household listing could be used and I do not mean to imply that the Ealing listing is the only appropriate one. It does have several advantages, however. The listing has been transcribed and published and thus is readily accessible in a legible form. It is of moderate length providing sufficient cases to yield a reasonably reliable picture of household composition and yet is not too long to become tedious to students doing the exercise. The list contains a reasonable amount of information about most of the inhabitants including their ages which adds to the interest of doing the exercise. Finally, the results of a previous analysis of the Ealing listings are published in a volume edited by Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, permitting the students to compare their results with those obtained by the experts.
The exercise as distributed to the students consists of (a) a cover sheet with general instructions, (b) a household composition analysis form to be used for tallying the results of the analysis, (c) a description of the definitions and the classification scheme as well as the ideograph scheme adapted almost verbatim in an abridged form from Peter Laslett's introductory essay in the Laslett and Wall volume, and (d) a copy of the transcribed listing of the inhabitants of Ealing. All parts of the exercise are reproduced in Appendix A of this article except that only a few households from the Ealing list have been transcribed to illustrate the classificatory system. The copy of the Ealing listing can be obtained easily from its published source.

The administration of the exercise is very simple and straightforward. About a week or so before the exercise is to be discussed in class, copies are handed out to the students and instructions are reviewed. The students are told to do the exercise independently of each other since part of the purpose of the exercise is to demonstrate that different judgements can be made by different analysts looking at the same material. Students are instructed to classify all households in the listing but to make ideographs only for the first ten households. Since the first ten households included in the Ealing listing are among the most complicated ones, they serve as useful examples for doing ideographs. Students have reported that it takes between one and a half and two hours to do the entire exercise including reading the introductory material. Students are also asked to read a selection of readings on the general topic of household structure and dynamics from the literature of historical demography. The purpose of these readings is to introduce the students to the general issues being debated within the field on this topic. A suggested list of articles to be assigned to students is included in Appendix B of this article. They are divided into higher priority and lower priority readings. Other sets of readings than those suggested in Appendix B could undoubtedly serve just as well but I believe it is important to combine the exercise with some set of readings which introduce students to the substantive findings and types of issues being debated.

At the class session during which the exercise is discussed, I have found it useful to start by having students draw on the blackboard the ideographs of the first ten households. Generally I try to have each of the ideographs drawn by a different student. It is also useful to list on the blackboard each of the households (which can be easily identified by the person number of the household head) and to have different students fill in the list with their results of how they classified the particular household. The number of households listed on the board by each student will, of course, depend on the number of students in a class. For example, if there are ten students in the class, each student will have to put down about eight to nine households on the board to complete the entire list. I have started our exercise by focussing on the ideographs and asking if all students agree with each of the ideographs on the board. Invariably there are disagreements which are then discussed. The resolution of the disagreements is generally achieved through discussion and has proved to be quite instructive to students who are
applying the scheme for the first time. After all the ideographs have been reviewed and agreement achieved, the discussion focuses on the remaining seventy-five households. Students compare their classification of each household with the one written on the blackboard. Again, disagreements are mentioned and discussed. About forty-five minutes seems to be an adequate amount of time for discussion of both the ideographs and the comparisons of classification of the remaining households. It should be stressed that it is the disagreement among different students about how to classify a particular household that is the most instructive part of the entire exercise. Thus it is important to stress to students that they do the exercise independently prior to the session in which it is discussed.

After the class has agreed on classification of each of the households, a final tally is made and then compared with the results published in Table 1.15 of Peter Laslett’s introductory essay in the Laslett and Wall volume. This will also prove interesting since it is very likely that the final results obtained by the class will not agree with those published by Peter Laslett. This helps underscore the point already evident from the previous discussion that to some extent arbitrary judgements must be made and that the solution of questions which arise from looking at specific listings must remain ambiguous because of the lack of information on certain household members. Since the results published in Peter Laslett’s introductory essay do not show the classification of each individual household, but rather the final aggregate distribution, it is not possible to compare household by household. However, in our comparison it was clear that there was disagreement concerning the household in the listings headed by a person listed as 178. It seemed clear to us that this household should be classified as type 5a while in the published results there are no households listed under this type.

I found it useful to plot a single year age distribution for the entire population of Ealing. This can probably be best done simply as a bar graph with the length of the bar corresponding to a particular age proportional to the number of persons in the population at that age. Before showing this bar graph representation of the age distribution to the students, I asked if they felt there was any evidence of ‘age heaping’ (i.e., preferences for certain digits) in the listing. The students may or may not have noticed that there actually is substantial digit preference evident in the listing from Ealing. Showing them the bar graph demonstrates this age preference quite conclusively. There seems to be a great deal of heaping at ages ending in zero for adults aged twenty through sixty. This helps generate some scepticism about the precision that can be attributed to age reporting in documents from the past. There is also an unusually large number of youths aged fourteen. It is not clear to me whether this is a question of digit preference or a genuine peculiarity of the Ealing population at the time of the listing. On the other hand, the age distribution shows that substantial numbers of young children were also included in the listing although, of course, it is impossible to know whether the enumeration was complete in this respect or not.

Each time a different group of students does the exercise, a new set of questions will undoubtedly arise concerning specific households or
specific persons. Some of them can be clearly resolved while others cannot. The fact that some ambiguity must remain is certainly one of the more important lessons to be learned from the exercise. Yet, despite these ambiguities, the general picture that emerges from the Ealing listing is quite clear. Simple family households predominate overwhelmingly. Servants, including those in husbandry, are very common. The larger and more complex households tend to be those of the more prominent villagers.

In my experience, a discussion of the general issues currently under debate in the literature on household structure and dynamics follows quite readily from the discussion based on the exercise. Because the students are able to gain some appreciation of the basic source of the data, i.e., the household listings, as well as the classification scheme being used for its analysis, they seem to be able to offer more informative criticisms of the literature than would otherwise be possible. It also seems clear in my experience that doing the exercise increased their interest in the subject.

NOTES


APPENDIX A

I. General Instructions

The purpose of this exercise is to replicate the analysis of households by structures reported for the English village of Ealing in P. Laslett and R. Wall, Household and Family in Past Time (Cambridge University Press, 1972). To do this you are provided with:

a) a Household Composition Analysis Form;

b) a copy of the transcribed listing of inhabitants of the village of Ealing made in 1599 as reported by Keith Allison, "An Elizabethian Village ‘Census,' " Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, Volume XXXVI, May 1963;

c) an abridged version of section II (Definitions, methods and scheme of analysis) from Peter Laslett’s introductory essay in the Laslett and Wall volume.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Number of households</th>
<th>% of households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 <strong>Solitaries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(singletons in households)</td>
<td>1a) given as widowed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1b) given as non-married or of unknown marital status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>sub total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 <strong>No family households</strong></td>
<td>2a) coresident siblings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(coresidents not constituting conjugal family</td>
<td>2b) other coresident relatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>units)</td>
<td>2c) coresidents with no familial relationship given</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>sub total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 <strong>Simple family households</strong></td>
<td>3a) married couples without children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(conjugal family units)</td>
<td>3b) married couples with children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3c) widowers with children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3d) widows with children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>sub total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 <strong>Extended family households</strong></td>
<td>4a) extension upwards (of which fathers mothers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(conjugal family units having kin-linked</td>
<td>4b) extension downwards (of which grandchildren</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individuals)</td>
<td>4c) extension sideways (of which brothers sisters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4d) combinations of 4a-4c, or any other form of extension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>sub total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 <strong>Multiple family households</strong></td>
<td>5a) households with secondary units disposed upwards from head (of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(two or more kin-linked conjugal family units)</td>
<td>which — also extended)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5b) households with secondary units disposed downwards from head (of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>which — also extended)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5c) households with secondary units disposed sideways from head, parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or parent-in-law of head being present and not part of a clu. (of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>which — also extended)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5d) Frèresches, households with secondary units disposed sideways</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>from head, parent or parent-in-law of head absent. (of which — also</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>extended)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5e) combinations of 5a-5d or any other multiple household arrangement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(of which — also extended)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>sub total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 <strong>Indeterminate</strong></td>
<td>households whose kin-linkages are insufficient for classification in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>any of above</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>sub total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL** 100%
Your basic task is to fill in the Household Composition Analysis Form based on the 85 households included in the listing. The following steps are suggested:

1. Read through the “Definitions, methods and scheme of analysis.”
2. Make ideographs for the first 10 households.
3. Go through the entire listing noting the appropriate classification category (e.g., 1a, 3c, 4a, etc.) in the margin next to each household.
4. Fill in the Household Composition Analysis Form.
   (Note: Filling in numbers in the spaces provided for in bracketed phases in categories 4 and 5 on the form is optional.)

III. Definitions and Scheme of Analysis


This section lays down suggested definitions and ways of exploiting the data provided by lists of inhabitants. It proposes a scheme of classification, as well as a method for the pictorial or ideographic representation of domestic groups.

1. DEFINITION OF THE DOMESTIC GROUP

* All we have is some knowledge of the law and custom of our chosen areas and a few documents left behind by a handful of the myriads of communities which have consisted of such domestic groups. These documents consist of lists of inhabitants, and the task is to exploit them in such a way that the exactest possible comparison can be made. For this purpose it is essential to lay down who is to be included in the coresident domestic group and who excluded from it.

In doing this no theory of domestic group organization is being advanced, simply the rules which have to be observed if surviving documentary evidence is to be made usable for comparative domestic group analysis. If faced with the challenge to answer the question what exactly is meant here by the terms family and household the only appropriate response would be an appeal to the past persons who created that evidence. The lists they left behind them consist of series of names of individuals in blocks, with clear indications of where one block ended and the next began; unless they made out exactly such lists their evidence has not been admitted. It requires no great perspicuity to see that these blocks of names must have been families, or households, and we know that the men of the past called them by these titles. Nevertheless we have to assume that in order to qualify for such descriptions the shape of these blocks was very far from being arbitrary, and in fact was determined by three main considerations. Persons would only appear together within those blocks if they had the three following characteristics in common: they slept habitually under the same roof (a locational criterion); they shared a number of activities (a functional criterion); they were related to each other by blood or by marriage (a kinship criterion).
Location, shared activity and kinship

The first two criteria are taken to be universal. Everyone recorded as belonging with a block of persons in a list is supposed to have been living together with the others, and is assumed to have cooperated in many directions with them, to have had a relationship of support or dependence with some or all of them, perhaps relationships of both kinds. But not all such persons are taken to have shared the third characteristic, that of kinship, because some individuals, always a minority but not an unimportant minority, are known to have shared in the activities of the domestic group in which they lived though not related by marriage or blood to any other member. These were the servants, the visitors, boarders and lodgers, who appear along with other members of the family or household within the blocks of names which we are discussing.

Members of the household

In the first place come the man, his wife and their socially recognised children. In the second place come all other resident relatives, as we shall call them in general; that is, all those connected by blood or marriage and living with the family. In the third place come all servants, those individuals who are now rare in modern society, but who were so common at all times up to those of our parents. They were commoner in England than in most other countries for they made up something like an eighth of the whole population in pre-industrial times.

But though we can be reasonably clear on membership of the domestic group up to this point, there were, and are, certain occasional or even semi-permanent residents in the household in an ambiguous position. These are the visitors, guests of the family, the lodgers and the boarders.

Once more the consideration has had to be the state of the evidence, which in its crudest exploitable form (and this is unfortunately the most usual), seems not to take separate account of visitors, lodgers and boarders, or lodging and boarding households.

2. TERMINOLOGY AND SCHEME OF ANALYSIS

Although we have to assume that the men of the past thought as we do when they gave boundaries to the domestic group, we must not suppose that they made any careful distinction of terms. In England, the word family was the ordinary term for what we should call, and call here household, but the word household was itself sometimes used and even the expression "family and household."

Types of family household

The terminology and classification recommended for the exploitation of lists of inhabitants should now begin to be clear. It must be strongly stressed that in this vocabulary the word family does not denote a complete coresident domestic group, though it may appear as an abbreviated title. The word household particularly indicates the fact of shared location, kinship and activity. Hence all solitaries have to be taken to be households, for they are living with themselves, and this is the
case when they have servants with them, since servants are taken as household members. In fact, because servants always modify the membership of households, we can allot all domestic groups to one of two classes: those with and those without servants. Nevertheless servants can hardly be said to affect the final structure of households, and when it comes to the more significant types of domestic groups, the form of description is by the title of the composition of the family in question, followed by the word household. Hence the descriptions "simple family household," "extended family household," "multiple family household." These terms require a little discussion.

The expression simple family is used to cover what is variously described as the nuclear family, the elementary family or (not very logically, since spouses are not physiologically connected), the biological family. It consists of a married couple, or a married couple with offspring, or of a widowed person with offspring. The concept is of the conjugal link as the structural principle, and conjugal linkage is nearly always patent in the lists of persons which we are using. For a simple family to appear then, it is necessary for at least two individuals connected by that link or arising from that link to be coresident. conjugal family unit (CFU) is a preciser term employed to describe all possible groups so structured. The first mentioned person in the household is always taken to be the head, and simple family households can be classified along with the rest as with or without servants.

An extended family household in our nomenclature consists in a conjugal family unit with the addition of one or more relatives other than offspring, the whole group living together on its own or with servants. It is thus identical with the simple family household except for the additional item or items. If the resident relative is of a generation earlier than that of the conjugal family unit, say, a married head’s father or a spouse’s mother, or a widowed head’s aunt, then the extension is said to be upwards. The headship of the household is irrelevant here. The resident relative may be head, or the child of the resident relative may be in that position.

Similarly the presence of a grandchild (without either parent) or a nephew or niece creates downward extension, and that of a brother, sister or cousin of the head or of his spouse, implies sideways or lateral extension. Some groups are extended vertically and laterally, and it should be noted that the presence of any kin or affine of the conjugal family unit creates extension however distant the relationship, though the relatives of a servant do not do so. It is particularly important that the whole phrase ‘extended family household’ be used for this category of domestic group, because the words ‘extended family’ by themselves have a highly significant but quite separate further meaning, which covers all relatives in habitual contact with a person, irrespective of whether they live with him.

Multiple family households comprise all forms of domestic groups which include two or more conjugal family units connected by kinship or by marriage. Such units can be simple or extended, and can be disposed.
vertically and laterally. The disposition of a secondary unit, that is, of a constituent unit which does not contain the head of the whole household, is said to be UP if its conjugal link involves a generation earlier than that of the head, as for example when his father and mother live with him. Such a secondary unit can include offspring of the head’s parents other than the head himself, that is, his resident unmarried brothers or sisters, and the presence of such persons keeps this secondary unit in being if one or other of the head’s parents dies. A secondary unit is disposed DOWN if, for example, a head’s married son lives with him along with his wife and perhaps offspring, with similar implications about siblings and widowhood. Where more than one secondary conjugal family occurs, these principles are intended to apply to any number. Unless there is specific contrary indication, servants are regarded as attached to the simple, extended or multiple family household as a whole, and not to any individual or to any conjugal family unit within it.

**Classificatory table**

It can be seen that the analysis of the structure of coresident domestic groups can get very complex, especially when it comes to differing forms of multiple family household. The various types which we have found it necessary to distinguish and define in order to arrive at a scheme making it possible to use lists of inhabitants and to compare the familial structure of different communities at different times are set out in the following table.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Solitaries</td>
<td>(a) Widowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Single, or of unknown marital status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 No family</td>
<td>(a) Coresident siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Coresident relatives of other kinds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Persons not evidently related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Simple family households</td>
<td>(a) Married couples alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Married couples with child(ren)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Widowers with child(ren)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Widows with child(ren)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Extended family households</td>
<td>(a) Extended upwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Extended downwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Extended laterally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Combinations of 4a - 4c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Multiple family households</td>
<td>(a) Secondary unit(s) up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Secondary unit(s) down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Units all on one level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Frérèches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(e) Other multiple families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Indeterminate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'Stem families'

- 5b
- 5b+5a
- 5b+5a+4a
- 5d

Frérèches, alternative definitions

- 5d+5c
- 5d+5c+4c
- 5d+5c+4c+2a
3. DOMESTIC GROUPS AND LIVING SPACES

The household and its dwelling; inmates, lodgers and lodging

At this point, questions such as the following arise. If a solitary, or any other householder, should take in a lodger or lodgers, are such lodgers to be regarded as members of his household? If not, and the very word lodger seems to imply that no other connection than the sharing of a dwelling should be inferred, then what assumption is to be made about the structure and status of a domestic group composed of landlords and lodgers? How is the relationship between households sharing a building to be defined?

We have found from experience that most of the complications about the exact structure of the domestic group, at least in Europe, arise from the occasional presence of persons in this variegated class of those casually rather than permanently connected with households (i.e. lodgers). This seems to have been recognised at the very outset of the study by Gregory King, who used the word inmates for all these persons, as we shall do. Many of the persons living in domestic groups in the second category of Table 1, those lacking familial structure, must have been related to each other in a similar way, though brothers and sisters living together, and more distant relatives too, may have formed more stable domestic groups than those consisting entirely of persons who can be regarded as “inmates” in respect to each other.

A houseful means all persons inhabiting the same set of premises, and premises is another word we have found useful to endow with a restrictive usage for our purposes. Premises in our system denotes the accommodation provided by a building, or in certain cases of a number of conjoined or contiguous buildings, say in the case of Western Europe a farmhouse with a yard surrounded by outhouses which can be made suitable for occupation by people.

The application of the concepts we are describing to the placing of inmates is quite straightforward. Inmates are thought of as being members of the same houseful as the one in which the household to which they are connected is to be found, and as having no other relationship with their landlords or hosts.

4. AN IDEOGRAPHIC NOTATION FOR DOMESTIC GROUPS

The attempt has been made to convey the classification system in its essentials, though not in detail by prose explanation only. The use of diagrams can make what was meant much clearer. The ideographic system adopted was devised by Eugene Hammel as an extension of that already in use by social anthropologists, with certain additions and modifications, particularly in respect to the drawing of boundaries round the various units. Figure 1 gives examples of the pictures for the more important domestic group structures.
Fig 1. An ideographic notation for domestic groups

- △ male
- ○ female
- ♦ sex unspecified, or unknown
- △ ○ servant (all types)
- △ ○ lodgers (inmates of all kinds)
- △ ○ brother and sister
- ○ widow
- ○ widow with child
- --- inferred link, unspecified in source
- →→→ adoptive link
- △ ○ married couple
- △ ○ widow, widow with children

Conjugal family units
(second involving remarriage)
NB curved boundary

Simple family households, with classification given, second with servants; solid black for head
NB squared boundary for household,
upper and lower lines for houseful.
Fig 1. Continued

Extended family
(1) Extension upward
(2) Extension upwards and laterally.
(3) Extension downwards with servant and lodgers.

NB Where source names relative(s) etc., and linkage cannot be fully specified, word describing relevant person(s) is reproduced and inferred linkage indicated.

Multiple family household
secondary unit DOWN, units numbered (secondaries all after 1), with lodger (inmate) specified in source as visitor.

Frèreche

A Multiple family household, secondary unit UP, with adoptive link.
B Lateral extended family household, with 2 male and 3 female servants. Note that resident kinswoman not specified as to which spouse she is related to is shown as attached to conjugal link.
C Solitary widow
APPENDIX B

Suggested Readings to Accompany Exercise

Higher Priority


Lower Priority


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