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## **51% of Women Are Now Living Without Spouse**

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By SAM ROBERTS; ARIEL SABAR, BRENDA GOODMAN AND MAUREEN BALLEZA  
CONTRIBUTED REPORTING. (NYT); National Desk

In 2005, 51 percent of women said they were living without a spouse, up from 35 percent in 1950 and 49 percent in 2000.

Several factors are driving the statistical shift. At one end of the age spectrum, women are marrying later or living with unmarried partners more often and for longer periods. At the other end, women are living longer as widows and, after a divorce, are more likely than men to delay remarriage, sometimes delighting in their newfound freedom.

In addition, marriage rates among black women remain low. Only about 30 percent of black women are living with a spouse, according to the Census Bureau, compared with about 49 percent of Hispanic women, 55 percent of non-Hispanic white women and more than 60 percent of Asian women.

In a relatively small number of cases, the living arrangement is temporary, because the husbands are working out of town, are in the military or are institutionalized. But while most women eventually marry, the larger trend is unmistakable.

“This is yet another of the inexorable signs that there is no going back to a world where we can assume that marriage is the main institution that organizes people’s lives,” said Prof. Stephanie Coontz, director of public education for the Council on Contemporary Families, a nonprofit research group. “Most of these women will marry, or have married. But on average, Americans now spend half their adult lives outside marriage.”

Professor Coontz said this was probably unprecedented with the possible exception of major wartime mobilizations and when black couples were separated during slavery.

William H. Frey, a demographer with the Brookings Institution, a research group in Washington, described the shift as “a clear tipping point, reflecting the culmination of the post-1960 trends associated with greater independence and more flexible lifestyles for women.”

“For better or worse, women are less dependent on men or the institution of marriage,” Dr. Frey said. “Younger women understand this better, and are preparing to live longer parts of their lives alone or with non-married Partners. For many older boomer and senior women, the institution of marriage did not hold the promise they might have hoped for, growing up in an ‘Ozzie and Harriet’ era.”

Emily Zuzik, a 32-year old musician and model who lives in the East Village of Manhattan, said she was not surprised by the trend.

“A lot of my friends are divorced or single or living alone,” Ms Zuzik said. “I know a lot of people in their 30s who have roommates.”

Ms Zuzik has lived with a boyfriend twice, once in California where the couple registered as domestic partners to qualify for his health insurance plan. “I don’t plan to live with anyone else again until I am married,” she said, “and I may opt to keep a place of my own ever then.”

**“A gentleman asked me to marry him and I said no. I told him, “I’m just beginning to fly again, I’m just beginning to be me. Don’t take that away.” Elissa B. Terris, Divorced in 2005 after being married for 34 years.**

Sheila Jamison, who also lives in the East Village and works for a media company, is 45 and single. She says her family believes she would have had a better chance of finding a husband had she attended a historically black college instead of Duke.

“Considering all the weddings I attended in the ‘80s that have ended so very, very badly, I consider myself straight up lucky,” Ms Jamison said. “I have not sworn off marriage, but if I do wed, it will be to have a companion with whom I can travel and play parlor games in my old age.”

**Carol Crenshaw, 57, of Roswell, GA, was divorced in 2005 after 33 years and says she is in no hurry to marry again.**

**“I’m in a place in my life where I’m comfortable,” said Ms Crenshaw, who has two grown sons. “I can do what I want, when I want, with whom I want. I was a wife and a mother. I don’t feel like I need to do that again.”**