Susan C. Ziehl

Documenting Changing Family Patterns in South Africa: Are Census Data of any Value?

1. Introduction

A number of scholars have shown an interest in the question of whether modernization; urbanization and\or industrialization have resulted in an homogenization of family patterns in South Africa (Marwick, 1978; Pauw, 1973; Simkins, 1986; Beittel, 1992; Russell, 1994; Amoateng, 1997; Moller, 1998). This has generally taken the form of asking whether among Black South Africans, in particular, extended family households have become less common and nuclear families more common over time. Although few of these writers actually mention the name of William Goode (1982), their work can be seen as an attempt to test (or at least respond to) his thesis that industrialization results in the simplification of household structures and a movement towards the nuclear family pattern.

One of the arguments of this paper is that the empirical bases of these studies are inadequate, either, because they do not involve longitudinal data and\or are not generalizable to South African society as a whole. Against this background, the question is posed as to whether a comparison of 1991 and 1996 census data provides more accurate information – at least for recent times. It will be pointed out that there are still significant problems around the use of census data for the identification of family patterns in this society – in particular around the question of change. Finally, the paper provides a comparison of the item on the South African census questionnaire dealing with relationships between individuals in households, with that used in other societies and asks whether a change in the wording of this item may lead to better results.

2. Previous research

While some have argued that it is politically, ideologically and\or academically incorrect to ask whether Black South Africans are moving in the direction of the nuclear family pattern (Russell, 1994), this has not perturbed scholars from entertaining this question. For example, in 1961 Marwick studied a predominantly Nguni-speaking African township near Johannesburg to determine 'the changes in domestic organization that Africans undergo on moving from traditional subsistence activity to participation in modern urban industrial life' (1978:52). He concludes that his data 'has shown that the patterns of domestic organization move in the direction of those normally found in industrial societ-

ies' (1978:52). He bases this assertion on the fact that the most common household structure was the nuclear family (48%) which together with other households 'which one would expect to find among any urban dwellers' – persons living alone and couples without children – constituted 71% of all households:

'... the shift in social composition of the domestic group has been from an extended family defined by patrilineal descent, patrivirilocal residence and polygyny to complete and incomplete forms of the nuclear family, along with a somewhat larger than normal proportion of extended families, among a few of which traditional principles of social organization have been superseded by the more elemental link between mother and child'. (1978:46).

Similarly, Pauw's study of residents of Duncan village in the 1960s showed relatively high levels of extended family households (58%) but 12 years later when he researched the residents of Mdantsane (to which many of the Duncan Village residents had moved) he found a substantial drop in the number of multi-generational households (1973:208). In this regard, Simkins comments that 'the general hypothesis would then be that (all other things being equal) the newer the African settlement, the higher the proportion of nuclear households' (1986:28). Simkins further claims that his own calculations from the 1980 Current Population survey show very little difference in the household patterns of Blacks living in metropolitan, urban and rural areas which prompts him to conclude that:

'the transformation of African household structure, discussed by Marwick (1978) and Pauw (1973) in the case of urban areas, has penetrated the entire society. Simulation work suggests that this transformation had largely been complete at least as far back as 1960.' (1986:38).

Table 1

Distribution of Households by type 1980 (%)			
	Metropolitan (City)	Urban (Town)	Rural
Single Person	7%	6%	2%
Single Parent	7%	9%	8%
Nuclear	41%	43%	37%
Extended & Compound	45%	42%	53%
Source: Simkins 1986:37. (Unpublished tabulations from Current Population Survey.) (Some categories combined for presentation).			

However, the general tenor of Simkins's analysis is one of caution and uncertainty. So, for instance, he indicates that since the nuclear family concept is being challenged due to the rise in the divorce rate there is a problem 'of decid-

ing on the pattern to which the distributions might converge' (1986:40). Indeed, he cites Burman & Fuchs (1986) who suggest that the rise of the divorce rate among Whites may result in their household structures becoming more complex. Secondly, he points out that issues around the sexual ethics of Africans are 'complex and by no means fully understood' (1986:40). More specifically, he contends that there are pressures towards the adoption of both more tolerant and stricter sexual mores which have implications for rates of illegitimacy and by extension, extended family households. To this he adds 'accordingly there are questions about the prospect of uniformity in South African household structures' (1986:40). He nevertheless offers a number of observations: (1) 'Cultural inter-penetration ... might further reduce the force of differing traditions'; (2) 'the closing of the income gap between Black and White will make smaller households – insofar as they are desired – more affordable' (3) the move towards greater private provision of housing 'will allow more scope for the realization of desired household structures' (4) the impact of the abolition of influx control on household structures is unclear but probably will not be great (1986:38-41). Simkins concludes his analysis with the following comment:

> 'Perhaps just over half of South African households are nuclear in structure; most of the rest are extended or multiple[1]. If there is a trend towards the nuclear household, it is a very weak one. More complex forms will be distributed in varying measure and to a very substantial degree throughout South African society for as far ahead as one can see'. (1986:41)

Beittel (1992) has also contributed to this debate – albeit from a different angle. Taking as his main focus the question of the sources of household income, and using data on households in Soweto, Beittel claims that there has been 'no linear path of development culminating in a homogeneous mass of urban workers who are fully dependent upon wages for subsistence' (1992:224). Rather, he claims that the development has been cyclical, with periods of economic expansion being associated with greater reliance on wages and economic stagnation or contraction with reliance on non-wage income: rent (from lodgers); market sales or trade; transfer payments (pensions for example) and subsistence (maintaining the home). Beittel is also interested in the question of household structure and claims that in this regard there has also been no general trend towards uniformity (1992:225). In the case of Whites, he asserts that the initial difference in the household composition patterns of poor and skilled whites was eliminated by the 1930s – the typical pattern being the nuclear family plus servant and very high levels of dependence (90%) on one wage. By contrast, 'among the African population one finds sharply increasing proportions of female-headed households and strong pressures toward multi-generation households' (1992:225). He bases these claims on historical sources as well as data produced by the Bureau of Market Research (BMR) on 'African multiple member households in Johannesburg from 1962 to 1985.' These show that

average household size declined from 1962 to 1970; increased from 1970 to 1980 and declined thereafter (1992:218). They further show a steady increase in the proportion of female headed households as well as the proportion of 'other household members'. The latter is defined as 'relatives not the children of the "household head" and non-related household members' (1992:218).

Moller is another scholar who has taken a position with respect to this debate. Having as her main concern the well-being of the elderly, Moller makes the following comment:

'Contrary to common knowledge, the multi-generation household is not on the decline: the majority of African elderly still live with children and grandchildren ... factors such as respect for the elderly in the family setting; improved services and government transfers to elderly households, the African renaissance and demographic trends bode well for the continuity of the multigeneration household as a living arrangement of choice in future' (1998:1).

She bases this claim on a comparison of three national surveys: the Multidimensional Survey (1990); the Living Standards and Development Survey (1993) and the October Household Survey (1995) which 'indicates that the proportion of older black South Africans living in two, three and four generation households has remained fairly stable since the early nineties' (1998:4).

Table 2

Generations in Households					
Survey	One	Two	Three	Four+	Total
MDS 1990	8%	34%	57%	1%	92%
LSDS 1993	9%	30%	58%	3%	91%
OHS 1995	11%	37%	49%	3%	89%
Sources: Multidimensional Survey MDS 1990: Ferreira et al., 1992:105; LSDS 1993: Moller & Devey, 1995:5; OHS 1995 database. Own calculations. In Moller, 1998:4.					

By contrast, Amoateng (1997) claims that his research data support the convergence hypothesis:

'Survey data from an African and coloured community on the Cape Flats are used to support the thesis of convergence between black family patterns (sic) and the nuclear family patterns (sic) among their white counterparts. We find that exposure to urban-industrial conditions is generally associated with an increase in the number of nuclear family households among the two ethnic groups' (1997:22).

In particular, Amoateng's research shows that in each of the residential areas 'nuclear family households' (which includes single parent families and couple households) accounted for about two-thirds of all households – the 'traditional nuclear family' making up 54% and 44% of households in the 'coloured' and African residential areas respectively (1997:33).

Table 3

Distribution of Types of Households and Community				
Type of Household	Belhar		Mfuleni	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Nuclear Family Household	**456**	**66.38**	**103**	**62.42**
Traditional Nuclear	369 (80.92)		73 (70.87)	
Father-Child Unit	14 (3.07)		10 (9.71)	
Mother-Child Unit	51 (11.18)		12 (11.65)	
Couple Household	22 (14.82)		8 (7.77)	
Extended Family HHS	**212**	**30.86**	**31**	**18.79**
Extended Nuclear	177 (83.49)		21 (67.74)	
Multi-generational Nuclear	17 (8.02)		5 (16.13)	
Extended Couple	18 (8.49)		5 (16.13)	
Traditional Extended	–			
Unrelated Persons	**8**	**1.16**	**10**	**6.06**
Single-Person Households	**11**	**1.6**	**21**	**12.73**
TOTAL	**687**	**100**	**165**	**100**
Source: Amoateng,1997:33 (emphasis in original)				

In sum, a number of scholars have made pronouncements on the question of whether there has been a convergence or divergence of family\household patterns in South African society. Three main positions emerge: (1) Black South Africans are increasingly approximating the nuclear family pattern (Marwick; Pauw; Amoateng); (2) Substantial differences remain and are likely to continue (Simkins; Moller & Beittel). But there is a third position which in my view is the more appropriate and that is one which says that we need to be very circumspect when we make pronouncements about how family patterns may or may not be changing – especially if our point of reference is South African society as a whole. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, with two exceptions (Simkins & Moller) only, the studies referred to above involve relatively small localized

communities which makes the drawing of inferences to the population as a whole problematic. Secondly, again with two exceptions (Moller & Beittel) none of these studies are longitudinal in the sense of providing data from the *same* community at two *different* points in time. In other words the crucial ingredient for any claim about how a phenomenon (family patterns in this case) has changed, namely a 'before picture' with which to compare contemporary data, is absent. So, for instance, Marwick compares his 1961 data with Hammond-Tooke's survey of '29 homesteads among the Bhaca' conducted in 1949; the 1951 British census and a 1966 study of households in a Melbourne suburb (1978:41). Even in the case of Moller who bases her assertions on three large scale nationally representative sample surveys, the latter were conducted by three different institutions, the samples were very different in size and the method of drawing the samples also varied.

Some of these scholars readily admit the limitations of the data which they have used to support their claims. Beittel, for instance, indicates that the BMR data 'are plagued by many shortcomings' in part, because they only refer to 'multiple households' – leaving out single person households and also because they report on 'average (rather than actual) household composition' which means they 'undoubtedly conflate significant differences among quite distinct household types' (1992:228-229). It is possibly in recognition of the absence of appropriate longitudinal data on a national scale, that Simkins makes use of an urban\rural comparison in formulating his views on the changing nature of family and household structures in South African society as a whole or, as he puts it, 'universalizing' the accounts of scholars like Marwick and Pauw (Simkins,1986:28). Against this background, the question arises as to whether census data are of any value in documenting changes in the family patterns of the various communities that make up South African society. A census is (or at least aims at being) comprehensive i.e. covering the entire population and is conducted periodically (every 5 years).

But before doing so, it is important to clarify the meaning that is attached to the central concepts used in this paper. A great deal has been written on the concept of 'the family' and the necessity of defining it broadly enough so as to avoid elevating the nuclear family to the position of moral norm against which all other family types are measured. Here it is defined as a social institution comprising an ideological component and a concrete component where the former refers to a set of ideas about marriage; procreation and residence and the latter to the actual domestic arrangements (households) which people reside in. This definition is deliberately abstract in order to avoid the prescriptiveness of 'the family equals the nuclear family approach'. In this definition of the family as social institution, the specific *content* of family ideology and the actual configuration of household structures is not determined *a priori* but can be filled in after investigation. The concept of 'the family' broadly defined is however not the main concern of this paper. Rather, what is at issue is what I have described

as the concrete aspect of the family as institution (household arrangements) and more particularly the notion of family pattern. The latter in turn is defined as a series of household arrangements which individuals participate in, in the course of a life time. In other words, a family *pattern* is defined as a series of *household structures* which mark off the different phases of the domestic life cycle of individuals. For analytical purposes, two ideal types of family patterns are identified – the first is called the nuclear family *pattern* and the second the extended family *pattern*. The nuclear family pattern consists of three house-hold types and five phases:

1. Nuclear – when ego is born
2. Couple – when ego marries
3. Nuclear – when ego has children
4. Couple – when the children leave home
5. Single person – when ego's spouse dies.

The extended family pattern consists of two household types and many more phases:

1. Extended family when ego is born
2. Nuclear family when ego's grandparents die
3. Extended family when ego marries and goes to live with her husband and his parent(s)
4. Nuclear family when ego's husband's parents die
5. Extended family when ego's son brings his wife and children to live with them

As will be noted from the above, the nuclear family household is common to both family patterns. This is why it is inappropriate to seek evidence of a com-munity following one family *pattern* or the other, in the prevalence of nuclear family *households* alone. This is a common mistake made by researchers who see the nuclear family household as part of a domestic life cycle involving other household types, but do not acknowledge this in the case of extended family households (see Marwick and Amoateng). Similarly, it is also inappropriate to seek evidence of a *change from one family pattern to another* in the frequency with which nuclear family households occur. Rather, it is more appropriate to ask if there has been any significant change in the frequency with which other i.e. non-overlapping, household structures occur. More specifically, with respect to the convergence\divergence debate we should ask whether White South Africans who have traditionally followed the nuclear family pattern, are increasingly living in extended family households. Conversely, in the case of Black South Africans, we need to ask whether they are increasingly living in

single person and\or couple households. This is the approach that will be used in the present paper.

3.   Census data

The most recent South African census took place in October 1996. It was the first to be conducted within the context of a democratic South Africa and covered the entire country i.e. included the former homeland areas (Transkei; Bophutatswana and Venda). The results met with a fair deal of controversy. This was mainly around the question of the total number of individuals enumerated. A Post-Enumeration survey was conducted in November 1996 and the numbers adjusted accordingly. The size of the total population was increased to 40 583 573 (Statistics SA, 1996:4).

Like other census questionnaires, the 1996 one contained an item on the number of individuals in households as well as the relationship between household members and the 'head of the household'. The latter was defined as 'the person who assumes responsibility for the household' (Statistics S.A., n.d:7) (Enumerator's Manual). The options given for the question of relationship to household head were:

1.   Head/acting head
2.   Husband/wife/partner
3.   Son/daughter/stepchild/adopted child
4.   Brother/sister
5.   Father/mother
6.   Grandparent
7.   Grandchild
8.   Other relative (e.g. in-laws)
9.   Non-related person

Statistics South Africa (SSA) analysed and made public the data on the number of individuals in households as well as the number of individuals who were classified in each of the above categories. In other words, the number of household heads; number of spouses\partners etc. It did not, however, analyse the data in terms of the actual structure of households. Below I present these data and ask if they are useful in illustrating the differences in the family patterns followed by Black and White South Africans. This is followed by a discussion of their utility in documenting any changes that may be taking place with respect to family patterns.

3.1   Documenting Difference:

Table 4

HOUSEHOLD SIZE BY RACE S.A. Census 1996				
Number of People	African		White	
	N	%	N	%
1	1 125 533	17.23	276 609	18.66
2	988 104	15.12	446 881	30.14
3	891 923	13.65	262 739	17.72
4	881 078	13.48	277 212	18.70
5	763 258	11.68	136 583	9.21
6	596 830	9.13	52 124	3.52
7	430 192	6.58	18 474	1.25
8	300 096	4.59	6 969	0.47
9	323 337	4.95	4 134	0.28
10+	233 648	3.58	767	0.05
Total	6 533 999	99.99	1 482 492	100

Table 4 provides data on the differences in the size of households. It indicates that households consisting of 4 or less persons are more common among Whites than Blacks – the opposite being true of households containing 5 or more individuals. Since extended family households are larger than single person and couple households and usually larger than nuclear family households, these data provide some support for the claim that Black and White South Africans follow different family patterns. However, data on household size is of limited value in documenting family patterns since the larger size of Black households could be an indication of higher levels of fertility rather than differences in household structures *per se*. So, for instance, a household of 6 people could consist of a married couple with four children or a three-generational extended family. Similarly, a household of 3 people could consist of a woman; her daughter and grandchild or a married couple with one child. In other words, there is no necessary connection between the size and structure of households.

Table 5

Relationship to Household Head (Individuals) S.A. Census 1996						
Total	Black	'Coloured'	Asian	White	Unspecified	Total
Head of household	22.2	23.85	23.9	34.76	16.77	23.49
Husband/ wife/partner	9.53	14.87	18.6	24.56	10.94	11.86
Son/daughter	40.42	41.35	42.4	32.29	39.31	39.67
Brother/sister	4.09	2.07	1.99	0.92	2.48	3.5
Father/mother	1.17	0.82	2.11	1.39	1.21	1.19
Grandparent	0.7	0.23	0.34	0.2	0.54	0.59
Grandchild	13.43	10.18	4.59	1.15	10.28	11.57
Other relative	3.72	4.71	4.95	1.54	3.88	3.61
Non-related person	1.78	3.02	0.86	2.68	9.39	2.03
Unspecified	2.96	1.01	0.34	0.51	5.19	2.48
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5 provides data on the proportion of individuals who were classified in one or other of the categories for relationship to household head. It shows that over 13% of Black children were living in households headed by a grandparent compared with less than 2% in the case of Whites. But once again, these data provide only limited evidence of the different family patterns followed by the various population groups since differences in fertility may also play a role here; there are numerous problems around the question of headship (see later) and the unit of analysis in this instance is the individual rather than the household. Conversely, in the case of Table 4, the unit of analysis is the household but we are only given information on the *number* of people in households rather than *their relationship*. How then do we obtain census data on the actual structure of households i.e. where the unit of analysis is the household and the information pertains to the relationship between household members?

This has required a special request on my part to Statistics South Africa and many months of email communication during which I, at times, received data that can only be described as meaningless. Eventually, it emerged that a special programme had to be written to 'marry' two data sets that are usually kept separate: data pertaining to households (where information on household size and

other 'household variables' is located) and data pertaining to individuals (where information on relationship to household head is located). I am extremely grateful to Piet Alberts and Wanda Steyn at Statistics South Africa for the effort they put into identifying the problem and finding a solution to it. The process involved, *inter alia*, identifying a number of categories of household structure and determining the number of *households* that fell into each of the categories[2]. Household structure was operationalised as follows: Households consisting of:

1.   A head only (single person) (1);
2.   A head and spouse\partner only (couple household) (1&2);
3.   A head; spouse\partner and child\ren only (nuclear family) (1,2&3);
4.   A head plus child\ren only (single parent household) (1&3);
5.   A head; spouse; child\ren & grandchild\ren (extended family household) (1,2,3&7) etc.

Initially we made use of 12 categories (as indicated in Table 6(a) in Appendix) but this proved problematic since about a quarter of all households fell into the 'missing values' category. There were two reasons for this: in some questionnaires the relationship to household head was not indicated (this can be called the non-response category) in others, the combination of relationship between household members was not covered by the original categories. The number of categories were then increased to 25 – primarily to take account of households with a basic structure and indicated in the first categorisation plus an 'additional relative'. In this way the proportion of missing values were reduced in the case of Black South Africans to less than 1% and unspecified to less than 14% (see Table 6b). By combining household structures that seem to go together e.g. nuclear family plus brother\sister and nuclear family plus 'other relative' the 25 categories in Table 6b have subsequently been reduced to 10. Table 7 below provides the data from this analysis and compares Black\African and White households[3].

Table 7

Household Structure South African Census 1996 Blacks and White		
Relationship to head of household	Black	White
Head living on his/her own	16.97%	17.88%
Head and spouse	7.14%	22.99%
Head, spouse and children	19.75%	31.31%

Nuclear Family & other relatives	7.20%	3.45%
Head and children	14.53%	5.03%
Head, Children and\or grandchild & other relatives	14.43%	1.12%
Head & other relative	4.52%	1.42%
Head & non-relative	2.10%	5.08%
Unspecified	13.32%	7.61%
Missing value	0.05%	4.12%
Total	100.00%	100.00%
Own calculations from data provided by Statistics S.A.		

The first noticeable feature of this comparison is the marked similarity in the proportion of single person households (head living on his\her own). There are special reasons for this, which I will visit later. The second noticeable feature is that in the case of Whites, three phases of the nuclear family patterns as described earlier account for over 72% of all households whereas this applies to only 44% of Black households. This finding clearly suggests that, on the whole, Black South Africans do not follow the nuclear family *pattern* whereas Whites do. Additional evidence of this can be found in marked difference in the proportion of 'head and spouse' households. As I and others have argued elsewhere, it is extremely unusual for Black married couples to live on their own – either before the birth of children or once children have married and\or had children of their own (Manona, 1988; Ziehl, 1997). This is a crucial feature of the nuclear family pattern which is established by the rule of neolocalism i.e. that a couple sets up a home independent of either sets of parents upon marriage.

Do these data indicate that Black South Africans follow the extended family pattern? The answer to this is less clear-cut. Comparing the data to the description of the extended family pattern made previously, it emerges that only a minority of Black households (between 30 and 40%) fall into the nuclear family and extended family household categories (i.e. nuclear family plus grandchildren of the head or nuclear family plus parent\s of the head). There are a number of reasons for this. The first is that many of the households under 'unspecified' could be extended family households. If we add these to the percentages already mentioned, we are brought to a figure of 50% of Black households falling within one of the phases of the extended family pattern (more or less as described earlier). This could be a 'real finding' i.e. a reflection of real life experiences, or a function of the inadequacies of the options given on the census questionnaire regarding the relationship between individuals in households. So, for instance, it is impossible to determine whether an 'other relative' is the spouse of a head's child (in-law) or a niece; cousin etc. More-

over, as noted before there are also major methodological problems around the question of headship that need serious attention if census data is going to be of any use in documenting family patterns in South Africa. The most we can say on the basis of the census data presented here is a negative statement to the effect that Black South Africans generally do not follow the nuclear family pattern.

3.2   Documenting Change

When discussing the use of census data in relation to the convergence\divergence debate (i.e. whether Black South Africans are increasingly approximating the nuclear family model and\or White South Africans the extended family model), I will use the same procedure as under 3.1. In other words I will start with the data analysed and published by SSA and then my own calculation of the relationship between individuals in households.

A crucial ingredient in support of any claim with respect to how family patterns have or have not changed over time is longitudinal data i.e. data taken from the same community at two different points in time. In theory, census data is longitudinal and comprehensive. Table 8 presents data from the 1991 and 1996 censuses on household size. It would appear from this comparison that there has been a massive increase in the number of one-person households amongst Blacks from 1991 to 1996. There are two reasons why such a conclusion would be premature or inaccurate. Firstly, the 1991 census excluded the former homeland areas whereas the 1996 census covered the entire country. The empirical\geographic bases of these censuses are therefore different making any comparison problematic. But secondly, and more importantly, in the 1991 census domestic workers living on the property of their employers were classified alongside their employers' households; in 1996 they were classified as separate households[4]. This is probably the major reason for the increase in single person households and the data in Table 8 cannot be used to make any claims about whether or not Black South Africans are moving away form the extended family pattern.

Table 8

HOUSEHOLD SIZE BY POPULATION GROUP 1991 and 1996				
Number of People	Black		White	
	1991	1996	1991	1996
	%	%	%	%
1	6.89	17.23	15.22	18.66
2	11.46	15.12	25.27	30.14

3	13.48	13.65	17.41	17.72
4	14.95	13.48	18.73	18.7
5	14.16	11.68	12.57	9.21
6	18.69	9.13	8.3	3.52
7	5.49	6.58	1.36	1.25
8+	14.87	13.12	1.14	0.8
Total	100	100	100	100

The only other avenue available to us is to focus solely on 1996 census data and compare households in rural and urban areas. Table 9(a) provides such a comparison. It shows that households containing 4 or less people are more common in the urban than non-urban areas while the opposite is true of households of 5 or more individuals. This can be seen as evidence of the claim that urbanization is associated with a reduction in the size of households and possibly the adoption of the nuclear family pattern. However, as noted earlier, size is not the same as structure.[5]

Table 9(a)

HOUSEHOLD SIZE BY URBAN\RURAL & POPULATION GROUP				
Number of People	African		White	
	Non-Urban	Urban	Non-Urban	Urban
1	13.68%	20.29%	13.31%	19.12%
2	11.91%	18.16%	34.16%	29.73%
3	12.26%	15.14%	18.32%	17.67%
4	13.33%	13.80%	18.36%	18.73%
5	12.70%	11.04%	9.83%	9.16%
6	10.75%	7.72%	3.73%	3.51%
7	8.17%	5.03%	1.24%	·1.26%
8	5.90%	3.25%	0.48%	0.48%
9	6.55%	3.25%	0.40%	0.28%
10+	4.76%	2.32%	0.16%	0.06%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

What then of comparing 1996 census data on household structure with data from previous censuses? There are two problems with this. Firstly, data on household structure from the 1991 census were not analysed or published. To some extent, this is not surprising given that the possible response categories were not coded. Secondly, even if they were and the analysis had been done, there would be problems of comparison given the different geographical bases of the censuses. The only previous census for which data on 'household' (called family) structure was analysed and published is the 1970 one. However, here there are even more problems since the unit of analysis here was 'the family' (in fact the nuclear family) and not the household as such and Blacks were excluded completely (see Simkins, 1986 & Ziehl 1997, for a discussion of the limitations of 1970 census data on 'families' and Table 10 in appendix).

We therefore turn to a consideration of 1996 census data which compares household structures in urban and non-urban areas. The data in Table 11 shows that households associated with the nuclear family pattern are more common in the urban than non-urban areas (a difference of 17% in the case of Blacks). But again caution is advised since a large proportion of the single person households – especially in the urban areas – are probably domestic workers and there is a major difference between this kind of single person household and one that follows the death of a spouse or occurs between leaving the parental home and getting married. We need to know a lot more about these single person households (age; marital status for example) before we can say that they do or do not fall within the nuclear family pattern as described earlier. We are therefore forced to rely on the data pertaining to couple households (head & spouse\partner) since it is the only remaining non-overlapping household structure. In other words, it is integral to the nuclear family pattern and not the extended family pattern. In this regard, the data show that couple households are almost twice as common in the urban than non-urban areas in the case of Blacks. It is also noteworthy that single parent households (head & child\ren) and extended single parent households plus other relatives (head, child, grandchild and other relatives) are significantly more common in non-urban compared to urban areas (18% vs 11% in both cases). Given the format in which the data has been made available, the data on the 'couple household' is the only reasonably sound evidence of a move from the extended to the nuclear family pattern associated with urbanisation.

Table 11

Household Structure South African Census 1996 Blacks and Whites by Urban\Rural				
	Black		White	
Relationship to head of household	Urban	Non-Urban	Urban	Non-Urban
Head living on his/her own	20.69%	13.41%	18.32%	13.35%
Head and spouse	9.80%	4.59%	22.24%	30.71%
Head, spouse and children	22.02%	17.58%	30.73%	37.17%
Nuclear Family & other relatives	7.13%	7.27%	3.41%	3.72%
Head and children	11.31%	17.61%	5.21%	3.22%
Head, Children and\or grandchild & other relatives	10.55%	18.18%	1.14%	0.84%
Head & other relative	4.89%	4.14%	1.46%	1.17%
Head & non-relative	2.45%	1.76%	5.29%	2.98%
Unspecified	11.09%	15.45%	7.73%	6.45%
Missing value	0.07%	0.02%	4.48%	0.36%
Total	100.00%	100.00%		
Own calculations from data provided by Statistics S.A.				

4.   Going Forward

The general tenor of the above discussion is that census data is of limited value in documenting any changes that may or may not be taking place with respect to family patterns. This section discusses some of the major problems and makes recommendations for future research.

4.1   Household Head

If the concept of 'household' is a problematic one, the notion of 'household head' is even more so. Since the first item on the census questionnaire requires the details of the household head (or acting head), it can only be assumed that the first question an enumerator asks of the person who opens the door of the dwelling is 'who is the head of this household?' In everyday language, the notion of 'head' carries the meaning of 'the person in charge', a control centre, a position of power and\or authority. But whereas it may be relatively easy to identify the person who is head of a bank or a head of state, it is not at all evident

that this is the case in families. Indeed, it is unlikely that all members of a household would agree on who the head is. Against this background, the much documented and discussed increase in 'female headed households' could be a function of an increasing tendency on the part of women to identify themselves as household heads rather than an increase in households headed by 'husbandless' women. At the very least, this could be one of the factors behind that trend.

But there are also other meanings that could be attached to this concept. The head could be the person who owns the dwelling; earns the highest income; pays most or all of the rent; has been an occupant of the dwelling the longest. Therefore, depending on the specific meaning which the respondent attaches to this concept, a different person's information will be entered in column 1.

Identifying 'the correct person' person as the head of a household may be of little significance when it comes to counting the total population or determining the size of households. But it is of great significance in attempts to determine the structure of households where it is useful to have a consistent reference point for making sense of data on the relationship between household members.

In none of the census questionnaires of other societies that I have at my disposal, is the notion of household head used. Rather, as can be noted from the excerpts below, there is a tendency to favour the instruction that the details of 'an adult' be entered on the first line.

Instruction in other census questionnaires:

French: 'Inscrivez sur la 1re ligne l'un des conjoints d'un couple (et, sur la 2e ligne, l'autre conjoint) ou, a defaut, l'un des adultes habitant dans le logement'. ('On the first line, write the name of one of the spouses (and, on the second, the other spouse) or, if not applicable, indicate the name of one of the adults living in this dwelling'. Options not coded.

Australian: 'Enter the householder or any adult household member as 'Person 1', and if present, the spouse or partner as 'Person 2.'

Canada: 'List below all persons who usually live here, at this address, as of 15, May, 2001, even if they are temporarily away. Don't forget to include yourself. Begin the list with an adult followed, if applicable, by that person's spouse or common-law partner ... Children should be listed immediately after their parent(s)'.

United States: 'Please answer the following questions for each person living in this house, apartment, or mobile home. Start with the name of one of the people living here who owns, is buying, or rents this house, apartment, or mobile home. If there is no such person, start with any adult living or staying here'.

England: 'List all members of your household who usually live at this address, including yourself. Start with the Householder or Joint Householders'.

Germany: 'Ab der nachsten Seite richten sich Fragen an alle Personen im Haushalt. Tragen Sie zunachst oben auf der ausklappbaren Lasche die Namen aller Personen, die am 25 April 2001 zu Ihrem Haushalt gehorten, in der folgenden Reihenfolge ein: Ehegatten, Kinder, Verwandte, sontige Personen'. ('On the next page answer the questions for all persons in the household. ... first open the flap and indicate the names of all individuals who, on April 25 2001, belonged to this household, in the following order: Spouse, Children, Relative, other person'.)

Italian: 'Nell'elencare le singole persone della famiglia, deve essere scrupolosamente osservato il seguente ordine:
- Intestatario del foglio di famiglia (indicare preferibilmente la persona a cui e intestata la scheda di famiglia anagrafe);
- Coniuge o convivente coniugalmente con 'intestatario del foglio di famiglia ....' ('When listing the individuals in the family, the following order should be strictly followed:
- Holder (head?) of the family form (preferably indicate the person who is the holder\head? on the card at the family registry'.

As can be noted, with the exception of England (where only 'householder' is used); Germany and Italy, there is a tendency to ask that the details of any adult be entered first, either as a first or second option. But while this (an adult) is an improvement on the 'head' concept (being somewhat less subjective), it is not necessarily best suited to an African society where a large percentage of households include adults of different generations. Obtaining a consistent reference point for generating data on household structure will therefore not necessarily be obtained in this way. Rather, my recommendation for future censuses is that the first instruction be that the details of *the oldest individual* who was present in the household on census night, be entered in column 1. This is not only less subjective than the headship notion but means that the number of categories that need to be provided as possible answers to the relationship question, is reduced (e.g. no need for 'parent' or 'grandparent'). It is to the question of the categories used in the coding of responses that I now turn.

4.2 Categories

One of the reasons it has been so difficult to identify household structures from the data on 'relationship to household head' is that the categories are ill-suited for the identification of households other than the conventional nuclear family and the two additional phases of the nuclear family pattern. Firstly, there is no specific category for 'foster child' and since fostering is a common practice in African societies and is one of the ways in which families become 'extended',

this needs attention. However, it is not at all evident that this concept should be used since 'fostering' has very different connotations in Western as opposed to African societies. In the former case the foster child is usually a stranger (non-relative) whereas in the African setting it is usually a relative – niece or nephew of one of the adults in the household. Moreover, some adults may regard the individual as simply 'a child' rather than a 'foster child' of the household. Introducing a new category called 'foster child' will therefore not necessarily solve the problem of identifying the actual (kin) relationship between household members. I will propose a different solution below.

Similarly, the child category includes step-children and adopted children. This means that it is impossible to identify complex family situations arising from divorce or death from the data available. That is, to distinguish between first time married couples living with their biological children from what I have called 'remarriage families' where one of the spouses has been married before or an 'adoptive family'.

Thirdly, the 'other relative' category is too broad. Included in this category (technically speaking) would be foster children; brothers- and sisters-in-law; parents-in-law; cousins (first and second); nieces and nephews etc. However, if we wish to identify an extended family from this categorisation we need to be able to distinguish between daughters- and sons-in-law on the one hand and parents-in-law, on the other. If, for example, we wanted to identify a three-generational extended family from this categorisation where the 'head' is a member of the oldest generation we could find the head (1); the head's spouse (2); child (3) and grandchild (7) but not the child's spouse (son-in-law or daughter-in-law) as these are subsumed under the 'other relative' category alongside cousins etc. as mentioned above. Similarly, if the head is in the middle generation, and the older generation is made up of his\her spouse's parents we need to be able to distinguish between 'parent\s-in-law' and other relatives which, given the present categorisation, is not possible. It is therefore recommended that some of the relationships included under 'other relative' become categories on their own. However, it is not recommended that the wording 'in-law' be retained.

One of the points of debate around the question of how Black families may or may not be changing has been the claim that there may be a move away from patrilineality as the basis for household formation in favour of matrilineality (see Marwick above). In other words, the question has been whether extended households are formed when a son brings his wife into the household containing his parent\s or a daughter brings her husband into the household. In the first instance, the youngest generation (grandchildren) is related to the oldest generation through the male line and in the second through the female line. It has further been argued that high rates of illegitimacy are responsible for the move towards matrilineality (or an adapted form thereof). Here, an extended family would be formed when a daughter remains in the parental

home with her child\ren but no spouse. To determine whether this trend is indeed occurring, we would need to distinguish between a daughter and a daughter-in-law, son and son-in-law. But the 'in-law' concept is part of the discourse associated with the Western (as opposed to African) family system and, as such, will not necessarily be meaningful to a large section of the South African population. It is therefore recommended that separate categories be created, not only for sons and daughters but for 'son's wife' and 'daughter's husband'. It could be argued that disaggregating the categories in this manner will result in too many categories. However, given my initial recommendation that the concept of 'head' be replaced with 'oldest member of the household', this problem can be avoided to some extent.

Using this approach, the following categories are recommended after the question: "How is this person (i.e. person 2,3,4 etc) related to person 1?":

1. Husband\wife
2. Daughter
3. Daughter's husband
4. Daughter's child
5. Son
6. Son's wife
7. Son's child
8. Brother\sister
9. Brother's child
10. Sister's child
11. Other relative (please specify) ....

4.3   Problems with recording the data

Since a census is a massive undertaking, it is to be expected that a large number of errors will be made in recording the data. Cross-tabulation of 'relationship to household head' and age, revealed that this is indeed the case. It emerged that there were more than 32 000 heads under the age of 5 years; more than 25 000 aged 5-9; almost 34 000 between the ages of 10 and 14 etc. Similarly, there were thousands of grandparents under the age of 5 and grandchildren aged 80 years or more. These are clearly errors either in the recording of the data on the census questionnaire or of data input. Others could be due to a failure to distinguish between the respondent and the head or acting head of the household, i.e. the person who happened to be at home when the enumerator visited the dwelling or the most literate person in the household as opposed to the 'head of the household'. Indeed, this is likely to be the case in South Africa where illiteracy rates are the highest among the older generation. But how does one deal with these errors? Does one just eliminate the 250 000 records that appear to be mis-

takes on the grounds that they represent only a small percentage of all cases (less than 3% in the case of household heads)? What then of the 3% of household head aged over 80 years? Are they also to be eliminated? In social scientific research, the appropriate procedure would be to check for errors of data-input by revisiting the relevant questionnaires. However, given the large number of records involved, this is clearly not feasible in the case of census data.

4.4 Quo Vadis?

A census is undertaken by a government for its own purposes. In the case of South Africa, these have been to determine the size of the population; its distribution between the provinces and various indicators of poverty (socio-economic status) that can be used to monitor the Reconstruction and Development Programme. Against this background the question of family\household structure has not enjoyed a high priority.[6] Moreover, in third world societies in particular, censuses are conducted within the context of financial and political constraints. An example of the latter would be the instruction to Statistics South Africa only to use unemployed individuals as field workers.

Given the above, it is recommended that the question of documenting changes in the family\household structures of South Africans be taken up by the Social Scientific community. More specifically, it is suggested that a family research project be undertaken with the following characteristics:

1. It should be led by a team of Anthropologists and Sociologists who are knowledgeable and have experience in the field of family studies;
2. It should include a survey based on a nationally representative sample of South African households;
3. The questionnaire should have as its prime focus the question of household structure;
4. The response options on the questionnaire should be geared towards the identification of extended family households in particular;
5. The domestic life cycle of a nationally representative sample of individuals should be documented;
6. Only well-trained field workers with first hand knowledge of the kinship systems as well as the language of the particular community in which they are deployed, should be used and
7. Sufficient funding be made available to adequately compensate those involved in the project.

5.   Conclusion

While the gist of this paper has been that there are a number of problems with the use of census data for the identification of family patterns in South Africa,

this should not be taken to mean that they are of no use at all. Indeed, as has been shown above, the comparison of Black and White household structures using data from the 1996 census shows that these two communities follow significantly different family patterns. On the question of change or whether there has been a convergence of family patterns, the data are less useful, but they do show that in the case of the Black community, couple households are more common in the urban than non-urban areas – a finding which supports the view that urbanisation is associated with the adoption of the nuclear family pattern.

It has furthermore been argued that there are significant problems around the use of the concept of household head and the specific categories of 'relationship to household head' which presently appear on the census questionnaire. Alternatives have been suggested and while these may also be problematic in some respects, they are at least offered as a starting point for a discussion of how census and survey questionnaires can be modified to provide more accurate data on the actual configuration of household structures in South Africa and how these may be changing. Census-type data will never provide a complete picture of the family life experiences of individuals in any society and, as such, need to be complemented by smaller scale in-depth analyses of specific communities as well as studies of the domestic life cycles of specific individuals. However, at present, the census remains the only source of nationally-representative data on household structures in South Africa.

Notes

1. Simkins defines an extended family household as consisting of 'one family nucleus plus at least one other relative (such as a grandmother or an uncle)' and a 'multiple family household' as having 'at least two family nuclei, with or without extensions'.

2. Since data on the relationship between people in households was regarded as an 'individual' rather than a 'household' variable; the former had to be brought over and matched with the 'household data'.

3. The main focus of this discussion will be a comparison of Black and White households. However, where the data for the other population groups have been analysed, they will also be provided. Statistics South Africa notes that it 'has continued to classify people into population group, since moving away from past apartheid-based discrimination, and monitoring progress in development over time, involves measuring differences in life circumstances by population group' (SSA,1996:np). The categories used as Black\African; Asian\Indian; 'Coloured'; White and 'Unspecified'. In the latter case the person did not wish to describe themselves in terms of any population group or race.

4. I am grateful to Wanda Steyn and Piet Alberts for this information.

5. There is only one exception here and that is the single person household where size does correspond to structure (there is one position and one person).

6.   This may be changing as evidence is sought for the claim that Aids is resulting in a massive increase in 'children-headed households'. What is disconcerting, though, is that the raw figures in Table 12 may already be used for this purpose.

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Appendix

Table 6a

Household Structure S.A. Census 1996 All Population Groups						
	Black	'Coloured'	Indian	White	Unspec.	Total
Head living on his/her own	16.99	8.26	5.55	18.63	15.37	16.2
Head and spouse/partner	7.14	8.09	8.02	23.89	9.24	9.98
Head and spouse/partner and children	19.76	35.41	45.92	32.78	28.63	23.89
Head and children	14.54	8.76	7.44	5.28	9.54	12.3
Head, children and grandchildren	6.75	4.46	1.24	0.29	3.48	5.32
Head, children and parents	0.55	0.39	0.53	0.34	0.49	0.5
Head and spouse/partner, children and parents	0.34	0.75	2.57	1.08	0.8	0.55
Head and spouse/ partner, children, grandchildren	3.63	5.38	1.79	0.62	2.63	3.22
Head and other relatives	1.05	0.53	0.36	0.2	0.58	0.84
Head and non-relatives	1.25	1.23	0.66	2.81	3.87	1.5
Head and grandchildren	2.58	0.95	0.27	0.16	1.32	1.98
Missing value	25.42	25.79	25.64	13.93	24.04	23.72
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Own calculations from data provided by Statistics South Africa.						

Table 6b

Household Structure (2) S.A. Census 1996 (Blacks Only)			
Relationship to head of household	Number	Percent	
Head living on his/her own	1 107 519	16.97%	16.97%
Head and spouse	465 820	7.14%	7.14%
Head, spouse and children	1 289 257	19.75%	19.75%
Head, spouse, children, sister/brother	63 986	0.98%	
Head, spouse children, other relatives	110 084	1.69%	
Head, spouse, children and parents	22 021	0.34%	
Head, spouse, children and grandchildren	237 146	3.63%	
Head, spouse, child, grandchild and other relatives	36 791	0.56%	7.20%
Head and children	948 682	14.53%	14.53%
Head, children and grandchildren	440 592	6.75%	
Head, children and parents	35 985	0.55%	
Head, children, sister/brother	99 367	1.52%	
Head, children, other relatives	96 909	1.48%	
Head and grandchildren	168 550	2.58%	
Head, children, grandchildren, an other relatives	73 828	1.13%	
Head, grandchild and other relatives	27 569	0.42%	14.43%
Head and brother/sister	190 420	2.92%	
Head and grandparent	2 834	0.04%	
Head and father/mother	16 005	0.25%	
Head, and other relatives	68 350	1.05%	
Any H/H containing head, grandparent and other relatives	16 828	0.26%	4.52%
Head, and non-relatives	81 381	1.25%	1.25%
Any H/H containing a non-relationship to head	55 430	0.85%	0.85%
Unspecified	869 300	13.32%	13.32%
Missing value	3 106	0.05%	0.05%
Total	6 527 761	100.00%	100.01%

Table 9(b)

	Coloured		Indian		Unspecified	
	Non-Urban	Urban	Non-Urban	Urban	Non-Urban	Urban
1	12.78%	6.97%	7.70%	5.44%	5.88%	8.38%
2	17.29%	12.54%	13.87%	12.60%	8.87%	13.70%
3	17.93%	15.74%	16.62%	17.30%	11.76%	16.18%
4	17.60%	19.81%	19.36%	25.07%	13.76%	18.78%
5	13.31%	16.73%	17.52%	19.48%	14.68%	16.96%
6	8.38%	10.97%	10.88%	10.70%	11.85%	9.92%
7	4.93%	6.66%	5.99%	4.99%	8.98%	5.83%
8	2.99%	4.12%	3.13%	2.29%	7.06%	3.66%
9	2.80%	3.76%	2.92%	1.61%	7.90%	3.27%
10+	1.99%	2.71%	2.00%	0.51%	9.27%	3.32%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Own calculations from data provided by Statistics South Africa.

Table 10

COMPARISON OF 'FAMILIES' IN SOUTH AFRICA – 1970			
FAMILY TYPE	ASIANS	'COLOUREDS'	WHITES
Husband and Wife	9.2%	10.7%	24.7%
Father, Mother and Children	77.4%	69.1%	68.2%
Father and Children	2.4%	3.0%	1.0%
Mother and Children	11.1%	17.2%	6.1%
TOTAL:	100%	100%	100%
Average Family Size	5	5.2	3.7
* Multi-occupancy rate	1.432	1.192	1.073

Source: 1970 Population Census in Simkins, 1986:33-35.
* Number of 'families' per household; Simkins' calculation (1986).

Table 12: Age of Heads of Households. Total Population

Age	Number	Percent
37290	32 264	0.34%
37384	25 469	0.27%
37542	33 764	0.36%
15-19	154 335	1.65%
20-24	495 309	5.30%
25-29	924 786	9.89%
30-34	1 185 102	12.67%
35-39	1 228 663	13.14%
40-44	1 097 082	11.73%
45-49	922 613	9.87%
50-54	727 883	7.78%
55-59	642 491	6.87%
60-64	551 074	5.89%
65-69	494 285	5.29%
70-74	315 660	3.38%
75-79	244 727	2.62%
80-84	103 884	1.11%
85+	172 661	1.85%
Unspecified	–	
Total	9 352 052	100.00%

Susan C. Ziehl
Department Sociology & Industrial Sociology
Rhodes University
Box 94
Grahamstown
South Africa
6140
S.Ziehl@ru.ac.za