DETERMINANTS OF DIVORCE OVER THE MARITAL LIFE COURSE*

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Using data from the young and mature women samples of the National Longitudinal Survey, this paper examines how the determinants of divorce (and separation) vary by the duration of marriage. In general, we find little evidence that the strength of previously identified predictors of divorce varies by marital duration. Variables such as race, wife's labor force participation, husband's employment, and urban residence seem to influence the probability of divorce, irrespective of the stage in the marital life course. The principal exception to this finding is the effect of wife's education, which appears to decrease the probability of divorce at early marital durations but to increase it at later durations. There is also suggestive evidence that the effects of home ownership and age at marriage may vary by marital duration.

Demographic trends frequently shape research interests, and current trends are no exception. Increased attention from both demographers and sociologists is being focused on aging, the life course, and divorce. The source of interest in divorce is clearcut, since recent projections suggest that close to half of recent marriages will end in divorce (Preston and McDonald, 1979; Cherlin, 1981). Interests in aging and the life course probably stem at least in part from the aging of the population, with projections of up to 18 percent over age 65 by the year 2030 (Soldo, 1980). This concern may also be due to the aging of the baby boom generation, which has captured public attention, and which is now beginning to experience mid-life crises (Preston, 1984).

While both areas of research are expanding at a prodigious rate, they have done so for the most part independently. Of course, demographers have long studied age/time-related determinants of divorce, such as age at marriage, marital duration, and life-cycle characteristics such as presence of children. Recent research (Morgan and Rindfuss, 1985; Thornton and Rodgers, 1984) has attempted to sort out the effects of these highly related variables. However, these analyses have focused almost solely on the age variables, and have not addressed the larger picture of how the divorce process may vary over the life course.

Both the determinants and the consequences of divorce might be expected to vary over the duration of a marriage (Teachman, 1982). Marriages may serve different functions over time, and decisions to terminate them should vary accordingly (Rodgers, 1973). Consequences of divorce, with or without remarriage, should also vary over time. Since divorce is more commonly experienced by those in their 20s and 30s than by older people, younger persons who divorce may receive more social support from peers (Hagestad and Smyer, 1982), and may experience more rapid adjustment (Bloom et al., 1979). Remarriage after divorce becomes less likely with age, especially for women, due to sex differences in life expectancy and age differences between remarried spouses.

Several recent empirical studies have examined how the determinants of divorce/separation vary by marital duration (Becker et al., 1977; Heaton et al., 1985; Morgan and Rindfuss, 1985; Thornton, 1978). These analyses are somewhat constrained by data limitations, and are therefore unable to examine whether many of the often-cited predictors of divorce interact with length of marriage. Moreover, several of these studies limit their sample to couples in the early and middle stages of the marital life course.

The purpose of this paper is to build a model which allows us to test for time-related differences in how characteristics of wives, husbands, and marriage contexts affect the probability of divorce. We analyze the determinants of divorce within marital duration categories for a sample of women studied during the late 1960s and 1970s in the National Longitudinal Surveys of Young and Mature Women. After reviewing our perspective on current divorce theories, we suggest hypotheses regarding how the impact of factors that affect divorce might be expected to vary over the marital life course.

PERSPECTIVES ON DIVORCE

Two major theoretical perspectives dominate the divorce literature today. The sociological model,

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based on exchange theory, includes three types of factors: those relating to benefits of the current marriage, alternatives to that marriage, and barriers to dissolution (Udry, 1981; Levinger, 1979). The other perspective, epitomized by Becker's (1981) economic model, speaks of costs and benefits of the current marriage versus alternatives, and of marriage-specific capital. The theories have much in common. Both posit a more or less rational evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of the current and any alternative marriages (or non-marriage), and both include factors impeding divorce. One disadvantage of these theoretical models is that they do not allow an exclusive categorization of variables used to test them.

In this research, we used a modified model which allows more readily a translation into measurable variables. These include variables that reflect: 1) preparation for marriage, 2) investment in marriage, and 3) external market forces. Preparation for marriage, increasing with both maturity and acquisition of relevant knowledge, should enhance the quality of a marriage and thus make it more rewarding for both spouses. This could be reflected by age, age at marriage, education or other training, or observation of marital role models. Investment in marriage includes any form of marriage-specific capital, such as children or financial investments such as home ownership. Market forces include those of both the labor and marriage markets, forces which are hard to separate since prospects for one invariably affect the other. For example, a woman with strong economic alternatives is less dependent on marriage for financial support, and a man who is economically solvent may be in a stronger position in the marriage market. On average, persons who are in a stronger position in either market should be more willing to consider dissolving a marriage, although they may be also more attractive to the current spouse, creating some countervailing effects. In many cases, spouses' market-related characteristics will be correlated positively. External markets will be reflected by aspects of both spouses' employment, as well as areal and subgroup characteristics.

The life course perspective, recently adopted by gerontologists and family sociologists (Nock, 1979; Elder, 1985), suggests that the process of aging can be understood only with reference to the entire course of an individual's life. The notion of a marital life course, however, is relatively undeveloped. The traditional concept of a family life cycle (Glick, 1977) is particularly lacking in usefulness when events such as marital dissolution or other deviant sequences are being studied. A high frequency of long-lived marriages is an historically new phenomenon (Riley, 1985), as is frequent divorce. Thus, the notion that marriages might serve different functions at different stages, and dissolve for different reasons over time, is relevant only in the current period.

In the next section we describe specific variables which we suggest as measures of each type of factor discussed above. We also review previous research, and discuss expected interactions with marital duration.

PAST EMPIRICAL WORK AND OUR HYPOTHESES

Marital Preparation

Our first category of variables relates to the degree of preparation for marriage and general maturity, and is expected to determine in part the benefits experienced by each marital partner. This is indicated in our analysis by wife's education and by her age at marriage. Generally, higher levels of education for both husband and wife (which are highly correlated) have been found to be associated with more stable marriages (Mott and Moore, 1979; Moore and Waite, 1981; Bahr and Galligan, 1984), although there is some evidence of nonlinearity in these effects (Thornton, 1978; Glenn and Supancic, 1984; Frisbie and Opitz, 1985).

The negative effect of age at marriage on marital dissolution is perhaps the strongest and most consistently documented one in the literature (e.g. Booth and Edwards, 1985). A number of explanations have been cited for this, including factors relating to search time (Becker et al., 1977) and maturity (Morgan and Rindfuss, 1985). Morgan and Rindfuss (1985) also emphasize the degree of change most persons experience during the late teens and twenties. If such change occurs within marriage, it may create strains and increase the likelihood that the couple's statuses and values will diverge.

We might expect that variables reflecting degree of preparation for marriage would taper off in their effects at higher marital durations, since over time, such differentials would become muddied as individuals gain in maturity and learning within the marriage. In fact, Morgan and Rindfuss (1985) do report a decline in the education effect after 31 months of marriage (see also Thornton, 1978). In contrast, Becker et al. (1977) reported a positive effect of education on dissolution, for men, at durations 5 to 10 years and 15 to 20 years.

Expectations regarding the effect of age at marriage over time depend on whether one focuses on the maturity or the continual change interpretation. Morgan and Rindfuss (1985) originally expected a declining effect but found a significant one over the first nine years of marriage. They concluded that the effects of normal early adulthood changes continue to operate during that period, although those effects did fall off slightly at the highest marital durations. It should be noted that we examine higher marital durations than their ten years, so we may find a dropoff beyond the point they were able to examine. Becker et al.

(1977) report the effect of age at marriage to decrease from 0–5 to 5–10 years duration and become nonsignificant beyond that point, for men, although the pattern for women is not monotonic.

Marital Investment

Next, we discuss factors which may indicate the extent to which individuals invest in current marriages. We include two indicators: the presence of young children, and home ownership.

Children have traditionally been expected to deter marital dissolution, although there are suggestions that such an effect may be declining as attitudes change. Thornton (1985) found a decrease over time in those believing that "When there are children in the family, parents should stay together even if they don't get along." Mothers and young adult daughters held similar attitudes, although sons tended to disagree more, which Thornton interpreted as possibly attributable to patterns of child custody. A similar possibility is suggested by Huber and Spitze's (1980) finding that husbands with pre-school children have fewer *thoughts* of divorce, while wives with school-age children have such thoughts more often. Husbands may fear separation from young children, who are almost invariably placed with mothers, while wives may contemplate independence only when children are old enough for single parenthood to seem feasible.

Cherlin's (1977) finding that only pre-school children deter separation or divorce was interpreted in light of the high costs of those children in time, money and effort. Waite et al. (1985) confirmed this, showing that a first birth decreases marital dissolution substantially during two subsequent years, relative to rates that would have been experienced by couples with similar characteristics. Morgan and Rindfuss (1985) also find a deterrent effect of a marital conception during the first ten years of marriage.

Home ownership is another indicator of marital investment. We would expect couples who own homes to be less likely to dissolve marriages, either because of the effects of investment, or because those in shaky marriages do not purchase homes (Becker et al., 1977; Levinger, 1979; Moore and Waite, 1981). We might expect that all measures of marital capital would decline in their effects with marital duration, since in later years, the duration itself constitutes a sort of investment which will also be reflected in intangibles like social networks. Thus, marriages would be more readily differentiated along those lines early on.

Outside Market Forces

Finally, we turn to forces of external economic and marriage markets which may exert pressures on marriages. We examine five indicators of these external market forces: wives' employment status, wives' entry into employment, husbands' employment stability, wives' race, and metropolitan residence.

Marriages have been found more likely to dissolve when wives are employed (Cherlin, 1979; Mott and Moore, 1979). Previous research has suggested that this could be due to the independence effect of wives' income (Ross and Sawhill, 1975), to the disruptive effect of changes from traditional work roles (Cherlin, 1979; D'Amico, 1983; Booth et al., 1984), or because wives work for pay as a sort of "divorce insurance" (Greene and Quester, 1982). While it is not possible to unambiguously separate these effects, our earlier work emphasized the time constraints imposed by wives' employment, which create both conflict about household labor and lower rates of spousal interaction (Spitze and South, 1985). Thus, we use wife's hours worked as our indicator of her employment.

The disruptive effect of time constraints is expected to cooperate more in the older age groups, since work and role patterns will be more solidified by that time. This would imply, however, the greatest impact for changes from non-employment to employment, rather than simply steady employment. While the potential importance of change has been suggested in past work (e.g. Morgan and Rindfuss, 1985), no research has examined empirically the impact of a change from non-employment to employment of wives on marital dissolution.

Indicators of husband's socioeconomic level have inverse effects on the probability of marital dissolution (Becker et al., 1977; Cherlin, 1979; Mott and Moore, 1979). However, it appears to be not the absolute levels of these resources so much as unexpected changes in them that disrupt marriages. Couples who experience lower than usual income for the year, those in which the husband experienced serious unemployment, and those in which the husband earned more (or less) than expected given his characteristics, are likelier to dissolve (Ross and Sawhill, 1975). Thus, we include a measure, husband's weeks worked during the previous year, which should capture this effect. Unlike some other variables we examine, this variable might affect each spouse in opposite directions, increasing the attractiveness of the husband in outside markets, while simultaneously increasing his wife's desire to retain him, leading to a null effect.

Race is clearly related to divorce; blacks are more likely to dissolve marriages than are whites, and to do so earlier in marriage (Thornton, 1978; Moore and Waite, 1981; Frisbie and Opitz, 1985). Of course, wife's and husband's race are almost always the same, so we include only the wife's race in our model.

We would expect those living in larger, metropolitan areas to feel more pressures to dissolve marriages, since both economic and

marriage alternatives would be more divergent in such areas (Preston, 1984). Attitudes in such areas may be also be less conducive to stable marriages (Elder, 1978). Empirical results on this issue have been mixed (Mott and Moore, 1979; Moore and Waite, 1981).

We might expect market variables to come into play more at later durations. Over time, variables measuring labor force activity will become more indicative of the wife's degrèe of independence or husband's economic attainment. For example, the difference in financial independence between employed women and full-time homemakers should increase with marital duration as employed women gain experience, seniority, and higher earnings. Earnings or employment patterns may be more indicative of the lifetime economic success of older men than of younger men, as the latter may be in school or just beginning a career. In short, the economic situations of both the wife and husband, as well as the perceptions and evaluations of the family's overall economic status, should crystallize as marriages grow older.

METHODS

In empirical analyses of divorce it is crucial to use longitudinal data whenever possible. Cross-sectional tests, which usually compare the ever-divorced with the never-divorced on key variables, are subject to problems of causal ordering. Data for this paper are taken from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Young and Mature Women, conducted by the Ohio State University Center for Human Resource Research. We use data from each survey over a nine-year period, from 1968–77 (young) and 1967–76 (mature). By combining them, we have information for women over a 30-year age range: the young women aged from 14–24 to 23–33 during the survey period, and the mature women from 30–44 to 39–53.

Longitudinal analysis of divorce probabilities requires a choice as to the length of the observation period; this has ranged from eight months (Morgan and Rindfuss, 1985) to five years (e.g., D'Amico, 1983). Since some independent variables may change quickly (e.g., a wife's employment), a shorter period seems preferable. Given the gaps between NLS interviews, two-year periods are the shortest feasible ones.[1]

In order to analyze data from both data sets and various years in an interpretable manner, we pool data for two-year periods from both samples. Data for the periods 1967–69, 1969–71, 1972–74, and 1974–76 for mature women are combined with data for 1968–70, 1970–72, 1973–75 and 1975–77 for young women. For each respondent currently in her first marriage at the beginning of a two-year period, data for the independent variables at the beginning of the period are combined with data on marital status (still married versus divorced or separated) at the end of the period.[2] If a respondent did not divorce in a prior interval, she is eligible for inclusion in later intervals. Each woman can contribute up to four observations, one for each two-year period.

This procedure yields a pooled data set of 18,585 cases (or woman-periods). Six hundred and two women separated or divorced during the study period. This pooling procedure met with minor problems for a few variables which were measured only in certain years. Decisions were made as to whether a particular variable would be assumed not to have changed from a previous period, whether it would be considered missing, or whether it could be estimated from prior data.[3]

The dependent variable is a dichotomy, coded 0 for still married at the end of a two-year period, and 1 for divorced or separated. Because this variable has a highly skewed distribution, we estimate all equations using a logistic regression procedure (Dixon et al., 1981).

The explanatory variables are coded as follows. Five categories of age at marriage are used: 17 or younger, 18 to 19, 20 to 21, 22 to 25, and 26 and older. Education, measured by years of schooling, has four categories: less than 12, 12, 13 to 15, and 16 or more.[4] We divide wife's usual hours worked per week into four categories: none, 1 to 20, 21 to 34, and 35 or more. Race is a dummy variable coded 1 for blacks and 0 for non-blacks. Home ownership is scored 1 for couples who own their home and 0 for those who rent. The presence of pre-school children is also a dummy variable, coded 1 for wives with a child under 6, and 0 otherwise. A change in wife's labor force status from non-employed to employed between the previous and current time period is measured by a dummy variable, coded 1 for such a change and 0 otherwise. The reference category for this variable includes wives who remain non-employed, those who remained employed, and those whose status

[1] Although it is uncertain whether a shorter period would yield different results, it is interesting to note that, in many respects, our results parallel those of Morgan and Rindfuss (1985), who use an eight-month period.

[2] We limit the analysis to divorce/separation among first marriages because of evidence that the determinants of marital dissolution vary by the number of previous marriages (McCarthy, 1978).

[3] For the first interval for each sample, the coding of wife's employment change was based on the job tenure variable. Thus, a woman is coded as having changed to employment if she either started working or changed jobs within two years.

[4] The coding of education is similar to that used by Morgan and Rindfuss (1985).

changed from employed to non-employed.[5] Three categories of husband's weeks worked in the past year are used: 0 to 39, 40 to 51, and 52. Finally, residence consists of three categories: not residing in an SMSA, residing in a suburb of an SMSA, and residing in a central city of an SMSA. With the exception of age at marriage and race, all of the independent variables are allowed to vary across time.

In order to examine how the effects of the independent variables vary across categories of (i.e., interact with) marital duration, we divide the sample into five marital duration subgroups based on the number of years married at the beginning of the interval. The categories are: 0 to 2 years, 3 to 5, 6 to 10, 11 to 20, and 21 to 36. These categories are constructed in such a way that roughly equal numbers of divorces (and separations) are included in each subgroup. It is worth noting that our analysis of the determinants of divorce at later durations is unique. Earlier studies have been limited to divorce/separation within the first ten (Morgan and Rindfuss, 1985), sixteen (Thornton, 1978), or twenty years of marriage (Becker et al, 1977). In contrast, our data set includes couples who have been married for up to 36 years.

The statistical significance of the interactions of the independent variables with marital duration is tested by adding these interaction terms to an equation based on all 18,585 observations, and noting the improvement in the fit of the model. To see how the pattern of effects changes with marital duration, we estimate the logistic regression equations separately for each marital duration subgroup.

RESULTS

The often observed inverse relationship between marital duration and the probability of divorce is clearly apparent in these data. The percentage of observations resulting in divorce in the subsequent two-year period declines from 6.6 percent among couples married less than three years to 1.5 percent among couples married 21 to 36 years (see bottom of Table 2).[6]

Tables 1 and 2 test the hypothesis that the predictors of divorce/separation vary by marital duration. Table 1 shows the improvement in the fit of the model from adding the interactions between marital duration and each independent variable to an equation which includes only the main effects of marital duration and the independent variables. Only age at marriage, education, and home ownership interact significantly with marital duration in their effects on divorce. Moreover, the interactions of marital duration with both age at marriage and home ownership are just barely significant at the .05 level. In contrast, the interaction of education with marital duration is statistically significant at the .001 level.

Table 2 shows how the effects of these variables on the probability of divorce/separation vary by marital duration. The coefficients in this table represent the effect on the log odds of divorcing/separating of being in the designated category relative to the omitted category. The effect of age at marriage is uniformly negative, with the sharpest contrasts at the middle durations between women who married before age 20 and those who married later (cf. Morgan and Rindfuss, 1985). Although the interaction between marital duration and age at marriage is statistically significant, the source of this interaction is not immediately clear. In general, the influence of age at marriage appears to weaken slightly at later marital durations. Even at these later durations, however, all of the coefficients are negative, and several are statistically significant.

The clearest evidence of a variable's having different effects on divorce at different marital durations comes from wife's education. For the first two marital duration segments, 0 to 2 and 3 to 5 years, all of the education coefficients are negative, and the contrasts between women with 16 or more years of schooling and women with less than twelve years of schooling are statistically significant. By the last two marital duration segments, all of the education coefficients have turned positive, and three of the six are statistically significant. Hence, early in marriage, wife's education appears to deter divorce, but later in marriage, it is associated with a higher probability of dissolution.

Almost without exception, the number of hours the wife works per week is positively associated with the probability of divorce. The sharpest contrasts are generally between wives who work

[5] In earlier analyses, we separated out wives whose labor force status changed from employed to non-employed. However, because the probability of divorce among these women did not differ appreciably from that among women who remained employed or non-employed, we included this group in the reference category.

[6] The reason for this decline in divorce rates with increasing marital duration is a matter of debate. Increases in marital investment over the life course (Becker et al., 1977), as well as the selection of less stable marriages out of the pool of older marriages (Blood, 1969), may both play important roles. While this selectivity may be, at least in part, the explanation for any *main effect* of marital duration on divorce probabilities, it is unlikely that this can explain the pattern of marital duration *interactions* reported below. If, over time, less stable marriages are selected out of the total pool of marriages, then the effects of all permanent characteristics of respondents should decline with duration, as those marriages susceptible to a particular factor are selected out. This is not the pattern of effects we find.

Table 1. Improvement to χ^2 From Adding Marital Duration Interactions to Main Effects Model (N=18,585)[a]

	Improvement to χ^2	df	P
Interaction of Marital Duration with:			
Age at Marriage	28.32	16	<.05
Education	50.83	12	<.001
Hours Worked per Week	8.83	12	ns
Race	2.91	4	ns
Home Ownership	10.54	4	<.05
Preschool Children	6.80	4	ns
Wife Entered Employment	6.35	4	ns
Husband's Weeks Worked	6.91	8	ns
Residence	4.62	8	ns

[a] Main effects model includes marital status, marital duration, and all variables listed above. The likelihood-ratio chi-square test comparing this model with the model of independence yields a χ^2 of 479.38 with 22 df (P<.001).

full-time (35 hours or more) and non-employed wives (the omitted category). As suggested by the lack of a statistically significant interaction between wife's hours worked and marital duration (see Table 1), there appears to be very little change in the effect of wife's hours worked across marital durations (Table 2).

As expected, all of the coefficients for race are positive, although only three of the coefficients are statistically significant. Because of the absence of a statistically significant interaction between race and marital duration, fluctuations in the size of the race coefficient are best attributed to sampling variability.

The hypothesis that owning a home is negatively associated with divorce finds ample support in Table 2. The sole exception to the significant negative effects of home ownership on marital dissolution, and the principal source of the significant home ownership-by-marital duration interaction, occurs among couples married less than three years. The effect of owning a home among these couples is actually positive, though

Table 2. Logistic Regression Analysis of the Determinants of Divorce/Separation, by Marital Duration

	Marital Duration (in years)				
Independent Variable[a]					
Age at Marriage:	0–2	3–5	6–10	11–20	21–36
18–19	−.901**	−.204	−.063	−.295	−.281
20–21	−.898**	−.592*	−.753**	−.413	−.431
22–25	−.806**	−1.100**	−.314	−.961**	−.887**
26+	−.344	−1.390**	−1.370**	−.344	−.461
Education (in years):					
12	−.376	−.791**	−.222	.271	.524*
13–15	−.402	−1.330**	−.350	.846**	.683
16+	−1.010**	−1.510**	−.719*	.541	1.370**
Hours Worked per Week:					
1–20	−.046	.641*	.165	.261	−.313
21–34	.076	.489	.299	.961**	.457
35+	.564**	.610**	.667**	.864**	.762**
Race: Black	.370	.914**	.194	.636**	.677**
Home Ownership	.020	−.607**	−.691**	−1.030**	−.356
Preschool Children	.427*	−.391*	−.157	.304	.074
Wife Entered Employment	.134	.420*	−.086	.378*	.367
Husband's Weeks Worked:					
40–51	.144	−.190	−.402	.138	.104
52	−.966**	−.411	−.739**	−.420	−.356
Residence					
Suburb of SMSA	.714**	.282	.276	.561**	−.099
Central City of SMSA	.717*	.272	.652**	.671**	.311
N	1527	2397	2786	6143	5732
% Divorcing/Separating	6.61	5.63	5.49	2.07	1.50
Log Likelihood	−345.23	−466.83	−549.01	−568.99	−426.08

* Significant at the .05 level.
** Significant at the .01 level.
[a] Omitted categories are: age at marriage, younger than 18; education, less than twelve years; hours worked, none; husband's weeks worked, 0–39; residence, not in SMSA.

statistically non-significant. At all other durations, owning a home deters divorce.

Perhaps in agreement with the inconclusive results of earlier studies (Cherlin, 1977; Koo and Janowitz, 1983; Waite et al., 1985), the presence of pre-school children has inconsistent effects on marital dissolution. Conceivably, a more detailed specification of this variable, such as whether the child was illegitimately born or conceived (Menken et al., 1981; Morgan and Rindfuss, 1985), would yield clearer results.

None of the remaining three variables—wife's entering employment, husband's weeks worked, and residence—show significant interactions with marital duration (Table 1). By and large, the main effects of these variables accord with theory and prior research. Wives who started employment in the preceding two years are on the whole more likely to divorce, although the coefficient for this variable is statistically significant only at marital durations 3 to 5 years and 11 to 20 years. Similarly, couples in which the husband worked the entire preceding year are less likely to divorce, although again the coefficient is statistically significant in just two of the five marital duration segments. Finally, residence in a suburb or central city, compared with living in a non-metropolitan area, tends to increase the probability of marital dissolution.

In sum, the results presented here provide substantial evidence that the effects of traditional predictors of divorce remain relatively constant throughout the marital life course. With the exception of wife's level of education, and to a lesser extent age at marriage and home ownership, the effects of salient variables on marital dissolution do not differ significantly by duration of marriage.

DISCUSSION

Although we have replicated a number of findings regarding main effects on separation/divorce, the major contribution of this paper has been to test for interaction effects with marital duration. We have extended previous research that tests such effects by including a wider range of variables and later marital durations. The only strong interaction, one which has also been found in previous work, is that with education. In addition to the tapering off from early to middle marital durations, as found previously, we find a reversal from negative to positive effects on dissolution over the entire marital life course. Although we cannot interpret this with certainty, we can speculate about the underlying processes.[7]

[7] We should not that this marital duration-by-education interaction does not appear to be reflecting a cohort-by-education interaction. Morgan and Rindfuss (1985) report no significant interactions between marriage cohort and various predictors of marital dissolution.

Since the negative effect of education declines with marital duration, it seems likely that our interpretation that education indicates preparation for marriage is not far off. It is to be expected that any effect of poor preparation would show up early in a marriage. However, education may have countervailing effects which operate differentially across the marital life course. Education, in addition to providing a person with a rational approach to life which could improve the quality of marriage, will also increase a woman's attractiveness in both marriage and labor markets. Thus, a more highly educated woman may be more likely to find an alternative partner in later years, once children are grown and no longer present a barrier to dissolution. She will also be able to find a job which yields both higher earnings and more interesting work, perhaps in part substituting for the fulfillment lacking in her marriage.

Finally, although the results of this analysis generally fail to support our hypotheses, their implications for theories of divorce may not be entirely unwelcome. Coupled with the results of other recent studies (Heaton et al., 1985; Morgan and Rindfuss, 1985), these findings suggest that theories of marital dissolution do not require extensive elaboration in order to accommodate differential determinants over the marital life course. Hence, the development of *parsimonious* theories of divorce is facilitated by these results. To be sure, until more variables can be considered, it would be premature to dismiss entirely the possibility that at lest some other determinants of divorce vary by marital duration. But the evidence accumulated thus far indicates that most factors which precipitate a divorce do so irrespective of the stage in the marital life course.

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