

### 3. **Determinants of Marital Dissolution: A Role of Marital Quality**

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#### 1. Introduction

Much research has been carried out on the causes and consequences of marital dissolution in the past few decades (see White 1990 for a review). A recent introduction of new statistical techniques such as event history analyses has increased our knowledge of the effects of demographic variables on subsequent separation and/or divorce (see, for example, Booth, Johnson, White, and Edwards 1986; Heaton and Call 1995; Lehrer 1996; Morgan and Rindfuss 1985; Teachman 1982).

There is, however, one aspect in past divorce/separation research that has not been firmly established; the effect of marital quality on marital stability. In one of the most comprehensive examinations of divorce, for example, Gottman (1994) concluded that "It is currently unknown whether the dissolution of marriages is part of the same process as the deterioration of marital satisfaction... or whether these are independent processes" (p. 109). In the present study, we attempt to answer this important question. We analyze determinants of divorce and separation with emphasis on the role of marital quality. We utilize a nationally representative sample of married couples, the National Survey of Families and Households, which contains data in two waves roughly five years apart from each other.

#### 2. Link between Perceived Marital Quality and Marital Stability

The notion of marital quality has long been discussed. Although marital quality is a multi-dimensional concept composed of happiness, interaction, and perceived stability (Johnson, White, Edwards, and Booth 1986), the central element in this variable is a subjective evaluation of the marriage by each spouse. Researchers have not found, however, unequivocal relationships between variables that stand for marital quality such as marital happiness and perceived fairness and the outcome of marriage (Gottman 1994). The lack of clear relationships is attributed to inadequate research design, primarily the lack of longitudinal data. Nevertheless, theoretical discussions on marital stability usually incorporate each spouse's subjective assessment of marital quality and implicitly or explicitly a rational calculation of staying in or leaving marriage based on this assessment. Below, we

will briefly review some of these theoretical treatments of marital stability.

According to one of the early conceptual models on the subject by Levinger (1965), marital stability is a result of three factors; attraction, barrier, and alternate attraction. Attraction within marriage, he argued, come from spouses' affection to each other, income and social position, and the degree to which both spouses share similar characteristics such as religion, education, and age. However, when the barriers to marital dissolution such as tough divorce law, external pressure, and commitment to marriage based on religious beliefs are low, and/or alternate attraction is high (either a prospect of remarriage or advantages of living without the current spouse), spouses may choose to dissolve the marriage. Similarly, Lewis and Spanier (1979) formalized Levinger's idea with three key factors affecting marital stability: premarital dispositions (social, economic, and cultural resources), marital quality, and threshold to divorce, including "real and perceived alternatives." Unlike Levinger, Lewis and Spanier make a clear distinction between (1) the subjective quality of marriage for each spouse, measured with such variables as marital interaction, communication, the method to deal with marital conflict, and satisfaction, and (2) premarital dispositions that affect marital quality. We believe this distinction is critical since various resources, either social, economic, or cultural do not by themselves indicate the quality of marriage. While many studies focus upon the relationship between "premarital dispositions," particularly economic resources, and marital outcome, marital quality stands in between and should be focused accordingly.

Marital stability is low when marital quality and/or threshold to divorce is low. Marital stability is high when marital quality and/or threshold is high. When we examine each spouse's decision on whether or not to divorce, however, we have to introduce another dimension, quality of life after divorce. Knowingly or unknowingly, we have a tendency to compare what we have now (quality of life while in marriage) to what we would have (quality of life after divorce). As Thibaut and Kelley (1959) indicate in their classic study on group formation and dissolution, we compare our current status to an alternative status (called CLalt, or comparison level for the alternative); when our current status is higher than CLalt, we stay in the current relationship, and when our current status is lower than CLalt, we exit the relationship. We argue that there are three primary aspects for comparisons; economic well-being (financial and personal resources), psychological well-being, and effects on someone other than the spouses, particularly children. We propose that each married person may contemplate divorce and/or separation by comparing what we have and CLalt, or what we would have on each of three factors. Depending on the comparison result and the height of threshold, each spouse makes a decision on whether or not to divorce.

From economists' point of view, Becker, Landes, and Michael (1977) examined

marital instability. The key idea of economic analyses, utility maximization, is very similar to the psychological utility maximization model, such as Thibaut and Kelley's work as mentioned above. Huber and Spitze (1980) criticized Becker and his colleagues' approach for its inability to predict the utility of situations surrounding the actors involved in transactions and to deal with subjectivity of utility. Particularly important to Huber and Spitze is a lack of attention in the economic analyses to the effect of each spouse's subjective evaluation of household division of labor (perceived fairness) on marital stability. The present study addresses this gap in past research.

### *Perceived Marital Quality*

The focus in this study is the second criterion of comparison, psychological well-being of each spouse. While many variables may be used to represent psychological well-being, we particularly focus upon marital quality and perceived fairness as the most critical variables deciding the subsequent marital outcome. When the quality of marriage is high, it is more costly to leave that marriage because it is harder to find an alternative relationship with a higher quality. Although the effect of perceived marital quality on the marriage outcome seems too self-evident to need empirical proof, there have been relatively few studies examining this relationship (White 1990), and this research has not necessarily found a compelling relationship between them (Booth et al. 1986). There is a large number of literature on perceived marital quality on one hand and divorce on the other, but the link between the two bodies of literature is largely missing (see Gager and Sanchez 1997, for a recent attempt in this issue).

As Huber and Spitze (1980) state, "Logically, marital satisfaction, thought of divorce, and divorce itself lie on a continuum, with fewer persons in successive categories. The propensity to end a bad marriage intervenes between marital satisfaction and divorce" (p. 78). This seemingly self-evident relationship, however, has not been tested often. The missing link between marital quality and marital stability may be attributed either to poor measurement of perceived marital quality or prominence of structural and/or demographic forces overshadowing individual's perception. The main reason for this lack of compelling finding is, however, a lack of suitable longitudinal data which contain important measures of perceived marital quality. The National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) is one of the first longitudinal data in the area of family research containing each spouse's perception of marital quality, and we use this data set for the present study.

While perceived marital quality may affect marriage outcome, terminating a marriage may be either impossible or very difficult for wives without their own job, even when their quality of marriage is low. Wives with their own jobs or large incomes, on the other

hand, may not have to endure marriages of low quality. Their CLalt is higher due to their financial status. This suggests that the effect of marital quality may depend on wife's employment status and income. It is relatively easy to test this contention. In this study, we enter two interaction terms, products of wife's perceived marital quality and employment status and wife's perceived marital quality and her income to find out how the effect of marital quality is magnified by the introduction of wife's employment status and income. Assuming that the overall effect of perceived marital quality on divorce/separation is negative (high quality is to decrease the probability of divorce and low quality is to increase the probability), the wife's economic resources will work in such a way to magnify the overall negative effect of perceived marital quality.

### 3. Factors Affecting Both Perceived Marital Quality and Marital Stability

Although subjective marital quality is not explicitly examined in past research on marital stability (again, see Gager and Sanchez 1997 for an exception), many demographic predictors analyzed in this research implied that a low perceived marital quality will eventually result in marital dissolution. Some examples include low income, premarital birth, and such interspousal heterogeneity as difference in age and religion between the spouses. Lehrer (1996), for example, found that marriages are more likely to dissolve if two spouses' religious affiliations are different from each other and/or the husbands are younger than wives by one year or more for first marriages. This relationship is more clearly explained if we enter marital quality between these two sets of variables.

It is well known that marital quality is affected by demographic and family life course variables of both spouses. Glenn and Weaver (1978) found that marital happiness is positively related to education and negatively related to age and the presence of children under 6. Blair (1993) also examined the subjective likelihood of divorce, and found that husbands' earnings, wives' socioeconomic status, and duration of marriage are negatively related. He also found that wife's egalitarian gender-role ideology and husbands' traditional family role ideology lead to a higher subjective likelihood of divorce. In a similar vein, Yogev and Brett (1985) found that marital satisfaction is affected by each spouse's perceptions of the distribution of housework and child care, and they explained this relationship by social exchange and equity theories. In addition, Suitor (1991) found that satisfaction with the division of household labor is more consistently related to perceived marital quality than such demographic variables as age, educational attainment, or wife's employment hours.

As we mentioned earlier, there seem to be two separate literature, one on perceived marital quality and the other on marital stability. They, however, share many predictors

leading to each outcome variable. Many of the shared predictors are those of economic resources. Following the reasoning of Lewis and Spanier (1979), we may contend that the effect of "premarital dispositions" variables on marital stability is primarily through subjective marital quality. If this is the case, there is no independent effect of "premarital dispositions" variables on the marriage outcome.

Alternatively, we could argue that resource variables are at work for marital stability independent of perceived marital quality. In other words, whether one is satisfied with his/her marriage, economic resources dictate the outcome of a particular marriage. If this is the case, we would find effects of "premarital dispositions" variables on divorce and separation even when we controlled for the effect of perceived marital quality. In the present study, we will empirically test these two claims. Below, we will review the relationship between preceding variables on one hand, and perceived marital quality and marriage outcome, on the other.

#### *Perceived Fairness of the Relationship*

As more married women entered labor force and had their own careers, traditional gender division of labor in household work became less justifiable. In many households, however, the traditional division of labor still remains practiced and many women feel distressed. The "fairness in household work" has become a very contentious issue for married women as a result (Huber and Spitze 1980). Based on an exchange between the two spouses of such resources as money (income), services (household work), prestige (education and occupation), emotional support, and physical/personal attractiveness, one or the other spouse may feel unjust in his/her marriage. With their own income, more favorable social supports after divorce, and increasing number of divorced women may have allowed married women, particularly those with careers, in "unfair" conditions to file for separation or divorce. Empirical evidence, however, is scant. While Huber and Spitze (1980) found a support for this thesis, their variables were thought of divorce, rather than actual divorce or separation and actual division of housework instead of each spouse's subjective evaluation. Implied in the argument is that marital quality mediates the relationship between perceived fairness and marriage outcome. Recently, Gager and Sanchez (1997) tried to show the relationship between perceived fairness and marital stability, but their findings were equivocal. Although perceived fairness is not one of the "premarital dispositions" as described by Lewis and Spanier, we include this variable to predict perceived marital quality.

It is important to note that perceived fairness of the relationship is not identical to objective exchange ratio between the two spouses. Although the former is affected by the latter, that effect is not very strong (Blair and Johnson 1992; Greenstein 1995; John, Shelton,

and Luschen 1995). What is critical to marital quality and marriage outcome is subjective evaluation of the relationship, not the fairness of relationship according to any objective criteria.

### *Gender-role Attitudes*

A difference in each spouse's gender role attitude may result in strain in the marital relationship. Married couples negotiate their roles in everyday life as husbands and wives, and gender-role attitude is the most critical factor to set the rule and context in which role negotiations take place. As Lewis and Spanier (1979) indicate, homogamy is one of the important criteria to maintain a good quality of marriage. Homogamy in terms of gender-role attitude should be examined accordingly. We thus expect that disagreement in gender-role attitudes between the spouses brings about serious consequences, including lower perceived marital quality and divorce/separation. Since egalitarian gender roles generally benefit women and less egalitarian gender roles benefit men, couples in which the wife possesses a more egalitarian gender role attitude than her husband are particularly susceptible to disagreement and to the risk of eventual divorce (Bowen and Orthner 1983). Empirical evidence on this contention is scarce. Huber and Spitze (1980) found that wives with egalitarian attitudes were more likely to have thought of divorce, but failed to find the relationship between the spousal difference in sex-role attitudes and either spouse's thought of divorce.

Lueptow, Guss, and Hyden (1989) examined the effect of gender-role ideology on marital happiness. They clearly found that non-traditional gender-role attitude is negatively related to marital happiness among married women, but not among married men. Greenstein (1996) went one step further. According to him, gender-role ideology works as a medium of the relationship between the objective inequality in division of household labor and perceived inequality. It also mediates the relationship between perceived inequality and perceived quality of the marriage. Egalitarian wives tend to perceive more inequality in the relationship and lower marital quality than non-egalitarian wives.

Greenstein (1995) also found that gender-role ideology mediates the relationship between wives' employment and marital disruption. When nontraditional or moderately traditional women work longer hours, their marriages are more likely to be disrupted later while traditional women who work longer hours do not necessarily experience marital disruption. He offers an explanation for these results, using the concept of fairness. Non-traditional women who work long hours feel that the relationship between them and their husbands is not fair, given the fact that they tend to do the majority of household work. Traditional wives take this gender division of labor at home for granted and thus do not feel

the relationship being unfair.

### *Duration of Marriage and Age at Marriage*

Marital duration should be considered one of the determinants of perceived marital quality and stability. We make an emotional commitment to our spouses and acquire skills to maintain a good relationship with them. Divorce (and a possible remarriage) is an action by which we lose our family specific emotional commitment and/or communication skills. A well-known negative effect of marriage duration on divorce (Heaton 1990) can be explained by our desire to protect the commitment and skills which we accumulate as our marriage prolongs. We also know that quality of marriage goes down for the first couple of decades, if not after that, of marriage (Johnson et al. 1986). The effect of length of marriage on divorce and separation, however, is not linear. Many published data indicate that the probability of divorce is highest either at the third or fourth year of the marriage and decreases after that. This non-linear effect will be examined in this study with a cubic term of marital duration.

Age at marriage is shown to be one of the most critical variables in divorce research (Booth and Edwards 1985; Bumpass and Sweet 1972; Heaton 1990; Heaton and Call 1995; Lehrer 1996; Martin and Bumpass 1989; Morgan and Rindfuss 1985; Teachman 1982). Booth et al. (1986) showed that this effect may be only short-term; a negative effect of early marriage disappears after a certain duration of the marriage. The detrimental effect of early marriage may be due to a lower socioeconomic status and lower perception of marital quality among couples who married early, possibly due to early parenthood. Another plausible factor to explain the effect of age at marriage is that those people who married early did not conduct a thorough search for their spouses. They may have decided to marry in a passion of youth, only to learn later that they did not make a right choice.

Booth et al. (1986), on the other hand, found a negative effect of late marriage on marital stability. They find that the negative effect of early marriage on marital stability is only for a short term (less than five years), but "the negative effect of late marriage is as strong as that of early marriage and is, moreover, longer lasting" (p. 434). Heaton and Call (1995) report the same effect but they claim this effect is only short term, compared to the long-term effect of early marriage. In Booth et al.'s study, the stability is measured by "divorce proneness," and this effect may not have stood for actual divorce and/or separation as shown in Heaton and Call's work.

### *Income, Work Hours, and Employment Status*

It is well known that divorce has negative financial consequences, particularly for women, and for children who are likely to live with their mothers. "Feminization of poverty"

refers to a single and/or divorced women with no jobs or low paying jobs, usually with their own children. This financial problem could be a source of psychological strain (depression, loneliness, etc.) or strain in interpersonal relationships (fight with ex-spouses). With no job of their own or small incomes, divorced women will have many things to worry about: how to finance their living; whether or not to move out of the house they lived; and whether or not to transfer their children from private schools. When married women have well-paid jobs and secure careers, on the other hand, they may be less likely to tolerate dissatisfying marriages, since losing their husbands' income is not as devastating as it is for full-time housewives (their CLalt is higher). We thus expect that wife's employment and income have negative effects on marital stability. Spitze and South (1985) found that wife's employment status itself and, among employed wives, hours worked affect divorce/separation two years later.

The effects of wife's employment and income on perceived marital quality, on the other hand, could be either positive or negative. While money itself enhances the objective quality of marriage, it may take a toll in the lack of time between spouses, the quality of spousal interaction, and wife's subjective evaluation of marital quality (Johnson et al. 1986). Wife's income may have a negative effect on the subjective evaluation of marital quality, particularly through perceived fairness of the relationship.

Similar to the effect of wife's income, a large income by husband may be conducive to marital instability through large alimony and/or child support. Assuming it is a major source of the household income, husband's large income, however, may enhance perceived marital quality by making family interaction more pleasant. Married couples with large assets may hesitate to separate or divorce since they have more to lose, such as larger houses and expensive automobiles. Thus, these two aspects of incomes preclude divorce. Past findings seem to suggest that this positive effect outweighs the affordability of divorce (South and Lloyd 1995). Booth et al. (1986) also found that large family incomes prevent divorce for marriages with shorter duration while they facilitate divorce for marriages with longer duration. To earn a large income, the husband may have to work over-time. This could hurt the perceived marital quality due to a lack of spousal interaction.

### *Education*

Education not only leads to high-paying jobs, but also brings social and cultural capital to the marriage. Accordingly, couples with more education may enjoy a higher quality of marriage. As such, attention has been paid to education of each spouse as factors affecting the probability of divorce. Education seems to lower the divorce propensity (Bumpass and Sweet 1972; Lehrer 1996; Martin and Bumpass 1989; Morgan and Rindfuss 1985; South and Lloyd 1995; Teachman 1982). Thus, we expect, in general, that education

lowers the probability of divorce, primarily through its effect on marital quality. Highly educated women, however, may be exceptions to this general pattern. For women, the effect of education on divorce may be curvilinear, in which the probability is high at both lower and higher education levels.

### *Effects of Children*

Many studies on marital dissolution found that birth of the first or second children, if not subsequent ones, decreases the probability of divorce (Heaton 1990; Waite, Haggstrom, and Kanouse 1985). Particularly critical is whether or not a couple has small children. If they do, the wife's financial disadvantages will be larger after the divorce (a large majority of children live with their mothers). Childcare needs after divorce are more imminent. Post-divorce stress will be higher. Small children may prevent or postpone divorce and/or separation, where wives have to endure less favorable marriage conditions (Heaton 1990). Heaton and Call (1995) also found that childbirth lowers the probability of separation for the first year. Lillard and Waite (1993), on the other hand, argue that perceived risk of marital disruption affects couple's fertility. The present study will closely examine the effect of children by their ages.

It is important to note that this deterrence effect of children on marital disruption is not through enhanced marital quality. In fact, marital quality is known to be hurt by children (Johnson et al. 1986). If that's the case, small children enhance marital stability despite the low marital quality.

### *Divorce History*

It has been reported that people who have divorced before are more prone to divorce (Bumpass and Sweet 1972; Heaton and Call 1995; Lehrer 1996; McCarthy 1978; Martin and Bumpass 1989). There are three explanations for this finding. The first explanation is based on the notion of threshold to divorce, stated by Lewis and Spanier (1979). Those who have been divorced once may have lower threshold than those who haven't, since the former have experienced the process once. Divorced spouses know what to expect after divorce, have better coping skills, and are less intimidated by the prospect. When the rational calculation of advantages and disadvantages of divorce results in an equivocal conclusion, those with lower threshold are more likely to divorce than others. It is also argued that those who have divorced have certain characteristics such as a non-conforming and/or non-traditional personality (Martin and Bumpass 1989). These characteristics lead not only to the first but also to subsequent divorces. Finally, difficulty dealing with step children may contribute to a higher probability of divorce for remarried couples (Wineberg 1992).

It has been found that not only one's own divorce experience, but also parent's divorce experience increases the likelihood of divorce (Amato 1996; Bumpass and Sweet 1972; Heaton and Call 1995; Lehrer 1996; McLanahan and Bumpass 1988; Teachman 1982). This effect of inter-generational transfer of divorce experience may be explained by the first explanation above, that is, the lower threshold for divorce. Having seen one's own parents go through the process of divorce, children of divorced parents may develop a lower threshold of divorce. Amato (1996), however, shows that there is no difference in "pro-divorce attitudes" between adult children of divorced parents and others. Instead, he found that interpersonal behavioral problems such as getting angry easily, being jealous, not talking to each other, and having an extramarital relationship are more common for couples with divorced parents, particularly when both spouses have divorced parents.

#### 4. Data and Methods

Data for our analysis came from National Survey of Families and Households, conducted by Center for Demography and Ecology at the University of Wisconsin (Sweet, Bumpass, and Cole 1988) which was conducted in 1987-88 (the first wave) and in 1992-93 (the second wave). We use data from both waves. The first survey was based on a representative sample of all the households in the United States. The total of 13,008 respondents were interviewed of whom 6,883 were married. Efforts were made to reinterview all the respondents in 1992-93, or roughly five years later. Of 6,883 married respondents, 5,489 were interviewed at the second wave. The data include the socio-economic and social-psychological variables of the respondents and their spouses in 1987-88. By the time second interview was conducted, 520 couples (9.5%) were found divorced. It should be noted that this proportion is for all married couples at the first interview.

In order to examine the detailed causal mechanism between preceding variables, perceived marital quality, and marriage outcome, we analyzed the data in two steps; the first to estimate the causal mechanism of perceived marital quality using ordinary least squares regressions and the second to estimate that of marriage outcome roughly five years later using discrete-time event history analysis. We present the results from event history analysis for both separation and divorce. Some scholars use separation as the outcome variable because the interval between separation and divorce varies from one couple to another and some couples never divorce after the separation (e.g. Heaton and Call 1995). Divorce, on the other hand, may be preferred for a couple of reasons: It is the phenomenon we often discuss and for which we see official statistics, and some separated couples live together again.

Since our sample includes many right-censored cases, or couples who have not divorced by the end of the observation period, we make use of the event history analysis. Several studies have used this method to examine marital dissolution (Fergusson, Horwood, and Shannon 1984; Gager and Sanchez 1997; Heaton and Call 1995; South and Lloyd 1995; Teachman 1982). Heaton and Call (1995) discuss the advantage of discrete-time event history analysis over continuous-time event history analyses including the Cox proportional hazards model.

The estimation of the hazard of divorce will be severely biased if we include only the number of periods to divorce observed between the two surveys, since the actual risk of divorce begins at the time of marriage which may precede 1987-88, the date of the first survey. Thus, to correctly reflect the risk periods in the analysis, we measured the duration of marriage since the time of marriage until divorce or the time at the second survey if divorce has not occurred. We then estimated the effects of predictors on this duration of marriage. However, the estimation in this way incurs two methodological problems.

First, while the risk period becomes correct, the variables collected in 1987-88 refer to the condition in that year, and may not reflect the condition at the time of marriage. The estimation procedure implicitly treats most variables as time-constant, whose values have not changed since the date of marriage to the time of data collection. The assumption of time-constancy for some variables is obviously a dubious one. Second, more importantly, the estimation after correction of the risk period may still be affected by sample selection bias due to left-truncation. The couples observed in 1987-88 are the married couples whose marriages survived to 1987-88. The data based on observed couples fail to include marriages that started and failed before the first interview.

While the problem of right-censoring has been dealt with in past research, few analyses of sample selection bias due to left-truncation have been carried out. The problems due to left-truncation are very difficult to resolve in a satisfactory manner in general, unless the underlying hazard function is assumed to be constant, a very unlikely assumption in the analysis of divorce (Guo 1993). The problem may be solved, however, by using the method of conditional likelihood, if the date of entry to marriage is available (Guo 1993; Hamerle 1991; Yamaguchi 1991). This method addresses the problem of sample selection by conditioning the density of a left-truncated case on the case's having survived to the time of first observation or the amount of time the case spends before the first interview. Since the effect of covariates are estimated correctly as the condition of marriage at the date of the first interview in this method, the ambiguity of the reference date of variables mentioned above is simultaneously addressed. While this method can not resolve the potential problem due to unobserved heterogeneity without the full knowledge of covariates before the observation

period (Yamaguchi 1991), it still addresses one of the important sources of bias in parameter estimates. Among several approaches Guo has shown to estimate the conditional likelihood, we adopt the discrete-time event history method based on the application of logistic regression.

The variables used in the OLS regression and the event history model are shown in Table 1. The age of the youngest children and the duration of marriage are entered as time-dependent variables in the event history model. Table 2 shows means and standard deviations of these variables.

**Table 1. Variables in the OLS Regression and Event History Model**

Hazard of divorce/separation	Whether or not a divorce/separation takes place between $t$ and $t+Dt$
Perceived marital quality	3 = extremely high, -3 = extremely low, scale composed of three questions based on factor analysis. Items include marital happiness, the time the spouses spent time alone with each other, and self-evaluation of whether the marriage is in trouble.
Length of marriage	In months since the onset of each marriage, divided by 100.
Husband's/wife's income	Annual household income in \$1,000
Husband's work hours	Weekly work hours.
Wife's employment	1 = employed, 0 = not employed
Husband's/wife's education	Years of formal education
Parent's divorce experience	1 = at least one spouse's parent has divorced, 0 = otherwise
Divorce experience	1 = at least one spouse has divorced, 0 = otherwise
Age at marriage	Younger spouse's age at the current marriage in years
Children	
Wife pregnant or with baby	1 = wife pregnant or living with baby under 12 months old, 0 = otherwise
Children under 3	1 = lived with children between 1 and 3 years old, 0 = otherwise
Children under 6	1 = lived with children between 3 and 6, 0 = otherwise
Children under 9	1 = lived with children between 6 and 9, 0 = otherwise
Children over 9	1 = lived with children 9 years or older, 0 = otherwise
Race	1 = at least one spouse is other than non-Hispanic white, 0 = both non-Hispanic white
Metropolitan area	1 = lived in a metropolitan area (more than 50,000 population), 0 = otherwise
Geographical region	1 = lived in the South/West/North Central, 0 = otherwise
Mean gender-role attitude of the couple	Originally measured 5 = extremely egalitarian, 1 = extremely non-egalitarian, scale composed of four questions based on factor analysis. Centralized later for each gender (mean=0).
Difference between couple's gender -role attitudes	Wife's gender-role attitude - husband's
Perceived fairness of marriage	5 = very unfair to spouse, 1 = very unfair to self, scale composed of four questions based on factor analysis. Items include household chores, working for pay, spending money, and child care.

**Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Variables <sup>a</sup>**

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Divorced at the second interview	.085	.279
Separated at the second interview	.116	.321
Duration of marriage (in 100 months)	2.188	1.653
Duration of marriage <sup>2</sup>	7.520	10.252
Duration of marriage <sup>3</sup>	35.298	85.011
Husband's perceived marital quality	.035	.924
Wife's perceived marital quality	-.009	1.061
Husband's income (in \$1,000)	26.111	21.666
Wife's income (in \$1,000)	12.413	9.764
Husband's work hours for pay	37.992	21.638
Wife's being employed	.594	.491
Husband's years of education	12.989	3.066
Wife's year's of education	12.815	2.554
At least one spouse's parents divorced	.187	.390
At least one spouse has ever been divorced	.283	.450
Younger spouse's age at marriage	23.483	7.070
Wife pregnant or youngest child younger than 1	.088	.283
Youngest child younger than 3	.106	.308
Youngest child younger than 6	.122	.327
Youngest child younger than 9	.085	.279
Youngest child 9 or older	.298	.457
At least one spouse is non-Hispanic white	.174	.380
Living in a metropolitan area	.683	.465
Living in the South	.346	.476
Living in the West	.186	.389
Living in the North Central	.299	.458
Inter-spousal mean of gender-role attitude	.007	.468
Wife's egalitarian gender-role attitude - Husband's	.004	.732
Husband's perceived fairness in marriage	3.095	.338
Wife's perceived fairness in marriage	2.868	.384

**Notes**

a: Means and standard deviations are based on discrete-time event history data for divorce (N=249,521), except whether or not couples divorced (N=3,753) and separated (N=3,754) at the second interview.

**5. Findings**

Table 3 shows our findings from the OLS regression predicting perceived marital quality for each spouse. Overall results show us that the explained variances (R<sup>2</sup>'s) are relatively small; .123 for husbands and .164 for wives. Relationships between demographic/psychological variables and perceived marital quality produce little discrepancy from those presented in the literature. Wife's employment is negatively related not only to her own but also to her husband's perception of marital quality. Since this regression is based on cross-sectional data, however, we should be careful not to interpret the relationship in

causal terms. Dissatisfying marriages may propel wives to seek gratification elsewhere, i.e. employment, though this causal mechanism is less likely to explain the negative relationship between wife's employment and her husband's perceived marital quality. Husband's income is positively related to his wife's perception of marital quality but not to his own. Neither wife's income nor husband's work hours is related to marital quality.

Table 3. OLS Regression Estimates of Perceived Marital Quality

	<u>Dependent Variable=Perceived Marital Quality</u>			
	<u>Husbands</u>		<u>Wives</u>	
	<u>b</u>	<u><math>\beta</math></u>	<u>b</u>	<u><math>\beta</math></u>
Length of Marriage	-.1723**	-.320	-.2209**	-.359
(Length of Marriage) <sup>2</sup>	.0835***	.916	.0833***	.801
(Length of Marriage) <sup>3</sup>	-.0080***	-.522	-.0072**	-.410
Husband's Income	.0007	.016	.0023**	.046
Wife's Income	-.0010	-.012	-.0002	-.003
Work Hours (Husband)	-.0014	-.032	-.0012	-.024
Employment Status (Wife)	-.0656*	-.034	-.1228***	-.056
Education (Husband)	.0009	.003	.0086	.025
Education (Wife)	-.0038	-.010	-.0004	-.001
Divorce by Parent	-.1351***	-.055	-.1529***	-.055
Divorce by a Spouse	-.0715*	-.034	-.0987*	-.041
Age at Marriage	.0078***	.060	.0048#	.032
With Baby/Wife Pregnant	-.2095***	-.058	-.3096***	-.075
With Child (12-35 months old)	-.2876***	-.101	-.3208***	-.099
With Child (36-71 months old)	-.3663***	-.119	-.4202***	-.119
With Child (71-107 months old)	-.3074***	-.087	-.3113***	-.077
With Child (108 months or older)	-.2468***	-.109	-.2491***	.096
Race	-.0622#	-.025	-.1404***	-.050
Metropolitan Residence	-.0867**	-.042	-.0581#	-.025
Residence in the South	-.0988*	-.049	.0040	.002
Residence in the West	-.0426	-.017	-.0950#	-.034
Residence in the North Central	-.0645	-.031	-.0098	-.004
Mean Egalitarian Gender-role Attitude	-.0004	-.000	-.0593#	-.026
Difference in Gender-role Attitudes	-.0478**	-.037	-.0294	-.020
Husband's Perceived Fairness	.1874***	.066	.1707***	.052
Wife's Perceived Fairness	.4177***	.171	.8174***	.294
Intercept	-1.4519***		-2.6369***	
R <sup>2</sup>	.123		.164	
N	4,514		4,514	

Notes.

\*\*\*P<.001, \*\*P<.01, \*P<.05, #P<.10

As has been well known, children hurt marital quality. Compared to married people with no children, marital quality of people with children is consistently lower, regardless of

their ages. Age at marriage of the younger spouse is positively related to husband's marital quality; the younger they get married, the lower their perception of marital quality. Though this relationship is not significant for wives in Table 3, it is significant when we delete a rather dominating variable, perceived fairness from the equation (table not shown). When either a spouse or one of the parents has been divorced, the perceived marital quality is lower, for both husbands and wives.

Marital quality is known to change with progress in family life stages in a non-linear fashion. It is expected that marital quality is high at the onset of marriage, declines for a few decades, and rises after that. To capture this non-linear relationship, we entered a cubic term of length of marriage along with a quadratic term. The cubic term was significant. When we drew plots for the estimated equations, both spouses' marital qualities followed U-shaped patterns. While the husband's perceived marital quality was at the lowest point at the 142nd month (12th year), the wife's hit the lowest at the 198th month (17th year).

The mean egalitarian gender-role attitude of each couple is not related to either spouse's perception of marital quality. When we delete a dominating variable, each spouse's perceived fairness from the equation, however, this becomes negative and significant (wives in more egalitarian couples perceive their marital quality to be low). More importantly, the difference between husband's and wife's scores is negatively related to husband's marital quality; husbands perceive the quality of their marriages low when their wives support more egalitarian views than themselves. This relationship also becomes significant among wives when we delete the perceived fairness variables.

Finally, both spouses' perceptions of fairness of the relationship are strongly related to their perceived marital quality. Given that these variables directly refer to the marriage, it was expected to be strongly related to perceived marital quality. Our findings confirm that. Both spouses' perceived marital qualities are positively related to both spouses' perceived fairness. Particularly significant is wife's perception of the fairness, which is strongly related both to her own and to her husband's marital quality. Its relationship with her own perceived marital quality is so strong that this variable alone increases the R2 by .085 above and beyond all other predictors. Wife's, but not husband's, perception of fairness is critical for both spouses' marital quality.

Tables 4 and 5 show our findings from discrete-time event history analysis predicting divorce and separation. In Model 1, we entered variables preceding perceived marital quality; demographic variables, gender-role attitudes, and perception of fairness. In Model 2, perceived marital quality variables are added to see if the effects of variables preceding them are mediated through the perceived marital quality. Model 3A includes an interaction term between wife's employment status and perception of marital quality while Model 3B includes

another interaction between wife's income and marital quality. In the following paragraphs, effects of predictors on log-odds of divorce and separation are discussed. Since overall findings are similar, we refer to the divorce equations. When the effects on separation differ from those on divorce, we will note it in our discussion.

Table 4. Discrete-Time Logistic Regression: Divorce

	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3A</u>	<u>Model 3B</u>
Length of Marriage	.1026	-.0200		
(Length of Marriage) <sup>2</sup>	-.2700***	-.2452**		
(Length of Marriage) <sup>3</sup>	.00516***	.00507***		
Husband's Income	.00494	.00555#		
Wife's Income	.00227	.00145		
Work Hours (Husband)	-.00579#	-.00597#		-.00298
Employment Status (Wife)	.1028	.0831	-.0317	
Education (Husband)	-.0582*	-.0599*		
Education (Wife)	.00214	.00879		
Divorce by Parent	.2490*	.1862		
Divorce by a Spouse	.4054**	.3709**		
Age at Marriage	-.0839***	-.0828***		
With Baby/Wife Pregnant	-1.2900***	-1.4315***		
With Child (12-35 months old)	-.5834**	-.7527***		
With Child (36-71 months old)	-.0710	-.2813		
With Child (71-107 months old)	-.5097*	-.7642**		
With Child (108 months or older)	-.0211	-.1526		
Race	-.1436	-.2251		
Metropolitan Residence	.2481#	.1957		
Residence in the South	.5187*	.4606*		
Residence in the West	.7066**	.5739**		
Residence in the North Central	.7123***	.6503**		
Mean Egalitarian Gender-role Attitude	.0871	.0421		
Difference in Gender-role Attitudes	.1195	.0807		
Fairness of Relationship (Husband)	-.4625**	-.3205*		
Fairness of Relationship (Wife)	-.4982***	.0110		
Perceived Marital Quality (Husband)		-.1654**		
Perceived Marital Quality (Wife)		-.3379***	-.2216**	-.3036***
<u>Interactions</u> <sup>a</sup>				
Wife's Employment Status x Marital Quality			-.1701*	
Wife's Income x Marital quality				-.00336#
Intercept	-1.0861	-2.8158***	-2.8125***	-2.7952***
$\chi^2$ (based on -2LL)	321.211	413.591	418.358	416.010

Notes.

a: Coefficients for variables other than those which composed interactions are omitted from the table.

\*\*\*P<.001, \*\*P<.01, \*P<.05, #P<.10

Table 5. Discrete-Time Logistic Regression: Separation

Dependent Variable = Log-Odds for Separation

	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3A</u>	<u>Model 3B</u>
Length of Marriage	.1613	.0362		
(Length of Marriage) <sup>2</sup>	-.2616***	-.2360***		
(Length of Marriage) <sup>3</sup>	.00498***	.00488***		
Husband's Income	.00329	.00408		
Wife's Income	.00137	.000582		-.00294
Work Hours (Husband)	-.00262	-.00300		
Employment Status (Wife)	.00137	.0480	-.0388	
Education (Husband)	-.0729**	-.0751**		
Education (Wife)	-.0173	-.0108		
Divorce by Parent	.2843**	.2313*		
Divorce by a Spouse	.4023***	.3656**		
Age at Marriage	-.0674***	-.0656***		
With Baby/Wife Pregnant	-.8205***	-.9705***		
With Child (12-35 months old)	-.3829*	-.5536***		
With Child (36-71 months old)	-.1976	-.4204**		
With Child (71-107 months old)	-.4464*	-.7086***		
With Child (108 months or older)	-.1226	-.2721#		
Race	.1057	.0230		
Metropolitan Residence	.2888*	.2445*		
Residence in the South	.3369*	.2794#		
Residence in the West	.3555*	.2296		
Residence in the North Central	.4156*	.3398*		
Mean Egalitarian Gender-role Attitude	.1602	.1142		
Difference in Gender-role Attitudes	.0343	-.00855		
Fairness of Relationship (Husband)	-.4279***	-.2856*		
Fairness of Relationship (Wife)	-.5915***	-.0543		
Perceived Marital Quality (Husband)		-.1781***		
Perceived Marital Quality (Wife)		-.3517***	-.2688***	-.3252***
<u>Interactions</u> <sup>a</sup>				
Wife's Employment Status x Marital Quality			-.1274#	
Wife's Income x Marital Quality				-.00269
Intercept	-.5381	-2.3396***	-2.3469***	-2.3271**
$\chi^2$ (based on -2LL)	396.398	530.875	534.526	532.919

Notes.

a: Coefficients for variables other than those which composed interactions are omitted from the table.

\*\*\*P<.001, \*\*P<.01, \*P<.05, #P<.10

The cubic term of the length of marriage is significant for both divorce and separation, indicating that the effect of the length of marriage on the log-odds of divorce and separation is not linear. Based on logistic regression coefficients of Model 1 (including all predictors preceding perceived marital quality), the estimated risk of divorce is the highest at 19th month while that for separation is the highest at 31st month.

Neither spouse's income affects marriage outcome. When such demographic variables as education, length of marriage, and age at marriage are controlled for, income is not related to the divorce/separation probability. Neither related to marital dissolution is wife's employment status. Husband's work hours show marginal effects on divorce (not separation), but the direction is opposite to what we predicted (couples with a longer working husband are less likely to divorce). Husband's education is related to marital stability in the expected direction; the more educated husbands are less likely to divorce/separate. This relationship is not found for wives. This may be due to a possible non-linear effect of wife's education on marital stability (wives with very low and high education are more likely to divorce and/or separate). We tested this hypothesis by including a quadratic term of the wife's education but didn't find any support for this contention.

When at least one of the spouses' parents went through divorce, the couple is more likely to separate and/or divorce ( $p < .05$ ), even when we control for the effects of perceived marital quality variables. In addition, when one or both of the spouses have experienced divorce, that couple is more likely to divorce or separate than others. It appears that having a first-hand experience of divorce/separation makes it easier to decide in favor of divorce or separation.

As expected, age at marriage has a negative effect on both divorce and separation (the younger they were, the more likely to divorce/separate). Children, particularly small ones, help enhance marital stability; couples of small children are less likely to divorce and/or separate. Note that children help marital stability despite that they hurt marital quality. Wives with small children feel the relationship is unfair and feel a low marital quality, yet they are less likely to divorce/separate possibly due to a foreseeable difficulty to live without their husbands. Alternatively, they may consider the welfare of their children before their own, and decide to stay in their marriages not to hurt children.

Neither the spousal mean of gender-role attitudes nor difference between them is related to marriage outcome. While the inter-spousal difference in gender-role attitudes is related to husband's perceived marital quality, it is not related to marriage outcome. In comparison, both spouses' perceived fairness strongly affect divorce/separation; marriages are more stable when spouses think the relationship is fair.

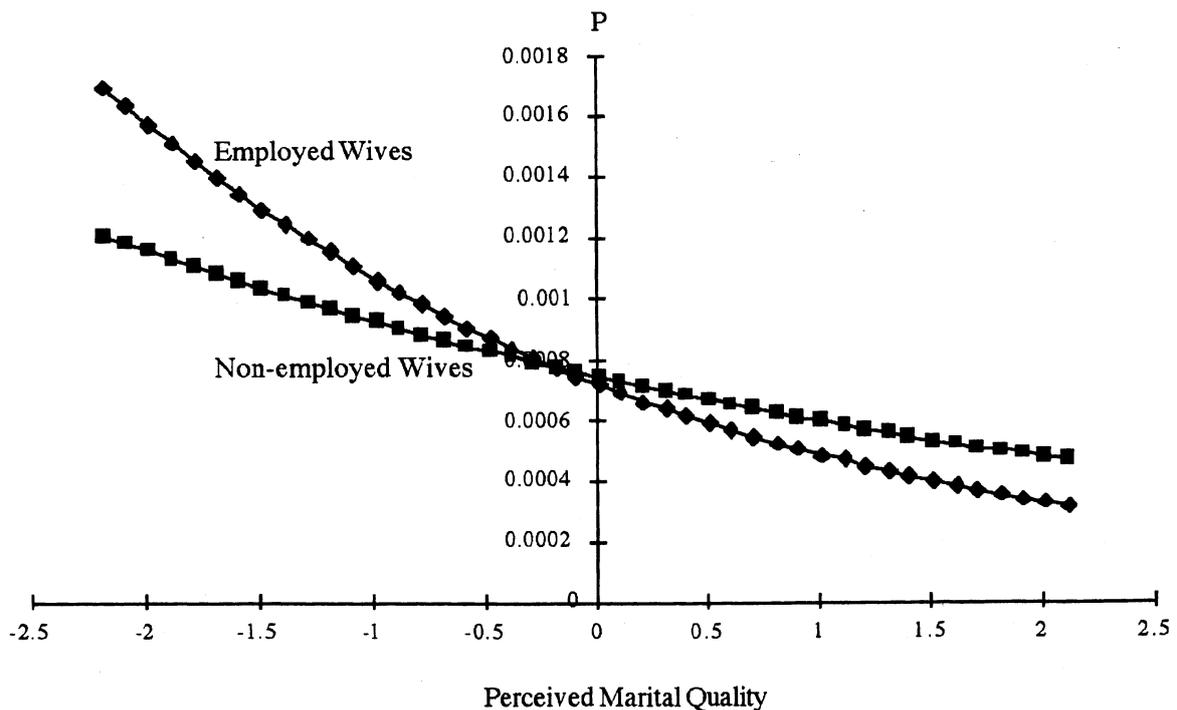
In Model 2, we entered each spouse's perception of marital quality. As we expected,

perceived marital qualities of both spouses have negative effects on the probability of divorce/separation. A more significant finding from this model is the invariance of variables preceding the perceived marital quality. Few effects of preceding variables on marriage outcome change as a result of including perceived marital quality. In other words, the effect of various variables are not mediated through marital quality. Outcome of a particular marriage seems independently affected by marital quality and variables preceding that.

In Model 3A, we entered an interaction between wife's employment status and her perceived marital quality. For divorce, the interaction term is significant. While wife's perceived marital quality affects marriage outcome among couples with employed wives ( $b = -.2216$ ), this effect is stronger among couples with employed wives ( $b = -.2216 - .1701 = -.3917$ ). As we predicted, employed wives can make a decision to terminate their marriage based on their perception to a greater extent than non-employed wives. Employed wives with a greater economic resources can terminate unsatisfactory marriage more easily than their non-employed counterparts. Though the interaction term for separation is not statistically significant, sign of the relationship is also negative.

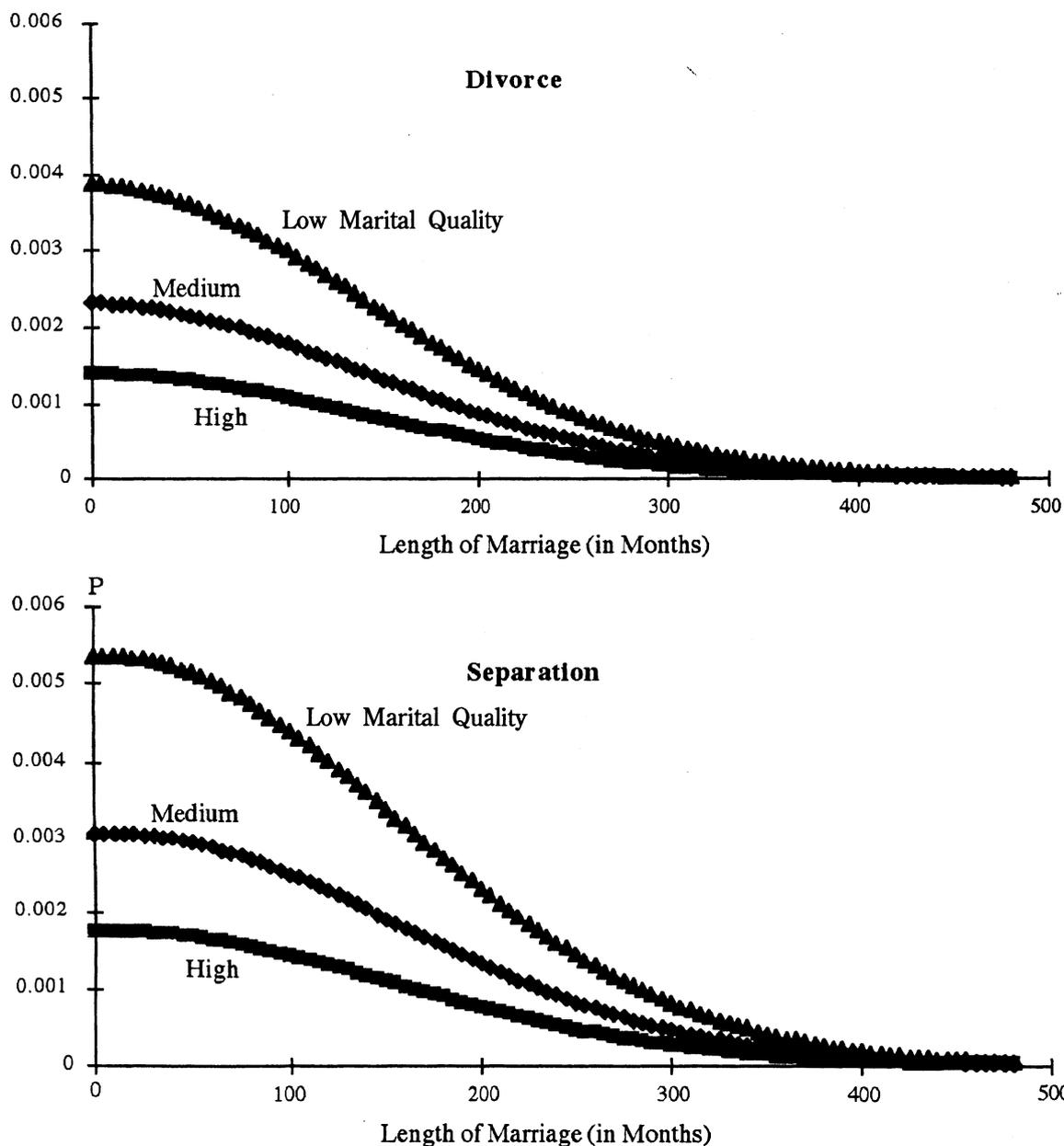
Created from regression estimates in this model, Figure 1 represents the effect of perceived marital quality on divorce for employed and non-employed wives. While wife's perceived marital quality affects whether they divorce or not five years later for both employed and non-employed wives, the effect is stronger (the slope is steeper) for employed wives.

Figure 1. Probability of Divorce by Wife's Employment Status and Perceived Marital Quality



In Model 3B, we entered another interaction term; between wife's income and her marital quality. This interaction is in the expected sign (negative) for divorce and separation, and significant for the former if we used a one-tailed test for divorce.

Figure 2. Probability of Divorce/Separation by Length of Marriage and Perceived Marital Quality



Using logistic regression estimates (of Model 2) and mean values for various predictor variables, we have predicted the probability of divorce and separation for different length of marriage (Figure 2). Predicted probabilities of divorce are charted separately for three levels of perceived marital quality. "High marital quality" indicates marriages in which both husband's and wife's perceived marital qualities are one standard deviation above the mean. "Medium quality" indicates couples with average perceived marital quality by both spouses while "low quality" indicates couples with both spouses' perceived qualities one standard deviation below the mean. In this Figure, difference between the highest and lowest curves at a given marital duration is a combined effect of husband's and wife's perceived marital qualities. Alternatively, if we examine each curve, we see an estimated pattern of marital dissolution. The probability of separation and/or divorce is the highest during the first five years of marriage (until about 60 months), which agrees well with the actual pattern of marital dissolution.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

Our findings shed some important light on the mechanism of marital dissolution, particularly the effect of perceived marital quality of husbands and wives, which has rarely been examined in longitudinal analyses. Marital qualities perceived by both spouses affect probabilities of divorce/separation. Nevertheless, such variables affecting marital qualities as demographic, gender-role attitudes, and perceived fairness, remained to be related to marriage outcome. The effects of these variables on marriage outcome seem to be independent of the effect of marital quality.

While both spouses' perceived marital quality is a critical variable for marriage outcomes, magnitude of its effect is different from a group of wives to another, separated by their employment status and income. With their financial independence, employed wives, particularly those with large incomes can follow their subjective assessment in terms of their decision to terminate the marriage. When employed wives and particularly those with large incomes are not happy, do not spend much time with their husbands, and/or sense that their marriage is in trouble, their marriage is in fact much more likely to end. This "privilege" of terminating unsatisfactory marriage may not be available for housewives and employed wives with small incomes.

The situation is similar for wives with small children; due to anticipation of difficult lives after divorce/separation, or lower CLalt, they have to endure marriages of low qualities. This is evident in the fact that wives with children are less happy with their marriage, spend less time with their husband alone, and/or perceive that their marriage is in trouble, and yet,

their marriages are more likely to survive than those without children. Despite low marriage quality, their children (one of the threshold factors) keep wives from divorce/separation.

Although divorce is a couple behavior, one of the spouses must initiate the process. It appears that more women do that in recent years. Our study indicates that this is in fact true, shown by the fact that the effect of the wife's perceived marital quality on marriage outcome seems to be larger than those of the husband's (Table 4, Model 2). The fact that wife's employment status conditions the effect of her perceived marital quality on marriage outcome may indicate that wives take a more active role to terminate their marriage than their husbands. In-depth analysis of the negotiation process between the spouses concerning divorce may be necessary. Qualitative research examining the process of negotiation between the spouses would nicely complement quantitative research like this study.

The present study can be thought of a follow-up of Huber and Spitze (1980). They did not have longitudinal data with such variables as gender-role attitudes and household division of labor (p. 78). They used, as the dependent variable, thought of divorce, instead of actual divorce, and had to qualify their findings stating, "...the relation of thought of divorce to divorce itself is unknown" (p. 78). Now that longitudinal data are available, we can test the relationship between perceived gender-role attitude, perceived fairness of the relationship, and marital quality on one hand, and marriage outcome on the other.

One qualification is in order. What initiates the process leading to divorce and/or separation may not have been completely captured by variables in this research. For example, a heated discussion between the spouses may lead to an entangled relationship which later ends in divorce. Extramarital relationships by one spouse may lead to divorce, regardless of other aspects of the marriage. Some recent longitudinal studies have analyzed this question of specific marital problems (Amato and Rogers 1997), but the evidence is far from clear. In the future, it will be necessary to analyze the effect of these "problem variables" together with other socio-economic and psychological variables.

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重点領域研究「マイクロ統計データ」・公募研究（課題番号 08209118）

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研究報告書（3） 平成9年度

## 家族構造の国際比較研究をめざして

－米国NSFHデータの利用を通して（第2次報告）－

1998年3月

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