

Paper Submitted for Population Association of America 2006 Annual Meeting
Los Angeles, CA March 30 – April 1, 2006

“Is Income Enough?: What Dependence can Tell Us about the Benefits of Marriage?”

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ABSTRACT

This paper begins an investigation into what areas of a couple's life are important for marital success in order to provide some insight into what men and women see as the necessary benefits, or the “purpose” of marriage. I find that the largest differences between men in women in how they believe that their own lives would be affected by marital dissolution are in the areas of standard of living and sex life. I also find that though the distributions of men and women's responses across all six areas are remarkably similar, their effects on marital dissolution vary substantially. Consistent with previous studies that have found that wives are more likely to initiate divorce, wives reports about the effect that marital dissolution would have on their own lives are more strongly related the likelihood that a couple will separate or divorce. The models suggest that in contrast to the theories advanced by Parsons and Becker, *both* partners prefer a relationship in which they have mutual economic dependence. There is also some evidence that husbands and wives consider different aspects of their relationship when reporting in at least two of the six areas included in the study.

**PRELIMINARY PAPER
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INTRODUCTION

The American family has experienced a great deal of change throughout the twentieth century. No changes have been as widespread or as dramatic as increases in divorce and changes in the economic roles of women. In the early part of the twentieth century, widespread sex discrimination in education, employment and pay, which was for many years codified in laws that allowed companies to pay lower wages to women than to men, placed women, both married and single, at a disadvantage relative to men in the labor market. Because of their concentration in female-typed, low-paying occupations, many women had little hope of maintaining a middle- or upper-class standard of living without the financial support from a husband's salary. This made women dependent on the institution of marriage for economic support for themselves and their children. The harsh realities of the difficulty of supporting oneself and, if necessary, one's children, made marriage a necessity for women in a way that did not apply to their male counterparts.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, due in no small part to the gains of the feminist movement, many laws that upheld discrimination based on sex were revoked or overturned. At the same time, changes in the structure of the labor market opened up new opportunities for women in paid employment. The trend of women receiving increasingly higher levels of education and participating in the labor force in greater numbers that had begun early in the twentieth century accelerated dramatically. Women's earnings increased significantly and, as a result, they began to close the earnings gap between men and women. Concurrent with these changes, both the age at first marriage

and the divorce rate increased substantially, leading to fears that women's newfound economic independence was eroding the importance of marriage.

These changes sparked an entire literature that attempted to link changes in women's employment and earnings to the observed "declines in marriage". Much of this literature focused on the importance of sex role differentiation within marriage.

Following the work of Talcott Parsons (1949), researchers assumed that the underlying basis for marriage rested on the functional division of labor in the household that allowed one partner (the husband) to be in charge of economic production and the other (the wife) to be in charge of household production. This prevented competition between spouses and led to greater social harmony. When this careful separation of spheres is disturbed, the primary social purpose of the family is undermined. This theory received renewed focus when Gary Becker (1981) published his book A Treatise on the Family, which argued that when women are economically independent, marriage is no longer as beneficial for them and they will therefore be less likely to marry and more likely to divorce.

A vast literature exists that aims to find support for this hypothesis with limited results. Valerie Oppenheimer (1997) reviewed this literature and found little support for economic independence theories. Underlying the focus in economic independence theories on change in the economic position of women as the main factor culprit in changes in family structure is the assumption that the primary benefit to marriage for women is the economic security that it provides. This argument seems flawed for several reasons. First, as Oppenheimer (1997) notes, the logic of this theory suggests that high-earning women will turn away from marriage altogether, choosing instead to remain

single; however this is not what has occurred. The age at marriage has risen, however marriage remains the social norm. Though over this period the proportion of women who never marry may have increased somewhat, the current levels are not high by historical standards and are likely due to the process of delayed marriage. In addition, recent studies that have compared marriage rates for women by educational attainment have found that in contrast to in the past, women who are more highly educated, the women who according to economic independence theories are *more* likely to eventually marry than women with low levels of education (Goldstein and Kenney 2001).

Second, it is not clear why marriage and work are incompatible for women, but not for men or why a wife who possesses her own income would cease to benefit from access to a spouse's income. The buying power in a given year of a husband's earnings of \$40,000 is the same regardless of whether the wife earns nothing or she earns \$30,000 per year. Both women increase their economic standing by adding an additional income to their household. The difference between these two women is that the one of them is *completely* dependent on a husband for her economic position, while the other, though not independent, is less dependent on her partner's earnings. Despite the significant gains that women have made, they remain far from achieving income parity with men. It remains the case that female-headed households in the United States are more likely to be poor than households with a male wage earner. Even if women were to reach income parity with their male counterparts, few individuals (men or women) earn so much that their standard of living would not be significantly improved by the addition of another income.

Economic independence, therefore, removes the coercion of women into marriage, based on their inability to economically support oneself or one's family due to sex discrimination and other labor market factors. It places women in a position, more similar to that of their male counterparts, in which they are freer to choose a spouse that may be a better partner for themselves in other areas or to leave a spouse when the match is not successful. Researchers such as Valerie Oppenheimer (1988) have argued that changes in female employment may in fact be beneficial to families. Changes in labor market structure during the 1970s and 1980s led to less stable employment and declining wages for semi-skilled men. The erosion of men's economic status has made women's employment a necessary coping mechanism for families. In these families, specialization of partner's activities may be detrimental to these families, leaving them less able to successfully deal with the financial hardship that comes from periodic bouts of unemployment or declines in income.

The single-minded focus of researchers on the economic function of marriage has led researchers to draw the conclusion that, now that women are less likely to be dependent on (coerced into?) marriage by their own dismal economic prospects, the family is in a state of decline. Researchers such as David Popenoe (1993) and Linda Waite (1995) have bemoaned the decline of the American family in the latter half of the twentieth century, citing a "retreat from marriage" and calling sociologists to take on the role of educating the public of the dangers of these changes in family structure and the additional benefits that marriage would bring to them. However, as noted above, marriage trends do not provide evidence that Americans are retreating from the institution

of marriage. Perhaps marriage offers other benefits to its participants that are not premised on the division of household labor by sex.

A number of researchers have provided evidence for other benefits that marriage provides its participants. With respect to physical and mental health and economic and financial health, married individuals have been shown to be better off than those who remain single (Ribar 2003; Waite 2000). It is not clear that individuals enter marriage with these benefits in mind. It seems unlikely that couples marry in order to improve their own or their partner's health or because they believe that their hourly wage rate will increase more rapidly. Instead, these appear to be byproducts of the manner in which the institution of marriage changes partners' behaviors¹.

However, there is a difference between the relative advantage that researchers have observed that married persons enjoy relative to single people and the benefits that individuals expect to receive in their marriages. To my knowledge there is little research about other benefits of marriage that individuals receive. One notable exception is the finding that married individuals report higher levels of overall happiness than unmarried individuals (Waite 2000). This study uses data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) to assess the importance of several areas of life in maintaining a successful marriage. These areas include standard of living, career opportunities, social life, overall happiness, sex life, and being a parent. These six areas were identified by the NSFH as distinct areas that they expected to be affected by marriage.

To my knowledge the information contained in this survey about these six areas has only been used summarily; no researcher has investigated how these areas may be

¹ Though it should be noted that it has been argued that many of the observed "benefits" of marriage such as better health or higher wages (for men) may be due to the selection of healthier or more productive men into marriage. For a review of the literature in these areas, see Ribar (2003).

independently related to the success of a marriage. In this paper I investigate whether differences exist between men and women in how these areas of their life would be affected if the couple were to separate or divorce. In all but one area, career opportunities, both men and women report that their lives would change for the worse if their marriages were to end. Though there are a number of differences between men and women, the distribution of responses for both are remarkably similar. I then determine the importance that each partner places on each of these six areas for marital success by modeling the relationship between both partners' responses about how both their own and their partner's life would change if the marriage were to end and the likelihood that the couple will end their marriage.

I argue that when a couple is less likely to separate when one or both partners feels their own or their partner's life would be adversely affected, there is evidence that one or both partners benefit from the marriage in that area of life. Additionally, if the couple is more likely to separate when one or both partners believe that they or their partner would be better off, then there is evidence that the partner believes that they *should* benefit from the marriage in this area. The results of these analyses show that, with the exception of the areas of standard of living and general happiness, the wife's views about whether she herself will be better or worse off have a stronger relationship with the likelihood that the couple will eventually separate or divorce than the husband's views of how his own life would be affected, which is consistent with research that has shown that wives are more likely to initiate divorce proceedings.

I investigate the relationship between these effects and different aspects of each of the six areas of life in order to document what aspects of the marriage are important for

its success. In this preliminary paper, I generally focus on aspects of the couple's life that focus on measures of marital quality or that would be affected by the participation of one or both partner's in the labor force. The results discussed in this paper are preliminary and are subject to change in future drafts.

DATA AND METHODS

The data used in this analysis comes from both waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). The NSFH is a probability sample of 13,017 respondents that was first conducted in 1987 and 1988. The sample consists of a main sample of 9,643 individuals and an oversample of blacks, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, single-parent families and families with stepchildren, cohabiting couples, and recently married couples (Sweet et al 1988). One individual was randomly selected to be the main respondent from all of the adults residing in the household at the time of the interview. If the main respondent was married or cohabiting, his/her spouse or partner was asked to fill out a self-enumerated partner questionnaire. In all, 5,648 spouses and 519 partners were interviewed in 1987 and 1988. Between 1992 and 1994, the NSFH reinterviewed main respondents as well as spouses and partners who were interviewed at the first wave and the main respondent's current spouse or partner. During the second wave, 10,005 main respondents, 5,624 current spouse/partners, and 789 ex-spouse/partners were interviewed. In this wave, spouse/partners were administered a questionnaire that was similar to that given to main respondents.

The analytic sample consists of all first marriages intact at the first wave interview for which there is information about whether the marriage is intact at the second wave and a date that the marriage ended or was censored. If the main respondent

was interviewed at the second wave and provided a date that the marriage ended or was not interviewed at the second wave, but the ex-spouse was interviewed and provided a date that the marriage ended, the marriage was included in the analysis. Due to small sample sizes for other racial/ethnic groups, only marriages in which the main respondent was either white or black were included in this analysis. This resulted in information on 4,639 marriages.

To evaluate the relationship between spouses' perception of the effects of separation on the experience of marital separation, I create two sets of variables: husband's (wife's) report on how their own life would change if the couple were to separate and his (her) report on how his (her) spouse's life would change. The variables of interest are constructed from the following sets of questions:

Even though it may be very unlikely, think for a moment about how various areas of your life might be different if you were separated. For each of the following areas, how do you think things would change? A) your standard of living; B) your social life; C) your career opportunities; D) your overall happiness; E) your sex life; F) being a parent.

How about your husband/wife? How do you think these various areas of life might be different for him/her if you separated? A) his/her standard of living; B) his/her social life; C) his/her career opportunities; D) his/her overall happiness; E) his/her sex life; F) being a parent.

The last area was only asked of respondents who had had children at the time of the interview. Each of these variables are coded on a 5-point scale, where 1 is much worse, 2 is worse, 3 is the same, 4 is better, and 5 is much better. These variables are recoded to three categories: worse, the same, better. In addition, I include a category for those who

are missing information. Both main respondents and their spouses were asked these questions and their responses were coded into separate variables for the husband and wife.

I use survival analysis, specifically, Cox proportional hazards models that model the relative likelihood that the couple will separate during the observation period. If the main respondent was interviewed at the second wave and reported the marriage intact, the marriage is coded as intact. However, if the main respondent reported that the marriage had ended, or if the main respondent was not interviewed, but his/her spouse was interviewed and reported that the marriage had ended, the marriage was coded as dissolved. Couples in which one partner died between waves are treated as censored observations with the censoring time coded as the time of death. There were 643 (or 13.8%) marriages that ended between waves. Analyses were conducted separately for each of the six areas.

The standard set of control variables included in the models are wife's age at marriage, husband's education², whether the wife's parents separated or divorced before she was age 14, wife's race (coded 1 if Black, 0 otherwise), whether the couple owns their home, whether the couple cohabited together before marriage, and both the duration of the marriage at the first wave interview and the duration squared. In addition, most models also included the husband's total income (excluding investments) and the wife's total income (excluding investments). In the model that includes changes in being a parent I

² Husband's and Wife's education levels were highly correlated and therefore both could not be included in the model. In each set of analyses, the effect of both husband's education and wife's education were included separately with measures in the difference between spouses' education levels. The models discussed in this paper control for husband's education unless specifically noted otherwise. There was virtually no difference in the predictive power of the measures and only very small differences on their effects on the variables of interest.

include an indicator for the presence of one or more biological or adopted children and an indicator for the presence of any stepchildren in addition to the other control variables listed above. These variables were initially included in all of the models, but were only found to have an effect in this model. In addition, the following variables were also tested in each of the models, but were ultimately dropped because they were not found to be related to the likelihood of marital dissolution between waves: the wife's proportion of the couple's total income (excluding investments), indicators for husband's employment status and wife's employment status, and the number of years since the wife (husband) was last employed. In order to test hypotheses (detailed below) about the relationship between marital dissolution and how each partner believes their life would change if the couple were to separate, I also coded a number of additional variables based on a series of questions about the couple's relationship. Details about these questions can be found in Appendix B.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the distributions of non-missing responses to how the respondent's (and his/her partner's) life would change if the couple were to separate in each of the six areas included in the NSFH. The top of the table shows the statistical significance of the pair-wise differences between men and women's responses. The bottom part of the table shows the Chi-square probability that the distribution of men's and women's responses are similar. From this table, we see that the pattern of responses for men and women are quite similar. Both men and women are more likely to say that both they and their partner would be worse off if the couple separated than better off. In fact, it is relatively rare for either partner to report that s/he would be better off if his/her marriage were to end. In all

areas except career opportunities, a majority of both men and women report that both they and their partner would be worse off without their marriage, suggesting that both partners rely on the marriage to maintain their quality of life in each of the remaining five areas.

Despite these similarities, there appear to be important differences between the distribution of men and women's responses. Comparing one partner's evaluation of how separation would affect his/her own life with his/her evaluation of how his/her spouse's life would be affected, we see that both partners see the wife as more dependent on the marriage for her sex life and standard of living than the husband. However, with respect to their overall happiness and their parenting ability, women are more likely to see their husbands as being similarly dependent on the marriage as themselves, while men are more likely to see differences in each partners' relative dependence on the marriage. In particular, men are likely to see themselves as *more* dependent on the marriage for their happiness or their parenting ability than their wives, while women are more likely to see both partners are equally dependent in these areas. However, it is interesting to note that more than half of women report that their ability to parent would decline if the couple were to separate despite the fact that women are much more likely to maintain custody over their children in the event of separation. This may be due to the greater burden that these women would assume in attempting to manage both their parenting and earning responsibilities if the couple were to separate. If the couple were to separate, they would be required to spend a greater proportion of their time in the workplace and less time with their children.

The only area in which there are no differences between men's and women's responses is social life. The largest differences appear in standard of living and sex life. With respect to standard of living, men are much less likely to report that their own life would worsen in the event of marital dissolution than women are. Though the distribution of men's and women's reports about how their partner's life would change are similar, when compared to their responses about how their own life would change, both partners report that the female partner's standard of living is more likely to worsen at the event of separation than the husband's and the husband's standard of living is more likely to improve. Both partners seem to recognize the greater importance of marriage to maintain the wife's standard of living than the husband. However, in more than half of all couples, men report that their own standard of living would worsen in the event of marital dissolution, implying that a majority of men are also dependent on their marriages in this area.

Turning to the couple's sex life, we can see that both men and women see both themselves and their partners as dependent on the marriage for sexual satisfaction. However, men are less likely to see report that either their own or their wife's sex life will worsen in the event of separation than women are. There is no difference between the proportion of men who say their own sex life would worsen and the proportion who say that their wife's sex life would worsen, however men are more likely to report that their own sex life would improve than to report that their wife's sex life would improve if the marriage were to end. Women, however, are more likely to report that their husband's sex life would improve than their own and less likely to report that his would worsen if the couple were to separate. This suggests that both husbands and wives are more likely

to see the wife as dependent on the marriage for her sex life. However, both men and women report themselves to be dependent on their marriage in this area. Only the area of overall happiness elicited a higher proportion of responses that the respondent's life would worsen if the couple were to separate.

To summarize, from the results displayed in this table, we see that large proportions of both men and women depend on their marriages to maintain their quality of life across five of the six areas included in the NSFH. Despite a number of statistically significant differences between men and women, the overall distributions for both sexes are remarkably similar. However, these distributions can only tell us part of the story. Differences between men and women across these six areas may not be important if these men and women do not expect their marriages to provide them with these benefits. In order to assess the *salience* of these differences, we now turn to the relationship between these measures of dependence and marital dissolution.

Table 2 provides the results of survival analysis estimates of the direct effect (without control variables) of these evaluations of partner dependence in each of the six areas on the likelihood of marital dissolution between waves. In the final model for Being a Parent, a control for the presence of children in the household is also included because those without children were not asked to respond to questions about parenting³. In each model, the omitted category is "The Same". Indicator variables are included for cases that are missing data (coefficient estimates for these variables not shown). For each analysis, two columns of significance indicators are included. The first designates the significance level of the coefficient estimates that compare the effect for reporting either "Better"

³ In future drafts I may restrict the sample to those with children.

or “Worse” to “The Same”. The second designates the significance level of the difference between “Better” and “Worse”.

Across all six areas, when the wife believes that her life will worsen, the couple is less likely to separate or divorce between waves, while the couple is more likely to separate or divorce if she believes that her life will improve. These effects reach statistical significance across all six areas. In general, the same relationship holds for the husband’s evaluation of how his own life would change, but the effects are much smaller and less likely to reach statistical significance. The only models in which the husband’s report on his own life is a stronger predictor of marital dissolution than the wife’s report are the models for standard of living and general happiness. In both cases, if the husband believes that his life will improve, the couple is more likely to separate or divorce, but there is no effect if he believes that his life will worsen. If the husband believes that his standard of living will improve, the marriage is 58% more likely to dissolve. When the husband believes that he will be happier if the marriage were to end, the couple is 75% more likely to separate between waves. Interestingly, the effects for improvement of own standard of living on separation are similar for both husbands and wives, providing some evidence that both partners see mutual dependence as optimal.

In contrast, when the wife believes that her life will worsen, the couple is less likely to separate or divorce between waves. The size of the effect varies from -0.185 , or 20% less likely ($e^{0.185}$) to separate, for sex life, to -0.892 , or 2.4 times (140%) less likely to separate, for being a parent. When the wife believes that her life will improve, the couple is more likely to separate between waves. The size of the effect varies from 0.252 , or 28% more likely to separate, for career opportunities to 0.481 , or 61% more likely to

separate, for standard of living. This is consistent with previous research that suggests that wives are more likely to file for divorce than husbands. It also suggests that wives are more likely to view these six areas as important aspects of their marriages than their husbands and that they are more likely to rely on their marriages as the means for obtaining satisfaction in these areas than their husbands are.

The results are less consistent for the effects of changes on spouse's life. Generally, the effect of how the wife believes that the husband's life will change is not related to the likelihood that the couple will separate or divorce. The only exception is with respect to the husband being a parent. In this area, when the wife feels that the husband's life will worsen, the couple is more likely to separate than if she feels that it will be unchanged. In contrast, there is evidence across five of the six areas that the husband's opinion of how the wife's life would be affected is related to the likelihood of divorce⁴.

Interestingly, though husbands and wives reported no differences in the effect that marital dissolution would have on their social life, there is evidence of a differing impact of the husband's and the wife's predicted changes in social life on the likelihood that the couple will separate between waves. In particular, the effect of separation on the wife's social life is related to the likelihood of separation, while no such relationship appears to exist for the effect of separation on the husband's social life. In addition, though both partners report that the husband's parenting would be negatively affected by separation, it

⁴ These models control for the effect of how the respondent feels his/her own life would change and how the partner feels the respondent's life would change simultaneously. This means that it is possible that if the wife's report of how separation would affect her husband is more likely to match his own report we may not see an effect for the wife's report on how the husband's life would be affected. However, cross-tabs that compare each partner's own report with their partner's report on them suggest that this is not likely to be the case.

is changes to the wife's ability to parent that are more strongly related to the likelihood of separation.

Overall, though the distributions of men's and women's reports of how life would change in each of the six areas listed in the NSFH are quite similar, we see important differences in the importance of each of these areas to husbands and wives for the success of a marriage. This may suggest that men and women have different expectations from their partners about whether marriage should provide satisfaction in each of these areas. It may also suggest that husbands and wives may consider different aspects of their marriage when evaluating the success of the marriage within these areas. This would mean that men and women would be interpreting the question and therefore, their responses may not be directly comparable. In the following sections I explore more deeply the relationship between dependence on the relationship in these six areas and the likelihood of marital separation in order to determine what aspects of the relationship explain the importance of each of these areas to the likelihood that the couple will separate.

Standard of Living and Career Opportunities

Though these two areas are undoubtedly related, it is important to distinguish between career opportunities and standard of living. In this paper, career opportunities are understood to be closely related to work and influenced by each partner's education, occupation, and the strength of ties to the labor force. Standard of living however, is understood to refer to the quality of life experienced by both members of the couple. Though it likely influenced by the joint income of the couple, this may not be the only or even the defining characteristic. While career opportunities may refer to the

(dis)advantages experienced by one partner in the labor market, standard of living is more likely to be generated by a combination of both partner's employment and familial obligations. In this preliminary paper, I focus on the economic aspects of both standard of living and career opportunities, however in future drafts I plan to expand these analyses to evaluate the effects of other aspects of the couple's relationship.

Table 3 shows the coefficient estimates for the survival analyses that include changes in standard of living and career opportunities. In both sets of analyses (and in all of the subsequent tables), Model 1 replicates the results from Table 2 in order to ease comparisons between models. The top of Table 3 displays the results of analyses focus on standard of living. The results of Model 1 show that the couple is more likely to separate between waves if either the husband or the wife believes that his/her standard of living would improve. In addition, if the husband believes that the wife's standard of living will suffer, the couple is less likely to separate between waves.

Many couples rely on the greater earnings of the male partner as their primary income. Employment interruptions in employment affect potential earnings, by reducing the woman's labor market experience. In addition, mothers who return to the labor are more likely to work part-time and in service occupations. High levels of occupational sex segregation in the labor force, combined with lower pay for female-dominant occupations mean that, on average, women earn less than men. The greater concentration of women in low-paying occupations, combined with their lower levels of work experience place wives at an economic disadvantage compared to their husbands within their marriages. In addition, when the couple separates, the wife is more likely to assume the responsibilities

of parenting as well as take on the role of sole-earner leaving her to support more people on less pay.

Education is the strongest predictor of earning potential, therefore we might expect that differences in education can explain the relationship between how each partner's standard of living would change and the likelihood of divorce. Model 2 includes the standard control variables: education, the difference in partner's education, age at marriage, the difference in partners' ages, wife's race, whether the couple owns their home, whether the couple cohabited before marriage, and the duration of the marriage. Once we control for differences in education between couples we see a decline in all three effects. However, more than half of the effect remains. Models 3 and 4 sequentially enter the wife's then the husband's income into the model. The results of these models show virtually no change in the effects of either partner's prediction of changes in standard of living in the event of separation on the likelihood of separation between waves.

These results suggest that both husbands and wives are more likely to consider potential earnings capacity than current income when evaluating how both their own and their partner's lives would change in the event of marital dissolution. However, differences in earnings capacity explain less than half of the effect of beliefs about how standard living would change. This is only one aspect of standard of living. Standard of living may also be affected by the quality of the couple's life, which may include behavioral factors such as the amount of vacation and leisure time that the couple enjoys.

Turning to career opportunities, Model 1 in the bottom half of Table 3 provides evidence that when either the husband or wife believes that the wife's career

opportunities would improve if the couple were to separate the couple is more likely to separate between waves, while the couple is less likely to separate if the wife's career opportunities would worsen. The possible change in husband's career opportunities is not related to the likelihood that the marriage will dissolve. There are a number of reasons why we might see differing effects between men and women with respect to career opportunities. Historically, marriage has had a greater effect on the employment of married women than married men as married women have been more likely to leave the labor force than single or cohabiting women. Over the latter half of the twentieth century, however, the differences in employment between married and single women with no children have declined. However, women remain the primary caregivers of children and married women, particularly those with young children, remain more likely to leave the labor force than single women (Cohen and Bianchi 1999). Often, when they do return to the labor market, they return as part-time workers in jobs that they are less likely to consider as a "career". In contrast, married men are more likely to remain continuously employed and are less likely to leave a job without another job in hand (Gorman 1999). Success in their careers are less likely to be negatively affected by marriage.

Based on the fact that wives are more likely to decrease their work hours or leave the labor force altogether than their husbands, we might expect that women would be more likely to report that their marriage has affected their career opportunities. However, we see little evidence that this is the case in the distributions in Table 1. Few women report that their career opportunities would improve if the couple were to separate. In part, this is undoubtedly due to the fact that it is now more common for women with children to work. Many women who are "career-focused" are less likely to leave the

labor force after marriage and childbirth than women who are not, because those who do leave the labor force are unlikely to reenter without experiencing a penalty for the period in which they were not employed. It is possible that many of those who leave the labor force were less attached to the labor force to begin with and would not have seen leaving the labor force as a career interruption. However, it is also possible that because women are more likely to be responsible for childrearing obligations, the difficulties of managing childcare and employment may force these women to limit their work hours and habits in ways that are not required of their partners.

This might lead us to expect a selection effect such that women who are well educated may be more likely to feel that their career opportunities have been negatively affected by their marriages, because they have invested more heavily in improving their human capital and are therefore likely to suffer the greatest loss. In addition, younger women are at earlier points in their careers and therefore their career opportunities are more likely to be affected by changes in employment. To test this, Model 2 introduces the standard controls listed above⁵. When these factors have been controlled, both the effect of the husband reporting that the wife would be better off and the effect of the wife reporting that she would be better off are dramatically reduced and no longer reach statistical significance. However, the effects of either spouse reporting that the wife would be worse off are not significantly affected. It appears that though differences in education can explain most of the positive effect of the wife's career opportunities improving on marital dissolution, they cannot explain couples in which the wife believes

⁵ The standard controls do not include measures for the wife's current age; however both wife's age at marriage and the duration of the marriage are included and these two measures will capture the effect of the wife's current age as well as their more obvious effects.

that her career opportunities would worsen if the couple were to separate are less likely to separate between waves.

Models 3 and 4 sequentially introduce the wife's, then the husband's income to the model, however neither partner's income affects the effect of the wife's career opportunities worsening. In additional analyses (not shown), I investigate whether the wife's ties to the labor force can explain this relationship. However, neither the introduction for controls for current employment status or for the length of time that the wife has spent out of the labor force could explain these effects. I plan to investigate this more fully in future revisions of this paper.

Social Life

In Table 1, we saw that both men and women report that their own social lives and those of their partners would be similarly affected by marital separation. However, Model 1 in Table 4 shows that despite the lack of differences in the distribution of how each partner's life would change if the couple were to divorce, there are differences in the effects of each partner's evaluation of changes in social life on the likelihood that a couple will separate between waves. In particular, when the wife believes that her own social life will improve, the couple is somewhat more likely to separate, while if she believes that her social life will worsen, the couple is much less likely to end their marriage. In addition, there is more limited evidence that when the husband believes his own social life will improve, the couple is more likely to separate than if he believes that his social life will suffer and that the marriage is marginally more likely to end if the husband believes that the wife's social life will improve than if he thinks it will suffer. When the standard set of control variables is introduced in Model 2, the effect for the

wife's report that her own social life would worsen is reduced by roughly 16%, but remains strongly significant at the $p=0.001$ level, while the husband's report of how his own life would change disappears. However, the effects of the wife believing that the husband's life would improve and the husband believing that the wife's life would improve become marginally significant. Strangely, when the wife believes that the husband's social life will worsen if the couple separates, the couple is slightly *more* likely to separate between waves.

Why might we expect that beliefs about changes in the wife's social life to be more important in predicting marital dissolution than the couple's beliefs about how the husband's social life would be changed? One possibility is that married women who are not employed are more likely to spend greater proportions of their time in the home. While employed mothers are likely to interact with their coworkers on a daily basis, stay-at-home mothers are more likely to interact with their children or other stay-at-home mothers. This leaves them more isolated from other adults than mothers who work and this can have a number of repercussions. Isolation can lead to a lack of social support from other sources outside the marriage.

Wives who are more isolated from others may be less likely to form friendships with individuals outside of their marital and kinship networks. Their social lives may therefore be more likely to consist of the time that they spend with their partners. Model 3 tests whether these hypotheses by introducing measures of the amount of time the husband and the wife reported that the couple spends alone together. The results of this model show that when either the husband or the wife reports that the couple spends time alone together once per month or less often, the couple is more likely to separate than if

they spend more time alone together⁶. The model also suggests that the wife's report of how much time the couple spends alone together is more important for predicting marital dissolution than the husband's report. However, these measures of time spent together explain little of the effects of change in social life on separation.

Wives that are employed may be more likely to participate in work-related organizations, which may give them greater access to social activities. However, wives who do not engage in paid employment may be more likely to participate in other organizations that allow them to meet other adults and improve their social lives as well. The NSFH asks respondents about their participation in 15 different types of organizations. I tested the relationship between employment and participation in each of these social organizations for men and women and found significant differences between working and non-working men and women in their participation rates. I grouped these organizations into five types: work-related, child-related, hobbyist, church-affiliated, and other organizations. Appendix A contains the list of organizations, their groupings, and the proportion of respondents who reported participating in each type. I entered indicator variables for participation in each of the five types of organizations, however only the wife's attendance at a church-affiliated organization was statistically significant⁷. The results of the inclusion of this variable are given in Model 4. The results show that when the wife participates in a church-affiliated organization the couple is less likely to separate between waves. The inclusion of this variable does not change the effect of

⁶ It should be noted that this model cannot distinguish the direction of the effect of time spent alone together. It is possible that the marriage is in trouble and the couple is not getting along and that is why the couple rarely spends time together rather than time spent together influencing the timing of separation.

⁷ Because my models do not include controls for religion or church attendance, this variable may be picking up the effect of religiosity rather than participation in a social group or organization. I will investigate this finding further.

changes in social life on separation between waves. There was no relationship between participation in any of the other four types of organizations and marital dissolution.

Another possible repercussion is that the wife's physical isolation leaves them with fewer individuals that they can call on for emotional, financial, and physical support. If their only source of social support is their partner, they may be less willing to end their marriage and face hardship on their own. If the husband believes that his wife is isolated from others (whether or not this is by her choice) he may be less likely to end the marriage and leave her without support. In Model 5, I test the relationship between the presence of financial and emotional support and the likelihood of marital dissolution⁸. The results for Model 5, which includes measures of who the respondent would go to for advice support this hypothesis. Both husbands and wives who report that they have no one (outside of their current household) to whom they could go to for advice are less likely to separate between waves and this effect is somewhat stronger for the wife's report than for husband's. However, the inclusion of these measures in the model do not explain the relationship between beliefs about how each partner's social life will change and the likelihood that the marriage will end between waves. The results for financial support show that in contradiction to expectations, when either the husband or the wife reports that they have no one from whom they could borrow \$200 or if the person that he or she would ask for money was a friend rather than a relative, the couple is more likely to separate. Again, the inclusion of this measure does not affect the effect of beliefs of how each partner's social life would change upon separation and the likelihood of marital dissolution.

⁸ In preliminary analyses, I also included measures of who the respondent would call in an emergency, however, this variable was found to be unrelated to either the likelihood of separation or beliefs about how social life would change.

The results of these models provide no evidence that suggest that time spent with partner, participation in organizations outside of the marriage, or the availability of social support explain the relationship between beliefs about how the wife's report of how her social life would change if she and her husband were to separate and the likelihood of experiencing the event of marital dissolution. The failure of these variables to explain this relationship may be due to these being poor measures of the phenomena they are believed to measure. However, it is also possible that some other factor explains this relationship. Isolation from others may also lead to a lack of knowledge of other available alternatives outside of the current marriage. In contrast, participation in the work force or an active social life may provide an individual with information about the possibility that s/he may find a new partner and later remarry should the current marriage run into difficulties. In the second wave of the NSFH, each spouse is asked what they believe is the likelihood that both they and their current partner would remarry if the couple were to divorce. The NSFH conducted a third wave of interviews on a more limited sample. In future research I hope to use this more limited sample to investigate this relationship further.

General Happiness

The results in Table 2 show that general happiness is one of the few areas in which the husband's beliefs about how his own life will change have a strong effect on the likelihood that the couple will separate between waves. When either the husband or the wife believes that s/he will be happier if the marriage were to end, the couple is more likely to separate, though the effect of the husband's report is stronger than the wife's. However, when the wife believes that she will be less happy if the couple were to separate, the marriage is less likely to dissolve and there is no effect for the husband's

belief that he will be less happy. These effects hold in Model 2 after the group of traditional controls has been introduced into the model. However, once these differences are controlled, we find that when the husband believes that the wife will be either happier or less happy in the event of marital dissolution, the couple is marginally less likely to separate between waves. These results suggest that both partners expect their marriages to increase their overall satisfaction and happiness. When they believe that something else outside of the marriage will make them happier, they are more likely to end their marriages.

We might expect happier marriages to be both more likely to improve each partners' general happiness and less likely to end in separation. We would expect that happy marriages are happy because partners are likely to provide comfort and support to each other, which can mediate the negative effects of problems in other aspects of each partner's life (e.g., at work). In contrast, marriages that are unhappy may be more likely to leave both partners feeling isolated, causing additional stress in both partner's lives and leading to higher levels of unhappiness overall. Those in unhappy marriages may be more likely to want to rid themselves of a partner who adds to their unhappiness and may therefore be more likely to separate or divorce.

Model 3 tests the relationship between marital happiness and the effects of each partner's report of how their general happiness would change on marital dissolution. Both the husband's and the wife's report about the happiness of the current marriage are included in the model and both appear to exert independent effects. As expected, both partners' reports of marital happiness is strongly related to the likelihood that the couple will divorce, though the effect of the wife's report is stronger. Controlling for marital

happiness dramatically reduces the effect on the likelihood of marital dissolution of both measures of the wife's report on how her own life would change if the marriage were to end. However, the effect of the husband's belief that he would be happier is virtually unchanged. It appears that for wives, their overall happiness is more closely tied to their perception of the overall quality of their marriage, but this is not the case for husbands⁹. I explore the reasons for this in the following models.

Model 4 tests whether the effect of marital happiness is due to its relationship between marital happiness and general happiness¹⁰. However, it appears that the effect of general happiness is explained by the relationship between marital happiness and marital separation. The inclusion of direct measures of current general happiness does not affect the coefficient estimates for how either partner's general happiness would change in the event of a separation or divorce. It appears that general happiness does not have an effect on marital dissolution except through its relationship to marital happiness.

Those who see marriage as less necessary may be less likely to view their own marriage as influential on their overall happiness. Perhaps men are more likely to see marriage as important for their own happiness than their wives¹¹ are. To test this hypothesis, I include measures of the husband's and the wife's agreement with the statement that "Its better for a person to get married than to go through life being single."

⁹ In analyses that are not shown, I test the relationship between general happiness and the likelihood of divorce. In these analyses, general happiness is related to the likelihood of marital separation, however this effect appears to be entirely explained by the relationship between marital happiness and separation (Model 4).

¹⁰ Preliminary models testing the optimal parameterization of including husband's and wives overall happiness in the model showed that the two reports did not exert independent effects and that wife's happiness was a better predictor than husband's. However, there appeared to be a significant effect for the difference between the husband and wife's reports, therefore two indicator variables were created to capture the difference between partners' reports.

¹¹ Though this would appear to be contradicted by the distributions in Table 1 in which husbands were less likely to report that both they and there partners would be unhappier if the marriage were to end. However, husbands were also more likely to report that their wives would be happier if the marriage were to end than themselves.

Preliminary results showed no effect for the husband's agreement. The results of the model including the wife's response are shown in Model 5. When the wife does not see marriage as important, the couple is more likely to separate between waves. However, this difference does not explain the relationship between marital dissolution and how each partner's happiness would be affected in the event of marital separation.

How might marriage increase happiness? One mechanism is through the amount of time that the couple spends alone together, while another might be the quality of the time spent together. If the time that the couple spends alone together is spent fighting, the husband may be more likely to report that he would be happier if the marriage were to end. Frequent arguments may be a sign of marital problems and may be an indicator of impending marital dissolution. Model 5 and Model 6 test whether those who spend more time alone with their spouse are less likely separate or divorce and whether the frequency of disagreements can explain the relationship between the husband reporting that he would be happier if the marriage were to end and the likelihood that the marriage will end between waves. Though both the amount of time each spouse reports spending alone with his/her partner and the frequency of disagreements are related to the likelihood of divorce, neither can explain the relationship between the husband's happiness and the likelihood of separation.

It appears that though both husbands and wives report that they depend on their current marriage to make them happy, it appears that for wives, this is almost entirely achieved through the maintenance of a happy marriage. If the wife would be happier outside the marriage, the marriage is not a happy marriage and the wife is more likely to end it. The relationship appears to be different for husbands. Though they report that they

depend on their marriages to maintain their happiness, they do not appear to be affected by the quality of the marriage. None of the measures of the importance of marriage, the closeness of the partners (as measured by time spent alone together) or the quality of the marriage could explain the relationship. If the husband believes that they will be happier outside the marriage, *regardless of the quality of the current marriage*, the couple is more likely to separate or divorce. This may be due not only to characteristics of the current relationship, but also on available alternatives outside the marriage. I will attempt to investigate this further in future revisions¹².

Sex Life

The results in Table 2 show that both partners view the quality of the couple's sex life to be more important for the wife. When the wife believes that her sex life will be better if the couple were to separate, the couple is more likely to separate. However, when she believes that her sex life would worsen, the couple is less likely to separate. Interestingly, though the husband's report of how his own sex life would change does not appear to be related to the likelihood that the couple will separate between waves, when he believes that his wife's sex life will suffer, the couple is less likely to separate. Introducing the traditional set of control variables somewhat reduces the effect of the wife's belief that separation will improve her sex life, but also slightly *increases* the stabilizing effect of her belief that her sex life will worsen on the ending of her marriage.

¹² It is notable that in only 5% of the marriages in the sample, the husband reported that he would be happier if the marriage were to end. The NSFH interviewed both partners at the second wave, regardless of whether the couple remained together. Each was asked to fill out a self-enumerated questionnaire that solicited information about the couple's separation, including whether either partner was involved with someone else before the couple separated. I plan to check whether men who reported that they would be happier outside the marriage were more likely to have been involved with someone else before the end of the marriage, providing some evidence that factors outside the current marriage influence the husband's report of how his overall happiness would be affected by separation from his current spouse.

It seems reasonable to suggest that differences between couples in the quality of their sex life are driving these results. The NSFH includes two measures that I use to proxy for the quality of the couple's sex life: number of times that the couple has sex with each other in the last month and how frequently the couple has disagreements about sex. Presumably, couples that report that they rarely had sex are more likely to be unhappy with their current sex life and more likely to say that their sex life would improve if the couple were to separate. In addition, we would expect that those who report that they had disagreed with their partner about sex would be more likely to be less satisfied with some aspect of the couple's sex life.

Model 3 introduces the frequency that the couple reported having sex in the past month¹³. Model 4 introduces a measure of satisfaction with the couple's sex life: how frequently in the past year the couple had open disagreements about sex. The number of times that the couple has sex was strongly significant, while how frequently the couple disagreed about sex was marginally significant. However, neither had an effect on the coefficient estimates for either the wife's report on her own life or the husband's report on the wife's life. The results of these models suggest that it may not be the quality of the couple's sex life *per se* that each partner is considering when answering how the wife's sex life would change¹⁴.

¹³ The models discussed in this paper include only the wife's report of the number of times the couple had sex. The husband's and the wife's reports were highly correlated with each other and only one could be included in the models. The wife's report provided a better fit in the models. Initially additional variables were included that provided information on the differences between the husband's and the wife's reports, however, none of these variables improved the fit of the model and were subsequently dropped from the analysis.

¹⁴ Of course, these are fairly crude measures of the quality of the couple's sex life and therefore it is not possible to rule out the possibility that the quality of the couple's sex life has an effect. However, the surprising lack of change in the wife's own life coefficient when the frequency of sex is included is suggestive that this variable is picking up the effect of some other process.

Instead, it could be that the partner's are using their reporting about their sex life as a measure of the quality of the couple's marriage. If the couple is not getting along, it would seem reasonable to think that their sex life may also suffer. I test whether including the measures of marital happiness used in the general happiness models above can provide some insight as to whether each partner's report of how the wife's sex life would be affected is capturing some other aspect of marital quality in Model 5. The results of this model show a significant reduction in the effect of the wife's report of how her own life would change, though the effect of the husband reporting her sex life would worsen remains unchanged. These results suggest that the wife's opinion about the relative quality of her current sex life is influenced by the quality of the couple's relationship.

In Model 6, I introduce measures of the amount of time that the couple spends alone together into the model. In contrast to the results of including this measure in the models for other areas, only the husband's report of the time spent alone is related to the likelihood of divorce, suggesting that the wife's report of the number of times that the couple had sex is closely related to her report of the amount of time that the couple spent alone together in the past month¹⁵. When the husband reports that the couple spends time alone together several times a month, the couple is less likely to separate than if the couple spends either more or less time alone together¹⁶. The inclusion of this variable further reduces the effect of the wife's report about her own sex life, but does not change the effect of the husband's report of how her sex life would change. The final model,

¹⁵ This is unsurprising given that the couple is most likely to be spending time alone together when they have sex.

¹⁶ This is in contrast with previous models where the couples in which the wife reports that couple spends the least amount of time together are the most likely to separate. I am surprised by this finding and I can think of no intuitive explanation for it.

Model 7, is similar to Model 7 described in the general happiness area and introduces the frequency of disagreement in order to assess whether the quality of the time the couple spends together is related to the likelihood of marital separation. As was the case above in the models describing general happiness this variable is only marginally significant in the model and does not explain the relationship between the husband's report of how the wife's life would change and the likelihood that the couple will separate between waves.

The results of this model suggest that both partners believe that the marriage is more important for the wife's sex life than for the husband. But are they referring to the quality of the wife's sex life or some other aspect of the marriage or her life? It appears that similarly to general happiness, the wife's response is related to how she views the quality of her marriage. However, this does not seem to be the case for husbands. One possible explanation is that both partners understand the importance of marriage for the wife to maintain her standard of living, both with respect to her access to her husband's income and her ability to raise her children, and her overall happiness. This variable may be picking up the husband's assessment of the likelihood that the wife will be able to find another partner should the marriage end. If he feels that she is unlikely to be able to replace him, he is less likely to end the marriage than he otherwise would be. This is something to be investigated in future drafts using data from the third wave of the NSFH.

Parenting

The results of Table 2 (also displayed as Model 1 in Table 7) suggest that both men and women see wives as the primary caregiver within the family. When the wife believes that her parenting will improve if the couple were to separate, the couples is 62% more likely to separate, while couples in which the wife believes that her parenting

ability would suffer are 2.4 times less likely (or 41% as likely) to separate. Similarly, when the husband believes that the wife's parenting will improve, the couple is nearly 60% more likely to separate. This is the only area in which all four reports (wife/husband on self, wife/husband on partner) reach statistical significance at at least a marginal ($p=0.10$) level. Model 1 in Table 7 also shows that when husbands believe that their own ability to parent will decline in the event of marital dissolution the couple is less likely to separate between waves. In contrast, when the wife believes that the husband's parenting ability will worsen, the couple is 53% *more* likely to separate. Taken together, these results suggest that both men and women are more likely see the female partner as primarily responsible for child well-being and to place greater importance on what they believe is best for her parenting abilities, despite a possible negative effect on the husband's parenting abilities. When the standard control variables are introduced, the effects of both the wife's report of how her own life and her husband's parenting would be affected are reduced. However, the effect of the husband reporting that his own parenting would worsen is increased, while the effect of his belief that the wife's parenting would improve is virtually unchanged, though it is no longer even marginally significant.

Parenting is a complicated area to analyze. The NSFH include a wide variety of measures of parent involvement with their children. Because of the vast number and complexity of possible measures of both parents parenting, I was not able to construct suitable measures. In future papers I plan to investigate whether beliefs about how the husband's parenting ability would be affected are more important for predicting marital dissolution in couples in which the husband is more involved with the couple's children.

Instead, in this preliminary paper I focus on the relationship between attitudes about parenting that I believe may also be related to the likelihood that a couple will later divorce.

Those who view children as more important for their own happiness may more likely to negatively assess the impact that separation or divorce may have on both their own and their partner's parenting abilities. However, those who do not see children as important for their own happiness may be more likely to separate from their partners irrespective of the effect that this will have on their own parenting abilities. We might expect to see differences between men and women in the importance that they ascribe to having children, because women are more likely to take on the duties of the primary caregiver for any children that the couple may have.

To test whether attitudes about the importance of children influence the likelihood that the couple will later separate, I create two measures of the importance of children. These measures are included in Models 3 and 4. There is reason to believe that those who place less importance on having children would also be more accepting of the possibility of divorce¹⁷. Model 3 includes two measures of whether the wife believes that it is better to have children than to go through life childless¹⁸. Though we find the expected statistically significant negative effect on the likelihood that the marriage will dissolve between interviews for both those who express neutrality and agreement relative to those who disagree that having children is better than remaining childless, these attitudes do not

¹⁷ Distributions from the NSFH provide some evidence that this is the case.

¹⁸ Initially, both husband's and wife's attitudes were included in this model, however there was no effect for the husband's attitudes and they were therefore dropped from the model.

explain the relationship between changes in parenting ability and divorce¹⁹. A more direct test of the importance of being a parent to the respondent is captured by whether the individual regrets having had children. Model 4 includes the both partners' agreement with the statement "I often wish that I could be free from the responsibilities of being a parent". However, this variable does not significantly predict the likelihood that the couple will divorce, nor does it affect the coefficient estimates for the variables of interest. There appears to be little support for the hypothesis that lower importance to children can explain the observed relationships between how separation would affect each partner's parenting abilities and the likelihood of separation or divorce.

Women who are more likely to see their parenting abilities as hampered by participation in the labor force may be less likely to seek a separation or divorce because to do so would force them to enter the labor force and therefore reduce the amount of time that they have available to spend with their children. Husbands who believe that their children will suffer if their mothers were to work may also be less likely to initiate a separation or divorce because this will leave their children without adequate parental attention. In addition, these individuals are somewhat less likely to approve of divorce overall and therefore may be less likely to seek a separation. Model 5 includes two variables that reflect the degree to which each partner approves of a mother working when a child is aged five or under²⁰. Lower values on this scale refer to higher levels of approval. Though both effects reach statistical significance, they are in opposite

¹⁹ It is possible that this variable is more important in intervening in the decision of whether or not to have children than in the importance of children to the parents once they are born and is therefore a poor measure for the interests at hand.

²⁰ Respondents provided responses on a 7-point scale with anchors at 1 = "Strongly Approve" and 7 = "Strongly Disapprove". Preliminary analyses suggested that this variable was best included as a numeric scale rather than a categorical variable.

directions and the effect of the wife's report is stronger. Model 6 includes a measure of the degree to which the respondent approves of a couple divorcing if they have a child under five years of age. This measure has a similar effect on the likelihood of marital dissolution as approval of mothers working when they have young children. Neither measure appears to explain any of the effects of partner's beliefs of how their own or their partner's parenting abilities would be affected by separation.

In conclusion, none of the attitudinal measures used in these analyses were able to affect the relationship between parenting abilities and marital dissolution, therefore we know very little about the ways in which parenting affects the likelihood of marital separation from these analyses.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper begins an investigation into what areas of a couple's life are important for marital success in order to provide some insight into what men and women see as the necessary benefits, or the "purpose" of marriage. I find that the largest differences between men and women in how they believe that their own lives would be affected by marital dissolution are in the areas of standard of living and sex life. I also find that though the distributions of men and women's responses across all six areas are remarkably similar, their effects on marital dissolution vary substantially. Consistent with previous studies that have found that wives are more likely to initiate divorce, wives reports about the effect that marital dissolution would have on their own lives are more strongly related to the likelihood that a couple will separate or divorce.

However, husband's reports on both their own and the wife's life were not unimportant. The models that evaluated the relationship between standard of living and

marital dissolution suggest that in contrast to the theories advanced by Parsons and Becker, *both* partners prefer a relationship in which they have mutual economic dependence. When either partner feels that his/her standard of living would improve if the couple were to separate, the couple is more likely to end their marriage. Generally, divorce will be most likely to improve the standard of living of one partner if that partner earns a disproportionate share of the couple's income.

There is remarkably little discussion within the literature on the benefits of marriage that addresses what factors make marriage attractive for men. According to the specialization hypothesis, the primary draw of marriage for men is the presence of someone to cook, clean, and care for them. Someone who can take charge of raising his offspring. However, over the course of the past few decades, men have also become less "specialized" in economic production by taking on greater household and childcare responsibilities (though women continue to do twice as much). Perhaps because this change occurred within the privacy of the home rather than in a public space such as the workforce, this "flip side" of the increase of women's labor force participation has been less focused on within the economic independence. To my knowledge, there have been few (no?) studies that have purported to study men's "retreat from marriage" despite the fact that men's age at marriage has also been rising in step with women's. Would we expect one to occur? It is hard to know without a better understanding of what men expect from marriage. This study attempts to fill this gap, though so far with limited success.

There is also some evidence that husbands and wives consider different aspects of their relationship when reporting in at least two areas: overall happiness and sex life. This

finding leads me to offer a cautionary note to researchers that use these or similar measures. If men and women are reporting on different aspects of the couple's life when answering the same question about the relationship, this complicates interpretation of analyses that attempt to draw conclusions about sex differences in responses or that use summary measures of these variables to show differences between men and women.

These analyses show the importance of possessing a better understanding of the reasons that respondents might provide a particular response. In a separate paper, I have begun to look at differences in the ways in which husbands and wives respond to these questions using multinomial logistic models to predict their responses. I hope that this other paper will provide me with greater insight as I revise this paper, taking into account the failure of many (most?) of the variables that I constructed to explain the relationship between attitudes about how life would change and marital dissolution.

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Table 1. Distribution of How Life Would Change in Six Areas (Non-Missing Cases)

Standard of Living						Social Life				
Own Report on:			Spouse Report on:			Own Report on:		Spouse Report on:		
	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife		Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	
Worse	52.3	***	66.5	58.5	56.6	Worse	44.4	43.5	42.7	43.6
Same	38.6	***	28.9	34.8	35.7	Same	39.0	39.5	40.3	40.4
Better	9.1	*	4.6	6.7	7.7	Better	16.5	17.1	17.0	16.0

Career Opportunities						Overall Happiness				
Own Report on:			Spouse Report on:			Own Report on:		Spouse Report on:		
	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife		Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	
Worse	18.2		19.8	17.7	20.4	Worse	76.7	76.9	77.2	*
Same	70.8	***	65.2	69.9	*	Same	17.7	**	15.3	15.5
Better	11.0	+	15.0	12.4	12.8	Better	5.6	**	7.8	7.2

Sex Life						Being a Parent				
Own Report on:			Spouse Report on:			Own Report on:		Spouse Report on:		
	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife		Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	
Worse	63.6	***	76.8	73.7	***	63.9	Worse	61.5	***	53.8
Same	24.7	***	18.1	19.1	***	26.5	Same	34.7	**	40.7
Better	11.7	**	5.1	7.2	9.6	Better	3.8		5.5	5.2

p<0.1	+
p<.05	*
p<.01	**
p<.001	***

Chi-Square Probability of Similar Distributions in Six Areas

	Standard of Living	Social Life	Career Opportunity	General Happiness	Sex Life	Being a Parent
Wife Report on Own Life Compared to:						
Husband Report on Own Life	0.000	0.666	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Husband Report on Wife's Life	0.000	0.385	0.018	0.002	0.000	0.021
Wife Report on Husband's Life	0.000	0.750	0.000	0.595	0.000	0.161
Husband Report on Own Life Compared to:						
Husband Report on Wife's Life	0.000	0.443	0.001	0.005	0.006	0.001
Wife Report on Husband's Life	0.000	0.316	0.171	0.001	0.000	0.000
Wife Report on Husband's Life Compared to:						
Husband's Report on Wife's Life	0.103	0.424	0.005	0.005	0.000	0.336

Table 2: Survival Analysis Coefficient Estimates for Way Life Would Change in Six Areas

Standard of Living						Social Life				Career Opportunities					
Hazard						Hazard				Hazard					
Ratio						Ratio				Ratio					
Coeff						Coeff				Coeff					
Std Err						Std Err				Std Err					
Own Report															
Wife Report															
Worse	0.704	-0.351	0.094	**	***	0.495	-0.703	0.078	***	***	0.684	-0.380	0.136	+	**
Better	1.617	0.481	0.335	*		1.309	0.269	0.193	+		1.287	0.252	0.198		
Husband Report															
Worse	1.007	0.007	0.131		**	0.816	-0.204	0.124		*	0.908	-0.097	0.166		
Better	1.587	0.462	0.289	*		1.150	0.139	0.170			1.061	0.059	0.165		
Report on Spouse															
Wife Report															
Worse	1.010	0.010	0.133			1.191	0.175	0.185			1.043	0.042	0.215		
Better	1.307	0.268	0.250			1.120	0.113	0.170			0.885	-0.122	0.151		
Husband Report															
Worse	0.689	-0.373	0.089	**		0.860	-0.151	0.130		+	0.795	-0.230	0.141		+
Better	0.758	-0.277	0.154			1.191	0.175	0.177			1.314	0.273	0.193	+	
BIC		-52.201				-85.671						-0.331			
General Happiness						Sex Life				Being a Parent					
Hazard						Hazard				Hazard					
Ratio						Ratio				Ratio					
Coeff						Coeff				Coeff					
Std Err						Std Err				Std Err					
Own Report															
Wife Report															
Worse	0.736	-0.307	0.154		**	0.831	-0.185	0.159		**	0.410	-0.892	0.076	***	***
Better	1.456	0.376	0.359			1.570	0.451	0.340	*		1.617	0.480	0.443	+	
Husband Report															
Worse	0.938	-0.064	0.161		**	1.303	0.264	0.222			0.716	-0.334	0.132	+	
Better	1.751	0.560	0.373	**		1.261	0.232	0.224			0.957	-0.044	0.293		
Report on Spouse															
Wife Report															
Worse	0.904	-0.100	0.189			0.914	-0.090	0.174			1.530	0.425	0.283	*	
Better	1.195	0.179	0.301			1.013	0.013	0.206			1.096	0.091	0.332		
Husband Report															
Worse	0.812	-0.208	0.139			0.604	-0.503	0.099	**	*	0.982	-0.018	0.181		+
Better	0.919	-0.084	0.187			0.998	-0.002	0.184			1.597	0.468	0.452	+	
BIC		-73.071				-21.621						-124.773			

TABLE 3: Survival Analysis Coefficient Estimates for Standard of Living and Career Opportunities

Standard of Living																				
Model 1: No Controls				Model 2: Incl Controls				Model 3: M 2 + Wife Inc				Model 4: M 3 + Husb Inc								
				Hazard Ratio				Hazard Ratio				Hazard Ratio								
				Coeff				Coeff				Coeff								
				Std. Err.				Std. Err.				Std. Err.								
Own Report	Wife Report (omit Same)																			
	Better	1.617	0.481	0.335	*	1.327	0.283	0.272	*	1.327	0.283	0.273	*	1.344	0.296	0.277	*			
	Worse	0.704	-0.351	0.094	**	0.820	-0.198	0.109		0.826	-0.191	0.110		0.814	-0.205	0.109				
	Husband Report (omit Same)																			
	Better	1.587	0.462	0.289	*	1.318	0.276	0.243		1.287	0.252	0.237		1.273	0.241	0.234				
	Worse	1.007	0.007	0.131		0.999	-0.001	0.128		0.983	-0.017	0.126		0.991	-0.009	0.127				
	Report on Spouse																			
	Wife Report (omit Same)																			
	Better	1.307	0.268	0.250		1.188	0.173	0.223		1.195	0.178	0.225		1.196	0.179	0.225				
	Worse	1.010	0.010	0.133		1.006	0.006	0.132		0.998	-0.002	0.131		0.993	-0.007	0.131				
Career Opportunities	Husband Report (omit Same)																			
	Better	0.758	-0.277	0.154		0.760	-0.274	0.156		0.772	-0.258	0.158		0.787	-0.239	0.161				
	Worse	0.689	-0.373	0.089	**	0.765	-0.268	0.098	*	0.773	-0.257	0.099	*	0.774	-0.256	0.098	*			
	BIC				-52.201				-243.843				-244.828				-249.720			
	Model 1: No Controls				Model 2: Incl Controls				Model 3: M 2 + Wife Inc				Model 4: M 3 + Husb Inc							
					Hazard Ratio				Hazard Ratio				Hazard Ratio							
					Coeff				Coeff				Coeff							
					Std. Err.				Std. Err.				Std. Err.							
	Own Report	Wife Report (omit Same)																		
Better		1.287	0.252	0.198	**	1.068	0.066	0.164	+	1.073	0.071	0.165	+	1.074	0.071	0.166	+			
Worse		0.684	-0.380	0.136	+	0.714	-0.337	0.145	+	0.713	-0.338	0.145	+	0.716	-0.335	0.147	+			
Husband Report (omit Same)																				
Better		1.061	0.059	0.165		0.856	-0.155	0.134		0.863	-0.147	0.135		0.867	-0.143	0.135				
Worse		0.908	-0.097	0.166		1.007	0.007	0.179		1.005	0.005	0.178		1.015	0.015	0.180				
Report on Spouse																				
Wife Report (omit Same)																				
Better		0.885	-0.122	0.151		0.842	-0.172	0.142		0.844	-0.170	0.143		0.843	-0.171	0.143				
Worse		1.043	0.042	0.215		1.108	0.102	0.232		1.110	0.104	0.234		1.105	0.100	0.234				
Own Report	Husband Report (omit Same)																			
	Better	1.314	0.273	0.193	+	1.164	0.152	0.170	*	1.156	0.145	0.169	*	1.159	0.148	0.169	*			
	Worse	0.795	-0.230	0.141		0.767	-0.265	0.132		0.762	-0.272	0.131		0.756	-0.280	0.130				
	BIC				-229.253				-232.916				-233.280							

Table 4. Survival Analysis Coefficient Estimates for Change in Social Life

[illegible]

Table 5: Survival Analysis Coefficient Estimates for General Happiness (cont)

	Model 5: M3 + Btr to Marry			Model 6: M5 + Time w/Sps			Model 7: M6 + Disagreemt		
	Hazard Ratio	Coeff	Std Err	Hazard Ratio	Coeff	Std Err	Hazard Ratio	Coeff	Std Err
Own Report									
Wife Report (omit Same)									
Better	1.154	0.143	0.290	1.148	0.138	0.288	1.197	0.180	0.299
Worse	0.850	-0.163	0.175	0.885	-0.122	0.182	0.894	-0.112	0.185
Husband Report (omit Same)									
Better	1.601	0.471	0.351 *	1.607	0.474	0.354 * +	1.598	0.469	0.353 * +
Worse	1.135	0.127	0.200	1.115	0.109	0.197	1.113	0.107	0.197
Report on Spouse									
Wife Report (omit Same)									
Better	1.019	0.019	0.257	1.000	0.000	0.251	0.987	-0.013	0.247
Worse	0.888	-0.118	0.181	0.860	-0.151	0.174	0.868	-0.142	0.176
Husband Report (omit Same)									
Better	0.724	-0.323	0.151	0.734	-0.310	0.153	0.737	-0.305	0.154
Worse	0.730	-0.315	0.127 +	0.742	-0.299	0.130 +	0.743	-0.297	0.130 +
Marital Happiness									
Wife (omit Unhappy)									
Not Happy	0.607	-0.499	0.111 **	0.614	-0.487	0.113 **	0.603	-0.505	0.111 **
Somewhat Happy	0.544	-0.609	0.098 **	0.550	-0.598	0.100 **	0.541	-0.614	0.099 **
Happy	0.400	-0.916	0.069 ***	0.412	-0.886	0.073 ***	0.407	-0.900	0.073 ***
Very Happy	0.395	-0.928	0.068 ***	0.406	-0.901	0.072 ***	0.391	-0.938	0.070 ***
Husband (omit Unhappy)									
Not Happy	0.936	-0.066	0.207	0.951	-0.051	0.211	0.960	-0.041	0.214
Somewhat Happy	0.733	-0.310	0.150	0.742	-0.298	0.153	0.756	-0.280	0.156
Happy	0.632	-0.459	0.124 *	0.634	-0.456	0.125 *	0.645	-0.439	0.128 *
Somewhat Happy	0.634	-0.455	0.125 *	0.631	-0.460	0.125 *	0.635	-0.454	0.127 *
Wife General Happiness (omit Unhappy)									
Not Happy									
Somewhat Happy									
Happy									
Very Happy									
Wife Happier									
Husband Happier									
Better to Marry than be Single (omit Agree)									
Neither Agree nor Disagree	1.226	0.204	0.125 *	1.222	0.200	0.124 *	1.233	0.209	0.126 *
Disagree	1.401	0.337	0.161 **	1.384	0.325	0.160 **	1.384	0.325	0.160 **
Time Spent Alone w/Partner									
Wife: Once per Mo or Less				1.240	0.215	0.146 +	1.259	0.230	0.150 +
Husb: Sevrl Times per Mo				0.714	-0.337	0.113 *	0.725	-0.321	0.116 *
Wife Freq Disagreement w/Spouse (omit Never)									
Once per Month							0.668	-0.403	0.125 *
Several Times per Month							0.694	-0.365	0.137 +
Once per Week							0.770	-0.262	0.159
Several Times per Week or More							0.684	-0.380	0.140 +
BIC		-330.071			-330.728			-322.887	

Table 6: Survival Analysis Coefficient Estimates for Change in Sex Life

	Model 1: No Controls				Model 2: All Controls				Model 3: M2 + Freq Sex				Model 4: M3 + Dsgmnt on Sex			
	Hazard Ratio	Coeff	Std Err		Hazard Ratio	Coeff	Std Err		Hazard Ratio	Coeff	Std Err		Hazard Ratio	Coeff	Std Err	
Own Report																
Wife Report (omit Same)																
Better	1.570	0.451	0.340	*	1.441	0.365	0.313	+	1.421	0.351	0.302	+	1.412	0.345	0.301	**
Worse	0.831	-0.185	0.159		0.712	-0.339	0.138	+	0.742	-0.298	0.143		0.730	-0.314	0.141	
Husband Report (omit Same)																
Better	1.261	0.232	0.224		1.057	0.055	0.186		1.022	0.021	0.180		1.011	0.011	0.178	
Worse	1.303	0.264	0.222		1.213	0.193	0.204		1.226	0.203	0.206		1.206	0.187	0.203	
Report on Spouse																
Wife Report (omit Same)																
Better	1.013	0.013	0.206		0.895	-0.111	0.181		0.823	-0.194	0.163		0.812	-0.209	0.161	
Worse	0.914	-0.090	0.174		0.970	-0.031	0.186		0.977	-0.024	0.186		1.004	0.004	0.192	
Husband Report (omit Same)																
Better	0.998	-0.002	0.184	*	1.077	0.074	0.196	**	1.094	0.090	0.199	**	1.092	0.088	0.199	**
Worse	0.604	-0.503	0.099	**	0.623	-0.473	0.101	**	0.636	-0.453	0.103	**	0.640	-0.446	0.103	**
Freq Couple has Sex																
Wife Report																
Wife Report ²																
Freq Disagree About Sex																
Wife: Several Times per Mo																
Marital Happiness																
Wife (omit Unhappy)																
Not Happy																
Somewhat Happy																
Happy																
Very Happy																
Husband (omit Unhappy)																
Not Happy																
Somewhat Happy																
Happy																
Somewhat Happy																
Time Spent Alone Together																
Husb: Several Times per Mo																
Freq Disagree on Other Topics																
Wife: Never																
BIC		-21.621				-273.240				-288.565				-285.969		

Table 6: Survival Analysis Coefficient Estimates for Change in Sex Life (cont)

	Model 5: M4 + Marital Happy			Model 6: M5 + Time w/Spouse			Model 7: M6 + Disagreement		
	Hazard Ratio	Coeff	Std Err	Hazard Ratio	Coeff	Std Err	Hazard Ratio	Coeff	Std Err
Own Report									
Wife Report (omit Same)									
Better	1.300	0.262	0.278	+	1.221	0.200	1.219	0.198	0.260
Worse	0.874	-0.135	0.165		0.840	-0.174	0.838	-0.176	0.159
Husband Report (omit Same)									
Better	0.917	-0.087	0.164		0.946	-0.055	0.949	-0.053	0.171
Worse	1.185	0.170	0.197		1.173	0.159	1.174	0.161	0.196
Report on Spouse									
Wife Report (omit Same)									
Better	0.793	-0.232	0.158		0.813	-0.208	0.819	-0.200	0.161
Worse	0.970	-0.031	0.180		1.004	0.004	1.008	0.008	0.188
Husband Report (omit Same)									
Better	1.050	0.049	0.193	*	1.041	0.040	1.028	0.027	0.191
Worse	0.682	-0.382	0.110	*	0.679	-0.387	0.678	-0.389	0.109
Freq Couple has Sex									*
Wife Report	0.942	-0.060	0.019	**	0.940	-0.061	0.942	-0.060	0.019
Wife Report ²	1.002	0.002	0.001	*	1.002	0.002	1.002	0.002	0.001
Freq Disagree About Sex									
Wife: Several Times per Mo	1.243	0.217	0.171		1.263	0.234	1.277	0.245	0.177
Marital Happiness									
Wife (omit Unhappy)									
Not Happy	0.638	-0.450	0.117	*	0.616	-0.485	0.610	-0.495	0.112
Somewhat Happy	0.545	-0.607	0.096	**	0.521	-0.652	0.519	-0.655	0.092
Happy	0.382	-0.962	0.063	***	0.364	-1.009	0.361	-1.019	0.060
Very Happy	0.383	-0.961	0.063	***	0.366	-1.006	0.353	-1.041	0.059
Husband (omit Unhappy)									
Not Happy	0.887	-0.120	0.196		0.910	-0.095	0.911	-0.093	0.202
Somewhat Happy	0.673	-0.397	0.137	+	0.675	-0.393	0.676	-0.392	0.138
Happy	0.590	-0.528	0.114	**	0.586	-0.535	0.584	-0.537	0.113
Somewhat Happy	0.591	-0.526	0.114	**	0.579	-0.546	0.572	-0.559	0.110
Time Spent Alone Together									
Husb: Several Times per Mo					0.673	-0.395	0.681	-0.384	0.110
Freq Disagree on Other Topics									
Wife: Never							1.378	0.320	0.244
BIC	-327.627				-331.520			-329.474	

Table 7: Survival Analysis Coefficient Estimates for Change in Being a Parent (cont)

APPENDIX A: List of Groups and Organizations by Sex of Partner and Employment Status

	Wife			Husband		
	Not Working	Working		Not Working	Working	
	N	%Yes	N	%Yes	N	%Yes
Work-Related Org.	974	10.6%	1350	31.2%	1505	40.5% ***
Prof/Academic	980	6.8%	1353	25.7%	1510	26.2% ***
Labor Union	980	1.2%	1359	6.4%	1513	13.4% ***
Farm Org	977	3.8%	1354	3.5%	1513	5.6%
Child-Related Org.	968	31.4%	1338	47.2%	1502	38.3% ***
Youth Groups	976	15.6%	1348	26.6%	1510	24.6% ***
School-Related Grp	975	28.2%	1357	41.6%	1508	30.8% ***
Hobby Org.	958	35.7%	1332	49.2%	1492	57.0% ***
Sports Grp	980	20.9%	1358	33.7%	1518	48.9% ***
Hobby/Garden Club	979	16.6%	1350	19.6%	1508	16.8% **
Lit/Art/Study/Discussion	984	14.5%	1354	18.5%	1505	11.8%
Church-Affiliated Org	1002	50.3%	1370	54.0%	1516	45.1%
Other Orgs	959	22.6%	1329	26.0%	1480	30.2%
Fraternal Grp	988	5.5%	1361	6.5%	1513	12.6%
Service Club	990	11.6%	1358	17.4%	1508	14.5%
Veteran's Grp	980	3.0%	1351	2.1%	1506	4.4% ***
Political Grp	984	5.6%	1358	6.8%	1509	9.4%
Fraternity/Sorority	977	4.1%	1355	5.2%	1510	5.5% *
Nationality Grp	980	3.0%	1358	3.7%	1510	4.4%

APPENDIX B: NSFH Questions Used to Construct Variables of Interest

Suppose that you had an emergency in the middle of the night and needed help. Who would you call?

- 0 – No One
- 1 – Friends, Neighbors, Coworkers
- 2 – Sons or daughters (19 and over)
- 3 – Parents
- 4 – Brothers and Sisters
- 5 – Other Relatives

What if you had to borrow \$200.00 for a few weeks because of an emergency. Who would you ask?

- 0 – No One
- 1 – Friends, Neighbors, Coworkers
- 2 – Sons or daughters (19 and over)
- 3 – Parents
- 4 – Brothers and Sisters
- 5 – Other Relatives

Suppose you had a problem, and you were feeling depressed or confused about what to do. Who would you ask for help or advice?

- 0 – No One
- 1 – Friends, Neighbors, Coworkers
- 2 – Sons or daughters (19 and over)
- 3 – Parents
- 4 – Brothers and Sisters
- 5 – Other Relatives

About how often do you do the following things:

- a. spend a social evening with:
 - a. relatives?
 - b. A neighbor?
 - c. People you work with?
 - d. Friends who live outside your neighborhood?
- b. Attend a social event at your church or synagogue?
- c. Go to a bar or tavern?
- d. Participate in a recreational activity such as bowling, golf, square dancing, etc.?
 - 0 – Never
 - 1 – Several Times a Year
 - 2 – About Once a Month
 - 3 – About Once a Week
 - 4 – Several Times a Week

Here are a few questions about your current marriage. Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage?

- 1 – Strongly Approve
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 – Strongly Disapprove

During the past month, how often did you and your husband/wife spend time alone with each other, talking or sharing an activity?

- 1 – Never
- 2 – About Once a Month
- 3 – Two or Three Times a Month
- 4 – About Once a Week
- 5 – Two or Three Times a Week
- 6 – Almost Everyday

How often did you and your husband/wife have sex during the past month? (number of times)

The following is a list of subjects on which couples often have disagreements. How often, if at all, in the last year have you had open disagreements about each of the following²¹:

- a. Household tasks
- b. Money
- c. Spending Time Together
- d. Sex
- e. Having a(nother) child
- f. In-laws
- g. The children
 - 1 – Never
 - 2 – About Once a Month
 - 3 – Two or Three Times a Month
 - 4 – About Once a Week
 - 5 – Two or Three Times a Week
 - 6 – Almost Everyday

²¹ Sex was coded separately than the remaining six areas in order to use Sex as a measure of the quality of the couple's sex life. A summary measure of these variables was created by coding the highest frequency of disagreement reported for any of the remaining 6 areas. It was reasoned that in a single disagreement, the couple could argue about multiple areas, therefore summing the measures would lead to a misleading picture of the frequency with which the couple experiences disagreement. Instead a second measure was coded that provided the number of areas in which the respondent reported that the couple experienced disagreement, however this measure was not significant in any model and was therefore dropped.

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

It is better for a person to get married than to go through life being single.

- 1 – Strongly Agree
- 2 – Agree
- 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 – Disagree
- 5 – Strongly Disagree

It's better for a person to have a child than to go through life childless.

- 1 – Strongly Agree
- 2 – Agree
- 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 – Disagree
- 5 – Strongly Disagree

I often wish that I could be free from the responsibilities of being a parent

- 1 – Strongly Agree
- 2 – Agree
- 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 – Disagree
- 5 – Strongly Disagree

Here are some questions about your views on some other topics. Please circle the number that best represents how much you approve or disapprove of the behaviors described.

Mothers who work full-time when their youngest child is under age 5?

- 1 – Strongly Approve
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 – Strongly Disapprove

A couple with an unhappy marriage getting a divorce if their youngest child is under age 5?

- 1 – Strongly Approve
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 – Strongly Disapprove