

He Left, She Left:

Gains to Marriage, Relative Resources, and Divorce Initiation

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Abstract

In most divorces, one person initiates the breakup when the other still prefers that the couple remain together. Theories of divorce contain, at least implicitly, ideas about when and under what circumstances husbands or wives will initiate divorce. Yet, after decades of extensive demographic research on determinants of divorce, we know of no research separately modeling the determinants of husbands leaving wives and wives leaving husbands. Thus, important predictions from the theories have not been tested. The innovation of our study is to use three waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) to classify divorces according to whether the wife or husband initiates it (as revealed by ex-spouses' reports on who wanted the divorce more) and to analyze the distinct determinants of women leaving men and men leaving women. We seek to understand 1) whether having resources that improve one's alternatives outside the marriage increases a spouse's likelihood of initiating divorce, 2) whether having a spouse with more desirable characteristics decreases the likelihood one will initiate divorce, and 3) whether the process interacts with gender so that some factors affect men and women's initiation differently. Preliminary results with two waves of the NSFH indicate that there is substantial evidence that having a dim view of the quality of the marriage at Wave 1 is associated with being the one to initiate divorce by Wave 2, although the evidence is much clearer for wives than husbands. Preliminary results also suggest that relative earnings do not affect initiation, failing to confirm the women's independence effect. However, we will be more confident of this result when we have used EHA models, and interacted relative earnings with marital satisfaction.

Introduction

In the United States, it takes only one person's decision to end a marriage. In most divorces, one person initiates the breakup when the other still prefers that the couple remain together. When we say that one person initiates a divorce, we are not referring to who files the legal papers (although this may be correlated), and we make no attribution of which person was "at fault" or which person's behavior was the ultimate cause of the breakup. Rather we are referring to who wanted the divorce enough to initiate the process in some way—usually by telling the spouse of the intent to divorce. While some cases are ambiguous, generally spouses and external observers agree that one person "left the other." Thus, in any given period, a marriage may stay together, a breakup may be initiated by the wife, or a breakup may be initiated by the husband (or, rarely, a breakup may be simultaneously initiated by both spouses).

Many theories contain, at least implicitly, ideas about which spouse will initiate divorce under what conditions, yet research on determinants of divorce has been conducted without measurement of who initiated the breakup. Thus, important predictions from the theories have not been tested. The innovation of our study is classifying divorces according to whether the wife or husband initiates it (as revealed by ex-spouses' reports on who wanted the divorce more) and analyzing the distinct determinants of women leaving men and men leaving women. We seek to understand 1) whether having resources that improve one's alternatives outside the marriage increases a spouse's likelihood of initiating divorce, 2) whether having a spouse with more desirable characteristics decreases the likelihood one will initiate divorce, and 3) whether the

process interacts with gender so that some factors affect men and women's initiation differently.

Who Initiates Divorce?

Prior qualitative research based on separate in-depth interviews of ex-spouses yield narratives that generally feature one partner initiating the breakup. Couples usually agree on who this was and characterize this person as wanting the marriage to end more than the other partner (Hopper 2001; Vaughan 1986). Given this, it is odd that despite many articles on determinants of divorce using the NSFH, and the fact that NSFH2 contains an item asking ex-spouses who wanted the breakup more, we could locate no research predicting women's and men's initiation of divorce. This item and items like it *have* been used in past research, but to answer questions about consequences rather than determinants of a partner's initiation of divorce (Amato and Previti 2003; see Sweeney 2002; Sweeney and Horwitz 2001).

NSFH2 data show that women initiate the majority of divorces (see our preliminary study below). Studies based on other data sets have used similar items to address the question of which sex initiates divorce more. Whether the study used qualitative interviews or fixed-response survey questions, studies show that women initiate a majority of divorces (Hobcroft 2000; Kitson 1992; Spanier and Thompson 1987; Svedin 1994; Wallerstein and Kelly 1980). While the spouse filing the legal papers is not always the spouse most wanting the divorce, data on filings agree with the survey data in the conclusion that most initiations are by women. Brinig and Allen (2000) review evidence that 60-70 percent of U.S. filings have been by women throughout most of the

last century. Although filings by men went up a bit when no-fault divorce laws were passed, in recent decades about two-thirds of U.S. filings are by women. There is variation by state, but women predominate in every state. About 70 percent of filings in the U.K. are by women (Hobcroft 2000:171). The question of why women initiate divorce more than men is of interest in its own right.

Drawing upon demographers' theorizing about divorce, exchange theory in sociology, and bargaining theories from economics, we hypothesize that a person is more likely to initiate divorce if his or her alternatives outside the marriage are better, and less likely to initiate divorce if his or her spouse has desirable characteristics. In this view, people will be more likely to initiate divorce if they have more personal resources such as earnings, good health, and other favored characteristics. The logic behind the prediction is that these resources create better alternatives outside the current marriage, such as the ability to support oneself and children well, or the ability to attract a favorable new partner on the "marriage market." Having a spouse who offers more resources and positive characteristics makes one less likely to be motivated to initiate a breakup. If both spouses consider alternatives inside as well as outside the marriage in this way, the result is that A's resources or desirable characteristics encourage A but discourage B from initiating divorce. These two effects work against each other in terms of their effect on the overall probability of divorce. As a result, past research ignoring who initiates the breakup may have found no effect of a factor on divorce even when there are strong effects on either men's or women's propensity to initiate.

Earnings and Divorce Initiation

Many researchers have tested the prediction that divorce is more likely when men's earnings are lower (or declining). One theoretical basis of the prediction is Becker's (1991) claim that specialization (where men generally specialize in market and women in household work) provides efficiency gains to marriage that benefit both partners.¹ In this view, higher men's earnings and lower women's earnings denote specialization, and this should make *either* partner less likely to want to divorce because of the "gains to trade." The notion that some marriages are "better matches" than others also suggests that better matches symmetrically discourage either spouse from initiating divorce (just as better matches between employees and employers discourage both quits and terminations). While Becker argues that specialization *decreases* the motivation of either partner to divorce, some gender scholars argue the opposite—that similar employment and household roles for spouses provide more empathy and, thus, emotional solidarity. In this view, homophily rather than functional differentiation is the glue that holds marriage together (England and Farkas 1986; Goldscheider and Waite 1991). Neither view sees variables as having a different effect on wives' versus husbands' initiation of divorce.

Another theoretical approach to couple dynamics is exchange or bargaining models (England and Farkas 1986; England and Kilbourne 1990; Lundberg and Pollak 1994; Lundberg and Pollak 1996; Lundberg and Pollak 2000; Lundberg, Pollak, and Wales 1997; Manser and Brown 1980; McElroy 1990). While Becker's view is relatively silent on distribution within marriage, economists' bargaining models based on game

¹ In principle, gains could be achieved by men specializing in the household and women in the market, but the reverse has been more common for social and/or biological reasons.

theory focus on effects of opportunities outside the marriage (which affect “threat points”) on the bargains couples strike within marriage. Similar ideas come from sociological exchange theory (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994; Cherlin 2000; England and Farkas 1986; England and Kilbourne 1990; Heer 1963; Molm and Cook 1995). In this view, a spouse’s ability to strike a favorable bargain within the marriage (e.g. getting one’s way in a disagreement) flow from resources that one shares with one’s partner if the marriage persists but that are portable if one leaves. But portable resources also make it more likely that the optimizing choice is to leave if one is unhappy but unable to bargain for the wanted change. Thus, the exchange/bargaining perspective implies that resources allow either “voice” or “exit” (England and Kilbourne 1990). This view has distinct predictions about who is likely to initiate divorce. Earnings are an example of a resource shared with a spouse within marriage but portable out of the marriage if it ends. Thus, the prediction is that men’s earnings increase men’s bargaining power within marriage as well as men’s propensity to initiate divorce if unhappy, and women’s earnings increase women’s bargaining power within marriage as well as women’s propensity to initiate divorce if unhappy. The latter has been called the “women’s independence” effect (Cherlin 2000; Ruggles 1997; Schoen et al. 2002).

There is a wealth of empirical research on how men’s and women’s earnings affect divorce.² Nonetheless, we could locate no studies that examined the effect of either spouse’s earnings on men’s and women’s likelihood of initiating divorce.

² For theoretical or practical reasons, earnings are measured various ways in these studies: as annual earnings, as wage or potential wage rates, or in terms of change. Weiss and Willis (1997) measure change, reasoning that if a man’s earnings were initially low and the woman married him, she must have found them acceptable (relative to her

Divorce is more likely when men's earnings are lower (Hoffman and Duncan 1995; South and Lloyd 1995) or declining (Weiss and Willis 1997). Findings on the effects of women's earnings are less consistent. Some studies find women's earnings positively related to divorce (Cherlin 1979; Heckert, Nowak, and Snyder 1998; Hiedemann, Suhomlinova, and O'Rand 1998; Moore and Waite 1981; Ono 1998; Ross and Sawhill 1975; Spitze and South 1985), especially when men's earnings are lower (Heckert et al. 1998; Ono 1998), or when women contribute about one-half of family income (Rogers 2004), but others find no effect (Greenstein 1995; Mott and Moore 1979; Sayer and Bianchi 2000; South and Lloyd 1995; Tzeng and Mare 1995), and a few suggest that women's earnings stabilize marriage (Greenstein 1990; Hoffman and Duncan 1995; Weiss and Willis 1997). Thus, no clear conclusion can be drawn regarding the effects of women's earnings on divorce. Schoen et al. (2002) reasoned that we would expect women's earnings to encourage divorce only for women significantly dissatisfied with their marriages. To test this, they interacted women's full-time employment status with their reported marital happiness. The interaction was significant; women's employment does, indeed, encourage divorce, but only for those who reported substantial unhappiness. Of course, it is possible that women who wanted to divorce sought jobs to ready themselves for making do without the man's income; Johnson and Skinner (Johnson and Skinner 1986) found a pattern of homemakers entering employment the years before a divorce; Rogers (1999) reports similar findings.

alternatives). They see low earnings to lead to divorce only when they result from an unforeseen decline.

Gains From Marriage and Divorce Initiation

Earnings are not the only resources that individuals share with their spouses but also retain if they leave a marriage. Measures of husbands' and wives' gains from marriage, such as Spouse A's attractiveness, good health, the absence of "problem behaviors," or behavior that B thinks is "fair" all should increase A's desirability to B, but also increase A's alternatives outside the marriage. Therefore A's desirable characteristics should increase A's but decrease B's propensity to divorce. None of these hypotheses have been explored, because empirical studies predicting divorce have not classified divorces in terms of who left whom.

Not surprisingly, spouses who report being happier in their marriage, or who say their life would be worse if they divorced, are less likely to divorce (Booth et al. 1985; Sanchez and Gager 2000; Sayer and Bianchi 2000). These assessments of marriage quality and how much better or worse off one would be in the event of divorce are strongly affected by the presence of drug or alcohol abuse, infidelity, and violence (Amato and Rogers 1997; Kurtz 1995; Sanchez and Gager 2000; Sayer and Bianchi 2000; White 1990). Unaddressed in these studies, but key to our proposed research, is clarification of which partner's initiation of divorce is affected by which partner having a given characteristic.

Measures of an individual's perceived gains from being in the marriage may also interact with resources, such that resources make initiating divorce more likely, but this effect is much stronger (or perhaps only present) when the person with resources is dissatisfied with the marriage. Even those with exceptionally good alternatives outside

their current marriage are unlikely to leave a wonderfully satisfying marriage. This is consistent with the finding by Schoen et al. (2002) that women's employment encouraged divorce among couples where the wife expressed substantial unhappiness with the marriage, but had no effect on other couples' likelihood of divorce.

In sum, many theories of divorce make predictions about the circumstances under which a given partner is motivated to initiate divorce. Structural theories focus on economic or political-legal factors that affect women's or men's opportunities outside marriage or dictate certain roles in marriage. Rational choice-related theories take the structural and institutional environment as exogenous and focus on the micro level; the bargaining/exchange perspective predicts that each partner decides about staying in or leaving the relationship on the basis of costs and benefits of staying in versus leaving the relationship. Given this, understanding why marriages stay together or breakup will be advanced by analyses that explicitly model what affects each spouse's propensity to initiate divorce relative to staying in marriage. It is this research need that we seek to fill.

Data & Methods

We will use Waves 1, 2 and 3 of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). The NSFH is a national probability sample survey of 13,007 adults age 19 and older interviewed in 1987-88. The sample includes a main cross-section of 9,643 households, plus an oversample of Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, single-parent families and families with stepchildren, cohabiting couples, and recently married persons. One adult per household was randomly selected as the primary respondent. In married couple and cohabiting households (57 percent of the total sample), the spouse or

partner also completed a self-administered questionnaire (Sweet, Bumpass, and Call 1988).

The NSFH covers many aspects of family life, including detailed questions on social background, individual characteristics, marital experiences, employment histories, earnings, income, and respondents' assessments of their marital relationship. The NSFH is the only data set on a national probability sample that tracks marital dissolution over time and includes a measure of which spouse wanted the relationship to end. Wave 3 of the NSFH extends the observations for an additional 8 years. The proposed analyses will use couples at NSFH1 (or married between NSFH1 and NSFH3) in which at least one spouse was interviewed in at least two waves.

Divorce Initiation Measure

Our dependent variable is whether a breakup had occurred and, if so, who initiated it. For couples separating or divorcing after Wave 1, Waves 2 and 3 ascertain the month the breakup occurred and ask each ex-spouse which person wanted the breakup more. In NSFH2, husbands and wives who had experienced a marital separation or divorce between NSFH1 and NSFH2 completed a self-administered module on the experience of relationship dissolution. This module included a question that ascertained which spouse most wanted the divorce. Specific question wording was as follows:

“Sometimes both partners equally want a marriage to end, other times one partner wants it to end much more than the other. Circle the number of the answer that best describes how it was in your case.” Response categories included 1) I wanted the marriage to end BUT my husband/wife did not; 2) I wanted it to end MORE THAN my husband/wife did; 3) We both wanted it to end; 4) My husband/wife wanted the relationship to end MORE

THAN I did; or 5) My husband/wife wanted the marriage to end BUT I did not. (This item was used above in our preliminary study.)

Wave 3 of the NSFH asked about this as well for those who separated or divorced between Waves 2 and 3. Whereas in NSFH2 the question was part of a self-administered paper module, in NSFH3 the module was administered verbally by the interviewer and the question wording was changed slightly to collapse and simplify response categories. The NSFH3 question was: “Some partners disagree about how much they want their marriage to end. In your case, who MOST wanted your marriage to end? Would you say that you wanted it most, you both wanted it equally, or that your (husband/wife) wanted it to end most?” Respondents were then queried as to whether or not either partner had not wanted the marriage to end *at all*, and if so, which spouse this was. Fortunately, the verbal administration of the question on who initiated the divorce in NSFH3 was extremely successful in reducing nonresponse; of 357 responses by divorced persons tabulated so far in the Wave 3 data just being cleaned, over 98% answered the question.³

We use these questions to construct a four-category measure of marital dissolution: 1) the wife ended the relationship; 2) the husband ended the relationship; 3) both partners equally ended the relationship; and 4) continued marriage (neither partner ended the relationship). Consistent with most past research, we consider marriages dissolved at the point of separation, even if there is no legal divorce.⁴ There are virtually no cases of spouses disagreeing on whether they broke up, but, as discussed above, some

³ Personal communication from Larry Bumpass, NSFH3 PI, February, 2003.

⁴ In the rare case where spouses separated between Wave 1 and 2 but reconciled by Wave 3, we will conduct sensitivity tests for effects on results of whether we count this as a divorce/separation or not.

ex-spouses disagree on who initiated the breakup and in Wave 2 a substantial number of persons failed to answer the question.

Resources and Characteristic Measures:

Earnings: The major variable falling in this category is earnings. We will experiment with measuring earnings in these ways: annual earnings, hourly wage, potential wage rate (predicted for the employed and nonemployed from other characteristics), proportion of family income contributed by a partner, and change in any of the above between Waves 1 and 2.

Education: Highest year of education completed can be seen as a resource, and a predictor of potential earnings.

Labor Force Experience: Respondents' employment experience can be seen as a resource, in that it predicts potential earnings. Wave 1 asked three questions from which we can construct estimates of full-time and all employment experience. First, to measure employment prior to Wave 1, respondents were asked the month and year in which they first worked for pay for at least six months not counting when primarily attending school or in the military. They were asked "after that when was the first time you stopped working, or were out of work, for at least 6 months," and then whether in the first period they were working mostly full- or part-time. Spouses of respondents were asked slightly less detailed questions (they were asked to circle all years since 1970 in which they were employed for at least 6 months and how many years they worked mostly part-time). In later waves, respondents and spouses (current and ex-) are both asked for dates of each spell of employment and whether full- or part-time.

Alcohol or Drug Problem: Husbands and wives were asked if anyone in the household had an alcohol or drug problem, and if so, if the respondent had the problem, or their spouse had the problem.

Physical or mental health/disability: Respondents were asked if physical or mental conditions limited their ability to: a) care for personal needs, such as bathing, dressing, eating, or going to the bathroom; b) move about inside the house; c) do day-to-day household tasks; d) climb a flight of stairs; e) walk six blocks; f) do heavy work like shoveling snow or heavy housecleaning; g) work for pay, such as the amount or type of work performed. Response categories included: 1 = does not limit at all; 2 = limits a little; and 3 = limits a lot.

Marital violence: Each spouse was asked how often their marital arguments turned physical. Respondents who indicated that marital arguments had turned physical were asked how many "physical" marital arguments resulted in her or him hitting, shoving, or throwing things at their spouse, and how many arguments resulted in the spouse hitting, shoving, or throwing things at her /him. (A measure of A's violence

toward B may be used as a measure of A's "bad behavior" that would increase B's initiation.)

Marital Quality, Gain, and Commitment Measures:

Marital quality is assessed in all waves of NSFH. Some of these items were used in our preliminary study described below.

Marital happiness: Spouses were asked "Taking all things together, how would you describe your marriage?" Response categories are: 1 = very unhappy to 7 = very happy.

Perceived Costs/Benefits of Remaining in Marriage: Interviews include questions asking respondents to think about how getting a divorce would affect their standard of living, social life, career opportunities, overall happiness, and sex life. Responses range from 1 = much worse, to 5 = much better. These questions tap perceptions of the costs and benefits of remaining in the relationship, compared to the alternative life respondents think they could have outside of this marriage. We will use items individually, and in other specifications, combine them into a scale for each spouse.

Troubled Marriage: Husbands and wives were asked if they thought their marriage was in trouble.

Control Variables

Other variables will be used as controls where appropriate, to assess intervening processes, or to test predictions from competing perspectives. These include *hours of paid work* worked in the past week, and the usual number of work hours per week if hours worked last week were unusual. We will also include measures of *gender ideology* from questions about male and female marital role obligations, such as sharing of household labor, and the appropriateness of mothers' employment when young children are in the household. *Other Demographic and Life Course Characteristics* will include information on the husband's and wife's race/ethnicity, length of marriage, whether grew up with both parents, whether cohabited before marriage, whether this is a first marriage, whether there are children from a previous union in the household, and frequency of spousal time together.

Preliminary Findings

We engaged in a preliminary study using the first two waves of the NSFH to see if ex-spouses usually agreed on who initiated the divorce, and whether the predictors of

this item increased our confidence in its validity as a measure of who wanted and initiated the divorce. Table 1 cross-tabulates the wife's report of who wanted the divorce with the husband's report of who wanted the divorce. We collapsed response categories 1 and 2 to include all cases in which the respondent wanted the relationship to end and response categories 4 and 5 to include all cases in which the respondent's ex-spouse wanted the relationship to end.

[Table 1 here]

When the wife reports that she wanted the divorce, 68 percent of husbands agree and an additional 24 percent report that both wanted the relationship to end (column 1). Similarly, when the wife reports that the husband wanted the divorce, 88 percent of husbands either agree that they were the initiators (77 percent) or say both wanted the divorce (11 percent). Extreme disagreement over which partner initiated the dissolution is uncommon: When the wife says she wanted the relationship to end only 8 percent of husbands report being the ones who wanted the divorce; when the wife says the husband wanted the relationship to end more, only 11 percent of husbands report that she wanted the relationship to end more. The considerable agreement between ex-spouses who answered the question on who wanted the divorce suggests that the item is a meaningful indicator of who initiated the divorce. Women are shown in Table 1 to be the ones more often initiating divorce, whether we use men's or women's reports; this is consistent with research reviewed above. Fifty-six percent of wives and 45 percent of husbands report that the wife wanted the breakup more, while only 24 percent of wives and 29 percent of husbands report that he wanted it more.

At the same time, these data alert us to an important problem: In NSFH2, where this item was asked as part of a written supplement to the verbal interview, many respondents didn't answer: 18 percent of ex-wives and 30 percent of ex-husbands. This may be because respondents are more reluctant to refuse to answer when a question is asked by an interviewer than when it is part of a (potentially confusing) self-administered written module. NSFH3, now in the field, is collecting all modules verbally. They are also using simplified wording and response categories for the variable, consistent with how we collapsed it (discussed below). Fortunately, in results tabulated so far, NSFH3 obtained a near-perfect response rate among divorced persons interviewed by asking the question about who initiated the divorce verbally.⁵

Our belief in the validity of the question as an indicator of who left whom would be increased if we saw that a spouse who saw the marriage in a more negative light at Wave 1 was more likely to have initiated a divorce by Wave 2 (relative to the marriage persisting or the other spouse initiating a divorce). This finding would also be consistent with the theoretical predictions developed here. To explore this, we examined whether wives' (husbands) reports of a) the extent to which they would be better or worse off in the hypothetical event of a divorce, b) the marriage being "troubled," and c) the marriage being "unhappy," were associated with the wife (husband) initiating the end of the relationship. We would expect that the wife's negative perceptions of the marriage should be associated with her ending the marriage, while husbands' perceptions should be associated with him ending the relationship. There is some ambiguity in this prediction for b) and c) above, because the items seem to call for a report of either one's

⁵ Personal communication from Larry Bumpass, PI of NSFH3, February, 2003.

own or the spouse's dissatisfaction of the marriage. In contrast, a), an index of items asking how much better or worse off one would be in the hypothetical event of a divorce is an excellent match to the concept relevant to a rational choice theoretical perspective—how one assesses their hypothetical prospective well-being inside versus outside the current marriage. For this analysis, the reports of marital quality are from NSFH1, and the dependent variable is whether, by Wave 2, about 5 years later, the marriage was still together, the husband had initiated divorce, the wife had initiated divorce (or a residual category that includes both had wanted divorce equally or no answer).

Examination of mean differences (not shown) among those separated by Wave 2, indicates that spouses who claimed to be the one who wanted the breakup more were more likely to have reported themselves at Wave 1 to be higher on the “better off divorced” scale, or to have a more troubled or unhappy marriage. These differences also persisted net of a host of controls for a variety of demographic and life course characteristics shown in previous research to predict divorce (Amato and Rogers 1997; Bumpass, Martin, and Sweet 1991; Sayer and Bianchi 2000; White 1990).

Table 2 shows odds ratios from multinomial logistic models predicting the wife ending the relationship and the husband leaving the relationship. Models are multinomial logistic regressions with the reference category of the marriage persisting to NSFH2, and coefficients calculated for effects on “wife left,” “husband left,” and both wanted divorce equally or respondent didn't answer the question (coefficients for the latter category are not shown). Two separate multinomial logistic regression models were run, one using husbands' and one using wives' report of who initiated divorce for those who divorced.

[Table 2 here]

Table 2 shows that each point on the 20 point "better off divorced" scale raises the odds of wives initiating divorce by 9-10 percent, whether we use the husband's or wife's report of who initiated. (A standard deviation on the scale is about 3.3 points for men and women.) Additionally, wives who report that the marriage is troubled (a dummy variable) have over twice the odds of initiating divorce by women's report, or 1.79 times the odds by men's report. Wives who report that the marriage is unhappy (a dummy variable coded 1 for the bottom 3 categories of a 7 item Likert scale) have about 4 times the odds of initiating divorce as those reporting happy marriages, regardless of whether we use men or women's reports of who wanted divorce.

Husbands' perceptions of relationship alternatives, trouble and unhappiness are also associated with their initiation of divorce, although fewer of the relevant coefficients are significant (2 out of 6 versus 5 out of 6 for women). The effects of men seeing themselves as "better off divorced" at Wave 1 on their having initiated divorce by Wave 2 are of similar magnitude as effects for women, although only one is significant for men. Either spouse's report that the relationship is troubled more than doubles the odds of that spouse initiating divorce, but only by the wife's report of who initiated. Whereas women who report they are unhappy in the marriage have more than four times the odds of initiating divorce (by either men or women's report), reporting unhappiness at Wave 1 does not elevate men's odds of initiating enough to reach statistical significance (by either men's or women's report of who initiated). If the sample included enough marriages in which the husband initiated divorce, it is possible that the effect of husband's assessments of the marriage would reach statistical significance. Since the

number of divorces should increase substantially by Wave 3, our analysis will provide a more sensitive test of what factors affect husbands' initiation.

It is notable that wives' assessments of marital quality have no significant effect on husbands' leaving (0 of 6 possible coefficients significant and 4 in the wrong direction), and husbands' assessments of marital quality show significant effects on wives' leaving in only 1 of 6 possible coefficients (although all have positive sign). Thus, overall, there is substantial evidence that having a dim view of the quality of the marriage at Wave 1 is associated with being the one to initiate divorce by Wave 2, although the evidence is much clearer for wives than husbands. Since initiator status is measured retrospectively, it is possible that reports of which spouse most wanted the divorce are influenced by post-divorce constructions or events (Hopper and Phua 2000). However, our preliminary results suggest that this is not the case. The relatively high level of agreement between ex-spouses on who wanted the divorce, combined with the fact that spouse A's report of the quality of the marriage often predicts whether A (but usually not B) initiates divorce up to five years later, suggests to us that the measure is picking up who initiated the divorce reasonably well.

Next Steps:

The results of our preliminary analyses suggest that analyses that distinguish between divorce initiators and noninitiators have the potential to test heretofore unexplored predictions of existing theories of divorce. We plan to extend these preliminary analyses by incorporating data from Wave 3 of the NSFH to a) to increase the number of couples experiencing divorce, in particular to increase the number of

divorces initiated by husbands so we can assess their determinants and b) test our hypotheses in the context of a discrete-time, competing risks regression model. Substantively, we are particularly interested in testing whether relative earnings affect divorce initiation, as the “women’s independence” effect suggests. We will also interact relative earnings with measures of satisfaction with the marriage.

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Table 1. Cross-Tabulation of Wife's Report of Who Wanted Divorce with Husband's Report of Who Wanted Divorce

Husband's Report	Wife's Report								No Answer N
	She Wanted		He Wanted		Both Wanted		Row Total		
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	
She Wanted	68%	127	11%	9	17%	11	45%	147	57
He Wanted	8%	15	77%	61	29%	19	29%	95	35
Both Wanted	24%	44	11%	9	54%	35	27%	88	40
Column Total	100%	186	100%	79	100%	65	100%	330	132
		56%		24%		20%			
No Answer		128		45		50		223	57

N = 742 Separated/Divorced Couples Wave 2

Table 2. Odds Ratios for Effects of Perceptions of Relationship Alternatives, Quality and Happiness on Relationship Dissolution

	Wife Left		Husband Left	
	Wife's Report	Husband's Report	Wife's Report	Husband's Report
Wife says better off divorced	1.09**	1.10**	1.00	1.05
Wife says relationship troubled	2.57*	1.79	1.37	1.02
Wife says relationship unhappy	4.38**	4.08**	2.62+	1.59
Husband says better off divorced	0.98	0.97	1.07	1.14**
Husband says relationship troubled	1.71	1.62	2.44+	1.08
Husband says relationship unhappy	0.50	0.96	1.50	1.81

Note: N=2,619 couples. Columns 1 and 3 are from the multinomial logit model using the wife's report; columns 2 and 4 are from the model using the husband's report. Models control for whether wife is > 3 years older than husband, wife's age at marriage, marital duration, premarital birth, presence of nonbiological children, wife (husband) raised in disrupted household, wife (husband) ever cohabited, wife (husband) previously divorced, wife or husband black, wife's (husband's) education, husband's logged earnings, wife's (husband's) weekly employment hours, number and age of children, wife's (husband's) religious services, wife's (husband's) report of couple time together, wife's (husband's) egalitarian gender ideology, wife (husband) has alcohol or drug problem, wife (husband) says marital arguments physical, years between NSFH1 and NSFH2 interview. Couples with missing data on any of these items are not included in the analyses. * p<.05 (Independent variables from responses from both husband and wife included in all models.)