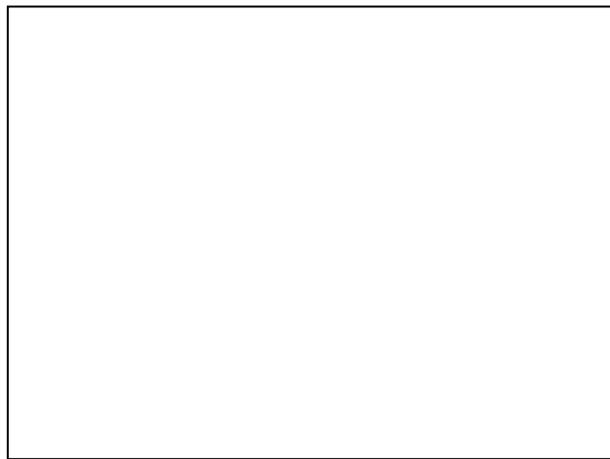


**Marriage Breakdown in Australia: social correlates, gender and initiator status.**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of  
Queensland in December 2006



Belinda Hewitt

The School of Social Science

### **Candidates Statement of Originality**

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text and in the statements below. The material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

### **Statement of Contributions by Others**

Professor Janeen Baxter, in her role as primary advisor, helped with the development of ideas in the early phases of the PhD during meetings and in giving written feedback on thesis drafts. Her contribution was greatest in the co-authored papers relating to Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

Professor Mark Western, in his role as associate advisor, helped with the development of ideas in the early phases of the PhD during meetings and in giving written feedback on thesis drafts. In addition he checked all statistical models and provided detailed feedback on the co-authored papers relating to Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

Signatures:

---

Ms Belinda Hewitt (Candidate)

---

Professor Janeen Baxter (Principal Advisor)

## **Acknowledgements**

I would first of all like to thank my supervisors Janeen Baxter and Mark Western. They have demonstrated unwavering encouragement and support for this thesis project and my research more generally. While the mistakes are my own, their insights and input have improved the quality of this thesis far beyond what I could have achieved on my own. Words cannot express my depth of gratitude to them.

I have also been very fortunate to have the invaluable support, love and friendship of Tara McGee and Lynda Cheshire to help me through my PhD and life in general. I would also like to thank Paul Smeaton for being a good friend and co-parent to our daughter Naomi, without his commitment to fatherhood and our shared care arrangements I know that this process would have been much more difficult. Naomi, for her part has been a great kid, demonstrating a great capacity for empathy and understanding and a willingness to cry with me when it all gets too much.

I would also like to acknowledge the feedback provided by several anonymous reviewers on the journal articles based on Chapter's 6 and 7; it not only improved the quality of the papers but of the thesis as well. I have also received valuable feedback from Dr Lynn Cooke on the paper based on Chapter 7. And would like to acknowledge Dr Zlatko Skrbis for his thoughts on the associations between ethnicity and marriage breakdown which helped me clarify some of my findings and also caused me to think differently about my sample. During my candidature the administrative staff working at the School of Social Science have been incredibly supportive and helpful, but in particular I would like to acknowledge Keitha Brown; the backbone of the School.

Last, but definitely not least, I would like to thank my partner Gavin Turrell. It is impossible to put into words the multitude of ways in which he has helped me through the PhD process and I am very lucky to have him in my life.

## List of Publications and Presentations

---

### Publications and Presentations by the Candidate Relevant to the Thesis

#### *Journal Articles*

**Hewitt, B.**, Western, M. & Baxter, J. (2006) Who Decides? The Social Characteristics of Who Initiates Marital Separation. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 68 (6): 1165 – 1177. (See Appendix 5).

**Hewitt, B.**, Baxter, J., Western, M. (2005) Marriage Breakdown in Australia: the social correlates of separation and divorce. *Journal of Sociology* 41(2): 163-183. (See Appendix 3).

#### *Refereed Conference Proceedings*

**Hewitt, B.** Social Change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century conference, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2006, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane. Paper: *'Trial Marriage': Is premarital cohabitation an effective risk minimisation strategy for marriage breakdown?*

#### *Invited Presentations*

**Hewitt, B.**, Western, M. & Baxter, J. The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services Seminar Series, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2005, Canberra. Invited presentation by Belinda Hewitt: *Who made the final decision? Social characteristics and initiator status of marriage breakdown.*

**Hewitt, B.**, Baxter, J. & Western, M. The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services Seminar Series, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2004, Canberra. Invited presentation by Belinda Hewitt: *Who Gets Divorced in Australia? An examination of temporal, life course and socioeconomic determinants of marital dissolution.*

#### *Conference Presentations*

**Hewitt, B.**, Western, M., & Baxter, J. The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) conference, 5 – 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2005, “Community, Place and Change”,

University of Tasmania, Hobart. Paper presented by Belinda Hewitt: *Whose decision was it? Social characteristics and initiator status of separation.*

**Hewitt, B.**, Baxter, J. & Western, M. The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) conference December 2003, University of New England, Armidale, Australia. Joint Paper presented by Belinda Hewitt: *Who Gets Divorced in Australia? A gender comparison of socioeconomic and life course determinants of marital dissolution.*

**Additional Publications and Presentations by the Candidate Relevant to the Thesis but not Forming Part of it**

***Publications***

**Hewitt, B.**, Baxter, J., Western, M. (2006) Family, Work and Health: the impact of marriage, parenthood and employment on self-reported health of men and women. *Journal of Sociology* 42(1): 61 – 78.

Western, M., **Hewitt, B.** & Baxter, J. (2005) Marriage and Money: Variations across the Earnings Distribution. *Australian Journal of Labour Economics* 8(2): 163 - 179.

***Invited Presentations***

**Hewitt, B.**, Turrell, G., Baxter, J. & Western, M. Department of Community Services and Families and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) Annual Workshop, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> November 2006, Canberra. Invited presentation by Belinda Hewitt: Marriage dissolution and health amongst the elderly: the role of social and economic resources.

**Hewitt, B.**, Turrell, G., Baxter, J. & Western, M. Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) Workshop, 1st & 2nd July 2004, “Australian Women Facing the Future: Is the intergenerational report gender-neutral?” Customs House, Brisbane, Australia. Invited presentation by Belinda Hewitt: Health impacts of marriage dissolution on older Australians: the role of social and economic resources.

## **Abstract**

---

This thesis investigates the social determinants of marriage breakdown in Australia. Research shows that a number of social characteristics including, birth cohort, ethnic background, parental divorce, family socioeconomic background, cohabitation, religiosity, premarital birth, early birth, marital children and education are associated with marriage breakdown. Using retrospective data on 8,993 first marriages from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey (2001), a large nationally representative Australian population survey, this study aims to develop our knowledge of gender differences in the social correlates of marriage breakdown and in particular to better understand why women are more likely than men to initiate separation.

I do this in two ways. First, I use discrete time event history analysis to examine differences in the associations between men's and women's social characteristics and the probability of marriage breakdown. Overall these results suggest that social characteristics are important factors in predicting marriage breakdown. I find gender differences in the associations between age at marriage, ethnic background and education showing these characteristics have a stronger association with the probability of marriage breakdown for women than men. This may be because women are more likely to initiate separation.

Second, I use discrete time event history analysis with competing risks to examine the associations between men's and women's social characteristics and their reports of which spouse initiated separation. Instead of treating marriage breakdown as a uniform event I investigate whether separation was initiated by the wife, husband or jointly. This issue has received little attention in the literature to date. My results suggest some differences in the associations between parental divorce, age at

marriage, ethnic background, religiosity, and the presence of preschool and older children and whether wives or husbands initiated separation. All of these characteristics with the exception of the presence of preschool children increase the risk of wife-initiated separation, but overall there are few differences between wife-initiated and husband-initiated separations and when there are significant differences it is usually in the magnitude of the effect rather than in the direction of the association. The main gender difference I find is that wives are more likely than husbands to initiate separation on the basis of their husbands' as well as their own social characteristics.

Overall, the findings of this thesis suggest three main conclusions. First, that sociostructural factors are important for understanding why some marriages break down and others remain intact. Second, wives are more likely to initiate marital separation than husbands. And third, while some gender differences in the social correlates of which spouse initiated separation are present, in general men and women tend to end their marriages under similar circumstances. It is likely that more wives initiate separation than husbands because women tend to take greater responsibility for the quality and maintenance of marital relationships which paradoxically entails ending an unhappy marriage in some circumstances. Investigating this issue further was outside the scope of this study and represents an important direction for future research.

## Table of Contents

---

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	- 1 -
CHAPTER 2: FROM DESERTION TO DIVORCE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN IN AUSTRALIA .....	- 11 -
CHAPTER 3: WHO GETS DIVORCED? THEORETICAL INSIGHTS AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH INTO THE SOCIOSTRUCTURAL PREDICTORS OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN.....	- 33 -
CHAPTER 4: WHY GENDER MATTERS: THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER IN MARRIAGE, FAMILY LIFE, MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN AND THE DECISION TO SEPARATE.....	- 58 -
CHAPTER 5: METHODS.....	- 78 -
CHAPTER 6: MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN IN AUSTRALIA: THE SOCIAL CORRELATES OF SEPARATION AND DIVORCE .....	- 116 -
CHAPTER 7: WHO DECIDES? THE SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF WHO INITIATES MARITAL SEPARATION.....	- 136 -
CHAPTER 8: THE CONDITIONS OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE: WHICH SPOUSE INITIATES MARITAL SEPARATION WHEN THERE ARE CHILDREN INVOLVED?.....	-165-
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS.....	- 199 -
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	- 214 -
APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF LITERATURE CONSIDERING WHICH SPOUSE INITIATED SEPARATION.....	- 228 -
APPENDIX 2: SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSIS FOR CHAPTER 5 .....	- 234 -
APPENDIX 3: PUBLISHED PAPER BASED ON CHAPTER 6 .....	- 239 -
APPENDIX 4: SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSIS FOR CHAPTER 6 .....	- 261 -
APPENDIX 5: PUBLISHED PAPER BASED ON CHAPTER 7 .....	- 268 -
APPENDIX 6: SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSIS FOR CHAPTER 7 .....	- 282 -
APPENDIX 7: SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSIS FOR CHAPTER 8 .....	- 286 -

## List of Tables and Figures

---

### Tables:

TABLE 5.1:	DISTRIBUTION (NUMBER AND PERCENT) OF SEPARATED AND DIVORCED IN ANALYTIC SAMPLE .....	84 -
TABLE 5.2:	INITIATOR STATUS OF SEPARATION FOR SEPARATED AND DIVORCED MEN AND WOMEN (COLUMN %). .....	87 -
TABLE 5.3:	DESCRIPTION OF COVARIATES, BY SEX .....	96 -
TABLE 5.4:	LIFE TABLE DESCRIBING NUMBER OF YEARS MARRIED, SURVIVAL AND HAZARD FUNCTIONS FOR ANALYTIC SAMPLE, BY SEX.....	100 -
TABLE 5.5:	LIKELIHOOD RATIOS FOR DIFFERENT DURATION SPECIFICATIONS.-	110 -
TABLE 6.1:	DISCRETE TIME EVENT HISTORY MODEL PREDICTING THE RISK OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN AS A FUNCTION OF VARIOUS SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR MEN AND WOMEN.....	124 -
TABLE 7.1:	DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN’S AND WOMEN’S REPORTS OF WHO INITIATED SEPARATION.....	146 -
TABLE 7.2:	DISCRETE TIME EVENT HISTORY MODELS WITH COMPETING RISKS OF WOMEN’S REPORTS OF WHO INITIATED SEPARATION RELATIVE TO STILL MARRIED BY SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS.....	149 -
TABLE 7.3:	DISCRETE TIME EVENT HISTORY MODELS WITH COMPETING RISKS OF MEN’S REPORTS OF WHO INITIATED SEPARATION RELATIVE TO STILL MARRIED BY SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS.....	152 -
TABLE 7.4:	COMPETING RISKS MODEL, CONTRASTING WIFE-INITIATED SEPARATION BY SELECTED SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR WOMEN AND MEN .....	155 -
TABLE 8.1:	TIME-VARYING VARIABLES: NUMBER AND AGES OF CHILDREN BORN IN FIRST MARRIAGES AT VARIOUS MARITAL DURATIONS, BY SEX ....	177 -
TABLE 8.2:	GENDER COMPOSITION OF CHILDREN WITHIN FIRST MARRIAGES FOR WOMEN AND MEN .....	178 -
TABLE 8.3:	<u>WOMEN</u> , NUMBER OF CHILDREN, RISK OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN AND REPORTS OF WHO INITIATED SEPARATION .....	182 -
TABLE 8.4:	<u>MEN</u> , NUMBER OF CHILDREN, RISK OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN AND REPORTS OF WHO INITIATED SEPARATION .....	184 -
TABLE 8.5:	<u>WOMEN</u> , AGE AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN, RISK OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN AND WHO INITIATED SEPARATION .....	186 -
TABLE 8.6:	<u>MEN</u> , AGE AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN, RISK OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN AND WHO INITIATED SEPARATION .....	188 -
TABLE 8.7:	<u>WOMEN</u> , GENDER COMPOSITION OF CHILDREN, MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN AND WHO INITIATED SEPARATION .....	192 -
TABLE 8.8:	<u>MEN</u> , GENDER COMPOSITION OF CHILDREN, MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN AND WHO INITIATED SEPARATION .....	193 -

**Appendix Tables:**

<b>TABLE A1.1: SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS EMPIRICAL RESEARCH EXAMINING WHICH SPOUSE INITIATED SEPARATION .....</b>	<b>- 229 -</b>
<b>TABLE A2.1: DISCRETE TIME EVENT HISTORY MODEL INCLUDING THE 154 IMMIGRANTS WHO SEPARATED OR DIVORCED BEFORE MIGRATING TO AUSTRALIA, BY SEX.....</b>	<b>- 235 -</b>
<b>TABLE A2.2: COX PROPORTIONAL HAZARDS MODELS OF MODEL PRESENTED IN TABLE 6.1.....</b>	<b>- 237 -</b>
<b>TABLE A4.1: LIKELIHOOD RATIO TESTS COMPARING MAIN MODEL IN CHAPTER 6 (TABLE 6.1) WITH MODELS EXCLUDING EACH OF THE COVARIATES. ....</b>	<b>- 262 -</b>
<b>TABLE A4.2: GENDER INTERACTIONS FOR DISCRETE TIME EVENT HISTORY MODEL PRESENTED IN TABLE 6.1 .....</b>	<b>- 263 -</b>
<b>TABLE A4.3: THE PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF COHABITING WITH PARTNER PRIOR TO MARRIAGE BY BIRTH COHORT AND SEX.....</b>	<b>- 266 -</b>
<b>TABLE A4.4: RESULTS OF DISCRETE TIME MODEL WITH AN INTERACTION BETWEEN COHORT AND COHABITATION PREDICTING THE RISK OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN, BY SEX .....</b>	<b>- 267 -</b>
<b>TABLE A6.1: SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS INTERACTED WITH GENDER BY REPORTS OF WHO INITIATED SEPARATION (SUPPLEMENTING TABLES 7.1, 7.2 AND 7.3).....</b>	<b>- 283 -</b>
<b>TABLE A6.2: FULL RESULTS OF MODELS PREDICTING THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS AND WOMEN'S AND MEN'S REPORTS OF HUSBAND- AND JOINTLY INITIATED SEPARATIONS COMPARED TO WIFE-INITIATED SEPARATIONS.....</b>	<b>- 285 -</b>
<b>TABLE A7.1: WIFE-INITIATED SEPARATION AS BASELINE FOR NUMBER OF CHILDREN FOR WOMEN (SUPPLEMENTING TABLE 8.3) AND MEN (SUPPLEMENTING TABLE 8.4). ....</b>	<b>- 287 -</b>
<b>TABLE A7.2: AGE AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN POOLED GENDER INTERACTIONS MODEL (SUPPLEMENTING TABLES 8.5 AND 8.6).....</b>	<b>- 288 -</b>
<b>TABLE A7.3: AGE AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH WIFE-INITIATED SEPARATION AS THE CONTRAST CATEGORY (SUPPLEMENTING TABLES 8.5 AND 8.6). ....</b>	<b>- 291 -</b>
<b>TABLE A7.4: WOMEN, NUMBER OF CHILDREN (WITH A REFERENT OF ZERO CHILDREN), RISK OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN AND REPORTS OF WHO INITIATED SEPARATION (BASED ON TABLE 8.3) .....</b>	<b>- 292 -</b>
<b>TABLE A7.5: MEN, NUMBER OF CHILDREN (WITH A REFERENT OF ZERO CHILDREN), RISK OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN AND REPORTS OF WHO INITIATED SEPARATION (BASED ON TABLE 8.4) .....</b>	<b>- 293 -</b>

**Figures:**

<b>FIGURE 2.1: CRUDE DIVORCE RATE, AUSTRALIA 1901 - 2003.....</b>	<b>- 17 -</b>
<b>FIGURE 2.2: DIVORCE RATE, AUSTRALIA 1981 – 2001.....</b>	<b>- 25 -</b>
<b>FIGURE 2.3: MEDIAN AGE AT DIVORCE FOR MEN AND WOMEN, AUSTRALIA 1977 – 2003.....</b>	<b>- 26 -</b>
<b>FIGURE 2.4: MEDIAN DURATION OF MARRIAGE TO SEPARATION AND DIVORCE (YEARS), AUSTRALIA, 1977 – 2003.....</b>	<b>- 27 -</b>
<b>FIGURE 2.5: PROPORTION OF DIVORCES INVOLVING CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 18.....</b>	<b>- 28 -</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.1: SURVIVAL ESTIMATES OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN FOR ANALYTIC SAMPLE, BY SEX .....</b>	<b>- 103 -</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.2: HAZARDS OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN IN ANALYTIC SAMPLE, BY SEX .....</b>	<b>- 105 -</b>
<b>FIGURE 7.1: ARE WOMEN'S AND MEN'S SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH THEIR REPORTS OF WHICH SPOUSE INITIATED SEPARATION? -</b>	<b>144 -</b>
<b>FIGURE 7.2: DO WOMEN'S AND MEN'S SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN SEPARATIONS INITIATED BY WIVES COMPARED TO THOSE INITIATED BY HUSBANDS OR JOINTLY? .....</b>	<b>- 145 -</b>
<b>FIGURE 7.3: BASELINE HAZARDS OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN AND MEN'S AND WOMEN'S REPORTS OF WHO INITIATED SEPARATION.....</b>	<b>- 147 -</b>

## List of Abbreviations

---

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ASCO	Australian Standard Classification of Occupations
HILDA	Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
NLC	Negotiating the Life Course survey
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

---

As with most Western nations, marriage and family life has undergone major changes in Australia since the end of World War II. Rates of marriage have steadily declined (De Vaus 2004); the number of couples living together before, or instead of, marriage has increased dramatically (Glezer 1997); the number of children being born in defacto unions rather than marital unions is increasing (De Vaus 2004); women are delaying child bearing and couples are having smaller families (McDonald 2000). Arguably though, the change that has had the most wide-ranging and far-reaching consequences for family life is the increase in divorce. While the increase in the rate of divorce in Australia has slowed since the 1980s and may have stabilised, in the year 2000 more marriages dissolved due to divorce than widowhood for the first time. Divorce continues to be a pervasive feature of Australian social life with 32 percent of current marriages expected to end in divorce and predictions this may increase to 45 percent over the next few decades (Carmichael, Webster and McDonald 1996).

Sociological theorists of modernity have highlighted the tensions and contradictions inherent in modern society that operate to destabilise relationships (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1992; Smart and Neale 1999). The rise of individualism and the erosion of traditional constraints to marriage breakdown such as family and economic considerations when selecting a marriage partner, provide individuals in modern society greater freedom of choice. But that freedom is accompanied by greater risks (Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Moreover, the desire for modern individuals, particularly women, to pursue a life of their own

through attachment to the labour market, combined with the structure of the labour market which engenders an expectation of mobility, flexibility and long work hours from employees, lies in contradiction to commitment to family and friends (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995).

Further, both Giddens (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Beck-Gernsheim 2002) argue that the expectations and the nature of partnering in modern society inevitably lead to relationship instability. Relationships are constantly negotiated and re-negotiated based on changing individual needs (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1992). As men's and women's economic roles converge and expectations of marital relationships have changed, being happily married has become more important than in the past. Consequently, marriage is destabilised not because it is no longer important, but because greater emphasis and importance is attributed to having a happy marriage.

Most, although not necessarily all, couples whose marriages break down are able to successfully move on with their lives and those with children often renegotiate their post-divorce relationship in positive ways (Funder and Australian Institute of Family Studies. 1996; Smart 2000; Smart and Neale 1999). Nevertheless in the short term there are major social, emotional and financial implications for separating and divorcing couples (Amato 2000). Overall, it is found that married people have better physical and mental health than the non-married and this has been observed in Australia (De Vaus 2002), the United States (Simon 2002), the Netherlands (Joung et al. 1997) and Sweden (Hemminki and Li 2003). Additionally, when differences amongst the non married (i.e. the separated, divorced, widowed, and never married) are examined, widowed and never married people tend to have better health than separated and divorced people (Hemminki and Li 2003; Joung et al. 1997).

The negative financial consequences of divorce are mostly experienced by women and children. In 2001 around 64 percent of sole parent households in Australia were formed due to separation and divorce, although this figure has dropped from 74 percent in 1981 (De Vaus 2004). Single parent households, particularly those headed by women, are disproportionately subject to poverty and rely on welfare as their primary income (Bittman and Pixley 1997). Even if separated and divorced mothers are not living in poverty, their standard of living usually declines, whereas father's either increases or remains much the same (Smyth and Weston 2000).

Further, there are major changes in the conduct of family life after separation and divorce. Many children lose regular contact and some lose contact altogether, with their non-residential parent who is usually the father (Smyth 2005; Smyth, Caruna and Ferro 2005). Co-parenting, re-partnering and the formation of step and blended families after divorce has added to the diversity of family and household forms in Australia, and increases the complexity of family and household arrangements (Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Cherlin 1978; Smart and Neale 1999). Whereas the death of a spouse represents a 'clean' break from the marriage, in the event of separation and divorce there is a continued 'post-marriage marriage' involving the negotiation of custody and visitation of children across households (Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Smart and Neale 1999).

The costs of marriage breakdown, however, extend beyond those incurred by the individuals and families involved. In 1994-95 divorce was estimated to cost the Australian community \$3 billion in direct costs per year (Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. 1998). This figure was derived from estimated costs incurred by Department of Social Security, The Family Court, Legal Aid, the Child Support Scheme, and the Sole Parent Tax Rebate in the financial year 1994-95 due to relationship breakdown.

Further, given that these figures are ten years old, it is likely that this amount has increased. In addition there are indirect costs, which include (but are not limited to) hidden costs to the healthcare system because people of separated or divorced marital status typically have worse health than those who are either currently married or never married (De Vaus 2002; Lillard and Waite 1995). In addition absenteeism and low work productivity have also been linked to relationship problems (Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs 1998).

A large and growing body of research has emerged to try and explain why some marriages end while others remain intact. Contemporary divorce research is dominated by two main approaches. One focuses on psychosocial explanations for marriage breakdown, or microrelational processes, such as couple behaviours and interactions (e.g. Gottman and Notarius 2002) and people's perceptions of relationship quality and satisfaction (e.g. Wolcott and Hughes 1999). The other approach examines sociostructural determinants of marriage breakdown, encompassing sociological, demographic, economic, and life course predictors of divorce.

The strength of the former approach is that it generates an understanding of the processes of marriage breakdown. However, it often relies on small non-representative samples of separated and divorced couples and provides little insight into the contexts of marriage breakdown. In contrast, the latter approach typically uses nationally representative samples and provides insight into the contexts and the circumstances within which marriage is conducted and the correlates of marriage breakdown. But it offers little insight into the processes of marriage breakdown. Only a handful of studies combine both approaches, usually by including measures of

both micro and macro predictors in models and examining the relative associations amongst them (see for example, Amato and Previti 2003; Sanchez and Gager 2000).

***Previous Australian divorce research***

A relatively small but important body of research on marriage breakdown has emerged in Australia over the last few decades. It encompasses both micro and macro approaches. This Australian literature, however, is dominated by descriptive studies of the demographic trends in divorce (Carmichael, Webster and McDonald 1996; De Vaus 1997; De Vaus 2004; Ozdowski and Hattie 1981; Stewart and Harrison 1982) and research into post-separation and post-divorce processes (Funder, 1996; Funder, Weston and Harrison 1993; McDonald, 1986; Smyth 2005; Smyth, Caruna and Ferro 2005; Smyth and Weston 2000). This latter body of work has grown exponentially with the recent interest in child custody arrangements after divorce following the 2004 parliamentary inquiry “Every Picture Tells A Story” (The Parliament of the Commonwealth 2003). Overall, this research provides little explanatory information about the predictors of marriage breakdown in Australia.

Only a handful of Australian studies specifically investigate factors that increase or decrease the risk of marriage breakdown. For example, Wolcott & Hughes (1999) investigate separated and divorced peoples’ perceptions of why their marriages failed. Burns (1981; 1984) also examined marital breakdown by investigating the reasons respondents gave for their separation/divorce. But both these studies are limited because they sampled separated and divorced people only and therefore provide no comparison of characteristics with people who remained married. Moreover, the main emphasis of the research was the respondent’s perception of why the relationship ended, with neither study able to fully investigate the broader social correlates of marriage breakdown.

Several other Australian studies examine the sociostructural predictors of marriage breakdown (Bracher et al. 1993; Bradbury and Norris 2005; Day 1964; De Vaus, Qu and Weston 2003; Jones 1994; Roden 1989; Sarantakos 1994) but all have limitations. Jones (1994) compared divorce rates of mixed-ethnic marriages with ethnically homogenous marriages. Similarly Khoo & Zhao (2001) investigated migrant divorce rates in Australia, adjusting for age and marriage patterns. And Day (1964) compared patterns and characteristics of divorce in Australia with those in the United States. Each of these studies used Australian Bureau of Statistics data for the divorced population only, with no comparison with those who remained married. Moreover, official data excludes those who were separated but not divorced, and therefore do not allow a comprehensive investigation of people whose marriages had ended. Both Bracher et al (1993) and Roden (1989) investigated the temporal and life course determinants of divorce in Australia but only included women in their sample. The study by Bradbury and Norris (2005) is the first published longitudinal examination of socioeconomic determinants of marriage breakdown in Australia and includes both husbands and wives characteristics, but little attention is given to gender differences. Finally, DeVaus et al (2003) conducted a detailed examination of the effects of premarital cohabitation on the likelihood of marriage breakdown within eight years of marriage but did not specifically examine other social characteristics (even though some were included in the models as controls). Similarly, Sarantakos (1994) focussed on the impact of cohabitation on marital quality and marriage dissolution paying little attention to other structural factors. Therefore, while previous research provides important background information and raises key issues, there is still a large gap in our understanding of gender differences in the relationship between sociostructural factors and marriage breakdown in Australia.

**What does this thesis do?**

The main aim of this thesis is to investigate gender differences in the sociostructural predictors of marriage breakdown such as family background, relationship and fertility and socioeconomic factors. I use retrospective life history data on 8,993 first marriages from the first wave (2001) of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey (HILDA), a large nationally representative survey of 7,682 households and 13,914 individuals. I make two main contributions to previous research: first, I undertake a baseline study of gender differences in the social determinants of marriage breakdown in Australia; second, I extend previous research and examine whether there are gender differences in the decision to separate based on social characteristics.

This study complements and extends previous Australian research on marriage breakdown in several respects. I use a large nationally representative population sample rather than purposive samples of separated and divorced people. I focus on structural and demographic determinants of marriage breakdown rather than respondents perceptions of why the relationship broke down, or general divorce trends, which is where much current Australian divorce research is concentrated. And I consider a broad range of social characteristics. Finally, I compare and contrast the associations between the social correlates of marriage breakdown for men and women, whereas previous Australian research has largely ignored gender differences in the determinants of marriage breakdown. For the purposes of this study I define marriage breakdown as either separated for at least 1 year (permanently separated) and/or divorced.

Additionally, I extend the international literature on marriage breakdown and examine whether sociostructural predictors of marriage breakdown are associated with which spouse made the final decision to separate. With the exception of only

three studies, all previous research on the social predictors of marriage breakdown examines gender differences in marriage breakdown in the effects of husbands' and wives', or men's and women's, social characteristics on marriage breakdown. In contrast I take into account gender in the dependent variable by examining which spouse initiated marital separation with three possible outcomes: wife-initiated, husband-initiated and jointly initiated separation. Therefore rather than treating marriage breakdown as a uniform 'event' I treat it as a 'process' allowing for one or both spouses to take the initiative to separate. Previous research indicates that more often than not the decision to separate is made by one spouse, without the knowledge of or agreement from the other. In addition, I further develop this literature by exploring differences in the effects of marital children on husband's and wife's decisions to separate or remain married.

My focus on legal marriage means that I do not examine relationship dissolution in defacto unions. While long term defacto partnerships are growing in popularity and increasing numbers of children are being born in defacto relationships (De Vaus 2004), cohabitation remains a step into marriage with the majority of people in defacto relationships moving on to legally marry. Marriage remains the dominant form of long term partnering in Australia (Baxter 2003). Further, by only examining separation and divorce I do not provide a comprehensive investigation of the stability or instability of marital relationships. There are other factors such as quality of the relationship and relationship satisfaction, which are also important indicators of marital stability. Finally, I focus on sociostructural factors, which have been found to be important predictors of marriage breakdown but do not offer much insight into the micro relational processes of marriage breakdown within couples, such as people's reported reasons for divorcing or the quality of their interpersonal relationships.

### **The structure of the thesis**

Before reviewing the literature on the sociostructural predictors of divorce, I provide a brief history of marriage and family life in Australia as background and context for the current study. The purpose of Chapter 2 is to set the scene by exploring broader historical social and policy contexts that underpin contemporary marriage and family life in Australia. In Chapter 3 I examine the main theories and research literatures that have emerged to explain the increasing rate of marriage breakdown since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One persistent theme, either explicit or implicit, in many of the explanations offered in Chapter 3, is that gender differences in the sociostructural predictors of marriage breakdown are important for understanding why marriages break down. In Chapter 4 I take up this theme and further explore the gendered nature of marriage and family life and the implications for marriage breakdown. Even though gender is an important sociostructural factor for explaining marriage breakdown and while there is a growing international body of literature examining gender differences in the association between husbands' and wives' characteristics and marriage breakdown, little research examines gender processes in marriage outcomes by examining which spouse initiates separation.

In Chapter 5 I describe the sample, measures and analytic approach to be used in the thesis. Chapter 6 is the first empirical chapter, where I examine gender differences in the patterning of association between women's and men's social characteristics and the risk of marriage breakdown. This analysis establishes a baseline of patterning for the sociostructural determinants of divorce and gender differences between them. No previous Australian studies have explicitly investigated gender differences in the social correlates of marriage breakdown. In Chapter 7, I extend the analysis in Chapter 6 and explore the gendered nature of marriage breakdown by investigating the sociostructural conditions and circumstances

that influence wives or husbands to take the initiative to end their marriage. One aspect of marriage and family life where gender differences are most pronounced is around child bearing and rearing. In Chapter 8, I focus on the role of marital children in determining whether husbands or wives are more or less likely to initiate separation when there are marital children involved. Finally, in Chapter 9 I assess the implications of my findings for theory, future international and Australian research into the causes of marriage breakdown and Australian family policy

In sum, this thesis builds on and extends Australian research on marriage breakdown by undertaking a gender comparison of the sociostructural determinants of marriage breakdown using a recent nationally representative population sample. I then further develop our knowledge of gender differences in the social determinants of marriage breakdown by examining gender differences in which spouse initiates separation. With only a few exceptions this has not been done before. Finally, I build upon this knowledge and undertake a detailed investigation of the associations between marital children and which spouse initiates separation.

## Chapter 2

### From Desertion to Divorce: A brief history of marriage breakdown in Australia

---

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I overview the main features of marriage and family life in Australia since 1788, when Australia was colonised by the British. The legislative and normative foundations for relations between the sexes that affected marriage and family life were established in early colonial Australia and their legacy can still be found in contemporary Australia. Further, even though many of the changes that have occurred in marriage and family life in Australia are similar to those in other Western countries, the Australian experience also differs in many respects. It is therefore important to provide an understanding of the specifics of the Australian context.

#### **Pre-divorce colonial Australia: 1788 to the 1850s**

Early colonial Australia was a uniquely hostile setting for marriage and family life, and 'traditional' forms of marriage - husband, wife, and their children - were virtually non-existent. The hostile environment was underpinned by the gender imbalance in the colonies. Only 15 percent of convicts transported between 1788 and 1858 were women (Dixson 1999; Ryan and Conlon 1989). Few soldiers and male convicts brought their families with them to Australia, hence the colonies were mostly populated by single men and married men separated from their families. At the same time women's labour was considered unimportant for the establishment of the Australian colonies and was therefore undervalued and underpaid (Dixson 1999). Many women, both convicts and free-settlers, faced with few alternatives turned to prostitution for survival (Summers 1975). Other women 'prostituted' themselves for accommodation, living in defacto cohabitation with freed convicts, free settlers, or

soldiers, although these unions were characterised by high rates of extramarital birth and desertion (Dixson 1999). Marriage was relatively rare (Burns 1980a).

Marriage and family life did not become a visible feature of Australian society until the 1830s mostly due to the free migration of families and 'respectable' young women (Burns 1980a). But with the slowing and eventual ceasing of convict transportation England reduced funding for development in the new colonies and Australia was hit by an employment slump in the early 1840s. With high unemployment there was an increase in desertion by husbands unable to support their families (Ryan and Conlon 1989). Due to prevailing attitudes towards women and women's work, deserted wives and their children were vulnerable to poverty (Twomey 1997). Wife desertion and its consequences were identified as a social problem by the colonial governments, but there was little they could do to prevent it. For example the New South Wales Colonial Government passed legislation in 1840 to force deserting husbands to continue to maintain their families but these laws were difficult to enforce and it was easy for husbands to disappear and avoid this responsibility (Burns 1980a; Twomey 1997).

With the gold rushes in Victoria and New South Wales there was a period of relative economic prosperity in the mid- to late-1800s. There was not only new wealth generated by those successful in the gold diggings but as men left their jobs to seek gold, there was also a shortage of labour and consequently wages increased (Ryan and Conlon 1989). Yet, relative prosperity did not generate relative stability in family life; many husbands left their wives and families for long periods of time seeking gold or employment, often never to return (Twomey 1997).

During this early colonial period there was no legal provision for the termination of marriage. This is not to say that marriages remained intact, but rather that the termination of marriage was often achieved informally without legal sanction.

In England a common law rule existed where “a person could be presumed dead, who had not been heard of for seven years by those who would be most likely to hear of them if they were alive” (Finlay 2005: 29). This ‘7 year rule’ was used to end a marriage where one spouse either through desertion or transportation had left the marriage. The rule was often misinterpreted (or misused) and taken to mean that once a marriage was broken, for example by transportation, that the way was open to remarriage and many people remarried before the 7 years had lapsed (Finlay 2005). Therefore, despite the unavailability of legal divorce people still found ways out of unworkable marriages and importantly for women into remarriage. But the full extent of desertion, separation and “divorce” in early colonial Australia is largely unrecorded and unknown.

### **Industrialisation, Federation and divorce in Australia**

The late 1800s and early 1900s were a period of major social transformation in Australian society (Reiger 1985). Three main features of this period that had implications for marriage and family life were the introduction of divorce laws, industrialisation and Federation. In the mid- to late-1800s, divorce laws were passed by all colonial governments. The divorce laws did not, however, arise out of a perceived social need for the legal termination of marriage in Australia. Rather with the passing of the 1857 English Divorce Act through British Parliament, Britain strongly encouraged the Australian colonies to introduce the Act to achieve uniformity across the empire (Finlay 1999; Finlay 2005). In some colonies intense debate surrounded whether and to what extent the Act should be adopted. Religious and conservative groups opposed the introduction of divorce laws altogether on the grounds that it would lead to the moral degradation of the social order (Burns 1980a; Geoghegan 1888).

Moreover, many aspects of the Act were irrelevant for residents in the Australian colonies as social conditions in England during the late 1800s were quite different from those in Australia. While the Act provided the possibility of legal divorce for the first time in Australia, it only made restricted provision for women to divorce their husbands. Under the Act husbands were able to divorce their wives solely on the ground of adultery whereas wives had to prove adultery as well as aggravating circumstances, such as cruelty, before they could sue for divorce (Stone 1990). This is referred to as the adultery double standard (Finlay 2005). The New South Wales and Western Australian colonial governments were unsuccessful in their attempts to introduce grounds of adultery for women as well as men so that women could more easily access divorce and remarry as a way out of poverty (Burns 1980a).

Further, other aspects of marriage breakdown particular to the Australian context remained largely unresolved by the British Act. In the larger colonies, particularly New South Wales, wife desertion continued to be a major social issue. But under the British Divorce Act divorce could only be obtained in the domicile of the husband, however, if a husband had deserted his wife and family and did not want to be found wives had few options for divorce. The Western Australian colonial government tried to extend the grounds of divorce by including desertion (James 1985). However, all attempts to modify the British Act for Australian conditions were unsuccessful and the British Divorce Act of 1857 was adopted unchanged in each of the six Australian colonies between 1858 and 1873 (Finlay 2005).

The new divorce laws had little impact and divorce rates remained low (Burns 1980a). Reliable Australia-wide statistics are not available for the late colonial period but in Victoria for example an average of 13 divorce decrees were issued per annum between 1862 and 1890 and only around half the petitions for divorce were successful (James 1985). The limited economic opportunities afforded to women at the time

would have also contributed to the low divorce rates. Women's wages were set at around half of men's (Ryan and Conlon 1989) and married women were expected to relinquish their financial resources to their husbands upon marriage unless an alternate pre-nuptial arrangement was made (James 1985). Therefore women, irrespective of their employment status or class, had little access to economic resources that would support themselves or a family and they were tied financially to husbands.

The processes of industrialisation that swept through Australia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century were part of a world wide transformation in economic production. Industrialisation changed the nature of marriage and family life because economic production was removed from the home to the factories of industrialised capitalism. The separation of work and home life in combination with prevailing gender role attitudes that men were responsible for supporting their wives and children laid the foundations of the male breadwinner model of household production that has since dominated Australian wage and family policy. In this instance 'dominance' implies that not only was the male breadwinner model statistically the most common form of household organisation, but this approach to marriage and family life was normatively and culturally held as the ideal and reinforced and upheld by policy, legislation and judicial decision making.

Industrialisation also provided women with more, albeit limited, employment opportunities. While the large scale movement of women into factory work did not occur until the 1920s, with the growth of secondary production that accompanied industrialisation the numbers of single and working class women employed in the factories increased, particularly in the textile and clothing manufacturing industries (Ryan and Conlon 1989). Nevertheless, women's wages continued to be set at about half of men's and were not sufficient to support a family.

Concurrently with industrialisation, changes were also occurring in ideal notions of masculinity and femininity and gender relations. Prior to the 1890s the dominant masculine ideal in the colonies was that of the ‘loner’, broadly standing for a working class (Irish), ‘mateship’ model of masculinity. This ideal largely emerged from the gender imbalance in the colonies which resulted in bachelorhood as the only option for many men. During the 1890’s a middle class masculine identity, the ‘family man’, began to emerge and challenge the loner ideal (Dixson 1999). The family man ideal was also a gendered relationship ideal as it implied children and a ‘wife and mother’ at home (Ryan and Conlon 1989). There were also changes taking place in the regulation of the family through charitable organisations aimed at reforming family and personal behaviour such as hygiene, physical health and moral conduct (Reiger 1985).

The other event that had implications for marriage, family life and marriage breakdown in Australia during this era was Federation. With Federation in 1901, the Commonwealth Parliament of Australia was given power to make federal laws including regulation of marriage and divorce but each State and Territory continued with independent systems of family law founded on the 1857 British Divorce Act (Quick and Garran 1901). Nevertheless there was an increased involvement by state governments in regulating the everyday lives of citizens, and by 1923 most States and Territories (with the exception of Victoria) had extended the grounds of divorce to remove the adultery double standard (Finlay 2005).

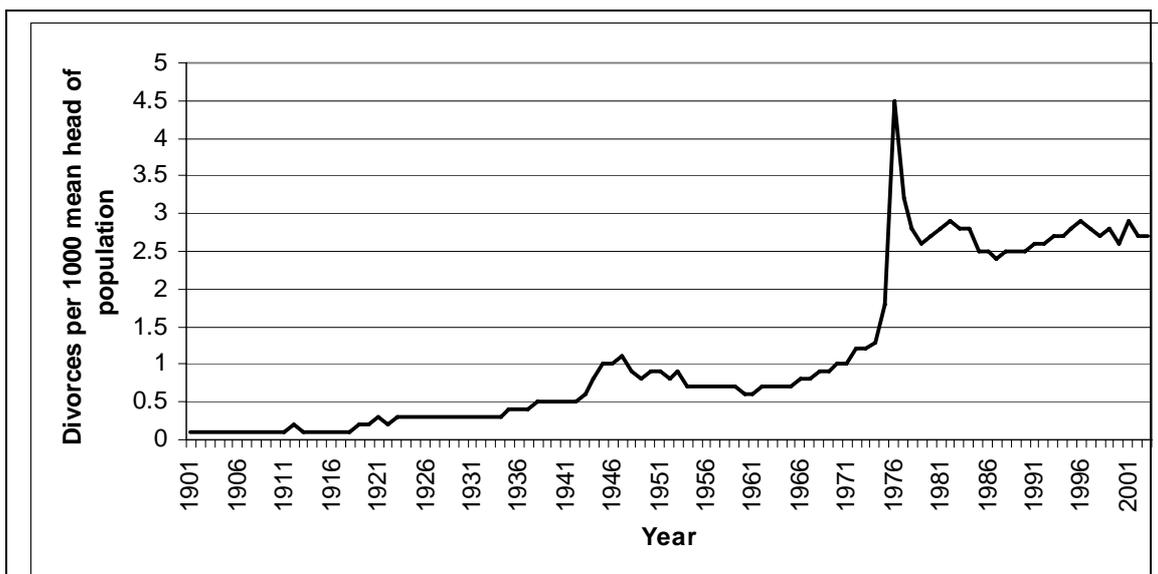
Extending the grounds of divorce for women had little effect on the divorce rate. Figure 2.1 plots the crude divorce rate<sup>1</sup> in Australia since 1901<sup>2</sup>. At the turn of

---

<sup>1</sup> The crude divorce rate is the number of divorces granted each year divided by the population aged 15 and over divided by 1000.

<sup>2</sup> Prior to 1901 Australian divorce data were collected independently by each colonial state and reporting varied from state to state, consequently reliable Australia-wide figures are not available before 1901.

the 20<sup>th</sup> Century divorce was virtually non-existent in Australia with only 398 divorces granted in 1901 and a crude divorce rate of less than 0.1 (ABS 1971). This is partly because at around the same time, the States and Courts were introducing legislation that would confirm women's secondary position in the wage and employment market well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Ryan and Conlon 1989). In the early 1900s the standard practices of limiting women's wages to half of men's and the restriction and rejection of women in certain industries and occupations were written into legally enforceable wage awards. These judicial decisions formally established wages and working conditions, the nature of which made it very difficult for women to support themselves outside of marriage.



**Figure 2.1: Crude divorce rate, Australia 1901 - 2003**

Source: (ABS 1971; ABS 2005a).

The 1907 Harvester Case judgment institutionalised the ideology of the 'living wage' which became the dominant ideology of the public, the unions, and the courts. A living wage was defined as a fair and reasonable remuneration for the average employee living in a civilised community (Ryan and Conlon 1989: 90 - 91). This definition included those who were responsible for keeping families but women were

excluded as they were not presumed to be responsible for keeping families. Hence the living wage was really a 'male wage'. The ideology of the 'male living wage' and its institutionalisation in wage awards in the early 1900s ensured that women earned much less than men, reinforcing women's dependence on a husband for financial support and restricting their alternatives to marriage, including divorce.

**Divorce in the war years: 1914 to 1945**

As with most other nations involved, the effect of both World War I and World War II on marriage and family life in Australia was dramatic. Men and husbands became soldiers and many did not return from war. Women's labour became valued and essential to the war effort and wives became family breadwinners. There was also an increase in cross-national marriages, particularly between Australian women and British and American servicemen stationed in Australia during World War II. And in the intervening years the Great Depression placed hardship on men, women and families. Overall, the crude divorce rate in Australia increased 10-fold from 0.1 per thousand mean head of population aged over 15 in 1918 to 1.0 in the late 1940s but was relatively low compared to crude divorce rates in other countries at the time such as the U.S. and Britain (Burns 1980a; Parsons and Bales 1956: 4).

World War I did not dramatically increase women's employment in Australia as it did in other countries such as Britain and the U.S., but the range of occupations and industries in which women worked expanded (Ryan and Conlon 1989).

Women's wages remained at around 50 to 66 percent of the male wage, depending on the industry and occupation, and strong divisions between men's and women's work persisted. The crude divorce rate doubled from 0.1 to 0.2 per thousand mean head of population aged over 15 after World War I because of wartime conditions whereby marriages were destabilised, relationships were dislocated and there was an increase in cross-national marriages, particularly between Australian women and overseas

soldiers stationed in Australia. Due to desertion of wives by overseas born servicemen the Commonwealth regulated divorce for the first time, and after World War I the Matrimonial Causes (Expeditionary Forces) Bill 1919 was passed, allowing deserted wives in Australia to take divorce proceedings against husbands not in the same domicile. This law expired 12 months after enactment (Finlay 2005).

The rate of divorce continued to increase after World War I and during the Great Depression. Family life was not only destabilised by the war but faced further hardship as a result of the Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s. There is evidence that the Depression was particularly harsh in Australia compared to other countries (Firth 2000). Wife desertion was prevalent. During the Depression the principle of a living wage was overturned in wage arbitration and the guiding principle in fixing wages became the 'capacity of industry to pay', and consequently all wages were reduced by 10 percent (Ryan and Conlon 1989). Unemployment for men rose to unprecedented levels of over 30 percent (Firth 2000). While women's work and wages were devalued their unemployment levels remained lower than men's possibly because married women were underreporting unemployment but also because women had moved into industries relatively unaffected by the depression, such as clerical work (Aveling and Damousi 1991). Working women came under increasing social pressure. They were attacked by men and other women for taking men's jobs and unions actively excluded women from many industries and occupations.

During World War II women's employment changed more dramatically both in participation rates and through movement into previously male dominated fields (Aveling and Damousi 1991; Firth 2000; Ryan and Conlon 1989). With the establishment of the Women's Employment Board in 1942 gains were also made in relation to wage equality and working conditions (Aveling and Damousi 1991). Even

though the paid work women performed through the war years was varied and often essential, for the most part it did not gain them skilled status. After World War II many women resigned from their jobs to make way for men returning home. But not all men returned to their jobs and not all women left their jobs, and disputes about women's employment and wages continued after the war (Ryan and Conlon 1989).

From the beginning to the end of World War II the crude divorce rate doubled from 0.5 to 1.0 per thousand mean head of population aged over 15. The government responded to the growing numbers of women living without husbands by creating a 'pension' for widowed, deserted, separated and divorced women in 1942 (Firth 2000). During World War II greater numbers of British and American servicemen were stationed in Australia and married Australian women than in World War I. Again many of them deserted their Australian wives and returned home alone (Moore 1981). The Commonwealth government passed the Matrimonial Causes Bill (1945) which made provisions during and after World War II for Australian citizens to divorce their husband or wife not in the same domicile. This Bill expired 10 years after enactment in 1955 (Finlay 2005). After the Second World War family life in Australia was characterised by relative affluence, low unemployment, urbanisation and the dominance of the male breadwinner model of the family. Similar patterns were evident in other comparable Western countries, such as the U.S., Canada, Britain and New Zealand (Baker 2001; Cherlin 1992).

#### **Australia's first federal divorce law**

Even though war time conditions meant that women's labour was more valued than in the past and they were granted some wage concessions, this changed after the war for the majority of women. The Basic Wage Inquiry conducted 1949 to 1950 overturned many decisions made by the Women's Employment Board during WWII and adult women workers were restricted to earning 75 percent of the male basic wage (Ryan

and Conlon 1989). Consequently after the war, wage policy reverted to a male living wage concept with the 'basic wage' attached to the male breadwinner as opposed to the 'industry' based wage concept established during the depression.

The 1950s were the heyday of the male 'breadwinner' and female 'homemaker' family model in Australia (Gilding 2001; Murphy 2002). As indicated throughout this chapter the breadwinner model was built upon long-standing cultural ideas of gender identity and policy ideas of the male family wage but was made feasible for the first time in Australia's history with the economic prosperity in the post World War II period (Murphy 2002). The architects of post-War reconstruction created a wage-earner welfare state where the wage earner was presumed to be male (Castles 2004; Firth 2000). Policies including taxation, employment, wage fixation and social security all supported the male breadwinner family model (Broomhill and Sharp 2005; Castles 2004; Mitchell 1998). The other half of the breadwinner model was the wife and mother. These same policies had the effect of limiting women's economic opportunities outside marriage, increasing their dependence on a husband for financial support and reducing their alternatives to marriage and family life, including access to divorce, even if their married life was unhappy and unsustainable. During this era legal divorce was a relatively rare event and by 1961 the crude divorce rate had dropped to 0.6 per thousand mean head of population aged over 15. This was similar to pre-WWII levels.

It seems strange then that within this climate Australia's first federal divorce law, the 1959 Matrimonial Causes Act, was passed through parliament. But the passing of the law reflects the growing tensions in the male breadwinner society (Walter 2001). Even though their numbers were still relatively few, the number of women in paid employment increased and there was a continued push for sex equality in wages that had begun during WWII (Murphy 2002; Ryan and Conlon 1989). The

new divorce laws changed some of the disadvantages that existing matrimonial and property laws posed for women by improving property settlements and payment of maintenance and allowing former spouses living in different states to divorce. Similar to the debates a century before, religious and conservative groups argued against extending the grounds for divorce. There was major concern that making divorce easy to obtain would precipitate a moral decline in society (Murphy 2002). In addition church based religious organisations were concerned about the inclusion of the 5-year 'no fault' clause, where after 5 years of separation with no possibility of reconciliation a couple could divorce without fault of either spouse being proved. This was seen as the secularisation of divorce.

When introducing the Bill to Parliament great care was taken to emphasise that the law contributed to stronger marriages by enabling people to leave bad marriages and have the opportunity to enter into better unions and taking into account the welfare of children in court decisions (Finlay 2005). Further the Marriage Act (1961), which was introduced at the same time, made provision for the Commonwealth to fund marriage and family education services to aid reconciliation between spouses (Halford and Simons 2005). Nevertheless, the primary function of the Matrimonial Causes Act (1959) was to dissolve marriage and there were 14 grounds upon which 'matrimonial relief' could be granted, including (in brief):

1. Adultery
2. Desertion for 2 years
3. Marriage not consummated
4. Cruelty for 1 year
5. Rape, sodomy or bestiality
6. Alcoholism, drug addiction for 2 years
7. Husband imprisoned for 3 years over a 5 year period or habitually left the petitioner without support
8. Imprisonment for life or sentenced to death
9. Physical violence, attempted murder within first year of marriage
10. Non-payment of maintenance for 2 years in separation period before divorce available
11. Failure of restitution of conjugal rights for 1 year

12. Insanity
  13. Separation for 5 years
  14. Absence of partner for sufficient time to presume they are dead
- Source: (The Parliament of the Commonwealth 1959).

For the first time Australia had unified laws of nullity and divorce but there was little change in the number of divorces granted. In fact the divorce rate dropped slightly in 1961 (see Figure 2.1). Essentially the Matrimonial Causes Act represented little departure from the prevailing State divorce laws of the time which were founded on the 1857 English Divorce Act of 100 years before. Virtually all grounds for divorce required proof of fault and the process remained costly and prohibitive (Funder, 1996). The crude divorce rate began to increase steadily from the mid-1960s but remained relatively low until the mid-70s and the introduction of no-fault divorce.

#### **No-fault divorce**

The dominance of the male breadwinner family model began to erode in earnest in the early 1960s (Broomhill and Sharp 2005). Women's participation in the work force was increasing, particularly among married women and mothers (Baxter 2003; Ryan and Conlon 1989). Further, since the 1960s there was a gradual shift in attitudes toward women's participation in and access to political and economic spheres, reflected in legislative changes such as the 'equal pay for equal work' action taken by the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission in 1969 (Ryan and Conlon 1989: 162). In addition the relative economic prosperity and full employment witnessed in the 1950s was dissipating and employment for men was becoming less certain. Finally, other changes were occurring to the structure of families in ways that undermined the breadwinner model (Broomhill and Sharp 2005). For example, the availability of the contraceptive pill since 1961 in Australia has given women greater control over fertility and family size.

The crude divorce rate increased gradually from the mid-1960s until 1975. In 1976 no fault divorce was introduced and the crude divorce rate spiked to 4.6 per thousand mean head of population aged over 15 (see Figure 2.1). The two main aims of the 1975 Family Law Act were first to support marriage and the family and second, to support the right of a party to leave marriage upon its irretrievable breakdown as evidenced by 12 months separation (Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. 1998). The fourteen grounds of divorce were replaced by one – irretrievable breakdown. Within a few years the crude divorce rate dropped back to around 2.6 per thousand mean head of population over the age of 15 and has oscillated between 2.5 and 3.0 since the late 1970s. The introduction of the 1975 Family Law Act and with it no-fault divorce permanently changed the patterning of divorce in Australia.

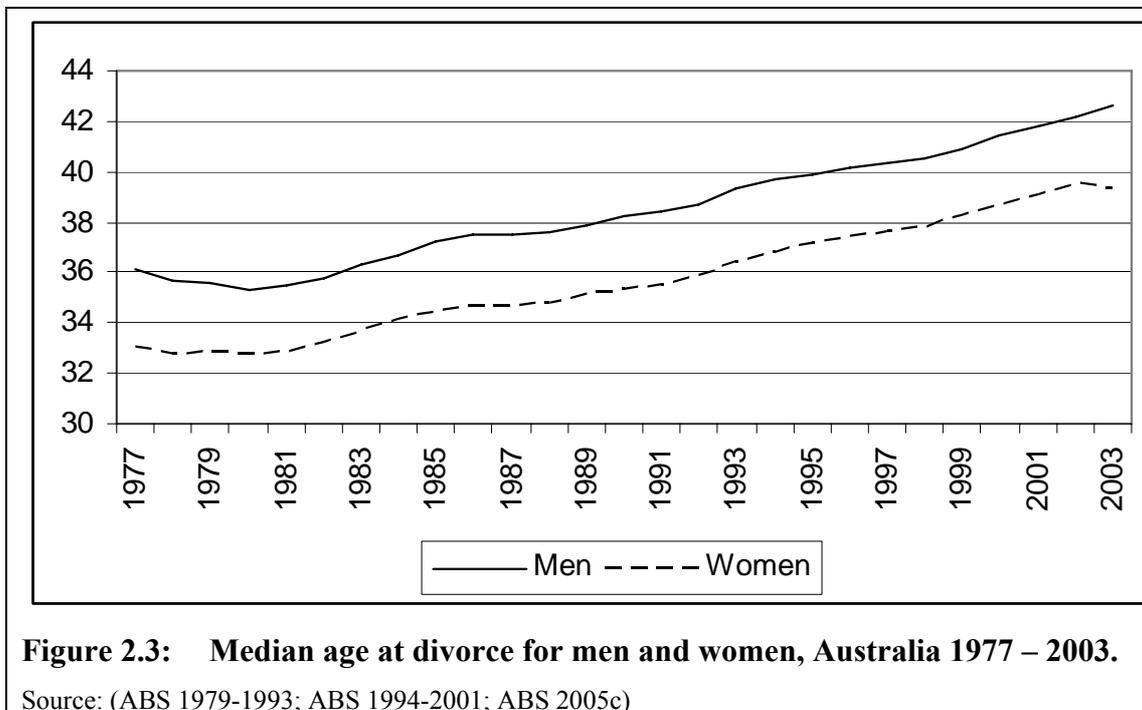
Some argue that the easy access to divorce provided by the Family Law Act was a major cause of the substantial increase in divorce in Australia from the mid-1970s. Research indicates, however, that the rise in the crude divorce rate following the introduction of the Family Law Act was relatively short-term. Within 5 years of the Act being introduced crude divorce rates had settled to a rate that reflected linear trends established in the mid-1960s (Ozdowski and Hattie 1981). It is likely that the spike in divorce was primarily in response to pent-up demand from couples who had separated but not divorced in the late 1960s and early 1970s. There is some survey evidence for this. Burns (1980a; 1980b) conducted a study on separation and divorce in late 1975, prior to the introduction of no-fault divorce, and found that some separated respondents were waiting for the introduction of the Family Law Act to divorce legally. Other than minor yearly fluctuations the steady increase in the crude divorce rate has flattened out and there has been little change since the early 1980s (see Figure 2.1).

***Continuity and change since no-fault divorce***

Even though crude divorce rates have stabilised, divorce trends continue to evolve and change in Australia. This is more clearly revealed if we use measures other than the crude divorce rate. The crude divorce rate indicates the rate of breakdown in the total Australian population age over 15, including those who are married and unmarried. Given that rates of marriage have also declined since the late 1970s, the crude rate may be under-estimating marriage breakdown because its denominator is not restricted to the married population (De Vaus 2004). An alternative indicator is the divorce rate which uses the married population as the denominator. Figure 2.2 shows the divorce rate in Australia since 1981. Compared to the crude divorce rate, the divorce rate shows a very similar patterning of divorce in Australia since the early 1980s but the peaks and troughs are more pronounced. Within the married population the rate of divorce has varied from a low of 10.6 per 1000 married men or women in 1987 to a high of 13.1 in 2001.

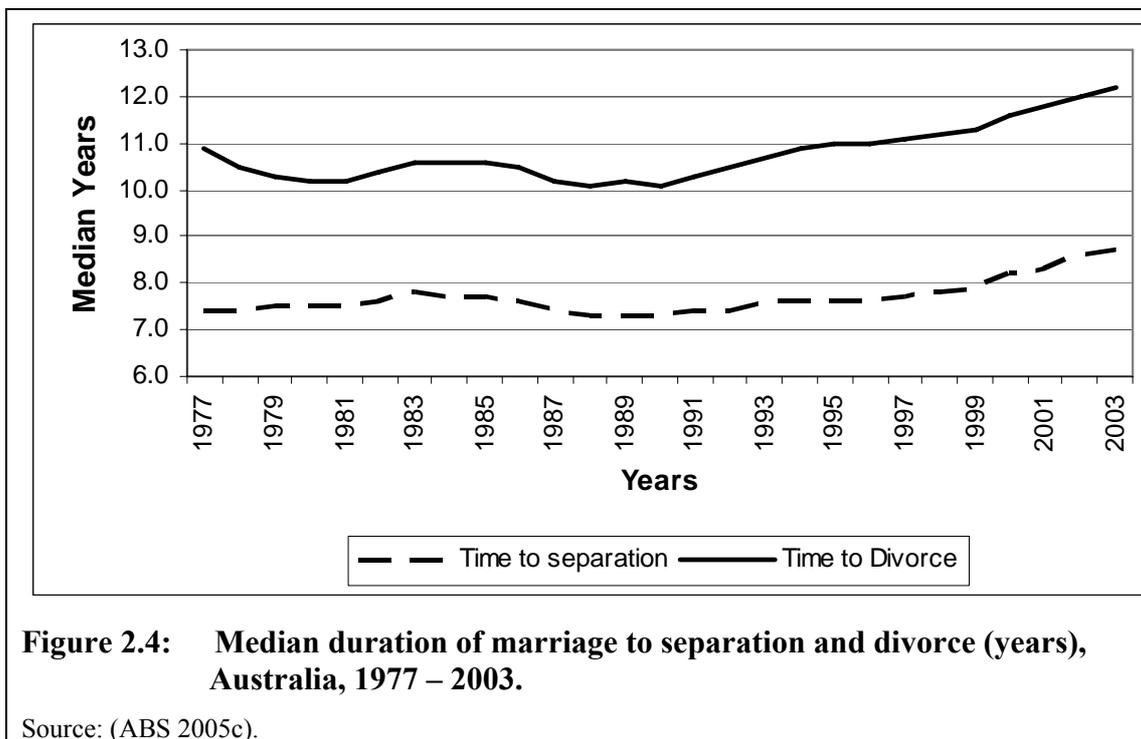


Other characteristics of divorce in Australia such as age at divorce, average time to divorce and number of dependent children involved in divorce have also changed since the 1980s. These changes reflect broader social and demographic changes in relationship formation and fertility timing in Australia over the last three decades. Figure 2.3 illustrates that since the introduction of the Family Law Act in 1976 the median age at divorce has increased from 36.1 in 1977 to 42.6 in 2003 for men and from 33 to 39.3 over the same time for women.



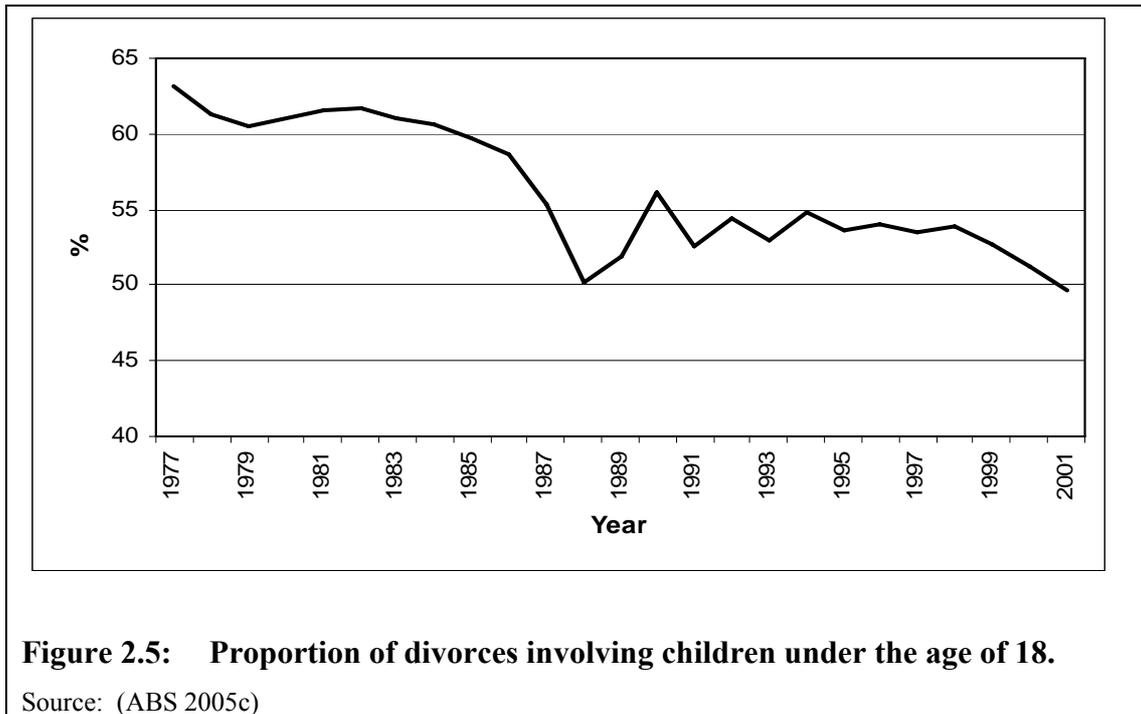
It is likely that the median age at divorce is increasing due to two factors. First, people are marrying at older ages. In 1977 the median age at first marriage was 23.8 for men and by 2003 this had increased to 29.6. Similarly for women the median age at first marriage increased from 21.4 in 1977 to 27.8 in 2003 (ABS 2005d). This increase in age at marriage is partly attributable to an increasing number of couples

who cohabit prior to marriage. In 1971 the proportion of people who cohabited before marriage was around 16 percent and by 2003 was around 75 percent (ABS 2005d). Second, the median duration of marriage to separation and divorce has increased. Figure 2.4 shows that the median duration of marriage prior to separation and divorce increased by approximately one year between 1977 and 2003, with the majority of that increase occurring over the last decade.



Another changing trend in the characteristics of divorce is the proportion of divorces involving children under the age of 18. Figure 2.5 illustrates that there has been a decline in the proportion of divorces involving dependent children from 63 percent in 1977 to less than 50 percent by 2003. This reduction in the proportion of divorces with dependent children is due in part to delayed child bearing. For women the median age at first birth has increased from an all time low of 25.4 in 1971 to an all time high of 30.2 in 2002. Similarly for men median age at first birth has

increased over this same time period from 28 to 32.5 (where the father's age was known) (ABS 2005b). Even though the proportion of divorces involving children has dropped since the early 1980s the actual number of children whose parents divorce each year has remained fairly constant at around 50,000 children (ABS 2001).



When considering changing trends in marriage breakdown the limitations of official statistics also need to be taken into consideration. First, defacto couples are not captured in these figures so the full extent of relationship breakdown in Australia is not represented. Only the legal dissolution of marriage is shown in these figures. Also, official divorce statistics tend to under represent marriage breakdown at any given point because many marriages end in permanent separation and never proceed to divorce or do not proceed to divorce for several years; the median time from separation to divorce was 3.5 years in 2003 (ABS, 2005c). In these circumstances

marriage breakdown is not officially recorded until divorce is awarded (ABS 1999a; ABS 2000)<sup>3</sup>.

Despite these limitations the general picture presented by official divorce statistics is that the rate of divorce in Australia grew steadily for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, spurred on by the two World Wars and the depression and spiking with the introduction of no-fault divorce but has stabilised since the early 1980s. Despite a plateau in the overall rate of divorce over the last three decades, marital separation and divorce continue to be a pervasive feature of Australian society. Moreover, the nature and characteristics of divorcing couples continue to change with increases in the median age of divorce, the median number of years to separation and divorce and a decrease in the proportion of divorces involving children under 18 (although the actual number of children affected each year has remained constant). All of these trends suggest that marriage breakdown continues to be an important social issue to investigate in the Australian context.

***The current marriage and divorce policy climate***

Over the last decade divorce policy has concentrated on two broad aspects of reform. The first is legal reform of the 1975 Family Law Act designed to reduce the emotional and financial burden of divorce. The second major focus of recent policy reform, and the most relevant for the purposes of this research, has been on policies that aim to prevent marriage breakdown. The Parliamentary Report *To Have and to Hold* highlighted the failure of the Court system and the Family Law Act in its operational form to provide adequate support to marriages and families (Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. 1998). Since then, a number of government policy initiatives have focussed on

---

<sup>3</sup> The ABS 5-yearly census collects information about marital status (including separation), but this data is not collected as regularly as the official divorce data and does not provide information about rates of separation each given year.

preventing separation and divorce primarily by increasing funding to relationship and pre-marital education and marriage counselling services and the evaluation of those services. Such initiatives include the Men and Family Relationship Initiative (1999-2000) and the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (2001-ongoing). For example, under the Men and Family Relationship Initiative funding was awarded to 46 community based organisations to target men for counselling and education programs designed specifically to assist men deal with relationship difficulties.

Most recently the Commonwealth Government allocated \$397.2 million between 2005 and 2009 to implement changes to the family law system including expanding services and facilities to assist families. The services directed towards preventing marriage breakdown are primarily focussed on marriage education and relationship counselling services. Research suggests that these types of services are effective in reducing marital conflict and marriage breakdown across a range of social and demographic groups but have some limitations (Halford et al. 2006; Halford and Simons 2005; Stanley et al. 2006). The risk factors for separation and divorce are complex and extend far beyond couple and individual dynamics where these policy initiatives are focused. Those couples who are most at risk of marriage breakdown are also the least likely to use marriage education or marriage counselling services (Halford et al. 2006).

While for some couples divorce is not necessarily a negative outcome and is the best solution to an unhappy or unworkable marriage, for many marriages that end in divorce it is believed that with appropriate help couples could have negotiated happy and workable marital relationships. Research identifying broader social and demographic factors associated with marriage breakdown and who initiates separation, such as that proposed here, can complement recent policy initiatives and aid in the identification of 'at risk' groups who can be targeted in prevention

campaigns promoting the use of premarital education and relationship counselling (Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. 1998; Halford 2000; Halford and Simons 2005).

### **Conclusion**

The foundations for policy and attitudes to marriage and family life were established in early convict Australia which was characterised by a disproportionately single male population, low rates of legal marriage and high rates of wife desertion. Generally women were marginalised, their labour was undervalued and they were seen and treated as second class citizens. Even as the colonies developed and more traditional forms of marriage and family life emerged, gender relations were, and still are to some extent, underpinned by these early foundations. As Burns notes, “every generation in Australia’s history has included a significant proportion of deserted women and children” (Burns 1980a: 126). Throughout most of Australia’s history deserted, or unhappy wives have had very few alternatives. They could not divorce in order to remarry and wage legislation ensured that women’s work did not pay enough to support a family.

Since World War II this situation has gradually changed accompanied by a steady increase in the rate of divorce until the mid-1970s. Despite the relative stability in divorce rates since the early 1980s the nature and composition of the divorcing population has continued to change with increases in age at divorce, time to divorce and the proportion of divorces involving children. Further, there is widespread government and community concern about divorce and its consequences as evidenced by recent government policy and legislative reforms.

Broadly speaking the increase in separation and divorce in most Western countries since WWII has been attributed to changing gender roles, changing social attitudes towards marriage and divorce and increases in women’s access to economic

resources such as secondary and tertiary education and participation in paid employment (Carmichael, Webster and McDonald 1996; Cherlin 1992; England and Farkas 1986). In the next chapter I explore the extent to which previous research has found evidence that these and other sociostructural factors explain why some marriages end in separation and divorce, while some stay together.

## Chapter 3

### Who gets divorced? Theoretical insights and empirical research into the sociostructural predictors of marriage breakdown

---

#### **Introduction**

The brief history of marriage breakdown in Australia in Chapter 2 broadly illustrates how marriage breakdown has increased particularly since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. It also draws attention to the importance of social and policy contexts for marriage and family life. As the incidence of marriage breakdown has increased, not just in Australia but in all developed Western nations, so too have attempts by social researchers to understand and explain these trends. In this chapter I overview the key theoretical perspectives, namely neoclassical economics, social exchange and exchange bargaining theory, that inform contemporary debates and research into marriage breakdown (Becker 1981; Blau 1964; Parsons and Bales 1956). I also review the empirical research on the social correlates of marriage breakdown and identify the factors of interest to the current study. In my review of the literature I develop the empirical literature by reviewing and discussing it within a theoretically derived framework.

#### **Theoretical perspectives on marriage breakdown**

Even though Becker's neoclassical economic theory of household organisation was developed with reference to a relatively outdated and idealised 1950s view of household organisation where a male head of household specialises in paid employment and a female head of household specialises in domestic labour and care work, current debates about marriage breakdown continue to employ ideas and assumptions drawn from this view. Becker argues that the optimal household model is one where the male spouse concentrates on paid employment while the female

spouse runs the household and raises children (Becker 1973; Becker 1981; Becker, Landes and Michael 1977). In other words a successful marriage relies on complementary inputs from each spouse. According to Becker the allocation of household roles is gendered by 'comparative advantage'. He argues this is the process whereby household roles are most efficiently allocated. Since women are the biological producers of children it is more efficient for them to stay at home and care for those children, while men are more efficient at accumulating human capital and so should focus on participation in the labour market to provide for their families (Becker 1981: Chapter 2, pp. 14 - 37). This is similar to functionalism. Parsons' systems theory, when applied to family life assumes a husband-father breadwinner and head of household and a wife-mother carer and homemaker (Parsons and Bales 1956).

This perspective implies that any deviation from 'traditional' divisions of labour within households increases marital instability. Oppenheimer (1997) has termed this the specialisation-trading model of household production; one spouse specialises in home based production and the other in market based production, and each trades their goods and services with the other to achieve maximum utility within the household. Women's access to economic resources through education and paid employment increases marital instability by enabling wives to become more economically independent and less reliant on their husbands. At the aggregate level there is good support for this hypothesis and several commentators have observed that women's participation in paid employment has increased in conjunction with the rate of divorce (Cherlin 1992; Oppenheimer 1994; Oppenheimer 1997). At the individual level researchers have tested the economic independence argument for women using a range of indicators for access to economic resources including employment status, hours of work, income, education and work experience (Sayer & Bianchi 2000; South

2001; Tzeng & Mare 1995). Overall the findings of this research are inconclusive and there is no consistent patterning of association between women's economic independence and divorce (Oppenheimer 1994; Oppenheimer 1997).

Becker (1973; 1981; Becker, Landes and Michael 1977) also argues that the likelihood of marriage breakdown is determined by the balance between the costs and benefits of the marriage relative to the costs and benefits of ending the marriage. The costs of terminating the marriage are not only financial but include non-financial factors such as the search for a new partner or the loss of contact with children. These costs increase as marital-specific capital such as children or home ownership are accumulated (Becker, Landes and Michael 1977). The value of marital 'assets' is less without the marriage or in a subsequent remarriage and therefore such assets operate to stabilise marriage (Becker 1981: 244). There is strong empirical evidence in support of this aspect of Becker's theory. For example, research shows that length of marriage and the birth of children in marriage reduce the risk of marriage breakdown (Brinig and Allen 2000; Waite and Lillard 1991).

A final aspect of Becker's theory that has been influential in research on marriage breakdown is the process of mate selection. Becker argues that the costs of finding a satisfactory mate are important for understanding marital dissolution because this process can affect the quality of the match and thereby impact the stability of marriage (Becker 1981). The costs of searching for a marital partner include the time and effort of searching as well as the foregone benefits of being married. Individuals make a decision to marry based on as much information they can collect about their prospective spouse at a reasonable cost to themselves. But invariably that information is incomplete. In the first few years of marriage, more complete information about their partner emerges and this is when the majority of marriages end (Becker 1981).

The other dominant theoretical paradigm for explaining marriage breakdown is social exchange theory (Blau 1964; Edwards and Saunders 1981; Levinger 1965; Levinger 1976; Levinger and Moles 1979; Manser and Brown 1980; McElroy 1990; Molm and Cook 1995). Similar to Becker's work this perspective employs cost-benefit analysis to understand why marriages breakdown. But unlike a neoclassical economics approach which emphasises the structural functioning of a system (i.e. the family or household) a social exchange approach to explaining marriage breakdown views marriage as an exchange relationship between actors that takes place in an institutional setting which establishes the costs and benefits of marriage (Blau 1964).

Researchers operating from a social exchange perspective identify a range of different factors which constitute "push" and "pull" forces that determine the balance of the overall costs and benefits of marriage (Edwards and Saunders 1981; Levinger 1965; Levinger 1976; Levinger and Moles 1979). For example, Levinger (1965; 1976; Levinger and Moles 1979) argues that the survival of marriage depends on the balance between the attractiveness of marriage, barriers to ending the marriage, and alternative attractions to the marriage. Internal attraction to marriage is positively associated with perceived financial and non-financial rewards such as love, status, companionship, money, goods, services and security, and is negatively associated with the costs of staying in the relationship such as conflict, time and energy demands (Levinger 1976: 25). Marriage breakdown occurs when the perceived costs outweigh the rewards.

Also important to the social exchange perspective are barriers, or restraining forces, that affect a person when they are considering marital separation (Knoester and Booth 2000; Levinger 1965; Levinger 1976; Previti and Amato 2003). Social and structural barriers to marriage dissolution include, lack of access to income outside the marriage (especially for women), joint ownership of assets such as a house, or the

perceived impact of ending the marriage on children (see Levinger 1976: 36 - 40, for a more complete list). These factors are similar to Becker's marital assets. From an exchange perspective, barriers to marriage breakdown can help long term relationships ride over temporary fluctuations, although if there is nothing but barriers keeping the relationship together then that results in an 'empty shell' marriage (Levinger 1976: 26).

Most exchange approaches to marriage breakdown also emphasise the importance of power within marital relationships and alternatives to the marriage. Some exchange theorists argue that power imbalances occur within relationships when one person is more dependent on the other for a more valued resource (Emerson 1976; Molm and Cook 1995). Power is often defined as the ability of an actor to realise their own will and exercise their own preferences even when there is resistance from other actors (Blau 1964; Blood and Wolfe 1960; Safilios-Rothschild 1970). Preferences in marital relationships encompass priorities for spending money, making decisions that affect the household, and divisions of household labour (Safilios-Rothschild 1970).

Finally, from an exchange perspective actors are rational and behave in ways that increase outcomes they positively value and decrease outcomes they negatively value. Therefore actors only remain in the exchange relationship as long as they get more out of it than their perceived alternatives (Molm and Cook 1995). Each actor is constantly weighing up the costs and benefits of continuing the exchange with the potential costs and benefits of alternatives. If one actor's alternatives outside the exchange improve or decline then that has implications for the dependence-power structure of the exchange (Emerson 1976). Levinger argues that even when there are few internal attractions to the marriage and barriers offer minimal restraint, a relationship will not necessarily be terminated unless perceived alternatives are more

attractive than the current situation (Levinger 1976). Alternate attractions are not necessarily another prospective partner, although certainly in some situations this is the case. Rather it could be the expectation of a more pleasant existence outside the marriage. This definition of alternate attractions allows for a scenario where living independently rather than being in an unhappy marriage is a preferred option (Levinger 1976: 41).

Economic exchange bargaining explanations for marriage breakdown draw heavily on social exchange theory but emphasise economic aspects of marital relationships. The concept of alternatives is integral to economic exchange bargaining explanations of marriage dissolution. Within this framework each spouse uses their relative power, which is determined by their relative economic contributions to the household, to bargain for their preferences within marriage but this bargaining power is limited or enhanced by alternatives outside the marriage (Blau, Ferber and Winkler 2006; Blau 1964; Edwards and Saunders 1981). In turn each spouse's alternatives to the marriage are shaped by broader social structures such as labour and marriage markets. The marriage is at risk when the perceived alternatives become more attractive than remaining married, which is known as the "divorce-threat point" (Manser and Brown 1980; McElroy 1990). Therefore factors such as marriage and divorce policies, labour market policies, state transfers, welfare provisions and other spousal alternatives to the marriage vary the divorce threat point and thereby influence the likelihood of marriage breakdown (Lundberg and Pollack 1996).

In sum each of these theories, neoclassical economics, social exchange and exchange bargaining, suggest that a range of social characteristics are important predictors of marriage breakdown. Nevertheless they have limitations. The model of household functioning proposed by Becker (1981) is limited by the assumption that

the system (i.e. the family or the household) is the smallest unit of analysis. In this respect his theory ignores other aspects of intra-household functioning, such as power differences between husbands and wives. These intra-household processes, which are influenced by social and structural environments are captured with social exchange and exchange bargaining approaches (Blau 1964; Levinger 1976; Lundberg and Pollack 1996). In particular, bargaining models for divorce have emerged in critique of the neoclassical model of marriage breakdown. Economic exchange bargaining models of marriage breakdown not only account for relationships between individuals but also deal more comprehensively than Becker's model with alternatives to the marriage in determining whether or not the marriage remains intact (Lundberg and Pollack 1996). Further, the application of all these theoretical perspectives to understanding divorce processes has been limited because most, although not all<sup>4</sup>, empirical research testing these theories tends to focus on a narrow range of socioeconomic factors such as spouses' relative income, absolute income or employment status (see for example, Ono 1998; Rogers 2004; South 2001).

Moreover, even though specialisation-trading, social exchange and exchange bargaining theories are the most influential theoretical perspectives in the divorce literature, much empirical research into the social determinants of marriage breakdown has taken place outside of these theoretical frameworks (White 1990). An equally large body of research adopts a life course approach to understanding marriage breakdown. A life course approach operates from the premise that temporal and life course factors intersect to influence marital outcomes (Bracher et al. 1993; Heaton 1991; Thornton and Rodgers 1987). Researchers adopting this approach have demonstrated the importance of a diverse range of social factors for marriage

---

<sup>4</sup> There are a smaller number of studies testing or operating from a social exchange perspective that examine the association between a range of non-economic factors of marriage breakdown, for example Black, Eastwood and Sprenkle (1991), Thompson and Spanier (1983), Knoester and Booth (2000) and Previti & Amato (2003).

breakdown which are often overlooked by the theoretically based literature (White 1990). To close this gap between the theoretical and empirical literatures, I draw on aspects of all theoretical and empirical approaches to examining the social determinants of divorce to identify three ‘mechanisms’ by which social factors can influence marriage breakdown. Some theoretical approaches are more heavily emphasised in some mechanisms than others. These theoretically derived mechanisms are then used to organise and discuss the empirical literature.

I label the first mechanism *normative and cultural* factors. Researchers operating from an economic exchange bargaining framework argue that normative and cultural factors can influence spousal preferences within marriage and therefore influence bargaining thresholds and divorce threat points (Lundberg and Pollack 1996). Other social exchange researchers have argued that some social factors influence commitment to marriage and thereby increase or decrease the risk of marriage breakdown (Edwards and Saunders 1981). To illustrate, normative and cultural social factors such as religion, ethnic background and birth cohort influence gender role attitudes, expectations about the conduct of marriage, commitment to the institution of marriage and attitudes towards divorce. These expectations and attitudes in turn influence spousal preferences within marriage that determine divorce threat points. For example, a person with strong religious beliefs is on average less likely to see divorce as a viable option even in an unhappy marriage than a less religious person (Heaton and Albrecht 1991). Therefore religion reduces the likelihood of reaching the divorce threat point.

The second mechanism relates to social characteristics that affect the *quality of the match* and either increase or decrease the likelihood of marriage breakdown. The quality of the match is a particularly important feature of Becker’s theory. For example Becker (Becker 1973; Becker 1981; Becker, Landes and Michael 1977)

argues that the process of mate selection is important for marital stability because the better the quality of the match the greater the chances of a successful marriage. Social factors that are seen to indicate better or poorer mate selection processes are age at marriage, premarital birth, premarital pregnancy and cohabitation prior to marriage. Social exchange theory also implies that relationship characteristics that influence the quality of the match are important for understanding marriage breakdown. For example, Levinger (Levinger 1965; Levinger 1976; Levinger and Moles 1979) argues that whether or not marriage breakdown occurs partly depends on the attractiveness of the marital relationship. Some social background factors such as parental divorce have been found to undermine the ability of spouses to successfully negotiate marital relationships and increase the likelihood of conflict, making the marriage less attractive (Amato 1996; Burns and Dunlop 2000).

The third mechanism I identify draws on the concept of *barriers* to marriage termination. Barriers are factors that deter marriage breakdown when one or both spouses are considering ending the marriage (Levinger 1976). Some social factors represent investments in the relationship that are unavailable or less valuable outside of the relationship and other factors limit the attractiveness of alternatives to the marriage and therefore deter marriage breakdown. For example, according to Becker children are a form of marital-specific capital, or an asset that couples invest in which act as a deterrent to marriage breakdown. The value of the investment in children diminishes with divorce because typically one partner has restricted access to the children and because the children from a particular marriage would be worth less in any other marriage (Becker 1981: 224). An exchange bargaining framework also argues that children deter marriage breakdown because children limit women's alternatives to the marriage. Most women take time out of paid employment when children are born which reduces their alternatives to marriage and their bargaining

power within marriage (Brinig and Allen 2000). Similarly, other sociostructural factors influence spouse's access to alternatives to marriage and thereby affect their divorce threat point. For example, more educated women, compared to less educated women, have on average a greater chance of finding paid employment in the event of separation (Becker 1981). Therefore, net of other factors the divorce threat-point for more educated women is likely to be lower than those with less education.

In sum I argue that social characteristics are important factors in understanding why marriages break down or remain intact in three main ways; through shaping *normative and cultural* expectations of marriage and perceptions of marriage as a breakable (or unbreakable) bond; by influencing the *quality of the match*; and by providing *barriers* that limit spouse's alternatives outside of marriage and deter marriage breakdown. In the next section of this chapter I use this theoretically derived framework of mechanisms to overview the findings of the empirical literature on the nature and extent of the association between sociostructural characteristics and marriage breakdown.

### **The sociostructural correlates of separation and divorce**

A large body of research literature identifies that temporal factors, family background characteristics, relationship and fertility histories, socioeconomic characteristics and beliefs and attitudes are associated with marriage breakdown (see Bracher et al. 1993; Bumpass, Martin and Sweet 1991; White 1990 for studies that offer a broad overview of these factors). As indicated earlier most divorce research, with the exception of studies investigating the economic determinants of marriage breakdown, tends to operate outside of the theoretical frameworks. To bridge this gap between the literature and theory, I not only review the empirical literature on the social determinants of marriage breakdown but develop it by organising and discussing the literature within the three theoretically derived mechanisms identified earlier:

normative and cultural factors, factors affecting quality of the match and factors that present barriers to ending marriage.

***Social factors indicating normative and cultural influences***

Several social characteristics are associated with marriage breakdown through normative and cultural mechanisms that either shape, or reflect a person's attitudes and beliefs about marriage and divorce and thereby influence spousal preferences within marriage and divorce threat points. For example whether a person believes that marriage is a partnership in which both spouses share equally in all tasks, or that marriage is forever and divorce is not an option, are all shaped by or reflected in social characteristics such as birth cohort, ethnicity, gender role attitudes, religion, and premarital cohabitation.

***Birth cohort***

It is well established that recent generations are more likely to divorce than older generations (Bracher et al. 1993; Heaton 1991). Both Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) identify shifts in the social expectations of long-term relationships and marriage over the last century. Presumably, older generations were normatively exposed to a *marriage culture*, where marriage was seen as an unbreakable bond (Hackstaff 1999). On the other hand younger generations have grown up with a *culture of divorce* with expectations of a less stable but more egalitarian model of marriage (Hackstaff 1999). Some social changes that have occurred in Australia over the last century that are also likely to contribute to differences between older and younger generations in their willingness to divorce include: an increasing acceptance of divorce (De Vaus 2004); legislative changes that have made divorce a less costly and time consuming process (Finlay 2005); and a substantial increase in married women's participation in the work force (Baxter 2003).

Several measures are used in the literature to capture the influence of historical time on divorce including age, marriage cohort, and birth cohort (Bracher et al. 1993; Heaton 1991; Thornton and Rodgers 1987). The most commonly used is respondent's birth cohort which captures the combined effects of historical context (i.e. morals, values, beliefs and economic conditions) during formative childhood years and ageing (Heaton 1991). Previous research finds that birth cohort has a curvilinear association with divorce with older cohorts less likely to divorce than younger cohorts, but younger cohorts have shorter marriage durations and a lower risk of divorce than older cohorts. Typically cohorts in the middle of the age distribution have the highest rates of marriage breakdown (Bracher et al. 1993).

### *Ethnicity*

Another factor that is likely to influence preferences within marriage is ethnic background. Racial differences have been found in the U.S., with Blacks more likely to divorce than Whites (Bumpass, Martin and Sweet 1991; Sweeney and Phillips 2004; Tzeng and Mare 1995). Researchers argue this is due to cultural variations in practices of marriage and divorce (Phillips and Sweeney 2005; Teachman 2002b). In Australia ethnic origin rather than race is important for marriage breakdown (Bracher et al. 1993; De Vaus 1997; Jones 1994; Roden 1989). Research finds that compared to the Australian born population migrants from English-speaking backgrounds have higher rates of marriage breakdown and non-English speaking migrants have a lower risk of marriage breakdown. It is likely that the practices of marriage and family life in migrant populations differ from the mainstream population because they retain the cultural and religious beliefs and practices of their country of origin (Ware 1975).

The increased risk of divorce in English speaking migrant populations in Australia may be because they come from countries such as the U.S., the U.K. and New Zealand that have a culture of divorce (Yodanis 2005) and rates of divorce

similar to or higher than those in Australia (United Nations 2005). Australian migrants from non-English speaking countries come from a more diverse range of countries but in many of these countries marriage and family practices are such that often divorce is not an option, particularly for women (see for example Bose and South 2003; and Rao and Sekhar 2002). For example, Bracher et al (1993) find that women born in Southern Europe had a reduced risk of marriage breakdown compared to women born in Australia. They argue that this is probably due to cultural differences that strengthen marriages, such as stronger family orientation and more traditional gender-roles.

Further, while specific ethnic groups are likely to experience different rates of divorce compared to Australians (and other ethnic groups) marriages that cross ethnic boundaries are particularly vulnerable (De Vaus 2004; Jones 1994). Jones (1994) argues that a higher rate of divorce in cross-ethnic marriages is likely due to cultural differences between the husband and wife in the expectations of the institution of marriage and how that is to be negotiated. This is consistent with Levinger's (1965) theory of attractions where homogeneity across ethnic groupings is seen to stabilise marriage because it facilitates adherence to social norms governing marriage.

#### *Attitudinal factors and marriage breakdown*

Attitudes and beliefs directly affect the risk of marriage breakdown through their influence on expectations of the conduct of marriage and family life, commitment to marriage and the acceptability of divorce. The two most common attitudinal measures used in the research literature on marriage breakdown are religion and gender role attitudes. The belief systems of many religions encourage and support marriage as a sacrosanct bond formed with the consent of God which reduces the likelihood of marriage breakdown for those who adhere to these beliefs (Waite and Lehrer 2003). Previous research finds that it is not necessarily religious affiliation

with a particular faith but religiosity, the level of engagement with religion, that is important (Call and Heaton 1997). Religiosity has a strong negative association with marriage breakdown because people who have higher levels of religiosity tend to have stronger commitment to and more traditional views of marriage (Amato and Booth 1995; Greenstein 1995; Heaton and Blake 1999; Rogers and Amato 2000).

More traditional gender role attitudes are also associated with more stable marriages. Traditional gender role attitudes uphold a gender based division of labour and support the consequent interdependence and power differentials between spouses whereby husbands are the primary breadwinners and wives are the primary home makers and carers. In contrast non-traditional gender role attitudes emphasise shared and negotiated divisions of labour where both spouses participate in economic activities and home based activities with an emphasis on shared power. Holding non-traditional gender role attitudes increases the potential for conflict within marriage because they challenge the gender based divisions of labour that underpin marriage and family life as well as labour market and employment policy and legislation (Broomhill and Sharp 2005; Pocock 2005).

Over the last few decades there has been a shift from traditional to non-traditional gender role attitudes for both men and women (which should also be reflected in the birth cohort differences) although research suggests that women tend to embrace non-traditional attitudes more strongly than men (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001). There is also evidence that gender differences exist in the association between gender role attitudes and marriage breakdown. For example, Amato and Booth (1995) find that wives with non-traditional beliefs report poor marital quality but husbands with non-traditional beliefs report good marital quality. Heaton and Blake (1999) also find that marriages where wives disagreed with the statement “household tasks should be shared equally” are less likely to end in

separation. Conversely when husbands held the same view there was an increased risk of marriage breakdown. Together this evidence suggests that men's non-traditional gender role beliefs reduce the risk of marriage breakdown but women's non-traditional gender roles attitudes increase the risk.

### *Cohabitation*

A popular belief exists that cohabitation improves the process of mate selection by giving couples the opportunity to get to know each other better, to negotiate roles and to develop communication skills prior to marriage (Becker 1981; Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Sarantakos 1994). There is, however, very little empirical support for the expectation that cohabitation reduces the risk of marriage breakdown. In Australia (Bracher et al. 1993; De Vaus, Qu and Weston 2003) and other comparable western countries such as the U.S. (Bumpass, Martin and Sweet 1991; DeMaris and Rao 1992) and Canada (Hall 1996; Hall and Zhao 1995) researchers consistently find that people who cohabit prior to marriage have an increased likelihood of marriage breakdown compared to those who do not cohabit.

The predominant explanation for this paradox is that there is a selection effect of people into cohabitation<sup>5</sup>. The argument is that those who cohabit are less conventional in their attitudes towards relationships and marriage and have lower levels of commitment to marriage than those who do not. People who cohabit before marriage are therefore more likely to divorce than those who do not (Hall 1996;

---

<sup>5</sup> Although it should be noted that this is not the only explanation for this association, two other less supported explanations for the increased risk of divorce with cohabitation have also been proposed. One is that the experience of cohabitation increases the propensity to divorce. For example, Axinn & Thornton (1992) found respondent's attitudes towards acceptance of divorce were more positive after a period of non-marital cohabitation than they were prior to a period of non-marital cohabitation. More recently a study by Dush, Cohan & Amato (2003) found that both selection and the experience of cohabitation explanation need to be integrated to better understanding the association between cohabitation and marriage breakdown. The second is a measurement explanation (DeVaus et al 2003; DeMaris & Rao 1992) that emphasises that couples who cohabit before marriage have been in the relationship longer than those who do not cohabit. They have therefore had longer exposure to the risk of relationship dissolution, which explains in part the higher rates of dissolution observed for marriages preceded by cohabitation.

Lillard, Brien and Waite 1995). Cohabitation prior to marriage thus reflects values and beliefs that are likely to increase the risk of marriage breakdown. Some studies find that the cohabitation effect on divorce may be lessening for recent generations for whom cohabitation has become more widely practised (De Vaus, Qu and Weston 2003; Schoen 1992). For example an Australian study by De Vaus et al (2003) found that the association between cohabitation and marriage breakdown in the first eight years of marriage in younger marriage cohorts (married 1990-1994) was not significant. But the association between cohabitation and marriage breakdown in the first eight years of marriage was strong and significant for older marriage cohorts (married between 1970-1974 & 1980-1984). They argue that the normalisation of cohabitation prior to marriage may have attenuated the association in younger cohorts to the degree that there is no difference in the propensity to divorce between those who cohabit and those who do not.

***Social factors impacting the quality of the match***

Some social characteristics disrupt marriage by undermining spouses' ability to successfully negotiate a marital relationship that detracts from the attractiveness of marriage and affects the quality of the match. These factors operate in three main ways. First, some factors such as parental divorce and family poverty predispose people to traits and behaviours that undermine the successful negotiation of marital relationships which destabilise marriage. Second, other social characteristics place stress and strains on the relationship (such as having children before or very early in marriage) increasing the propensity for disagreement in the relationship and the risk of marriage breakdown. Other factors increase the risk of divorce because they indicate a poor mate selection process such as young age at marriage or premarital pregnancy.

*Family background*

Family socioeconomic background is hypothesised to influence marriage breakdown in two ways. First, people from more prosperous and educated family backgrounds may have more stable marital histories because they have been exposed to less hardship and turmoil while growing up (Wolfinger 1999). Alternatively, parents with higher levels of education are more likely to impart social and cultural capital to their children which increases children's marital stability (Wolfinger 2000). In particular there is an expectation that children with more economically stable family backgrounds will have had better childhood experiences and better role modelling and therefore be better positioned to have stable marriages.

Findings of previous research linking family socioeconomic background and divorce are mixed. For instance in the U.S., Bumpass et al (1999) found that women whose mothers had lower levels of education were more likely to experience marital disruption, whereas Wolfinger (1999) found that respondents whose parents had less than a high school diploma were less likely to divorce. Using Australian data Bracher et al (1993) found no association between mother's or father's education, father's occupation, and marriage breakdown for women. However, Corley and Woods (1991) using U.S. data found that men whose fathers had high occupational status had a longer duration between marriage and divorce. Studies from the U.S. consistently indicate that growing up in a family which received public assistance increases the likelihood of marriage dissolution (Bumpass, Martin and Sweet 1991; Wolfinger 2000). Thus, while the findings are mixed on parents' education and occupation, experiencing childhood poverty is associated with an increased risk of divorce.

The most consistent family background risk factor for marriage breakdown is parental divorce where respondents whose parents have divorced are more divorce prone. This phenomena has been labelled the *intergenerational transmission of*

*divorce* (Amato 1996; Beck-Gernsheim 2002; McLanahan and Bumpass 1988). The most common explanation is that children of divorced parents receive poor socialisation and role modelling for marriage (Kiernan and Cherlin 1999; Mueller and Pope 1977; Teachman 2002a; Teachman 2004). Amato (1996) using longitudinal data from the U.S., found that the main causal mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of divorce is the increased likelihood that children of divorce exhibit behaviours such as jealousy that interfere with the maintenance of mutually rewarding intimate relationships. There is some Australian evidence in support of this explanation. A longitudinal Australian study by Burns & Dunlop (2000) examined the extent to which personal qualities of children of divorced parents reported by parents and the children themselves predicted the quality of their early adult relationships. Burns and Dunlop (2000) found that children of divorced parents had more behavioural problems than children of intact families which in turn negatively affected the quality of their intimate relationships 10 years later.

In addition children of divorced parents compared to children with still married parents, are more likely to have relationship and fertility histories that increase the risk of divorce. For example Teachman (2002a) found that women whose parents divorced had an increased risk of teenage marriage, teenage childbirth, lower education at marriage and marrying a husband more than five years older than themselves. One possible explanation for these patterns is that children of divorce may see early marriage and childbirth as a 'way out' of an unhappy family situation (McLanahan and Bumpass 1988). Alternatively, children of divorced parents may be forced to grow up more quickly and take on more adult responsibilities earlier than children whose parents remain married, thereby creating the impression they are ready to marry and have their own families sooner (McLanahan and Bumpass 1988).

*Age at marriage*

Other sociostructural factors indicate poor mate selection processes and thereby increase marital instability. In Australia, people who marry under the age of 25 have a greater risk of divorce than those who marry after age 25 irrespective of the year they married (ABS 2000). Some argue that young age at marriage reflects a poor mate selection process because it implies that a shorter time was spent searching for a marriage partner (Becker 1981; England and Farkas 1986; Kalmijn and Poortman 2006). Others argue that these marriages face greater risk because the couple are less likely to have developed the maturity and social skills required to negotiate a long-term marital relationship and often do not have access to adequate socioeconomic and financial resources (Moore and Waite 1981; South 1995; Teti and Lamb 1989; Wolcott and Hughes 1999).

*Premarital birth and premarital pregnancy*

Children born before marriage increase the risk of marriage breakdown (see White 1990 for a review). One possible explanation is that premarital children may encourage marriage with an unsuitable partner (Waite and Lillard 1991).

Alternatively, if the premarital child is not the biological child of one partner (with the exception of foster or adopted children) they may be a destabilising force in the marriage in similar ways to step children in remarriages (Coleman, Ganong and Fine 2000; Morgan and Rindfuss 1985).

Children born early in marriage can also increase the risk of marriage breakdown. First, an early birth may indicate a “shot-gun” wedding where a couple decides to marry because of pregnancy (Teti and Lamb 1989). This destabilises marriage because it speeds up the mate selection process and a couple may decide to marry when they otherwise would not. Second, children born early within marriage may add stress and strain in the developmental stages of the marriage (Waite and

Lillard 1991). The results of studies investigating the divorce risks for marriages with early births, children conceived before but born within marriage, are mixed. Becker et al (1977) found premarital conception increased the risk of divorce. In contrast, Morgan & Rindfuss (1985) found that premarital conception moderately reduced the risk of marital separation, while Waite and Lillard (1991) found no significant association between premarital conception and marriage breakdown. Given the chronology of these studies, the differences between them may also reflect changing acceptance of premarital pregnancy and birth over the last few decades.

***Social factors representing barriers to marriage breakdown***

Social barriers are constraining factors that prolong a marriage even when one or both spouses are considering ending the relationship. Even though researchers have found that changes in society have eroded the effectiveness of some social characteristics as deterrents to marriage breakdown (Knoester and Booth 2000) two social factors that continue to act as deterrents to marriage breakdown include marital children and real or potential access to economic resources outside of marriage.

***Marital children***

The role of children in marriage and marriage breakdown is an important one. According to Levinger's (1976) psychosocial perspective on marriage breakdown children represent a restraining force when one or both partners are considering terminating the relationship. Researchers have identified that one of the most important deterrents to marriage breakdown is concern over loss of contact with children and children's well being if divorce occurs (Knoester and Booth 2000; Poortman and Seltzer 2005). But children deter divorce in other ways. From Becker's (1973; 1981; Becker et al 1976) perspective children are the most important form of marital-specific capital whose value diminishes with divorce. And an exchange bargaining theoretical perspective emphasises women's restricted access to

resources outside of marriage when children are born, which reduces their bargaining power within marriage and their alternatives outside of marriage and therefore reduces the risk of marriage breakdown (Brinig and Allen 2000).

Even though it is well documented that the conception and birth of children within marriage reduces the likelihood of marriage breakdown research also indicates this is conditional on the number and ages of those children. Studies have found a U-shaped relationship between number of children and marriage breakdown where couples with no children and families of three or more children have higher rates of dissolution than small to medium sized families. This patterning has been found in Australia (Burns 1980b), the U.S. (Becker, Landes and Michael 1977; Heaton 1990), Britain (Murphy 1985) and Sweden (Andersson 1997).

In addition, research finds that younger children reduce the risk of marriage breakdown but that this protective effect diminishes as children age (Bracher et al. 1993; Heaton 1990; Waite and Lillard 1991). This is possibly because younger children require greater investments of time and energy, particularly before they start school, and the early years of childrearing are when women are most economically dependent on their husband (Baxter 2005c; Brinig and Allen 2000; Cherlin 1977; Heaton 1990; Waite and Lillard 1991). As children age they become less reliant on their parents, women are more likely to return to paid employment and the protective effect of children on marriage diminishes (Waite and Lillard 1991).

Over the last two decades there has also been some interest in the association between the gender composition of children and marriage breakdown. The seminal work by Morgan, Lye and Condran (1988), using U.S. data, found that having more daughters than sons increased the risk of marriage breakdown in one and two child families. To explain this finding, Morgan et al (1988) propose a 'father involvement' hypothesis, where fathers are more involved with raising sons than daughters which

increases husband's investment in families and generates good-will between spouses. Subsequent research investigating this issue finds little evidence to suggest that sons decrease the risk of marriage breakdown in developed western countries (Andersson and Woldemicael 2001; Diekmann and Schmidheiny 2004). But research from South and East Asia, where a cultural preference for sons exists provides some evidence that having boys reduces the risk of marriage breakdown (Bose and South 2003; Lundberg 2005). Altogether, previous research on the association between children and marriage breakdown indicates that while in general marital children are a deterrent to marriage breakdown there are various conditions under which they may increase the risk of breakdown or have little or no association with marital stability.

*Economic resources*

Arguably the main structural explanation for the increase in marriage breakdown in Western countries is the overall improvement in women's socioeconomic position relative to men's particularly over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Access to economic resources is considered important for all theoretical perspectives overviewed earlier but the mechanisms whereby the increase in women's access to economic resources contributes to marital instability differ across each theoretical approach. From a social exchange perspective a wife's access to economic resources implies that she could survive economically should the marriage end and increases her alternatives outside of marriage (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Blau 1964; Cherlin 1992). The other mechanism suggested by a neoclassical economic model is that a wife's participation in the paid work force, results in lower returns to marriage for both partners and therefore destabilises the marriage (Oppenheimer 1997). Both approaches view a husband's lack of economic resources and a wife's access to economic resources or economic independence as destabilising for marriage because

economic resources increase women's alternatives outside of the marriage (Ono 1998; Sayer and Bianchi 2000).

Research consistently shows that men of higher socioeconomic status have more stable marriages than men of lower socioeconomic status (Corley and Woods 1991; Ono 1998; Sayer and Bianchi 2000; Tzeng and Mare 1995; Waite and Lillard 1991; White 1990). Most researchers attribute the greater stability of marriages where the husband has a higher socioeconomic position to the greater financial stability of the household and the successful fulfilment of gender roles (Ono 1998). From an exchange bargaining perspective, when husbands have good access to socioeconomic resources this increases wife's benefits of staying, increases the costs of leaving and decreases the attractiveness of possible alternatives.

A large body of research has tested the economic independence hypothesis for women using a broad range of socioeconomic measures that include employment status, hours of work, income, education, work experience and access to welfare (Hoffman and Duncan 1995; Sayer and Bianchi 2000; South 2001; Tzeng and Mare 1995). Overall the findings are mixed. Some studies find a significant positive association between women's economic resources and divorce (Bradbury and Norris 2005; Hoffman and Duncan 1995; Sayer and Bianchi 2000; South 2001; Tzeng and Mare 1995), others find no association (Bracher et al. 1993) and others report a negative association where women's higher socioeconomic position reduces the risk of divorce (Hoem 1997; Ono 1998). The scant research evidence from Australia also indicates mixed support for the independence hypothesis, where Bradbury and Norris (2005) found that couples where the wife had less than secondary education were more likely to separate. In contrast Bracher et al (1993) found no association between education and marriage breakdown.

Given the mixed support for the women's economic independence hypothesis researchers have argued that there are scenarios whereby women's economic contribution to households has a stabilising rather than a disruptive effect on marriage. To illustrate, Oppenheimer (1994) has observed that men's real income has dropped over the last few decades and that the labour market is less stable. Therefore, the economic contributions of wives may provide important resources, offer financial stability in uncertain labour markets and thereby reduce the risk of marriage breakdown. Further, as the participation of married women and mothers in paid employment increases and becomes 'normal', it is likely that the impact of women's workforce participation on marriage breakdown will be attenuated (Jalovaara 2003). There are a number of studies that offer strong empirical support for this view (Ono 1998; Rogers and DeBoer 2001; Sayer and Bianchi 2000). Under these scenarios, wives' economic resources relative to their husbands are seen as essential to understanding marriage breakdown.

In addition some research suggests that rather than women's workforce participation increasing the risk of divorce, it may be that women increase their contact with the labour market when their marriage becomes unhappy to protect themselves against the financial consequences of divorce (Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Oppenheimer 1997). For example, in a U.S. study Johnson and Skinner (1986) found strong evidence that women anticipating a higher probability of separation increased their labour market participation but found little evidence to suggest that women's labour force participation increased the probability of divorce. Another U.S. study investigating this possibility by Rogers and DeBoer (2001) offers partial support for this argument. Rogers and DeBoer (2001) report women who were unhappy in their marriage increased their work force participation. But rather than destabilising marriage women's happiness with their marriage increased and their employment

reduced the likelihood of separation. Using data from the Netherlands, Poortman (2005) found support for the anticipatory behaviour hypothesis where full time work significantly increased the risk of marriage breakdown for women who expected their marriages to end.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this chapter was to identify the key theoretical perspectives and empirical literature on the social correlates of marriage breakdown and to develop a coherent theoretical framework to combine them. Together these literatures suggest that even though marriage is a union between two people, marriage and marriage breakdown are integrated into wider social contexts and there is a definite structural base to marriage and family life. As Levinger (1979: 38) points out “The private lives of marriage partners are intertwined with events in their surrounding social and economic environment”. Combining the theoretical and empirical literatures I identified three mechanisms through which social factors influence marriage breakdown including factors that operate through normative and cultural mechanisms, those that influence the quality of the match, and factors that provide barriers to termination of marriage.

A common theme, either explicit or implicit, in both the theoretical and empirical literatures is the gendered nature of marriage and family life. One of the limitations of the research considered in this chapter is that gender differences are often overlooked or ignored. It is this theme that I take up in the next chapter. I argue that gender is an important factor in understanding why some marriages break down while others remain intact. I also draw attention to the limitations of most previous divorce research looking at gender differences in the social determinants of divorce.

## Chapter 4

### Why gender matters: the importance of gender in marriage, family life, marriage breakdown and the decision to separate

---

#### **Introduction**

The review in Chapter 3 identifies the main theoretical and empirical literatures on the social determinants of marriage breakdown. In this chapter I highlight the importance of considering gender in the process of marriage breakdown. One limitation of the body of divorce research overviewed in Chapter 3 is that the majority of studies investigate gender differences in marriage breakdown by examining how men's and women's or husbands and wives characteristics differentially impact marriage breakdown. An additional approach to examining gender in the process of marriage breakdown is to consider whether a marriage is ended by the husband or wife (or in some cases jointly). Bernard (1972) famously argued that within marriage there are two distinct perceptions and experiences of the relationship, "His" and "Hers". In this chapter I argue not only is there "His" and "Her" marriage, but there may also be "His" and "Her" marriage breakdown. First, I overview the evidence on the importance of gender for understanding processes related to marriage, family life and marriage breakdown and second I examine the previous evidence on which spouse initiates separation.

#### **The importance of gender in marriage and family life and marriage breakdown**

From neoclassical economics and functional perspectives gendered divisions of labour are integral to the successful and efficient functioning of families and households (Becker 1981; Parsons 1956). Within this framework husbands and wives characteristics are important for creating good or bad marriages. For example, a husband's employment and income is essential for the economic viability of the

household and a good marriage (Parsons 1956: 12 - 14). From the perspective of exchange theories, husbands and wives characteristics shape their access to alternatives and bargaining power within marriage (Lundberg and Pollack 1996; McElroy 1990). Gender differences emerge because men's and women's access to social structures (i.e. the labour market) depend upon their own social characteristics (i.e. education) and the social circumstances of the marriage (i.e. the presence, or not, of children). Therefore gender differences in sociostructural characteristics and variations in the constraints and opportunities that emerge from these gender differences are central to understanding the costs and benefits of marriage and are important for understanding why marriages break down or remain intact (Edwards and Saunders 1981).

Historically the majority of divorce research does not account for gender. In a review article White (1990) argued that prior to 1990 little research examined sex differences in the divorce process. Even beyond the 1990s many divorce studies examine women only, either because relationship data were only collected from women (i.e. Bracher et al. 1993; Sweeney and Phillips 2004) or men's reports of relationship dissolution have been found to be unreliable (i.e. Bumpass, Martin and Sweet 1991). Nevertheless over the last two decades with the emergence of longitudinal panel studies on couples and advances in statistical modelling this tendency has changed. Panel data on couples enables indicators of both husbands' and wives' social characteristics to be modelled when predicting marriage breakdown. A growing body of work taking into account gender in the social determinants of marriage breakdown has emerged, particularly from the U.S. (c.f. Amato and Previti 2003; Heaton and Blake 1999; Rogers and Amato 2000; Sanchez and Gager 2000; Sayer and Bianchi 2000; South 2001; Teachman 2002b; Waite and Lillard 1991) but also Europe (c.f. Cooke 2004; Jalovaara 2003).

The overwhelming majority of this work examines socioeconomic characteristics and tests specialisation-trading, relative resources, and exchange bargaining explanations for marriage breakdown. This research was described in detail in Chapter 3 but overall it finds that men with higher socioeconomic position have more stable marriages compared to men with lower socioeconomic position (Ono, 1998; Sayer & Bianchi, 2000; Tzeng & Mare, 1995). On the other hand, the association between women's socioeconomic position and marriage breakdown is less straightforward. For women, this association varies depending on the indicator used (Jalovaara, 2003), whether or not change in socioeconomic position occurs within the marriage (Tzeng & Mare, 1995) and marriage duration (South, 2001). Therefore, there are gender differences in how socioeconomic characteristics impact on marriage breakdown but the exact nature and extent of those differences is complex and uncertain.

A smaller but growing body of work investigates gender differences in other, non socioeconomic, sociostructural predictors of marriage breakdown (Call and Heaton 1997; Heaton and Blake 1999). For example, Heaton and Blake (1999) using couple data from the National Survey of Families and Households in the U.S. found that women's social background characteristics were more strongly associated with marriage breakdown than men's. Specifically their results indicated that wife's age at marriage, parental divorce, prior marriage and income all had a stronger association with marriage breakdown than the same characteristics for husbands.

The research literature on gender differences in the social determinants of divorce is relatively small and a much larger body of work highlights differences in men's and women's experiences of marriage and family life (Ferree 1990; Fox and Murry 2000; Thompson and Walker 1995). In general this work examines gender differences in two main areas; psychosocial factors, and the division of paid and

unpaid labour. Gender differences in both areas have implications for marriage breakdown.

***Psychosocial gender differences in marriage and family life***

Clear gendered patterns are evident in the research literature examining psychosocial aspects of marriage and family life. For example, recent research finds that compared to husbands, wives offer better social support to their spouses (Neff and Karney 2005), report higher levels of emotional expression (Rauer and Volling 2005) and have different conflict initiation and resolution styles (Faulkner, Davey and Davey 2005). Overall, wives take more responsibility for the emotional and relational aspects of the marriage than do husbands (Steil 1997).

Research also shows gender differences in the determinants of marital quality and satisfaction. Women, compared to men, tend to monitor relationships more closely and their marital satisfaction is tied more than men's to the intimacy and emotional qualities of the marriage (Faulkner, Davey and Davey 2005; Steil 1997; Thompson and Walker 1989). In addition longitudinal studies suggest gender differences in perceptions of marital quality and satisfaction over the course of marriage where quality and satisfaction decline at a faster rate for wives compared to husbands (Kurdek 2005). Consequently compared to husbands, wives are more sensitive to and aware of relationship problems.

Differences between husbands' and wives' experiences and perceptions of their marital relationships have implications for marriage breakdown. Studies find that women have more complaints about their marriages and cite different reasons for their marriage ending compared to men (Amato and Previti 2003; Burns 1984; Kitson 1982; Ponzetti et al. 1992; Wolcott and Hughes 1999). For example, Amato and Previti (2003) found that women are more likely than men to report infidelity, mental or physical abuse and alcohol or drug use as reasons for divorce, and are less likely to

report communication problems or to claim that they did not know what caused the divorce. Further, other research has found that women's added responsibility for relationships extends to women terminating bad marriages (Walzer and Oles 2003).

*Gendered divisions of labour in households*

Significant gender differences also exist around divisions of labour within households. Women do much more housework than men. Recent Australian research has found that women spend more than twice as much time in domestic chores as men (Baxter, Hewitt and Western 2005; Bittman et al. 2003). These trends are consistent with research from the U.S. (Bianchi et al. 2000) and Europe (Yodanis 2005).

Further, within married couple households, the types of tasks undertaken are stratified by gender (Ferree 1991). Wives tend to be responsible for those tasks which are more time consuming and central to the efficient daily functioning of the household such as cooking and cleaning, whereas men are responsible for tasks that are intermittent and less time consuming such as gardening and house repairs (Baxter 2005a; Bianchi et al. 2000; Bittman et al. 2003).

In marriages with children the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that even though both mothers' and fathers' time spent performing child care has increased over the last few decades, mothers continue to spend much more time in child care tasks than fathers (Baxter 2005a; Craig 2006; Gauthier, Smeeding and Furstenberg 2004; Milkie et al. 2002; Sandberg and Hofferth 2005; Sayer, Milkie and Johnson 2004). Mothers and fathers also differ in the type of care and activities that they do with children with mothers doing more emotional caring work and fathers doing more activity based child care (Dubas and Gerris 2002; Laflamme, Pomerleau and Malcuit 2002).

Contrary to the expectations of feminists writing in the 1960s and 1970s that husbands would increase their involvement in household and caring work as more

married women entered the work force, the gender division of domestic labour has proven remarkably resistant to change (Baxter 2002; Breen and Cooke 2005).

Surprisingly little research has investigated the associations between divisions of labour and marriage breakdown but research finds that husbands' and wives' relative paid and unpaid work is important for marriage breakdown (Cooke 2004). Other research suggests, however, that whether or not divisions of labour are associated with divorce is mediated by whether or not wives, but not husbands, perceive the divisions to be fair (Frisco and Williams 2003).

In sum, the research on gender, marriage and family life suggests that husband's and wife's perceptions and experiences are different on almost every dimension of the relationship. Women tend to be more responsible for, and invest more in, the emotional maintenance of the relationship, care of children, and the day to day functioning of the household. Men, on the other hand, tend to contribute less to the running of the household but invest more in the financial stability of the household through their paid employment and continued enhancement of their economic resources. England and Farkas (1986), have observed that the main investments that men make in relationships are in resources that are useful or easily transferable outside of their current relationship, whereas women make greater relationship-specific investments. These differences have implications for marriage breakdown because it is women's rather than men's monitoring of relationships and satisfaction with divisions of labour that increase, or decrease, the likelihood of marriage breakdown. In light of all these factors it is not surprising that one of the most salient gender differences in the divorce literature is that women are twice as likely to end their marriages than men (Pettit & Bloom, 1984; Sweeney, 2002; Jordon 1988; Colburn et al, 1992; Wang & Amato, 2000; Braver et al, 1993; Panzetti et al, 1992). Nevertheless, even though many studies find that women are more likely to

end their marriages than men, little research has attempted to better understand this process (see England, Sayer and Allison 2005; Kalmijn and Poortman 2006; Pettit and Bloom 1984; Walzer and Oles 2003 for some notable exceptions).

Understanding who initiates separation is not only empirically important but is theoretically important. Earlier it was argued that most theories of marriage breakdown implicitly or explicitly suggest that gender is important for understanding marriage breakdown. These perspectives can also be extended to predict circumstances whereby one or both spouses may initiate separation. The theories of both Parsons' (1956) and Becker (1981) suggest that a complementary division of household labour maximises the returns to specialisation of both the husband and wife while any deviation from complementary roles increases the risk of marriage breakdown because it destabilises the functioning of the family unit. Implicit in this scenario is that in marriages where the division of labour is non-complementary neither spouse has the benefits of specialisation and therefore from this perspective it is most likely that both spouses end the relationship jointly (Kalmijn and Poortman 2006). In contrast social exchange and exchange bargaining theories argue that divorce threat points are important for understanding why some marriages breakdown and others do not (Levinger 1976; McElroy 1990). Divorce threat points are determined by each spouse's preferences within marriage, their barriers to ending marriage and alternatives to marriage. It is likely that gender differences in social characteristics will differentiate husbands and wives threat points (Levinger 1979: 43). From this perspective marriages end because the wife, husband or both spouses have reached their divorce threat point. A better understanding of differences between husbands' and wives' threat points can be obtained by examining the associations between social characteristics and which spouse initiated separation.

Despite good empirical and theoretical reasons for examining which spouse initiates separation, virtually all empirical divorce research is conducted treating marriage breakdown as a uniform event. Hence gender differences in the processes of marriage breakdown are examined in the covariates, or the associations between husbands' and wives', men's and women's characteristics and marriage breakdown. This practice assumes that the decision to end a marriage is made jointly, which ignores or overlooks the fact that the majority of decisions to end a marriage are made unilaterally, where one spouse acts to end the marriage without full knowledge and consent of the other.

**Who initiates separation?**

Over the past three decades researchers have found that initiator status (i.e. which spouse initiates separation) is an important factor in developing knowledge and understanding of the processes relating to marriage breakdown. Most research examining initiator status investigates how recovery from marriage breakdown varies for initiators and non-initiators. Overall, initiators tend to have more positive experiences than non-initiators after separation, including lower levels of attachment to their former spouse (Amato and Previti 2003; Brown et al. 1980; Kitson 1982), less time between divorce and remarriage (Spanier and Furstenberg 1982; Sweeney 2002) and less post-separation stressors such as housing mobility (Buehler et al. 1985; Colburn, Lin and Moore 1992; Wang and Amato 2000). It is also worth noting that some studies using longitudinal data find very little difference between initiators and non-initiators three to five years after separation in divorce related stressors such as housing mobility or attachment to former spouse (Buehler et al. 1985). This suggests that any differences between the two groups may be present in the short- to medium-term, but not long-term.

Studies examining the effect of who initiated separation on emotional and psychological adjustment after separation have less consistent findings, with some reporting that initiators fair better than non-initiators (Gray and Silver 1990; Spanier and Casto 1979) and others finding they do worse than non-initiators (Buehler et al. 1985; Sweeney and Horwitz 2001). This mixed evidence has been taken to suggest that initiators and non-initiators experience similar emotional and psychological patterns after separation, but the underlying causal mechanisms differ (Emery 1994). For instance, initiators may have poor emotional and psychological well being due to feelings of guilt and remorse whereas for non-initiators poor emotional and psychological well being may be due to feelings of loss and abandonment. Overall, the key point to take from the literature on the post-separation and post-divorce differences between initiators and non-initiators is that, given the large differences between initiators and non-initiators after separation, it is likely there are also differences prior to separation.

An extensive literature search<sup>6</sup> identified 14 empirical studies<sup>7</sup> that report on processes leading up to the initiation of separation or divorce; studies were excluded from the review if they did not report differences between initiators and non-initiators prior to separation. In common with the broader literature on marriage breakdown there are two main approaches to investigating which spouse initiates separation. Studies either investigate the psychosocial or sociostructural determinants of initiator status. However, the vast majority of studies examine psychosocial processes in particular people's perceptions of why their relationship ended and their feelings

---

<sup>6</sup> This included undertaking Descriptor, Key Word and Title searches for 'Initiation and separation', 'Initiator status' and several other derivatives of these terms in electronic data bases such as 'Psychinfo' and 'Sociological Abstracts'. I also snowballed and identified other studies from the literature obtained through the database searches.

<sup>7</sup> A summary of all these studies are presented in Appendix 1, Table A1.1, I report the key details of the sample, the measure(s) of initiator status used and the main findings in relation to differences between spouses who initiated separation and those who did not for each study.

about their previous relationship. Only three studies examined the associations between social characteristics and marriage breakdown. Next, I review and discuss the research literature on the psychosocial predictors of which spouse initiates separation and second I review the research findings of studies examining the sociostructural predictors of which spouse initiates separation.

***The psychosocial predictors of which spouse initiates separation***

Even though not all studies examining psychosocial predictors of initiator status found differences between initiators and non-initiators (for example, Gigy and Kelly 1992; Hopper 1993; Rokach, Cohen and Dreman 2004 did not), in general this body of research indicates that important differences exist. For example, initiators, compared to non-initiators, have more positive attitudes towards divorce, and identify more alternatives to marriage (Black et al. 1991); give more, and different, reasons for why their marriage ended (Kincaid and Caldwell 1995; Pettit and Bloom 1984); report lower levels of marital quality, and relationship intimacy (Vannoy 2000b); and show differences in personality traits and self perception (Vannoy 2000a).

Of the research literature investigating psychosocial determinants of initiator status only four studies, take into account gender differences between initiators and non-initiators. Nevertheless, the findings of these studies indicate that there are different processes leading to a female, or wife-initiated separation, than a male, or husband-initiated separation (Pettit and Bloom 1984; Thompson and Spanier 1983; Walzer and Oles 2003; Wolcott and Hughes 1999). An Australian study by Wolcott and Hughes (1999) reports that women are more likely to initiate separation when there is verbal or physical abuse in the relationship, but do not report any other gender differences in initiator status.

Using social exchange theory Thompson and Spanier (1983) find that internal attractions to the marriage such as companionship, affectional expression and marital

harmony, differentiate between men and women. They find these factors are not associated with women's reports of who initiated separation but men were more likely to report they initiated separation if they recalled that the marriage was lacking in companionship and harmony. Men were also more likely to report their wives initiated separation if they (men) recall a greater level of companionship, marital harmony and personal commitment to the marriage.

Pettit & Bloom (1984) found gender differences between initiators and non-initiators where, compared to male-initiators, female-initiators cited more and different reasons for marriage breakdown. For example, female-initiators mentioned financial problems, partner's excessive job or school commitments, problems with their children, and spouses nagging or being bossy, whereas male-initiators only cited lack of love as their main reason for the marriage breakdown. In addition, Pettit and Bloom found that female-initiators complained more of problems than female-non-initiators, but male-initiators complained less than male-non-initiators. The authors took this to suggest that men initiate separations when marital difficulties are relatively minor but do not terminate their marriage when difficulties are more severe. Women, on the other hand, seem to tolerate minor marital discomfort but as their level of dissatisfaction increases are more likely to end the relationship.

Finally Walzer & Oles (2003) find important gender differences between initiators and non-initiators narratives about the end of their marriages. They report that some women who took the initiative to end their marriage did not necessarily want to claim the status of having initiated the divorce. These women gave *collective* reasons for ending their marriage such as they were acting to minimise harm to their children or framed their decision to divorce as a last resort in response to husbands' behaviour such as having an affair. Men on the other hand often talk in initiator rhetoric even in circumstances when they did not actively end their marriages. These

gender differences suggest that even though the majority of separations and divorces are initiated by wives, women often account for their actions in terms of taking care of and responsibility for the well-being of the family. Walzer and Oles conclude that women, in this sense are “doing gender” by “doing divorce”, where they are taking a disproportionate responsibility for cleaning up family messes including a bad marriage.

The research into the psychosocial predictors of initiator status has several important limitations. First, many studies focussed primarily on post-divorce processes and any consideration of differences between initiators and non-initiators prior to divorce were incidental to the study (c.f. Gigy and Kelly 1992; Hopper 1993; Kincaid and Caldwell 1995; Pettit and Bloom 1984; Thompson and Spanier 1983). Second, most studies are exploratory and based on small non-nationally representative samples of separated and divorced people (c.f. Black et al. 1991; Gigy and Kelly 1992; Hopper 1993; Kincaid and Caldwell 1995; Pettit and Bloom 1984; Rokach, Cohen and Dreman 2004; Thompson and Spanier 1983; Vannoy 2000a; Vannoy 2000b; Walzer and Oles 2003). Therefore comparison with married people is not possible and it is difficult to properly investigate associations between social characteristics of who initiated separation or divorce. Consequently, most research into which spouse initiates separation does not consider sociostructural factors when investigating differences between initiators and non-initiators, focussing instead on psychosocial differences. Third, most studies used cross-sectional samples and examine people’s perceptions and attitudes relating to their previous marital relationship and marriage breakdown (c.f. Black et al. 1991; Gigy and Kelly 1992; Hopper 1993; Kincaid and Caldwell 1995; Pettit and Bloom 1984; Rokach, Cohen and Dreman 2004; Thompson and Spanier 1983; Vannoy 2000a; Vannoy 2000b; Walzer and Oles 2003; Wolcott and Hughes 1999). This approach does not take into

account the temporal ordering of the observed differences between initiators and non-initiators. For example, some differences may be due to post-divorce narratives that have been generated in response to the divorce process (Hopper 1993). Finally, even though most studies report that women were more likely to initiate separation than men, only three considered gender differences in initiator status in any detail (Pettit and Bloom 1984; Thompson and Spanier 1983; Walzer and Oles 2003).

***The sociostructural predictors of which spouse initiates separation***

Only recently has research emerged that examines the associations between husbands and wives social characteristics and which spouse initiates separation (England, Sayer and Allison 2005; Kalmijn and Poortman 2006; Rogers 2004). This research typically uses large nationally representative population samples. Overall, these studies provide good evidence that under certain social conditions wives rather than husbands are more likely to take the initiative to separate, while under other conditions husbands initiate separation. I undertake a more detailed review of these studies as they are directly relevant to this thesis. Rogers (2004) examined the associations between wives income and whether the wife or husband first discussed divorce using panel data spanning 1980 – 1997 on 1,704 individuals from the U.S. Marital Instability Over the Life Course study. The results suggest a positive association between wives income and risk of both wives and husbands initiating divorce. There was also a positive association between wives percentage income contribution and both husbands and wives initiating divorce. Overall there was an increased risk of both wives and husbands first discussing divorce when wives earned more income and contributed a greater proportion of household income. Roger's (2004) argues that similar economic resources may give both spouses the freedom to initiate divorce because their economic obligations to each other are low and each spouse can provide for themselves.

England, Sayer and Allison (2005) test bargaining models of divorce by examining the relative earnings of wives and husbands and which spouse initiates separation using longitudinal couple data from the U.S. National Survey of Families and Households. They find that, between 1987/88 and 2001/3, 21 percent of the couples in their sample had experienced marriage breakdown. Of these separations 53 percent were initiated by wives, 24 percent were initiated by husbands, and 23 percent were allocated “other”. (The “other” category included couples who jointly initiated their separation, cases where couples disagreed on who initiated the separation, or cases with missing data on initiation).

England, Sayer and Allison (2005) find that relative to marriages where wives contribute no earnings, if wives contribute 1 percent or more to household earnings there is a significantly increased risk of wives initiating separation. There are virtually no differences between wives who contribute more than 60 percent of household earnings and those who contribute more than 1 percent. As long as wives are working and contributing some income there is an increased risk of a wife-initiated separation. In a second model, England, Sayer and Allison (2005) interacted relative earnings with a “better off divorced” scale. The scale was developed from five items pertaining to the respondents’ perceptions of how getting divorced would affect their lives. Not surprisingly, when both wives and husbands have a higher score on this scale, indicating that respondents felt they would be better off divorced, couples have a significantly increased risk of all types of separation. Yet this measure interacted with relative earnings does not provide any compelling evidence that women who have a more positive perception of divorce will be more likely to divorce if they have higher relative earnings.

England, Sayer and Allison (2005) also include controls for a range of other social and demographic factors some of which were significantly associated with

which spouse initiated separation. When wives had greater than primary school education they were less likely to report jointly initiated separation. Husbands' education was not associated with which spouse initiated separation. Wife's older age at marriage reduced the risk of wife- and jointly initiated separation. In marriages where wives were three or more years older than husbands there was an increased risk of husbands initiating separation. When a wife's parents had divorced, couples had an increased risk of wife-initiated separation but when a husband's parents were divorced there was no significant association with any of the types of separation. If wives had cohabited (either with their husband or another partner) prior to marriage there was an increased risk of wife-initiated separation. In contrast husband's cohabitation increased the risk of jointly initiated separation. Finally, the presence of children who were not the husband's biological children significantly reduced the risk of wives initiating separation and marriages with a premarital birth had an increased risk of jointly initiated separation only.

Kalmijn & Poortman (2006) use retrospective life-history data from the Netherlands to examine the associations between husbands and wives characteristics and which spouse took the initiative to separate. Specifically they focus on four key sociostructural determinants of divorce, the employment of wives, the financial situation of the household, the presence of children, and the quality of the match between spouses. Of the respondents who had separated, wives took the initiative in 61 percent of cases, husbands took the initiative in 29 percent of cases and in 10 percent of cases separation was jointly initiated.

Using women's reports only, Kalmijn and Poortman (2006) find a significant positive association between wives' working hours and the odds of a wife-initiated separation but not a husband-initiated separation. This difference was statistically significant. Second, couples who had financial difficulties had increased odds of

wife- but not husband-initiated separation. Even though the differences between husband- and wife-initiated separations were not statistically significant this suggests that wives have higher levels of dissatisfaction when relationships are under financial pressure. Couples with young children are less likely to divorce but the magnitude of this effect is greater for a husband-initiated separation than for a wife-initiated separation. The authors took this to suggest that compared to wives, husband's concerns over the loss of children play a more important role in their decision to initiate separation. Finally, using three indicators for 'quality of the match' they find mixed results. Age at marriage does not differentiate between male, female or jointly initiated separation, however, when the husband is younger than the wife, there is an increased risk of husband-initiated separation. The longer period of time that a couple know each other before marriage significantly reduces the risk of a wife-initiated separation but not separations initiated by husbands. This gender difference was significant. In summary, Kalmijn and Poortman conclude that wife-initiated separations are more frequent than husband-initiated separations and that most determinants of divorce are more strongly associated with wife- than husband-initiated separations. Consequently, what determines a husband-initiated separation is less clear from their study than what determines a wife-initiated separation.

With the exception of these studies no other research investigating the social correlates of which spouse initiates separation were found. All three studies provide consistent evidence that wives with better access to economic resources have an increased likelihood of initiating separation (England, Sayer and Allison 2005; Kalmijn and Poortman 2006), although Rogers (2004) also found an increased likelihood of husbands initiating separation when wives had better access to economic resources. The other social correlates considered by these studies are more diverse and therefore the findings are less consistent, although when husbands are younger

than wives there is an increased likelihood of husbands initiating separation (England, Sayer and Allison 2005; Kalmijn and Poortman 2006). Clearly there is scope for further research into the social determinants of which spouse initiates separation.

These studies also indicate that a minority of separations, 10 percent (Kalmijn and Poortman 2006) and 23 percent (England, Sayer and Allison 2005), are initiated jointly which further suggests that in the majority of separations either the husband or wife takes the initiative to end the marriage. In this respect, these studies also provide good evidence that marriage breakdown is not a uniform event. Moreover, given that more women than men initiate separation it appears that the process of separation is different for husbands and wives. If a wife decides to remain married, or separate, she has tacitly taken into account the likely impact on children, her possibility of financial stability, her religious and cultural beliefs, and other factors related to her own and her husband's well being. Likewise, a husband considering divorce may or may not make his decision taking into consideration a similar range of social and economic conditions and outcomes related to sociostructural factors. It is these issues that this thesis aims to better understand.

### **Research questions**

In the international research literature on marriage breakdown examining the relative characteristics of both spouses in a marriage has become the 'gold standard' for understanding the gendered nature of marriage breakdown. Despite this, research examining relative characteristics of both spouses and examining gender differences in the correlates of marriage breakdown in Australia has lagged. This is in part because only recently have suitable data become available to examine the relative characteristics of couples in marriage breakdown (De Vaus and Baxter 2005). Even so, no prior studies have explicitly examined gender differences between men and women in the social correlates of marriage breakdown. While several Australian

studies examine the social correlates of marriage breakdown, many of them focus on one social factor (such as ethnicity or cohabitation) (De Vaus, Qu and Weston 2003; Jones 1994), only examine women (Bracher et al. 1993; Roden 1989) or only sample separated or divorced populations (Burns 1980a; Wolcott and Hughes 1999). The study by Bracher et al (1993) includes some husband's characteristics such as education, age at marriage, ethnic background, religion, whether previously marriage and whether they had any children when predicting marriage breakdown for women. And Bradbury and Norris (2005) investigate the associations between husbands and wives characteristics such as age at marriage and education, and the likelihood of separation between 2001 and 2002. But neither study offers detailed gender comparisons of the social determinants of marriage breakdown. Altogether, this body of Australian work tells us little about gender differences in the social factors associated with marriage breakdown. This thesis aims to go some way toward filling this gap.

***Research question 1***

The first aim of this thesis is to investigate the social correlates of marital separation and divorce in the Australian context with a particular focus on gender differences in the patterning and associations of social and structural predictors of marriage breakdown. This research question arises out of the need to further investigate and establish a 'baseline' of the patterning of associations between social characteristics of marriage breakdown, identified in the international (primarily U.S.) divorce literature, in the Australian context. The first research question with a subsidiary research question is:

**1. What is the nature and extent of the associations between social characteristics and marriage breakdown in Australia?**

*1a. Are there gender differences in the associations?*

***Research Question 2***

The first research question is aimed at investigating gender differences in social factors associated with marriage breakdown. This will do little to explain one of the most salient gender differences in the divorce literature; that women are two times more likely to initiate separation than men. To better understand why marriages break down it is important to investigate the background and motivations of the partner who initiated the separation and identify what characteristics (if any) are likely to lead to that action being taken. The second research question to be addressed in this thesis, with its subsidiary research question, is:

- 2. Are there differences in the nature and extent of the association between social characteristics and separations initiated by husbands, wives or by both spouses?**

*2a. Are there gender differences in the social characteristics associated with husband-initiated, wife-initiated or jointly initiated separations?*

**Conclusion**

The gendered duality of marital relationships underpins much of the theoretical and empirical literatures on the sociostructural correlates of marriage breakdown. Gender differences in social characteristics impose cultural, normative and structural constraints on spouses and also increase or decrease the attractiveness of the marriage in ways that are likely to differ for men and women. Even though most research investigating gender differences in marriage breakdown has focussed on differences in social characteristics and marriage breakdown, there are also likely to be differences between husbands and wives social characteristics and their decision to remain married or separate. I will examine these issues in more detail in the empirical

chapters. In Chapter 6 I address the first research questions; in Chapter 7 I address the second research questions. In Chapter 8 I address both research questions, but in relation to the number, ages and gender composition of children. My rationale for this approach in the final empirical chapter is that, given the gendered impact of children on marriage and family life, any gender differences in marriage breakdown and the decision to separate are likely to be evident in relation to children.

## Chapter 5

### Methods

---

#### **Introduction**

This thesis relies on quantitative analysis of a national Australian household panel survey to address the research questions raised at the end of Chapter 4. In this Chapter I describe the data, analytic sample, the dependent and independent measures and the analytic approach to be used in the empirical chapters. Ideally, to investigate the complex issues raised by theoretical and empirical explanations for marriage breakdown raised in the preceding chapters, nationally representative longitudinal couple data on a wide range of sociostructural and marital characteristics for large numbers of couples before and after their marriages breakdown is required. However, because suitable longitudinal data were not available at the beginning of this project I have restricted my analysis to using retrospective life history data from the first wave of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey collected in 2001. The HILDA survey is funded by the Australian Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) and conducted by the Melbourne Institute for Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne, Australia. It is currently in its 6<sup>th</sup> Wave of data collection with the 4<sup>th</sup> wave of data released in January 2006 (The Melbourne Institute for Social and Economic Research 2005). The other main reason for using the HILDA survey is because respondents were asked which spouse initiated separation at Wave 1.

Unfortunately this information was not collected from respondents who separated since the survey began until Wave 5 of data collection<sup>8</sup>.

### **The Data**

The data used in this analysis are Version 3 of Wave 1 of the public access confidentialised data. These data were collected in 2001 and the Wave 3 version incorporates respondent information from Wave 2 and Wave 3 where applicable. HILDA is an Australian national longitudinal panel survey, with Wave 1 comprising 7,682 households and 13,914 individuals. For Wave 1, households were selected using a multi-stage sampling approach, and a 66 percent response rate was achieved (Watson and Wooden 2002a). Within households, data were collected from each person aged over 15 years using face-to-face interviews and self-completed questionnaires, and a 92 percent response rate was achieved (Watson and Wooden 2002a).

Data were collected using four different tools; a household form, a household interview with one or more people from the household, a person interview with each person in the household aged over 15 years and a self-completed questionnaire for each person in the household aged over 15 years. All survey instruments are available from the HILDA website at [www.melbourneinstitute/hilda/](http://www.melbourneinstitute/hilda/).

Overall the Wave 1 HILDA sample is representative of Australian households, but there are some characteristics of individuals in the HILDA sample that differ from the Australian population. Specifically women are over-represented, unmarried people are under-represented and immigrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds are under-represented. However, the discrepancies are not large and are unlikely to compromise the overall quality of the data (Watson and Wooden 2002b).

---

<sup>8</sup> Longitudinal data on which spouse initiated separation will not be available until 2007, outside of the time frame of this project.

***Analytic Sample***

The analytic sample used in my thesis includes all respondents who have married ( $n = 9,744$ ) regardless of marital status at the time of the survey. I also apply other restrictions. First, people whose marriages ended in separation less than one year before the survey are excluded ( $n = 97, <1\%$ ), because previous research indicates that most marriages that reconcile tend to do so within the first twelve months of separation and including this group in the sample may overestimate the incidence of marriage breakdown (Bumpass, Martin and Sweet 1991). Further, under the 1975 Family Law Act, the only ground for divorce is irreconcilable differences evidenced by one year of separation (Stewart and Harrison 1982). Therefore all separated respondents in the sample are considered permanently separated and are legally eligible to divorce. Second, people who married in the year of the survey are excluded ( $n = 163, 1.7\%$ ), because the smallest time-unit of marriage duration observed in this study is one year and this group of respondents had married less than one year prior to the survey. Third, only first marriages are considered because evidence shows that higher order marriages have an increased risk of ending and the determinants of marriage breakdown in higher order marriages tend to be different than those for first marriages (Booth and Edwards 1992; Coleman, Ganong and Fine 2000). Comparing the differences between first and higher order marriages is outside the scope of this study. Fourth, I exclude migrants who separated and/or divorced prior to living in Australia ( $n = 154, 1.6\%$ )<sup>9</sup>. They were omitted because I am

---

<sup>9</sup> To calculate how many migrants had separated before arriving in Australia the year of immigration was compared with year of separation from first marriage; if the year of separation was greater than year of immigration a score of 0 = *did not separate before migrating* was allocated, if the year of separation was smaller than or equal to year of migration that was scored 1 = *separated before migrating*. It should also be noted here that there may be some measurement error built into this measure. There are 17 people that migrated to Australia in the same year they separated who are included in the same category with those who separated prior to migration. This may result in a small over-estimation of the number of people who separated prior to migration if those people separated shortly after arrival in Australia rather than before arrival in Australia.

interested in the determinants of marriage breakdown in Australia, and these marriages had ended prior to the respondent living in Australia; presumably under different social, economic and cultural conditions<sup>10</sup>. Fifth, respondents with missing data on their marital history (n = 221, 2.3%) or current marital status (n = 4) were dropped from the sample. In addition, a total of 129 (1.3%) respondents with missing or implausible data on some of the independent variables were dropped from the sample where the numbers were insufficient to warrant imputing or controlling for missing data. Specifically, the missing values included religion (n = 13), cohabitation (n = 10), fathers' occupation (n = 2), parental divorce (n = 16), children (n = 17) and age at marriage (n = 71)<sup>11</sup>. The final sample comprises 8,993 first marriages, 4,110 male respondents and 4,883 women<sup>12</sup>.

### ***Retrospective life course data***

One limitation of using retrospective accounts from respondents about events that happened in the past is that the greater the time between the event and the data collection the greater the possibility of memory lapses and reconstruction of events (Berney and Blane 1997; Heaton and Call 1995). Ideally, data need to be collected about the event as it is happening, or soon after the event occurred, but the majority of event history research relies upon retrospective accounts. Research comparing the reliability of retrospective accounts with panel data finds that retrospective accounts have a satisfactory level of reliability for a range of issues, including employment and residential histories (Berney and Blane 1997; Powers, Goudy and Keith 1978). Recall of other factors such as values and attitudes tends to be poor (Powers, Goudy and

---

<sup>10</sup> To investigate the impact of migrants who had separated prior to migration on the results (Appendix 2, Table A2.1). I re-estimate the model presented in Table 6.1, including this group; including this group the risk of marriage breakdown is over-inflated for all ethnic groups and there are also moderate changes in the results of other covariates.

<sup>11</sup> This group of respondents also included those who had an implausible value for age at marriage which, for the purposes of this study was considered to be marriage under the age of 16.

<sup>12</sup> Note that numbers of missing and the final analytic sample do not add up exactly as some respondents had missing data on multiple measures.

Keith 1978). Further, important life events, including marriage, separation, divorce, and birth of children, are more likely to be remembered more accurately than everyday activities (Heaton and Call 1995).

The recommended approach to collecting retrospective life and event history data is to use a personal interview combined with a chart or calendar to prompt the respondent's memory and to allow them to situate life events within a broader life context and relate life events to each other (Axinn, Pearce and Ghimire 1999). This approach was used to collect the marital relationship histories in HILDA. During the person interview a marital history table was used to obtain information about all of the respondent's marriages including, whether they cohabited and for how long, the month and year they married, whether the marriage had ended and if so how it had ended (i.e. separation, divorce, widowhood), what year the marriage ended and in the event of separation or divorce which partner made the decision to end the relationship.

The same approach was not used, however, for all areas of interest to this study. The data available on fertility history for example, was not as detailed and only included the ages (at interview) and sex of all the respondent's residential and non-residential children. This resulted in some measurement error being introduced into the calculation of the fertility measures. The nature and extent of this measurement error and the likely consequences for the results are discussed further when describing the construction of these measures. Overall though respondents recall of major life course events have been found to be relatively good and the data used here are likely to have satisfactory levels of reliability.

A second limitation of these data is that the HILDA marital history data did not collect background information on respondent's spouse(s) from former marriage(s). Therefore, while the breakdown of a marriage inevitably involves two

people and the characteristics of both may be relevant to the marriage dissolution, there is only data available on the respondent's characteristics. This limits the gender comparisons that can be made because spouses' relative social characteristics cannot be examined. Despite this limitation, the data available enable the association between social characteristics, marriage breakdown, and initiator status to be investigated separately for men and women.

### **Dependent Variables**

I use two dependent variables, marriage breakdown and initiator status of marital separation. Each of these measures is derived from the marital histories table collected from HILDA respondents during completion of the individual interview.

#### ***Marriage breakdown***

As only first marriages are under consideration in this analysis, if a respondent had married once the information about their *present* marriage was included in the calculation of the dependent variable. If the respondent had been married more than once then information about their *first* marriage was included but not information about subsequent marriages. The final measure is coded 0 if the respondent is still in their first marriage and 1 if their first marriage has ended in separation (for at least 1 year) or divorce.

Table 5.1 shows that a total of 2,049 first marriages have ended in separation or divorce in the analytic sample (the remaining 6,944 first marriages were still intact). Of the sample respondents whose first marriages had ended, around 85 percent had gone on to legally divorce. The separated as well as the divorced are included in the measure of marriage breakdown because excluding the separated would underestimate the prevalence of marriage breakdown in the sample by around 15 percent. The data suggest that most people go on to divorce and further

investigation indicates that the permanently separated in the sample are typically those whose marriages have broken down more recently, within the last 5 years.

**Table 5.1: Distribution (number and percent) of separated and divorced in analytic sample**

	N	%
<b>Separated (for at least 1 year)</b>	309	15.1
<b>Divorced</b>	1740	84.9
<b>Total</b>	2049	100

### *Initiator Status*

The same retrospective marriage histories were used to construct a measure of the second dependent variable indicating which spouse initiated separation. If the respondent indicated that their first marriage had ended (in separation or divorce) further information was obtained about who initiated the separation with the question: “Whose decision was it to finally separate?” The response categories were “Mostly mine”, “Mostly partner’s”, and “Joint”. Male respondents who answered “Mostly partner’s”, were coded 1 = *wife initiated*, and those who answered “Mostly mine”, were coded 2 = *husband initiated*. Female respondents who answered “Mostly mine”, were coded 1 = *wife initiated* and female respondents who answered “Mostly partner’s”, were coded 2 = *husband initiated*. If either male or female respondents answered “Joint”, that response was coded 3 = *jointly initiated*. In this final category both partners were considered to play a major role in the final decision to separate from the marriage. People still in their first marriage were coded 0 = *still married*.

A common theme identified in the narratives of the qualitative studies on which spouse initiated separation is that marriage breakdown is a fluid, and ambivalent process, with both spouses considering separation or contributing to the

separation at some point (see for example Hopper 1993; Rokach, Cohen and Dreman 2004; Walzer and Oles 2003). Nevertheless most separated or divorced people can clearly identify which spouse took the initiative to end the marriage (Hopper 1993). Two further methodological issues relating to the measurement of initiator status have been identified in the research literature. First, defining initiator status is difficult because there are several different stages in the process of marriage breakdown that can potentially be construed as “initiation”. Consequently, prior studies use a wide variety of measures for initiator status such as who most wanted the marriage to end (Amato and Previti 2003; England, Sayer and Allison 2005; Gray and Silver 1990; Sweeney 2002), who made the decision to separate (Kalmijn and Poortman 2006; Kincaid and Caldwell 1991), who first suggested or raised the idea of divorce (Duran-Aydintug 1995; Rogers 2004), who was to blame for why the marriage failed, and who filed the legal papers for the divorce (Braver, Whitely and Ng 1993; Brinig and Allen 2000). Some of these measures relate to earlier stages of the marriage breakdown process, such as who was to blame for why the marriage failed. Others relate more immediately to the point at which the separation occurred such as who most wanted the marriage to end, who made the decision, who first suggested or discussed divorce. The final stage in the process of marriage breakdown is the filing of the official divorce papers which can take place many years after separation. This is not a satisfactory way to measure initiator status of marriage breakdown because measures relating to earlier stages in the process offer a more temporally accurate picture of the context in which the marriage ended. Filing divorce papers may be associated with other post-separation processes such as which spouse wants to remarry.

Further, research by Braver et al (1993), which compared and contrasted three different measures of initiator status, found that the different measures are not necessarily interchangeable. For example, the spouse who first suggested divorce is not necessarily the same spouse who filed the legal papers for divorce. Kalmijn and Poortman (2006) also compared their measure of initiator status (who first made the decision to end the marriage) with respondent's evaluations of the decision to divorce (whether the respondent was more positive about the decision, both respondent and spouse were positive, or spouse more positive) and who filed the legal papers for divorce. They found that filing for divorce, which relates to later stages of the divorce process, was not highly correlated with the other two measures relating to earlier stages of the divorce process. It should therefore be noted that my measure indicates the partner who made the final decision to separate from the marriage and that is not always the same partner who subsequently filed for divorce, but is likely to be fairly closely related with the person who most wanted the marriage to end or first raised the issue of divorce.

The second methodological issue is the potential for systematic bias in the reporting of initiator status. Research indicates that people going through marriage breakdown generate their own narratives about their experience and may reconstruct events to suit themselves (Hopper 1993). Some studies have therefore found that respondents are more likely to report they initiated the separation than their ex-spouses (Kalmijn and Poortman 2006; Wang and Amato 2000). For example, Kalmijn and Poortman (2006) found that when the respondent evaluated the decision to divorce more positively it was almost always the respondent who made the decision to separate. When the respondent's spouse viewed the decision to divorce more positively it was mostly the spouse who took the initiative. When both spouses saw

the divorce decision as positive the partner who initiated the separation was less clearly delineated, but there is evidence of a tendency for respondents to report they took the initiative. Furthermore, research investigating the level of consistency in the reporting of initiator status between ex-partners shows that while there is not exact congruency between reports, self-reported initiator status appears to have acceptable levels of reliability in that the majority of spouses agree. For instance, Braver et al (1993), found that partners agreed on who initiated the marriage breakdown in around 70 percent of cases. Similarly Sweeney (2002) found agreement in around 80 percent of cases.

Table 5.2 shows the distribution of initiator status for men and women in the analytic sample. In total 902 men and 1,147 women have separated or divorced from their first marriage. Of these, men report wife-initiated separation in 35 percent of cases, husband-initiated separation in 27 percent of cases and jointly initiated separation in 37 percent of cases. Women report wife-initiated separation in 58 percent of cases, husband-initiated separation in 18 percent of cases, and jointly initiated separation in 24 percent of cases. It is worth noting here that, in total, only 30 percent of marriages are ended jointly. In the other 70 percent of cases an initiator status is assigned to either the wife or the husband, of these wives initiated in 69 percent of cases.

**Table 5.2: Initiator status of separation for separated and divorced men and women (Column %).**

	<b>Women</b>		<b>Men</b>		<b>Total</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Wife initiated</b>	665	58	320	35	985	48
<b>Husband initiated</b>	201	18	245	27	446	22
<b>Jointly initiated</b>	281	24	337	37	618	30
<b>Total</b>	1,147		902		2,049	

The total figures differ slightly from other comparable studies. Kalmijn and Poortman (2006) found that 61 percent of separations were initiated by wives, 29 percent were initiated by husbands, and only 10 percent were jointly initiated. England, Sayer and Allison (2005) found that wives initiated in 53 percent of cases, husbands in 24 percent and 23 percent of cases were defined as “other”, which included jointly initiated and cases where former husbands and wives disagreed about which spouse initiated separation. Despite these overall differences the one consistent finding across all studies and countries is that wives are around two-times more likely than husbands to initiate separation.

While the data available do not include both partners’ reports of who initiated the separation making it impossible to determine the exact nature and extent of reporting bias in the initiator status measure, there is some evidence of reporting bias. For instance, a higher proportion of men report that they initiated separation (27%) than is indicated by the women’s responses (18%). Conversely a higher proportion of women report they initiated separation (58%) than is indicated by the men’s reports (35%). Finally, a higher proportion of men (37%) compared to women (24%) indicated that they experienced a jointly initiated separation. Thus while both women and men say that women are more likely to initiate separation than men, these data are also consistent with an ego-enhancing bias in reporting.

There are potential implications of this reporting bias for the results. The over reporting of certain types of initiator status, such as husband-initiated or jointly initiated separations for men, and wife-initiated separations for women, increases the heterogeneity of these groups. This increased heterogeneity then biases the associations between the covariates and initiator status towards 0 and increases the chances of making a Type II error. I carried out further analysis to better understand

the nature of the bias in the sample by investigating the effects of time since separation on the differences between women's and men's responses to who initiated the separation. This strategy was based on the assumption that recall bias would be greater the longer the amount of time since separation. Results from this analysis showed no significant differences between women's and men's reports of initiator status if they had separated up to 2 years before the survey, but there were significant differences between those separated longer than 2 years prior to survey. To adjust for this bias (and reduce the impact of reporting bias on the estimates) a dummy control, coded 1 = *separated less than two years*, and 2 = *not separated and separated 2 or more years* was included in the models examining initiator status.<sup>13</sup>

### **Explanatory variables**

My review of prior research identified a number of theoretically and empirically important sociostructural correlates of marriage breakdown. These included *normative and cultural* factors that either shape or reflect a respondent's attitudes towards marriage and divorce such as birth cohort, ethnic background, gender role attitudes, religiosity and cohabitation prior to marriage. Other factors were identified that increase the psychosocial disruption of marriage and impact on the *quality of the match* including family socioeconomic background, parental divorce, age at marriage, premarital birth and early birth. Finally some social correlates act as *barriers* to ending marriage such as marital children and socioeconomic position. HILDA provides data on many of these explanatory variables. The means, proportions (for

---

<sup>13</sup> Another approach to examining the differences between respondents who had separated recently (in the last two years), and respondents who had separated more than 2 years prior to survey, was tried. The full model (Table 6.1) was estimated separately for 1) people whose marriage had ended in permanent separation in the 2 years prior to the survey, and 2) people whose marriage had ended in permanent separation more than 2 years prior to the survey. This approach did not yield any satisfactory results as the model for people more recently separated lacked sufficient data for reliable estimates due to the relatively small numbers of recent separations (n=189).

categorical measures) and standard deviations for the model covariates are presented in Table 5.3.

### ***Measures of normative and cultural factors***

#### ***Birth cohort***

Previous research shows that birth cohort is associated with the development of normative and cultural values towards marriage and divorce (Bracher et al. 1993; Heaton 1991). Birth cohort is included as a series of eleven 5-year birth cohorts. This measure was constructed in several stages. First the year in which the respondent was born was established by subtracting respondent's age at 30 June 2001 from the year of survey (2001). For example, if a respondent was aged 56 at 30 June 2001, their birth year was 1945. Unfortunately, due to the limited information on respondent's birth dates in the confidentialised data, there was some measurement error built into respondent's year of birth (and consequently their birth cohort). To illustrate, using the example above, if a respondent was aged 56 at 30 June 2001, but had a birthday in July and turned 57, then their birth year should be 1944, not 1945. Therefore the nature of the measurement error for birth cohort is that anyone who has a birthday after the 30 June will be allocated a birth year 1 year younger than their actual birth year.

The measurement error is minimised by aggregating respondents together into eleven 5-year birth cohorts: born before 1925, 1925 – 1930, 1931 – 1935, 1936 – 1940, 1941 – 1945, 1946 – 1950, 1951 – 1955, 1956 – 1960, 1961 – 1965, 1966 – 1970 and born in 1971 or later. The middle cohort (1946-1950) is the reference category to accommodate the curvilinear relationship between divorce and birth cohort. Using the cohorts, any measurement error applies to those people born in the first year and last year of each cohort, where some respondents may have been born in the year prior to the cohort they were allocated. For example, some respondents

allocated the birth year of 1946 may have actually been born in 1945 and therefore should be in the 1940 - 1945 cohort not the 1946 - 1950 cohort. But those respondents born in the middle of the cohort, the years 1947, 1948 and 1949 will be grouped in the correct category.

### *Ethnicity*

It is likely that migrant ethnic populations have different marriage and family profiles from the native born population because they retain the normative and cultural values of their country of birth (Bracher et al. 1993; Ware 1975). The measure for respondent's ethnicity was derived from a question in the person interview asking "In which country were you born?" Responses were coded according to the Standard Australian Classification of Countries (ABS 1998). For the purposes of this analysis countries were aggregated into groups that differentiated between 1 = *Australian born*, 2 = *Overseas born – English speaking country*<sup>14</sup>, and 3 = *Overseas Born- NESB (non-English speaking background)*<sup>15</sup>. Australian born is the reference group.

### *Religiosity*

Adherence to a religion usually indicates values and beliefs that reduce marriage breakdown such as a stronger commitment to marriage and the belief that divorce is not acceptable (Call and Heaton 1997). I use a measure of religiosity which indicates the importance of religion in the respondent's life measured by a scale ranging from 0 = *not important* to 10 = *very important*.

---

<sup>14</sup> Overseas born English speaking countries included New Zealand, England, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Canada, and United States of America.

<sup>15</sup> Overseas born NESB countries included Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, Western Europe, Northern Europe, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, South Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Asia, South America, Central America, and the Caribbean.

*Gender role attitudes*

Gender role attitudes affect spousal preferences for the conduct of marriage and thereby influence divorce threat points (Lundberg and Pollack 1996). The measure for gender role attitudes indicates agreement with the statement that: “It is much better for everyone involved if the man earns the money and the woman takes care of home and children”. The responses were on a scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*, hence a higher score indicates more traditional gender role attitudes. The inclusion of this measure is somewhat problematic in that gender role attitudes are likely to change with marriage breakdown and therefore this measure is unlikely to accurately reflect attitudes prior to marriage breakdown.

*Cohabitation*

The main explanation for the increased risk of marriage breakdown when a couple cohabit is a selection effect where cohabiters have less traditional beliefs towards marriage and divorce (Lillard, Brien and Waite 1995). The measure for cohabitation prior to marriage was taken from the marital history table. Respondents were asked to indicate (for each marriage) if they had lived together with their partner before marrying. If the respondent had only been married once, the information relating to their *present or most recent* marriage was used. If they had been married more than once then information relating to their *first* marriage was used. Responses were coded 1 = *Yes*, and 0 = *No*.

***Measures of quality of the match****Family Socioeconomic background*

Family socioeconomic background is indicated by measures of mother’s and father’s occupational status. I include parent’s occupational status as an indicator for quality of the match because prior research has indicated that children with more

economically stable family backgrounds will have had better childhood experiences and better role modelling and therefore be better positioned to have stable marriages (Wolfinger 1999). Higher-level occupations represent greater stability in employment, attract better wages and usually require some type of specialised education and training, so it is expected that if parents had higher occupational status there will be a lower risk of marriage breakdown (Corley and Woods 1991). This measure was derived by aggregating mother's and father's ASCO<sup>16</sup> occupational classification into five categories 1 = *Managers and administrators*, 2 = *Professionals*, 3 = *White collar*, 4 = *Blue collar* and 5 = *Never worked*. The reference category is managers and administrators. A dummy variable for missing values for mother and father's occupations is included in the statistical models.

#### *Parental divorce*

Adult children whose parents have divorced have traits and behaviours that are less conducive to the successful negotiation of long-term relationships and thereby effect the quality of the marriage (Amato 1996; Burns and Dunlop 2000). The measure of parental divorce was taken from a question in the person interview, asking each respondent: "Did your mother and father ever get divorced or separate?" These responses were coded 1 = *Yes*, 0 = *No*.

---

<sup>16</sup> The Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) is a skill-based measure that groups together occupations requiring similar levels of education, skills, knowledge, responsibility, and on-the-job training and experience. The occupational groupings are hierarchically ordered based on their relative skill-levels, with those occupations having the most extensive skill requirements located at the top of the hierarchy (ABS, 1997). The nine-level ASCO classification comprises Managers and Administrators, Professionals, Associate Professionals, Trades and Related, Advanced Clerical, Intermediate Clerical, Intermediate Production and Transport, Elementary Clerical, and labour and Related. For the purposes of this study these groupings were further aggregated into 5 groups comprising 1) Managers and Administrators, 2) Professionals (including associate professionals), 3) white collar (including advanced, intermediate and elementary clerical), 4) Blue collar (including trades and related, intermediate production and transport, labour and related), and 5) Never worked.

*Age at Marriage*

Younger age at marriage indicates a poorer mate selection process whereas older age at marriage indicates a better mate selection process and therefore impacts the quality of the match (Becker 1981; Kalmijn and Poortman 2006). Age at marriage was not collected in the marital history table. This measure was derived by subtracting the year of marriage from the respondent's birth year. Consequently, measurement error was also a problem in calculating age at marriage. While reliable retrospective data were available on the year (and month) that the respondent got married in their first marriage, the birth year measure (described in the construction of the birth cohort measure) had to be relied upon for estimating a respondent's age at marriage. The nature of the measurement error introduced is similar to that described for birth cohort.<sup>17</sup> Age at marriage is included as a continuous variable.

*Premarital birth and early birth*

Premarital birth and early birth increase the risk of divorce either by encouraging a couple to marry when they otherwise would not, or by introducing stress and strains in the developmental stages of the relationship (Teti and Lamb 1989; Waite and Lillard 1991). Due to the lack of detailed information on fertility history in the confidentialised data set these measures had to be derived in several steps. First, the age of the oldest child was established using two sets of variables in the HILDA data set, one set of variables indicated the ages (at survey) of all the respondent's *non-*

---

<sup>17</sup> To illustrate, if a respondent was aged 56 at June 2001 then their allocated birth year would be 1945. If they then married in 1971 their derived age at marriage would be 26 years. However, if that respondent turned 57 in July then even though their allocated birth year is 1945 they were actually born in 1944 and their actual age at marriage may have been 27 years if they had married after 30 June in the year they got married. The measurement error only applies to those who married after 30 June. If the respondent had married before the 30<sup>th</sup> of June then they would have been 26 when they married and age at marriage calculated for that respondent would be accurate. Using this approach 71 respondents had values for age at marriage under the legal age of 16. While some values may have been genuine, there was no way of assessing this and these respondents were dropped from the sample.

*residential* children<sup>18</sup>, and the other set of variables indicates the ages (at survey) of all the respondent's *residential* children<sup>19</sup>. Information from both measures was incorporated to establish a rank-ordering of all respondent's children (residential and non-residential) from first- through to last- born child. The age of the respondent's oldest child was then subtracted from the year of survey (2001) to establish the year in which the first child was born.<sup>20</sup>

Year of birth data were used to develop measures for premarital and early birth. The year in which the first child was born was subtracted from the year of marriage to establish whether or not the first child was born prior to marriage. If a respondent's first child was born in a year before the first marriage then that child was considered to be a premarital birth and a measure indicating 1 = *yes*, 0 = *no* was developed to indicate this. Due to the nature of the possible reporting bias, children who were born the same year of marriage (i.e. where the year of first birth was 1971 and the year of marriage was 1971) were included in a different measure, called *early birth* as it could not be accurately determined whether those children were born before or after the date of marriage in that year. This measure was coded 1 = *yes* and 0 = *no*.

---

<sup>18</sup> Children may be non-residential because they are adults and no longer live with their parents, or because of relationship breakdown and the parent being interviewed is the non-residential parent.

<sup>19</sup> Residential children are children who reside in the household at least 50% of the time.

<sup>20</sup> There is some measurement error in the year of birth of the oldest child. The only data available on respondent's children included ages and sex at the date of survey, and the date of survey ranged from September 2001 to January 2002. Therefore if a respondent's oldest child was aged 26 at interview their allocated birth year would be 1975 (where  $2001 - 26 = 1975$ ), but if that child's birth date was after the date of the interview then their year of birth would be 1 year younger than their actual year of birth.

**Table 5.3: Description of covariates, by sex**

	Women (n = 4883)		Men (n=4110)	
	Mean	SD <sup>a</sup>	Mean	SD <sup>a</sup>
<b>Normative and Cultural</b>				
<i>Birth Cohort:</i>				
< 1925	.07		.06	
1926 – 1930	.06		.06	
1931 – 1935	.06		.06	
1936 – 1940	.07		.08	
1941 – 1945	.08		.09	
1946 – 1950	.10		.11	
1951 – 1955	.11		.12	
1956 – 1960	.13		.13	
1961 – 1965	.13		.13	
1966 – 1970	.11		.10	
> 1971	.09		.06	
<i>Ethnicity:</i>				
Australian Born	.74		.71	
Overseas Born – English	.10		.12	
Overseas Born – NESB	.16		.17	
Religiosity	5.52	3.5	4.49	3.6
Gender role attitudes	4.06	2.1	3.71	2.0
Missing Gender role	.08		.08	
Cohabited prior to marriage (1=yes)	.29		.30	
<b>Quality of the Match</b>				
<i>Father's Occupation:</i>				
Manager/Administrator	.20		.21	
Professional	.22		.21	
White Collar	.11		.09	
Blue Collar	.44		.44	
Never Worked	.03		.002	
Missing	.04		.04	
<i>Mother's Occupation:</i>				
Manager/Administrator	.03		.03	
Professional	.15		.15	
White Collar	.26		.25	
Blue Collar	.24		.22	
Never Worked	.28		.29	
Missing	.04		.06	
Parents Ever Divorced (1=yes)	.16		.13	
Age at marriage	22.9	4.5	25.44	5.0

Pre-marital birth (1=yes)	.07	.06
Early birth	.06	.07
<b>Social Barriers</b>		
First child born in marriage (1=yes) <sup>tv</sup>	.65	.67
Missing children	.09	.06
<i>Highest Level of Education:</i>		
Bachelor Degree or Higher	.20	.20
Diploma	.08	.10
Trade or Certificate	.22	.35
Year 12 or less	.47	.34
Missing	.03	.02

---

Note: A similar version of this table also appears in Hewitt et al (2005). See Appendix 3.

<sup>a</sup>Standard Deviations are only reported for continuous measures.

<sup>tv</sup>Indicates that measure is time varying

*Measures of social barriers**First child born in marriage*

The first social characteristic representing a barrier to marriage breakdown is a measure for first child born in marriage. This measure is time varying because couples who stay together longer are more likely to have children and therefore whether or not children are born within the marriage is correlated with the duration of marriage (Yamaguchi and Ferguson 1995). Similar to the approach used to identify premarital or early births, the year in which the first child was born was subtracted from the year of marriage to establish when the first child was born during marriage. This information was then used to develop a measure indicating when the first child was born within the marriage. The variable is coded 0 in the marriage-years before the first child is born and 1 from the year the first child was born. Respondents whose first children were born prior to marriage are coded 0 on this measure, but early birth is coded 1 from the first year of marriage. Additionally, 39 respondents had their first child in the same year that they separated. These respondents were excluded from the time varying child measure as it was not certain whether children were born before or after separation.

Six hundred and thirteen respondents indicated they had at least one child who had died but no additional information was provided about these children. Therefore the child data from these respondents were incomplete and it was not possible to accurately rank order all of their children by age. A small number of respondents (n = 20) also had missing data on 1 or more of their children. Both these groups of respondents were coded 1 on a dummy variable indicating missing child data.

*Education*

Education is included as a measure of socioeconomic position and indicates potential access to employment should marriage end (Becker 1981). Education was chosen

because previous research has shown that it is a relatively stable indicator of socioeconomic position that tends to be established early in adulthood and changes very little after marriage (Tzeng and Mare 1995). Other measures of socioeconomic position such as occupation and income are more volatile during marriage and retrospective data were not available for them. The education measure consists of four categories based on the Australian Standard Classification of Education (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001): 1 = *Bachelor degree or higher*, 2 = *Undergraduate or Associate Diploma* (tertiary qualification beyond high school but not bachelor level), 3 = *Trade or Certificate* (attained a trade qualification or certificate beyond high school), and 4 = *Year 12 or less* (high school diploma or less). Bachelor Degree or higher is the reference group and a dummy for missing values is included.

### **The time dependent nature of marriage breakdown**

Previous research indicates that marriage breakdown is a time dependent event (Heaton 1991; Heaton, Albrecht and Martin 1985; Heaton and Call 1995). To better understand the nature and extent of the time dependency of marriage breakdown in the current sample, life tables are used to describe the event data (Box-Steffensmeir and Jones 2004; Heaton and Call 1995; Singer and Willett 2003). The life table presented over the next few pages in Table 5.4 tracks the event occurrence (i.e. marriage breakdown) in the analytic sample from the beginning of the exposure to the event (i.e. marriage) through to the end of the observation period (i.e. date of survey).

**Table 5.4: Life Table describing number of years married, survival and hazard functions for analytic sample, by sex**

1	2	Men						Women				
		3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Year	Time Interval	Number of men married at the beginning of the year <sup>a</sup>	Number of men separated during the year	Number of men censored at the end of the year	Survivor function (% of men still married at the end of the year)	Hazard Function (% of men separated during the year)	Number of women married at the beginning of the year <sup>a</sup>	Number of women separated during the year	Number of women censored at the end of the year	Survivor function (% of women still married at the end of the year)	Hazard Function (% of women separated during the year)	
0	0 1	4110	8	85	0.998	0.0019	4883	15	89	0.997	0.0031	
1	1 2	4017	57	69	0.984	0.0142	4779	72	75	0.982	0.0151	
2	2 3	3891	68	83	0.967	0.0175	4632	99	93	0.961	0.0214	
3	3 4	3740	57	66	0.952	0.0152	4440	77	78	0.944	0.0173	
4	4 5	3617	59	81	0.936	0.0163	4285	81	90	0.926	0.0189	
5	5 6	3477	40	66	0.926	0.0115	4114	69	80	0.911	0.0168	
6	6 7	3371	47	76	0.913	0.0139	3965	65	94	0.896	0.0164	
7	7 8	3248	40	67	0.902	0.0123	3806	49	66	0.884	0.0129	
8	8 9	3141	37	80	0.891	0.0118	3691	64	93	0.869	0.0173	
9	9 10	3024	40	73	0.879	0.0132	3534	43	81	0.859	0.0122	
10	10 11	2911	44	82	0.866	0.0151	3410	45	86	0.847	0.0132	
11	11 12	2785	24	79	0.858	0.0086	3279	49	93	0.835	0.0149	
12	12 13	2682	33	80	0.848	0.0123	3137	39	91	0.824	0.0124	
13	13 14	2569	31	57	0.838	0.0121	3007	41	66	0.813	0.0136	
14	14 15	2481	29	79	0.828	0.0117	2900	32	81	0.804	0.0110	
15	15 16	2373	23	85	0.820	0.0097	2787	33	94	0.794	0.0118	
16	16 17	2265	21	74	0.812	0.0093	2660	24	88	0.787	0.0090	
17	17 18	2170	30	76	0.801	0.0138	2548	27	82	0.779	0.0106	
18	18 19	2064	26	62	0.791	0.0126	2439	30	68	0.769	0.0123	
19	19 20	1976	13	65	0.786	0.0066	2341	12	83	0.765	0.0051	
20	20 21	1898	17	67	0.779	0.0090	2246	24	81	0.757	0.0107	
21	21 22	1814	18	58	0.771	0.0099	2141	20	74	0.750	0.0093	
22	22 23	1738	21	43	0.762	0.0121	2047	22	50	0.742	0.0107	
23	23 24	1674	14	60	0.755	0.0084	1975	10	69	0.738	0.0051	
24	24 25	1600	9	59	0.751	0.0056	1896	18	61	0.731	0.0095	
25	25 26	1532	19	57	0.742	0.0124	1817	15	80	0.725	0.0083	
26	26 27	1456	11	61	0.736	0.0076	1722	12	72	0.720	0.0070	
27	27 28	1384	9	55	0.731	0.0065	1638	9	60	0.716	0.0055	
28	28 29	1320	10	69	0.726	0.0076	1569	10	67	0.712	0.0064	
29	29 30	1241	11	68	0.719	0.0089	1492	7	76	0.708	0.0047	

30	30	31	1162	7	62	0.715	0.0060	1409	7	66	0.705	0.0050
31	31	32	1093	7	64	0.710	0.0064	1336	4	80	0.703	0.0030
32	32	33	1022	3	71	0.708	0.0029	1252	3	75	0.701	0.0024
33	33	34	948	3	54	0.706	0.0032	1174	3	64	0.699	0.0026
34	34	35	891	0	57	0.706	0.0000	1107	4	70	0.697	0.0036
35	35	36	834	5	52	0.702	0.0060	1033	2	66	0.695	0.0019
36	36	37	777	2	41	0.700	0.0026	965	2	53	0.694	0.0021
37	37	38	734	1	44	0.699	0.0014	910	2	60	0.692	0.0022
38	38	39	689	3	51	0.696	0.0044	848	0	55	0.692	0.0000
39	39	40	635	1	49	0.695	0.0016	793	4	54	0.689	0.0050
40	40	41	585	2	45	0.693	0.0034	735	0	62	0.689	0.0000
41	41	42	538	0	37	0.693	0.0000	673	0	51	0.689	0.0000
42	42	43	501	0	45	0.693	0.0000	622	0	56	0.689	0.0000
43	43	44	456	0	47	0.693	0.0000	566	0	56	0.689	0.0000
44	44	45	409	0	39	0.693	0.0000	510	0	50	0.689	0.0000
45	45	46	370	0	46	0.693	0.0000	460	0	62	0.689	0.0000
46	46	47	324	0	47	0.693	0.0000	398	0	48	0.689	0.0000
47	47	48	277	1	34	0.690	0.0036	350	1	40	0.687	0.0029
48	48	49	242	0	26	0.690	0.0000	309	0	31	0.687	0.0000
49	49	50	216	1	34	0.687	0.0046	278	0	45	0.687	0.0000
50	50	51	181	0	30	0.687	0.0000	233	2	38	0.681	0.0086
51	51	52	151	0	32	0.687	0.0000	193	0	39	0.681	0.0000
52	52	53	119	0	29	0.687	0.0000	154	0	37	0.681	0.0000
53	53	54	90	0	16	0.687	0.0000	117	0	23	0.681	0.0000
54	54	55	74	0	16	0.687	0.0000	94	0	19	0.681	0.0000
55	55	56	58	0	11	0.687	0.0000	75	0	10	0.681	0.0000
56	56	57	47	0	14	0.687	0.0000	65	0	15	0.681	0.0000
57	57	58	33	0	7	0.687	0.0000	50	0	11	0.681	0.0000
58	58	59	26	0	5	0.687	0.0000	39	0	8	0.681	0.0000
59	59	60	21	0	10	0.687	0.0000	31	0	14	0.681	0.0000
60	60	61	11	0	5	0.687	0.0000	17	0	4	0.681	0.0000
61	61	62	6	0	4	0.687	0.0000	13	0	6	0.681	0.0000
62	62	63	2	0	0	0.687	0.0000	13	0	0	0.681	0.0000
63	63	64	2	0	0	0.687	0.0000	7	0	2	0.681	0.0000
64	64	65	2	0	0	0.687	0.0000	5	0	1	0.681	0.0000
65	65	66	2	0	0	0.687	0.0000	4	0	1	0.681	0.0000
66	66	67	2	0	0	0.687	0.0000	3	0	0	0.681	0.0000
67	67	68	2	0	0	0.687	0.0000	3	0	2	0.681	0.0000
68	68	69	1	0	1	0.687	0.0000	1	0	1	0.681	0.0000

<sup>a</sup>This column represents the risk set at each marriage duration.

Table 5.4 is divided into a series of rows indicating time (Column 1) and time intervals (Column 2). A respondent enters into the risk set the year they get married. In other words, once married a respondent becomes exposed to the ‘risk’ of separation. The life table provides, for each interval, information on the number of men (Column 3) and women (Column 8) who were married at the beginning of the year (this is the risk set); the number of men (Column 4) and women (Column 9) who separated from their marriage during that year; and the number of men (Column 5) and women (Column 10) who were censored at the end of that year. A respondent may be censored because there are no longer any observations on them, for example if a respondent has only been married for five years then they will be censored at the end of the fifth year, or because they experienced an event other than separation, such as widowhood. This information is used to calculate the survivor and hazard functions.

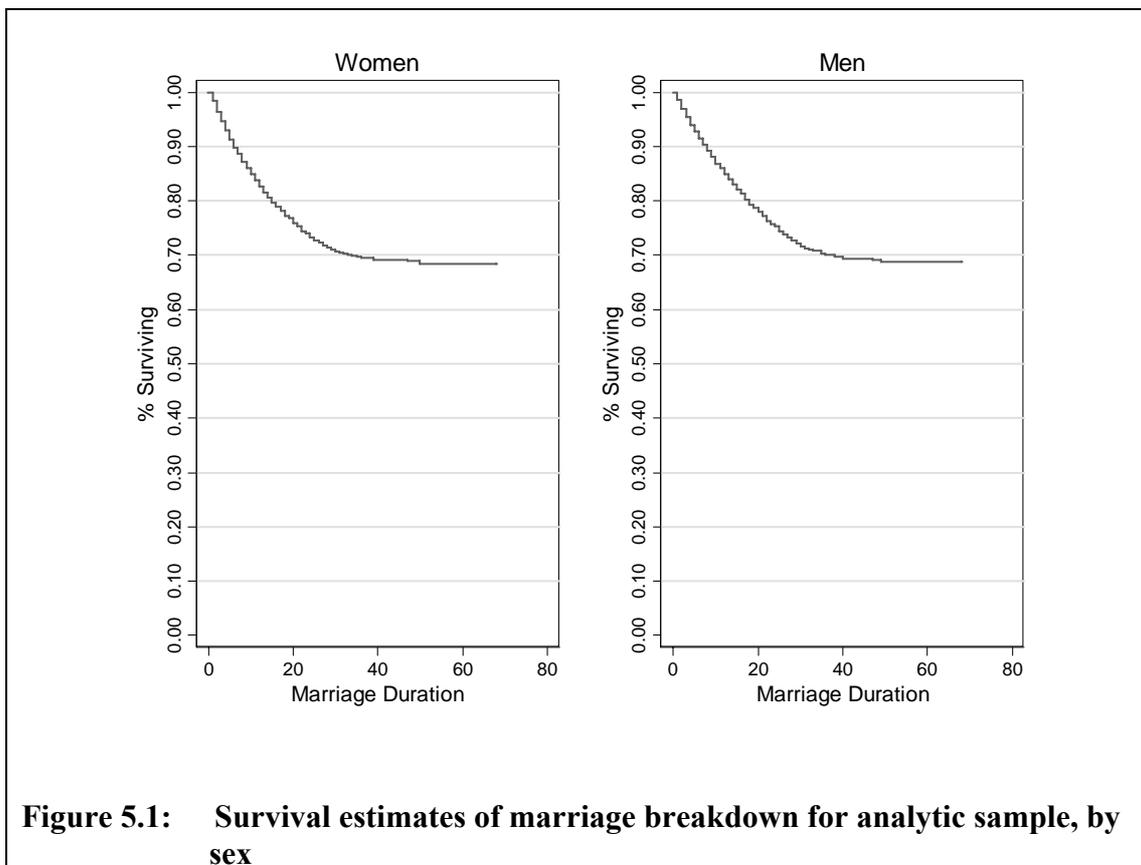
### ***Survivor Function***

The survivor function tells us the proportion of respondents surviving marriage breakdown at each time interval (marriage duration). The survival function is:

$$S(t) = 1 - F(t) = \Pr(T \geq t)$$

Where  $S(t)$  is the probability that the event has not occurred at any given duration. The survival estimates for men are contained in Column 6 and Column 11 of Table 5.4 for women. There is a lot of useful information contained in the life tables, but a more efficient way of representing the overall trends is by graphing the survival estimate over the duration of marriage. Figure 5.1 plots the survival function for men and women in the sample. The data in Table 5.4 and Figure 5.1 show that the overall proportion of men and women who have not experienced marriage breakdown since entry into the risk set. The overall survival of first marriages in the analytic sample is 68.1 percent for women and 68.7 percent for men. We can see that the

survival probabilities drop steadily within the first 25 years or so of marriage for women and men, after which the survival function flattens out. After 35 or 40 years the proportion staying married is relatively constant and does not drop below 68 percent for either men or women, although this final figure varies slightly for men and women. Further, this figure estimated from the HILDA data accords closely with official estimates that 32 percent of current marriages will end in divorce (ABS 2000).



**Figure 5.1: Survival estimates of marriage breakdown for analytic sample, by sex**

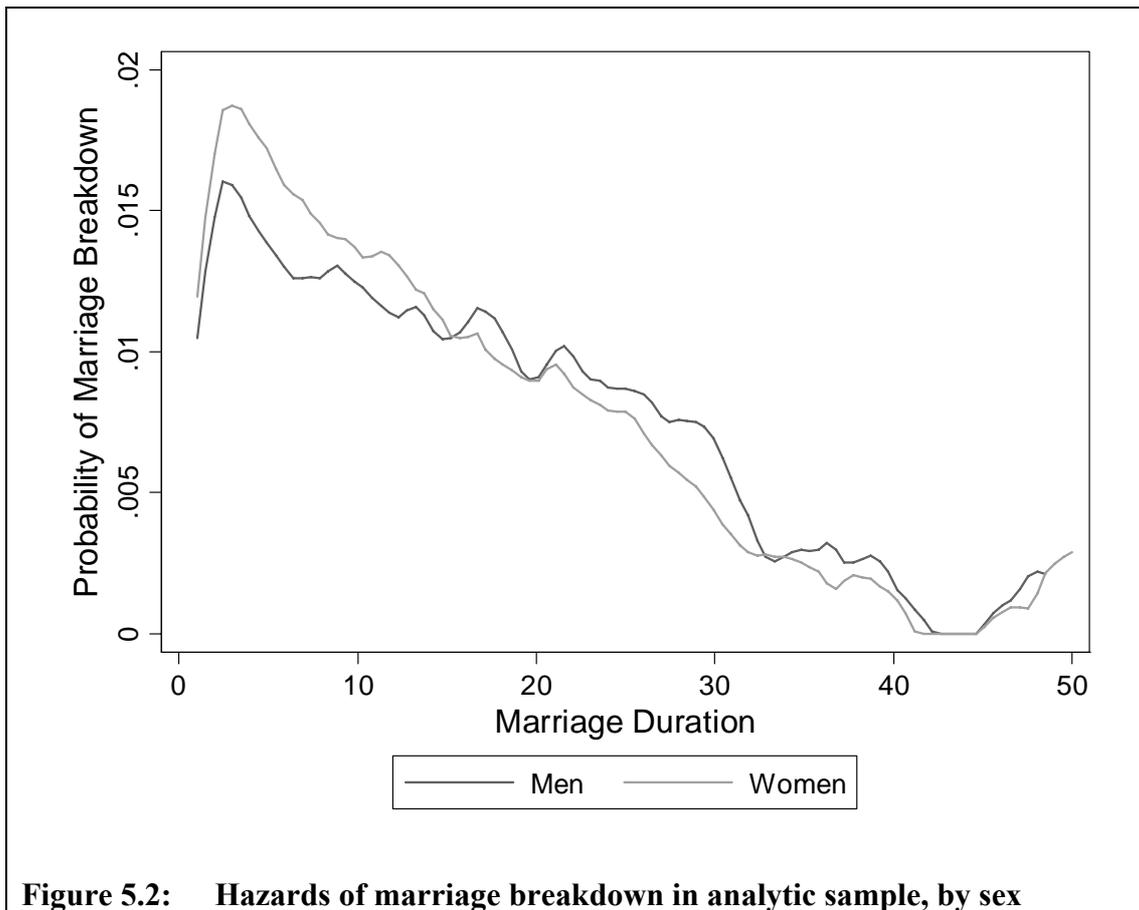
Note: This figure also appears in Hewitt et al (2005) (Appendix 3).

***Hazard Function***

An alternative way of looking at the incidence of marriage breakdown is to examine failure rather than survival. This is done using the *hazard rate*. The hazard function is:

$$h(t) = (f(t) | s(t))$$

The hazard rate represents the likelihood of experiencing marriage breakdown  $f(t)$  given that the event did not occur in the previous time period  $s(t)$ . The hazard rate is an important concept for the present study because event history analysis models the hazard rate (Yamaguchi 1991: 9). The hazard function for men is presented in Column 7 and Column 12 of Table 5.4 for women. I also plot the hazard functions for men and women, which are presented in Figure 5.2. The hazard indicates the proportion of marriages that ended due to the event under consideration for each time interval, given that the respondent had entered into that time interval. Overall, these results demonstrate a broadly curvilinear association between length of marriage and marital breakdown in this sample. The hazard of separation (marriage breakdown) increases within the first 5 years of marriage and then declines at a decreasing rate in subsequent years. The hazard of separation after 40 years of marriage is virtually non-existent. In any given year, the probability of separation is very low for both women and men, but as the survival estimates indicate the cumulative incidence of marriage breakdown over time is much greater. These results also indicate that overall the men and women in this sample have very similar patterns of marriage duration and probability of marital breakdown. This is not surprising given that the breakdown of a marriage includes both the husband and wife.



**Figure 5.2: Hazards of marriage breakdown in analytic sample, by sex**

Note: This figure also appears in Hewitt et al (2005) (Appendix 3).

### Analytic approach

As illustrated in Figure 5.2 marriage breakdown is time-dependent. The hazard of separation is not constant over the duration of the marriage because the likelihood of marriage breakdown is much greater early in marriage and declines later in marriage. Therefore, event history modelling approaches, that take into account this time-dependency, have become the standard method used in divorce research (Allison 1984; Box-Steffensmeir and Jones 2004; Singer and Willett 2003; Yamaguchi 1991). There are two main approaches to event history modelling – continuous time and discrete time. The differences between each approach relates to the nature of the data collected.

Continuous event history approaches assume that the event under consideration can occur at any time. The two continuous time approaches include

parametric models, and Cox proportional hazard models. The main difference between these two techniques is that the parametric models are concerned with the exact nature of the duration dependency of the event, whereas with a Cox approach the duration dependence of the event does not have to be taken into account. The Cox model is used widely in social research, because the concern is primarily with the associations between the covariates and the hazard of an event occurring, rather than the nature of the duration dependency (the timing of the event itself). One important limitation of the Cox model is that it does not deal well with large numbers of multiple failures within time intervals. The model relies on the sequencing of events in estimating the partial likelihood function, and when there are tied events it is not possible to determine precisely the composition of the risk set at the time of the failures and the partial likelihood function has to be estimated (although several methods have been developed to estimate the partial likelihood function for tied events such as the Breslow method).

Often, however, the data available are not detailed enough to be used as continuous measures and multiple failures are amassed at discrete time intervals (i.e. years). For example in this study marital separation would occur on a specific day, month, and year. The data collected, however, only indicate the year in which separation occurred. Therefore, even though the event under consideration here is continuous in nature, the data collected amasses the event(s) at discrete time intervals. Hence, given the nature of the data available the discrete time model is the preferred model.

While a discrete time model is the most appropriate approach to use given the data there are additional considerations with using this approach. The main limitation with a discrete time approach is that the nature of the duration dependence has to be accurately specified so that the baseline hazard does not unduly impact on the

coefficients of the covariates (controlling duration dependence is dealt with in more detail in the following sections). To further confirm that the best approach to modelling the data in this study was selected, the models presented in Table 6.1 were also estimated using a Cox Proportional Hazards modelling approach (the results of this model are presented in Appendix 2, Table A2.2). The Cox model yielded similar results to the discrete time model, possibly because the observation period encompassed a long time frame (68 years) and the data therefore approximate continuous data. Nevertheless, the discrete time approach was still the preferred model for the theoretical reasons outlined above.

#### *Discrete time event history model*

The first model estimated is a discrete time event history model. This modelling approach requires the identification of an ‘event’ as well as the ‘timing’ of that event. The event in the current study is marriage breakdown, where respondents whose first marriage had ended (either in permanent separation or divorce) were coded 1 and intact first marriages were coded 0. The timing of marriage breakdown is measured by a variable indicating the duration of marriage. The description of event occurrence at each time interval (Table 5.4, Column 2) for the analytic sample is presented in Table 5.4 Column 4 for men and Column 9 for women. This measure for the timing of marriage breakdown was constructed by subtracting the year of separation from the first marriage from the year the first marriage began. To illustrate, if a person separated in 1996 and was married in 1943 then their marriage duration was 53 years. Duration for respondents who were still married in their first marriage was calculated using the year of survey and their year of marriage. To illustrate, if a person married in 1943 and was still married at 2001 their marriage duration is 58 years. Once the duration measure was created I constructed a marriage-year data set, where each respondent contributes one person-year to the dataset for every year they are married.

The hazard formula for the discrete time event history model is:

$$h(t)=\Pr(T = t_i | T \geq t_i, \mathbf{x})$$

Source: (Box-Steffensmeir and Jones 2004: 73).

Here, the probability of failure ( $T = t_i$ ) is conditional on survival ( $T \geq t_i$ ) as well as the covariates ( $\mathbf{x}$ ). Given that the dependent variable is binary, coded 0 in years that a respondent is married and 1 in the year they separate, logistic regression is used to predict the likelihood that a marriage will end given that it did not end in the previous year conditional on the covariates. Essentially, in this form, the discrete time event history model is a conditional logit model, where the occurrence of the event is conditional on the respondent not having experienced the event in the previous observation period (in this case the previous year).

### *Censoring*

Censoring in event history modelling occurs when there is incomplete data for a respondent within an observation period (Allison 1984; Box-Steffensmeir and Jones 2004; Yamaguchi 1991). There are two main types of censoring, left and right. Left censoring occurs when risk-history prior to the observation period is unknown. There are no left censored observations in the present study. The data have been reconstructed retrospectively, and entry into the risk period occurs when the respondent marries. Respondents with missing data on their date of marriage were dropped from the analytic sample ( $n = 225$ ). Right censoring occurs when a respondent does not experience an event (in this case marriage breakdown), before the observation period ends, or because a respondent drops out of the risk set for reasons other than the event under consideration. Both types of right censoring are present in this study. Respondents who remained married until the survey (i.e. those who did not experience the event within the observation period) are coded 0 only on the

dependent variable and treated as right censored at survey. If a respondent's marriage ended in an interval due to death of a spouse (i.e. due to reasons other than the event under consideration), then one-year marriage intervals were included for that respondent until the year in which widowhood occurred, and treated as right censored after that year.

*Controlling for duration dependence in the discrete time model*

One of the limitations of the discrete time event history modelling approach indicated earlier is the need to control for duration dependence. Duration dependence arises because each individual case in a discrete time event history data set contributes multiple lines of data and these repeated measures on the same individual may be temporally dependent. For the current analysis the likelihood of marriage breakdown is not equally distributed for each observation year (as indicated in Figure 5.2), but a logit discrete time model assumes that the hazard rate is flat with respect to time. Therefore the duration dependence of the baseline hazard needs to be controlled.

There are several different approaches to specifying the duration dependence of the baseline hazard and the best approach depends on the shape of the baseline hazard of the event under consideration. Table 5.8 presents the likelihood ratios for several different duration dependency specifications of marriage breakdown in the current sample.

**Table 5.5: Likelihood ratios for different duration specifications**

<b>Duration Dependency</b>	<b>Logit Model</b>	<b>Likelihood Ratio test<sup>a</sup></b>
None	-11979.62	-
Linear	-11701.82	554.69**
Natural Log	-11782.97	392.38**
Quadratic	-11689.62	579.09**
Spline (to the 6 <sup>th</sup> power) <sup>b</sup>	-11683.96	590.40**
<b>5<sup>th</sup> order Polynomial</b>	<b>-11683.96</b>	<b>590.40**</b>

<sup>a</sup> Likelihood ratio tests comparing each model controlling for duration dependence to a model with no controls for duration dependence.

<sup>b</sup> Splines were set at 2 years, 11 years, 22 years, 39 years and 50 years to coincide with the ‘bumps’ on the baseline hazard as indicated in Figure 5.2.

It is evident from Table 5.8 that all models accounting for duration dependency in some way are preferable to the model that does not account for duration dependency. Of the models used to account for duration dependency the spline and the polynomial provide the best fit. This is not surprising given the number of ‘bumps’ that can be observed in the baseline hazard presented in Figure 5.2. Even though there is a broadly curvilinear trend there are a number of ‘ups’ and ‘downs’ in the hazard rate at certain marriage durations that suggests that the trend is not strictly linear or quadratic. For the current analysis the fifth-order polynomial specification for duration dependence was used, but the spline would have done equally as well.

### ***Discrete time event history model with competing risks***

The second type of model estimated in this study is a discrete-time survival model with competing-risks that takes into account who initiated separation. The competing risks modelling approach was deemed appropriate for the current study because I am interested in investigating the probability, that when marriage breakdown occurs, it is initiated by the wife, the husband or jointly (see Hachen 1988 for a discussion on whether, and when, the competing risks modelling approach is appropriate).

To estimate the competing risks event history model the same marriage-year data set is used and censoring and duration dependence are treated the same as in the

discrete time event history model, but the outcome measure is different. The dependent variable is coded 0 in years that a respondent is married and coded 1 = *wife initiated* separation, 2 = *husband initiated* separation or 3 = *jointly initiated* separation in the year they separate. Due to the multiple (competing) type-specific risks, multinomial logistic regression is then used to model the type-specific rates<sup>21</sup>. The model estimates the conditional probability of experiencing a wife-initiated separation versus remaining married, experiencing a husband-initiated separation versus remaining married, or experiencing a jointly initiated separation versus remaining married. For each dependent variable the other types of initiator status are treated as a competing events (Box-Steffensmeir and Jones 2004). The hazard formula for the competing risks model is:

$$h_k(t | \mathbf{x}) = \Pr(T = t_i | T \geq t_i, \mathbf{x})$$

Source: (Box-Steffensmeir and Jones 2004: 167).

The competing risks model is identical to the discrete time model except it estimates the hazard of  $k$  type-specific events occurring (Box-Steffensmeir and Jones 2004). Using this approach once a type-specific event is experienced the observation exits the risk set and is no longer at risk of experiencing the remaining events. This means that only one type-specific outcome is observed and only the shortest failure time is observed even though it is assumed that the respondent was at risk of experiencing the other events prior to experiencing the type-specific event (Box-Steffensmeir and Jones 2004; Singer and Willett 2003). This may pose a problem for some outcomes, where the exposure to other type-specific events may continue after

---

<sup>21</sup> This was not the only modeling approach available within the competing risks framework. The other modeling approach entails modeling the hazard of the event and then estimating the odds that the event is of a specific type. This alternative approach is typically used when there is a theoretical reason for believing that the event and the type-specific outcome are sequential (see Allison 1984, pp. 46-50; Yamaguchi 1991, pp.169-171; and Hachen 1988).

experiencing one type-specific event. However, for the current study, it seems a relatively safe assumption, that once a respondent has experienced separation from their first marriage, with either the wife, husband, or both partners, taking the initiative, a respondent is no longer at risk of experiencing the remaining events.

### **Plan of analysis**

The main limitation of the approach here is that, even though understanding gender differences in the determinants of marriage breakdown is one of the main aims of this thesis, I am unable to take into account a couple's relative characteristics in predicting marriage breakdown. This is because the retrospective data in HILDA does not contain any information on former spouse's characteristics for those respondents who were separated or divorced prior to Wave 1. Nevertheless, I take gender into account in two ways. First, I conduct all analysis separately for men and women, and then formally test whether the observed gender differences are significant by pooling men's and women's samples and interacting gender with all covariates. Second, HILDA collects information from separated or divorced respondents on which spouse decided to end the marriage. I can, therefore, take into account gender in the process of marriage breakdown by investigating whether the wife, husband or both spouses decided to end the marriage.

In Chapter 6 I address the first research question "What is the nature and extent of the association between social background characteristics and marriage breakdown in Australia?" To examine the patterning of association between sociostructural factors and marriage breakdown I estimate a discrete time event history model including all social characteristics described earlier in this chapter. To address the subsidiary question "Are there gender differences in the associations?" I use two analytic strategies. First, I consider gender differences by running the models separately for men and women, but due to data limitations outlined earlier, I do not

investigate the relative contribution of husbands' and wives' characteristics to marriage breakdown. Second, to formally test whether the observed differences between men and women are significant I pool the men's and women's samples and re-estimate the models with gender interactions for each covariate.

In Chapter 7, I address the second research question "Are there differences in the nature and extent of the association between social characteristics and separations initiated by husbands, wives or by both spouses?" To examine the associations between social characteristics and which spouse took the initiative to end the marriage I estimate a discrete time event history model with competing risks for wife, husband or jointly initiated separation. In this model I include only those social characteristics that significantly improved the overall fit of the model estimated in Chapter 6. This analysis assesses whether there are gender differences in the dependent variable of which spouse initiated separation. Second, to further investigate gender differences in marriage outcomes I estimate models that contrast wife-initiated with husband- and jointly initiated separation to formally test whether the differences between separations initiated by wives and husbands are significant. To investigate the gender differences in the covariates I also address the subsidiary question "Are there gender differences in the social characteristics associated with husband-initiated, wife-initiated or jointly initiated separations?" To do this I employ two analytic strategies. First, I estimate the models separately for men and women, and second I pool the men's and women's samples and interact gender with all model covariates to test whether the differences between men's and women's characteristics are significantly different.

In Chapter 8, I further develop our understanding of gender differences in marriage breakdown. As illustrated in Chapter 4, one aspect of marriage and family life that is highly stratified by gender is the care and responsibility for children.

Therefore in Chapter 8 I undertake a detailed case study of the relationships between the number, age and gender composition of marital children and marriage breakdown and which spouse initiates separation. In that chapter I address both research questions but the covariates in the models include several time-varying measures for the presence and characteristics of children in marriage. To address the first and subsidiary research question “What is the nature and extent of the association between marital children’s characteristics and marriage breakdown in Australia?” and “Are there gender differences in the associations?” I first estimate a discrete time event history model of marriage breakdown separately for men and women. Then I re-estimate that model on the pooled sample with gender interactions. To address the second and subsidiary research questions “Are there differences in the nature and extent of the association between marital children’s characteristics and separations initiated by husbands, wives or by both spouses?” and “Are there gender differences in the marital children’s characteristics associated with husband-initiated, wife-initiated or jointly initiated separations?” I first estimate competing risks models of which spouse initiated separation relative to staying married for men and women, second I estimate a competing risks model of wife-initiated separation relative to husband or jointly initiated separation, and finally I estimate a model on the pooled sample interacting gender with each covariate.

### **Conclusion**

In this study I use retrospective life history data from Wave 1 of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey (HILDA) to investigate the sociostructural determinants of marriage breakdown, and which spouse initiated separation. Even though longitudinal couple data would have been more suited to the current research, appropriate data were unavailable. I examine a broad range of social characteristics, including birth cohort, ethnic background, religiosity, gender role

attitudes, cohabitation prior to marriage, parent's occupation, parental divorce, premarital and early births, children born in marriage and education. The overall focus of the analysis is twofold: first to establish patterns of association between sociostructural factors, marriage breakdown, and which spouse initiates separation; and second to investigate how gender contributes to differences in the process of marriage breakdown.

## Chapter 6

### Marriage breakdown in Australia: the social correlates of separation and divorce

---

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I investigate the patterning of association between the sociostructural factors identified in Chapter 3 and marriage breakdown<sup>22</sup>. While considerable international research documents how these factors are correlated with marriage breakdown only a handful of Australian studies have undertaken a similar investigation (Bracher et al. 1993; Bradbury and Norris 2005; Day 1964; De Vaus, Qu and Weston 2003; Roden 1989). Moreover, none of the Australian research explicitly takes into account gender differences. This chapter therefore provides a baseline of Australian findings using a large recent nationally representative population sample. I address the first research questions posed at the end of Chapter 4: “What is the nature and extent of the association between social background characteristics and marriage breakdown in Australia?” and the subsidiary question “Are there gender differences in the associations?”

#### **Background**

The key social characteristics associated with marriage breakdown were discussed in Chapter 3. I grouped these characteristics according to three mechanisms by which

---

<sup>22</sup> This chapter is an adapted version of Hewitt, B., Baxter, J. and Western, M. (2005). Marriage Breakdown in Australia: The social correlates of separation and divorce. *Journal of Sociology*, 41, 163 – 183 (Appendix 3). Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the University of Queensland Postgraduate Research Conference, November 2003; The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) conference December 2003, University of New England, Armidale, Australia; and in the research seminar series at The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, 19 March 2004, Canberra.

sociostructural factors influence marriage breakdown: normative and cultural mechanisms, psychosocial disruptive factors, and social barriers.

*Normative and cultural* factors include birth cohort, ethnic background, religion, gender role attitudes and cohabitation. Previous research finds that birth cohort has a curvilinear association with divorce, because older cohorts are less likely to divorce than younger cohorts but younger cohorts have shorter marriage durations and have not been exposed to the risk of divorce for as long as older cohorts and are therefore unlikely to be divorced. Typically cohorts in the middle of the age distribution have the highest rates of marriage breakdown (Bracher et al. 1993). Therefore, I expect that respondents in older and younger birth cohorts will have a lower likelihood of marriage breakdown than birth cohorts in the middle of the distribution. Immigrants from English-speaking countries have higher rates of divorce compared to people born in Australia but immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds are less likely to divorce (Bracher et al. 1993; De Vaus 1997; Jones 1994; Roden 1989). It is likely that these differences are due to cultural and religious differences that shape marriage and family life (Bracher et al. 1993; Jones 1994; Ware 1975). The belief systems of most religions hold marriage as an unbreakable bond. People who have strong attachment to religion are therefore also likely to have more traditional views of the institution of marriage and are less likely to divorce (Waite and Lehrer 2003). Traditional gender role attitudes, emphasising the husband as the primary breadwinner and the wife as the home maker and carer have also been found to reduce the risk of marriage breakdown. However, there is also good evidence that the nature of this association differs for men and women. If women hold traditional gender role beliefs then this is likely to reduce conflict within the marriage over the divisions of labour and power differentials that tend to underpin

marriages (Heaton and Blake 1999; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001). On the other hand, when men hold traditional gender role attitudes that increases conflict over power differentials and reduces marital quality (Amato and Booth 1995). Finally, previous research has found premarital cohabitation reflects less traditional attitudes and lower levels of commitment to marriage increasing the risk of subsequent marriage breakdown for those who cohabit (Lillard, Brien and Waite 1995).

The *quality of the match* is influenced by factors such as family socioeconomic background, parental divorce, age at marriage, premarital births, and early births. Children who grew up in homes with higher levels of economic prosperity are expected to have suffered less hardship and to have experienced more positive role modelling and therefore have a lower likelihood of experiencing marriage breakdown (Wolfinger 1999; Wolfinger 2000). Higher-level occupations offer greater stability in employment, better wages and usually require specialised education and training. Thus if parents had higher occupational status it is expected that there will be a lower risk of marriage breakdown. Previous research only examines the influence of father's occupation on marriage breakdown as this is most likely to have determined the family's prosperity. This literature has mixed results with some studies finding no association between father's occupation and divorce (Bracher et al. 1993) and other studies finding a negative association (Corley and Woods 1991). In contrast, if mothers had higher occupational status this indicates exposure to non-traditional family roles which may vary the risk of divorce for men and women by establishing non-traditional expectations of the division of labour within relationships. For women this type of role modelling may encourage less traditional gender role attitudes and destabilise marriage. For men on the other hand

it may increase their acceptance of women's employment and work and reduce the risk of marriage breakdown. I include measures of both father's and mother's occupations to better understand these processes.

Experiencing parental divorce increases the likelihood of marriage breakdown primarily because children of divorced parents are more likely to exhibit interpersonal behaviours (such as jealousy, anger, poor communication) that interfere with the successful negotiation of relationships than adult children of parents who remained married (Amato 1996; Burns and Dunlop 2000). Young age at marriage also increases the risk of marriage breakdown because those who marry at younger ages tend to have less maturity and life experience to negotiate a marital relationship (Bumpass, Martin and Sweet 1991; Wolcott and Hughes 1999) and young age at marriage indicates a poorer mate selection process (Becker 1981; Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Pre-marital or unplanned pregnancies and births increase the risk of marriage breakdown because a couple decide to marry when they otherwise might not, alternatively the birth of a child early in marriage can add to stressors and strains in the developmental stages of the relationship (Waite and Lillard 1991).

Factors that operate as *social barriers* to marriage breakdown include the presence of children and socioeconomic resources within marriage. Children born within marriage reduce the likelihood of marriage breakdown because they represent a greater investment in the relationship and a reason to stay together even if the marriage is unsatisfactory (Becker 1981; Levinger 1976; Waite and Lillard 1991).

This study uses education as an indicator of socioeconomic resources because appropriate alternative measures such as income or employment status are not available. Specialisation-trading arguments hold that women with higher levels of education will have better labour market opportunities which decreases their reliance

on husband's income and thereby increase the likelihood of divorce (Becker 1981). Conversely, men with higher levels of education are more likely to have better employment prospects and employment stability and therefore more successfully fulfil their provider role leading to a lower likelihood of divorce. Empirical research provides support for these expectations for men but the majority of evidence for women indicates the opposite to the expected associations. Studies using samples from Finland (Jalovaara, 2003), Sweden (Hoem, 1997), and the US (South, 2001; Tzeng & Mare, 1995) show that both men and women with higher levels of education have a lower likelihood of divorce. Together the theoretical and empirical literatures suggest two different hypotheses, anticipating different outcomes for women with higher levels of education. One based on theory would predict an increased risk of marriage breakdown and the other based on empirical evidence would predict a reduced likelihood.

## **Methods**

### ***Measures***

The descriptive statistics for the measures used in this model are presented in Table 5.1. As described in Chapter 5, the dependent variable is marriage breakdown. This measure is coded 0 if the respondent is still in their first marriage and 1 if their first marriage has ended in separation (for at least 1 year) or divorce.

### ***Analysis***

First, I estimate a discrete time event history model predicting marriage breakdown, separately for women and men. As described in Chapter 5, this approach is appropriate for time dependent outcomes such as marriage breakdown, because it allows for instances where the event has not been observed during the observation period, or where respondents drop out of the risk set for reasons other than the event under consideration (such as death of spouse). More conventional statistical methods,

such as logistic regression, do not allow for this kind of “right censoring” of the dependent variable. This model includes all the sociostructural variables discussed in Chapter 5.

This model was estimated separately for men and women to investigate the possibility that the associations between the explanatory variables and marriage breakdown varied by gender. Within these equations, each variable was tested for statistical significance using likelihood ratio and Wald tests (Agresti 2002). Results of these models are presented in Appendix 4, Table A4.1. In addition, I estimate a model using pooled men’s and women’s samples and interacting gender with each of the covariates to formally test whether the associations between the socio-structural variables and marriage breakdown differs for women and men. In this model I also adjust for clustering within households as *still married* men and women are from the same household. The *cluster* command in STATA specifies that the observations are independent across groups (i.e. respondents from different households) but not necessarily within groups (i.e. respondents from the same household) (StataCorp 2003). This command estimates a robust standard error and variance covariance matrix for the explanatory variables but does not affect the coefficients. Therefore applying this command to the models adjusts the significance level accounting for covariance between spouses at the household level but does not adjust the coefficients. This model is reported in Appendix 4, Table A4.2. On occasions, as noted in the text, I also fit additional models when further investigating patterns of association for some variables.

## Results

The discrete time models are presented in Table 6.1. The odds ratio, log-odds (coefficient), and standard error of the log-odds, are presented for all predictors except the polynomial term for duration dependence, and missing values. The results are written up in reference to the odds ratios. A value greater than one indicates a multiplicative increase in the odds of marriage breakdown as the covariate increases, while a value less than one indicates a multiplicative decrease in the odds of marriage breakdown as the covariate increases (Box-Steffensmeir and Jones 2004).

All normative and cultural factors were significantly associated with marriage breakdown. As expected, men and women in older cohorts have a lower risk of marital breakdown than more recent birth cohorts. People born in cohorts prior to the reference cohort (1946-1950) have significantly lower risk of marital breakdown than those born in (or after) the reference cohort. The likelihood ratio tests indicate that the inclusion of birth cohort in the model significantly improves the overall fit of the model, for both men and women.

As expected the results for ethnicity indicate that women born overseas in non-English speaking countries have a decreased risk of marital breakdown than women born in Australia, and women from English speaking backgrounds have a greater risk (although this is only marginally significant at  $p = .061$ ). Contrary to expectations, men from English speaking backgrounds have a significantly lower risk of separation than Australian born men. The gender interactions (Appendix 4, Table A4.2) indicate that women from English speaking countries have a significantly greater risk of marriage breakdown than men from English speaking countries.

Religiosity has a significant negative association with the risk of marital breakdown. Movement up (or down) the scale by one unit results in a 4 percent decrease (or increase) in the risk of marriage breakdown for both men and women. The interpretation of this hazard is multiplicative. Therefore respondents who answered 0 on the scale (religion is not important) have a 34 percent ( $0.96^{10} = 0.66$ ;  $1 - 0.66 = 0.34$ ) greater risk of marital breakdown than those who answered 10 (religion is very important). Gender role attitudes were not a strong predictor of marriage breakdown, although less traditional gender role attitudes were significantly associated with an increased risk of marriage breakdown for women. But note that the likelihood ratio tests indicate that gender roles did not improve the fit of the model for either men or women. Respondents who cohabited before marriage have odds of marital breakdown that are 44 percent higher for men and 33 percent higher for women than they are for respondents who did not cohabit.

Most factors hypothesised to increase or decrease 'the quality of the match' were significantly associated with marriage breakdown as predicted. Men with divorced parents have a 24 percent greater risk of separation or divorce than men whose parents stayed married. This is even stronger for women where those with divorced parents have a 51 percent greater risk of separation than women whose parents did not divorce.

**Table 6.1: Discrete time event history model predicting the risk of marriage breakdown as a function of various social characteristics <sup>a</sup> for men and women.**

	Women			Men		
	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se
<b>Normative and Cultural</b>						
<i>Birth Cohort:</i> <sup>b,c</sup>						
< 1925	0.30***	-1.19	.20	0.29***	-1.23	.23
1926 – 1930	0.37***	-0.98	.20	0.35***	-1.06	.21
1931 – 1935	0.48***	-0.73	.17	0.62**	-0.47	.17
1936 – 1940	0.59***	-0.52	.15	0.73*	-0.31	.15
1941 – 1945	0.75*	-0.28	.13	0.83	-0.18	.13
1946 – 1950 (ref group)	1.00			1.00		
1951 – 1955	1.01	0.005	.11	1.10	0.10	.12
1956 – 1960	1.15	0.14	.11	1.09	0.09	.13
1961 – 1965	1.18	0.16	.12	1.37	0.32	.14
1966 – 1970	1.20	0.18	.14	1.20	0.18	.17
> 1971	1.24	0.21	.18	0.97	-0.03	.28
<i>Ethnicity:</i> <sup>c,d</sup>						
Australian Born	1.00			1.00		
Overseas Born – English	1.18	0.17	.09	0.77*	-0.26	.11
Overseas Born – NESB	0.80*	-0.22	.10	0.92	-0.08	.10
Religiosity <sup>b,c</sup>						
Gender role attitudes	0.96***	-0.04	.009	0.96***	-0.04	.01
Gender role attitudes	1.03*	0.03	.02	1.04	0.04	.02
Cohabited prior to marriage <sup>b,c</sup>						
Cohabited prior to marriage	1.33***	0.29	.08	1.44***	0.37	.09
<b>Quality of the Match</b>						
<i>Fathers Occupation:</i>						
Manager/Administrator	1.00			1.00		
Professional	1.06	0.06	.10	1.33*	0.28	.12
White Collar	1.03	0.03	.12	1.09	0.08	.14
Blue Collar	1.08	0.08	.09	1.22	0.19	.10
Never Worked	1.63	0.49	.52	0.83	-0.19	1.01
<i>Mothers Occupation:</i>						
Manager/Administrator	1.00			1.00		
Professional	1.52*	0.42	.21	1.29	0.26	.25
White Collar	1.50	0.41	.21	1.17	0.15	.24
Blue Collar	1.28	0.25	.21	1.15	0.14	.24
Never Worked	1.20	0.18	.21	1.13	0.12	.24
Parents Ever Divorced <sup>b,c</sup>						
Parents Ever Divorced	1.51***	0.21	.08	1.24*	0.41	.10
Age at marriage <sup>b,c,d</sup>						
Age at marriage	0.93***	-0.07	.01	0.96***	-0.04	.009
Premarital Birth <sup>b,c</sup>						
Premarital Birth	2.35***	0.85	.12	1.78***	0.57	.14

Chapter 6 Marriage Breakdown in Australia

Early birth <sup>b,c</sup>	1.32*	0.28	.12	1.67***	0.51	.11
<b>Social Barriers</b>						
First child born in marriage <sup>tv,b,c</sup>	0.37***	-1.01	.11	0.41***	-0.89	.12
<i>Highest Level of Education:</i> <sup>b,d</sup>						
Bachelor Degree or Higher	1.00			1.00		
Diploma	0.89	-0.11	.13	1.61***	0.48	.14
Trade or Certificate	0.97	-0.03	.10	1.39**	0.33	.11
Year 12 or less	0.79*	-0.23	.09	1.39**	0.33	.11
Number of Respondents		4883			4110	
Marriage-Years		101232			85081	
Number of Events		1147			902	

\* significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\* significant at  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* significant at  $p > .001$ .

Note: This table differs from that presented in Hewitt et al (2005). In this analysis the gender role attitudes were included and different measures for the timing and presence of children were used.

<sup>a</sup>Models also include polynomial terms for duration dependence and controls for missing values for some measures. <sup>b</sup>Likelihood ratio tests indicate that the inclusion of this variable in the model resulted in a significant improvement in the overall fit of the model at  $p < .05$  for men (Appendix 4, Table A4.1).

<sup>c</sup>Likelihood ratio tests indicate that the inclusion of this variable in the model resulted in a significant improvement in the overall fit of the model at  $p < .05$  for women (Appendix 4, Table A4.1). <sup>d</sup>Gender interactions indicate that the observed differences between men and women are significant for this variable (Appendix 4, Table A4.2). <sup>tv</sup>Indicates that measure is time-varying

Age at marriage is inversely associated with the risk of marital breakdown. Older age at marriage is associated with a lower risk of marital breakdown. Further, this association is relatively large. An additional year's delay in age at marriage results in a reduction in the odds of marital breakdown of 4 percent per year for men and 7 percent per year for women. Therefore, if we compare a man who married at age 18 with a man who married at age 28, the older man's odds of marriage breakdown are 36 percent lower than those of the younger man ( $0.96^{10} = 0.64$ ;  $1 - 0.64 = 36$ ), net of other things. Even more pronounced, a woman who marries at 28 has odds of marital breakdown that are 52 percent lower than an 18 year old's ( $0.93^{10} = 0.48$ ;  $1 - 0.48 = 52$ ). The gender interaction for age at marriage confirms that this association is stronger for women than men.

Having a premarital child implies increased risk of marriage breakdown for men and women.<sup>23</sup> For men, having a child before marriage is associated with a 78 percent increase in the odds of marriage breakdown compared to men who do not have a premarital child. The odds of marriage breakdown for women with a premarital child are 135 percent greater than not having a premarital child. Similarly, early birth increases the risk of marriage breakdown for men and women where men have a 67 percent increased risk of marriage breakdown and women have a 32 percent increased risk, compared to those who do not have their first child within the first year of marriage. The gender interaction model indicates that the difference in magnitude of the association between early birth and marriage breakdown for men and women is marginally significant at  $p = .072$ .

---

<sup>23</sup> Note that we do not know if the premarital child is the child of the current partner, or if the child lived with the respondent in their first marriage. Gender differences in both these variables could help explain the gender difference in the association between having a child before marriage and marital breakdown.

Parent's occupation is not a strong predictor of marriage breakdown. Men, with fathers who were professionals and women whose mothers were professionals both have an increased likelihood of marriage breakdown compared to respondents whose parent were in blue collar and administrative occupations. Even so, the global likelihood ratio tests indicate the inclusion of father's and mother's occupations did not significantly improve the model for either men or women.

Finally, the results suggest that social barriers are also important. If the first child is born within marriage the marriage is less likely to end than if the marriage has a premarital or early birth or no children. Education is significantly associated with the risk of marital breakdown for both men and women, and the associations differ in directions predicted by specialisation-trading or economic independence arguments. For men, higher education is associated with decreased likelihood of separation and divorce. Men with diplomas have 61 percent higher odds of separation than men with degrees. Men with a trade certificate or partial or completed high school have odds that are around 40 percent higher than men with degrees. The results suggest, net of other factors that marriages where the husband has a high socioeconomic position are more stable. The findings for women are consistent with an economic independence argument, where women in the lowest education group have lower odds of marital breakdown than women with a bachelor degree or higher qualification. Although the differences between women with diplomas or trade/certificate qualifications and women with a bachelor degree or higher are not statistically significant.

### **Discussion**

Overall, social characteristics are important for understanding which marriages end in separation and/or divorce and those that remain intact, but there were few gender differences between them. Further, most factors significantly improved the fit of the model for both men and women, with the exception of gender role attitudes and

parents occupations. Consistent with previous research (Bracher et al. 1993), men and women in birth cohorts prior to the reference cohort had a significantly decreased likelihood of marriage breakdown. This supports the argument that older cohorts have been exposed to different historical and contextual influences that result in a lower propensity to divorce compared to younger cohorts (Hackstaff 1999).

The finding that men from English speaking countries had a significantly lower risk of marriage breakdown than Australian born men is not consistent with previous Australian research which reports that English speaking migrants have an increased risk of divorce (Bracher et al. 1993; De Vaus 1997; De Vaus 2004). Further, the gender interactions suggest that migrant women from English speaking countries have a significantly greater risk of marriage breakdown than Australian born women and this difference equals the corresponding difference for men. Again this contradicts previous findings which suggest that the likelihood of divorce in these groups should be similar for men and women (De Vaus 2004).

This gender difference may be because these women are more likely than men to initiate separation due to cultural differences in expectations of marital relationships which diminish the quality of the match. Both Jones (1994) and DeVaus (2004) find that Australian men whose wives are born in the U.K. have a higher divorce rate than Australian men with Australian born wives, although this is true of most marriages that cross ethnic boundaries. This explanation implies that it is not just the ethnicity of the respondent, but their ethnic background in combination with their spouses that determines marriage breakdown. While investigating this further requires couple data and is therefore outside of the scope of the current study it is nevertheless an important direction for future research. Alternatively, the inflated risk of marriage breakdown for English-speaking migrant women may be due to the additional strains of migration on a relationship which destabilise the marriage. On

the other hand the finding that women from non-English speaking countries have a comparatively low risk of marriage breakdown is consistent with previous Australian research. For example, Bracher et al (1993) found that immigrant women from non-English speaking backgrounds, particularly those of Southern European origin, were less likely to experience marriage breakdown than Australian born women.

Cohabitation prior to marriage increases the risk of marriage breakdown for both men and women, a finding that agrees with prior Australian (Sarantakos 1994), U.S. (Bumpass, Martin and Sweet 1991) and Canadian (Hall and Zhao 1995) research. Some research shows that the association between cohabitation and marriage breakdown may vary depending on either marriage cohort (De Vaus, Qu and Weston 2003) or birth cohort (Schoen 1992). Younger cohorts who cohabit before marriage have a lower risk of marriage breakdown than older cohorts who cohabit before marriage. These studies suggest that the association between cohabitation and marriage breakdown is changing across cohorts, probably due to the increasing rate of, and therefore 'normalisation' of, cohabitation across developed nations (Nazio and Blossfeld 2003).

In Australia defacto cohabitation has become accepted practice. The proportion of marriages preceded by cohabitation in 2003 was around 75 percent (ABS 2005d), whereas it is estimated that only around 16 percent of marriages were preceded by cohabitation in the early 1970s (ABS 2002).<sup>24</sup> With a larger proportion of couples in younger cohorts cohabiting, cohabiters are less likely to be a select group that differ from those who do not cohabit. This aspect of the association between cohabitation and marriage breakdown was not captured in the analysis presented in Table 6.1. That model does not take into account differences in rates of

---

<sup>24</sup> I examined the probability of cohabitation by cohort in this sample and found that the likelihood of cohabiting before marriage increased from 1% - 2% for the cohorts born before 1930 to over 50% for the cohort born after 1965 (Appendix 4, Table A4.3)

cohabitation between birth cohorts and the resulting coefficients represent the ‘average’ effect of cohabitation across all cohorts. Further analysis was undertaken to investigate whether the cohabitation effect on marriage breakdown varied by age, and evidence of a cohort effect was found. Younger cohorts who cohabited had a lower risk of marriage breakdown than older cohorts who cohabited.<sup>25</sup> This supports the view that as cohabitation becomes more widespread in the population the association with marital breakdown is growing weaker.

Consistent with previous work on the association between religion and marriage breakdown (Call and Heaton 1997; Lillard, Brien and Waite 1995), religiosity reduces the likelihood of marriage breakdown for both men and women. In addition, Call and Heaton (1997) found that high levels of religious commitment among husbands and wives reduced the risk of marriage breakdown, but when spouses reported extremely different levels of religiosity then the marriage was less stable. This suggests that the combination of spouses’ religiosity, not just one spouse’s religiosity, is also important for marriage stability. This is an issue further research could investigate.

Finally, even though gender role attitudes reach statistical significance for women, gender role attitudes are not important predictors of marriage breakdown in the current analysis as they did not improve the overall fit of the model. This contradicts previous research which found marriages where wives have traditional gender role attitudes and husbands have non-traditional gender role attitudes are

---

<sup>25</sup> Additional analysis was undertaken to investigate changes in the association between cohabitation prior to marriage and marriage breakdown across cohorts. The original 11-category variable was collapsed down to 6 categories; 1 = <1930, 2 = 1931 – 1940, 3 = 1941 – 1950, 4 = 1951 – 1955, 5 = 1956 – 1965, 6 = 1966>, to reduce the number of interactions and remove the problem of small cell sizes for some interaction terms (i.e. there were only 6 men and 5 women born prior to 1925 who cohabited before marrying their partner). I re-estimated the model, but include interactions between cohort and cohabitation. For men, the effects of cohabitation for men did not vary by cohort. In contrast, for women born in the oldest cohort that cohabited before marriage have a significantly greater risk of divorce compared to women who cohabited in any other age cohort (Appendix 4, Table A4.4). Pair-wise comparisons show that this is the only significant difference. This is an interesting issue that requires further investigation.

significantly less likely to end in separation or divorce (Heaton and Blake 1999). This finding should be viewed cautiously, however, as the measure included is the respondent's gender role attitudes at the time of survey, which is post separation and divorce, whereas attitudes are likely to change over the life course and are likely to change in response to major life events such as separation and divorce. The influence of gender role attitudes on marriage breakdown is best captured with longitudinal data on couples before and after separation. Further, other measures included in the models, such as religiosity and cohabitation act as proxy measures for gender roles, which may be attenuating the overall effects of gender roles<sup>26</sup>. Gender role attitudes are excluded from subsequent analysis.

With the exception of parents' occupation all factors theorised to impact the quality of the match were significantly associated with marriage breakdown. Overall, parent's occupation was not a strong predictor of marriage breakdown. Men whose fathers had professional occupations had a significantly increased risk of marriage breakdown compared to men whose fathers were managers or administrators. This is inconsistent with a U.S. study by Corley and Woods (1991) which found that the men whose fathers had high occupational status had a longer duration between marriage and divorce. Women whose mothers had professional occupations had a significantly increased risk of marriage breakdown than women whose mothers were managers or administrators. Research on mother's occupation and the likelihood of divorce is scant, but the result here is consistent with the expectation that women whose mothers have high occupational status may be more likely to experience marriage breakdown due to the non-traditional gender role modelling that it engenders.

---

<sup>26</sup> Additional analysis indicates that when religiosity and cohabitation are removed from the model gender roles have a strong significant association with marriage breakdown for both men and women.

Although the significance tests of coefficients indicate no difference associated with parent's occupation, the likelihood ratio tests indicate that neither father's or mother's occupation significantly improved the model fit for men or women. This finding is consistent with previous Australian research that finds no association between fathers occupation and marriage breakdown for women (Bracher et al. 1993). Given that the inclusion of fathers and mothers occupations did not improve the overall fit of the model, these measures are excluded from all subsequent analysis.

Consistent with prior research from Australia (Bracher et al. 1993), the U.S. (McLanahan and Bumpass 1988; Mueller and Pope 1977; Teachman 2004), Canada (Hall and Zhao 1995) and the U.K. (Kiernan and Cherlin 1999), the results here suggest that parental divorce increases the risk of marriage breakdown for both men and women. There are two main explanations for this association. First, children of divorced parents, compared to children whose parents remained married, exhibit social and life course characteristics that increase the risk of divorce, such as young age at marriage, premarital child birth and cohabitation prior to marriage (Kiernan and Cherlin 1999; McLanahan and Bumpass 1988; Mueller and Pope 1977; Teachman 2002a; Teachman 2004). Second, children of divorced parents are not as well equipped to negotiate long term relationships compared to children whose parents remained married (Amato 1996). For example, in an Australian study Burns & Dunlop (2000) report that children of divorced parents had more behavioural problems compared with children of intact families, which in turn had a negative impact on the quality of their intimate relationships 10 years later.

I also find that both men and women who marry at younger ages have an increased likelihood of marriage breakdown than those who marry older. This provides support for the maturity hypothesis that those who marry at younger ages

tend to have less maturity and life experience to successfully negotiate a marital relationship. In addition, the gender interactions indicate that this association is significantly stronger for women. This may be because women who marry young are more likely to initiate separation than men. If younger age at marriage indicates a poorer quality match (Becker 1981) and women are more sensitive to relationship quality (Steil 1997; Thompson and Walker 1989) then women may be more likely to initiate separation in marriages characterised by young age at marriage. Over the last few decades in Australia there has been a strong trend towards marrying later; in 1982 the median age at first marriage was 25 for men and 22 for women, by 2003 this had risen to 29 for men and 27 for women (ABS 2005d). This suggests that age at marriage may not continue to be as important for future generations, although it is likely that this increasing age at marriage is due in part to the increasing rates of cohabitation prior to marriage in recent marriage cohorts.

Consistent with previous research the results here indicate that both premarital birth and early birth increase the risk of marriage breakdown for men and women. It is also worth noting here that early birth has a much greater effect on men's odds of separation, than women's, and the gender interaction model indicates that this gender difference is marginally significant at  $p=.072$ . This may be because men feel 'trapped' into marrying because their partner was pregnant and therefore may be more likely to initiate separation in these circumstances than women.

Both factors that represent barriers to terminating marriage were significantly associated with marriage breakdown and in the expected directions. The finding that marriages are much less likely to end when the first child is born within marriage is consistent with prior studies (Cherlin 1977; Thornton 1977). Yet, the association between children and marriage breakdown has been found to also vary according to

the number, age and gender of children (Bracher et al. 1993; Waite and Lillard 1991). These issues are addressed in more detail in Chapter 8.

There is also some tentative support for a specialisation-trading or economic independence explanation for divorce. Men with higher levels of education have a decreased risk of separation, but highly educated women have an increased risk of separation compared to those with low levels of education. This finding for women contradicts other studies that find better educated women tend to be less likely to separate or divorce (Jalovaara 2003; South 2001; Tzeng and Mare 1995). However, these results should be viewed with some caution. Other socioeconomic measures may provide different results. Education is the best available measure of socioeconomic status because there were no retrospective data available on occupation, income and employment histories. As suggested by exchange-bargaining or relative resources arguments, a more complete test of the economic hypothesis would examine the ways in which respondents' socioeconomic position relative to their partner determined the risk of marital breakdown. This modelling could not be pursued because of data limitations.

### **Conclusions**

The results of this chapter confirm the importance, and significance, of sociostructural factors for marriage breakdown. This chapter builds on and extends previous Australian divorce research by investigating the association between structural characteristics and the risk of marital breakdown for both men and women using recent nationally representative data. Overall the findings here confirm that the patterns of association between temporal, life course, attitudinal and economic factors identified in the international literature exist in Australia.

In general the patterning of association between social background factors and marriage breakdown were similar for men and women, but the findings also suggest

some gender differences in the association of age at marriage, ethnic background and education. These gender differences may be due to differences in the decisions of men and women to initiate separation when these characteristics are present in marriage. Over the next two chapters some of these issues are addressed in more detail. While it is not possible to examine the relative influence of couple characteristics on marriage breakdown with the available data, gender differences in the process by which the marriage ended can be investigated by examining which spouse initiated separation. In the next chapter, I explore the gendered nature of marriage breakdown by using social characteristics to predict whether the marriage ended because the wife, husband, or both spouses took the initiative to end the relationship.

## Chapter 7

### Who Decides? The Social Characteristics of Who Initiates Marital Separation<sup>27</sup>

---

#### **Introduction**

Even though the number of studies investigating gender differences in the associations between social characteristics and marriage breakdown have increased in recent decades most treat marriage breakdown as a uniform event and few studies differentiate whether the wife or husband initiated separation (exceptions include England, Sayer and Allison 2005; Kalmijn and Poortman 2006; Rogers 2004). Implicit in this literature is the assumption that the processes leading to marriage breakdown are the same irrespective of who initiates separation. Many studies, however, find that wives are around twice as likely to end their marriages than husbands suggesting that the social factors associated with wife-initiated separation may be different to those associated with separations initiated by husbands (Amato and Previti 2003; Braver, Whitely and Ng 1993; Sweeney and Horwitz 2001; Sweeney 2002; Wang and Amato 2000).

In this chapter I extend the research literature into gender differences in the processes of marriage breakdown and examine the sociostructural determinants of which spouse initiates separation. I address the second set of research questions raised at the end of Chapter 4: “Are there differences in the nature and extent of the association

---

<sup>27</sup> This chapter is an adapted version of: Hewitt, B., Western, M. & Baxter J. (2006) Who Decides? The Social Characteristics of which spouse initiates separation. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68: 1165 – 1177 (Appendix 5). Earlier versions of this chapter were presented in the research seminar series at The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, 24 August 2005, Canberra, and at The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) conference December 2005, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia.

between social characteristics and separations initiated by husbands, wives or by both spouses?” and “are there gender differences in the social characteristics associated with husband-initiated, wife-initiated or jointly initiated separations?”

### **Background**

Overall, there has been little research on the social correlates of which spouse initiates separation. The three previous studies identified in the review in Chapter 4 find there are different circumstances that lead wives to initiate separation compared to husbands. For example, all studies find evidence that wives are more likely to initiate separation when wives have better access to economic resources (England, Sayer and Allison 2005; Kalmijn and Poortman 2006; Rogers 2004). There is also consistent evidence that husbands are more likely to initiate separation when husbands are younger than wives (England, Sayer and Allison 2005; Kalmijn and Poortman 2006). However, these studies include either self reported or proxy data for both husband’s and wife’s characteristics in their analysis. For example, Kalmijn and Poortman (2006) and Rogers (2004) were able to report proxy data for some former partner’s characteristics such as age at marriage and education, while England, Sayer and Allison (2005) used longitudinal panel data on couples. Given that I do not have data on couples I am restricted to examining men’s and women’s characteristics separately and therefore include a different range of measures in my analysis than previous studies. In the next section I develop scenarios under which one spouse may or may not be more likely to initiate separation than the other spouse based upon the findings in Chapter 6 and my review of the literature.

*Normative and Cultural Mechanisms*

Social characteristics that influence marriage breakdown through normative and cultural beliefs relating to expectations of marriage and the durability of marriage include religiosity, cohabitation, birth cohort and ethnic background. Some factors such as religion and cohabitation, are unlikely to differentiate between husband's and wife's decisions to initiate marital separation because they are likely to have the same influence on men's and women's decisions. The results in Chapter 6 showed that people with higher levels of attachment to religion are less likely to divorce than those who are less religious. Previous research indicates that this is because religious individuals tend to have stronger commitment to and more traditional views of marriage (Call and Heaton 1997; Lillard, Brien and Waite 1995). It is unlikely that stronger commitment to, and more traditional views of, marriage would operate differently for men and women and thus are unlikely to differentiate between the different types of separation. Instead, it is more plausible to expect that both men and women who have greater religious attachment would be less likely to end their marriage than individuals who are less religious.

With respect to cohabitation, the results in Chapter 6 showed that people who cohabit prior to marriage have an increased risk of marriage breakdown. Previous research has found that this is due, for the most part, to lower levels of commitment to the institution of marriage than those who do not cohabit (Hall 1996; Lillard, Brien and Waite 1995). Since both spouses are equally exposed to cohabitation it is unlikely that cohabitation will increase or decrease the likelihood of a husband initiating separation compared to a wife, or vice versa<sup>28</sup>.

---

<sup>28</sup> Recall that cohabitation here refers to cohabitation with the partner in the first marriage, not any prior experience of cohabitation.

The possible association between birth cohort and who initiates separation is less clear. The findings reported in Chapter 6 and previous research (Bracher et al. 1993; Heaton 1991), show that older birth cohorts are less likely to divorce than those in the middle of the age distribution. Among older cohorts, low rates of divorce reflect historically specific norms and values about the permanence of marriage (Heaton 1991). Typically men and women marry those in similar cohorts and have been exposed to similar normative contexts as their partner. Therefore birth cohort would not necessarily predispose one partner to initiate separation more than the other. On the other hand, there may be an increased tendency for husbands to initiate separation in older cohorts because compared to wives husbands in older cohorts may have had better access to social and economic resources thereby enabling them to end their marriage. Conversely in younger cohorts, there may be a higher likelihood of separation initiated by wives due to younger women's increased access to social and economic resources through women's advances in educational attainment and labour force participation and also due to changing values about women's roles in society.

In relation to ethnic background, the results in Chapter 6 imply that immigrant women from English speaking countries have an increased risk of marriage breakdown compared to other women, and men from English speaking countries. I argued that this may be because this group of women are more likely to initiate separation. Within the international context, not only do English speaking countries have higher rates of divorce than non-English speaking countries (United Nations 2005), but there is also evidence that for some English speaking countries such as the U.S., wives are more likely to initiate separation than husbands (Amato and Previti 2003; Braver, Whitely and Ng 1993; Sweeney and Horwitz 2001; Sweeney 2002; Wang and Amato 2000). It

is also likely that these women are married to Australian men, and cross-ethnic marriages are found to have more stressors due to differing expectations of marriage (ABS 1999b; Jones 1994). Finally, migration is likely to place additional stressors and strains of migration on relationships (De Vaus 2004) and under these conditions women may be more likely to initiate separation due to lower levels of relationship quality and satisfaction.

In contrast, the findings in Chapter 6 show that women born in non-English speaking countries have a lower risk of marriage breakdown than other women. This may be because in many non-English speaking countries divorce is not an option for wives (see for example Bose and South 2003; and Rao and Sekhar 2002). Or, non-English speaking migrant populations in Australia may have more traditional marriage and family beliefs and practices that reduce marriage breakdown (Bracher et al. 1993). Therefore, I expect that women from non-English speaking backgrounds will be less likely to initiate separation than Australian born women.

### ***Quality of the Match***

Some social characteristics undermine the successful negotiation of relationships and thereby increase the risk of marriage breakdown. Adult children of divorced parents, compared to adult children whose parents remained married, have an increased risk of marriage breakdown because they are more likely to exhibit interpersonal behaviours (such as jealousy, anger, poor communication) that interfere with the successful negotiation of relationships (Amato 1996). Those who marry at younger ages tend to have less maturity and life experience to negotiate a marital relationship which increases the risk of marriage breakdown (Bumpass, Martin and Sweet 1991). Pre-marital or unplanned pregnancies and births also increase the risk of marriage breakdown because

a couple may decide to marry when they otherwise would not, or the presence of a young child early in marriage may add stress and strains in the developmental stages of the relationship (Waite and Lillard 1991). These characteristics that undermine the successful negotiation of marriage, and reduce the attractiveness of marriage, may increase the likelihood of wives initiating separation, rather than husbands. As discussed in Chapter 4 wives monitor their relationships more closely and their marital satisfaction depends more on intimacy and emotional qualities of the marriage than husband's (Steil 1997). The results of the study by England, Sayer and Allison (2005) indicate some support for this argument. They find that older age at marriage decreases the risk of wife-initiated separation and that wives parental divorce increased the risk of wife-initiated separation.

### ***Social Barriers***

Social factors that represent barriers to ending a marriage include children born within marriage and economic resources. One of the most consistent findings in the divorce literature is that children born within marriage reduce the risk of marriage breakdown (Heaton 1990; Waite and Lillard 1991). As discussed in Chapter 4, one of the major gendered divisions of labour within marriage and family life is around men's and women's roles in relation to children. Women are typically primary carers for children. Men's role as the primary breadwinner is reinforced when children are born, as the majority women take time out of the workforce to dedicate more time to child caring duties (Baxter 2005b; Blossfeld and Drobnic 2001). Women are therefore more economically dependent on their husbands when children are present, and since they are also more likely than men to have post-divorce custody of children, concerns over standards of living in the event of marriage breakdown may deter them from initiating

separation (Poortman and Seltzer 2005). Men on the other hand, may also be reluctant to initiate separation when there are children, because they are less likely to have custody and therefore risk losing contact with their children (Kalmijn 1999; Poortman and Seltzer 2005). Given both these possible outcomes the birth of children in marriage is expected to reduce the likelihood of separation initiated by both husbands and wives. The results of the study by Kalmijn and Poortman (2006) provide some support for this, they find that the presence of dependent children aged under 12 significantly reduced the risk of both husbands and wives initiating separation, although they found the association was significantly stronger for men. Further, it is also likely that the association between children and who initiates separation will differ depending on the age, number and sex of children. These relationships are explored in more detail in Chapter 8.

In relation to economic resources, the specialization-trading argument described in Chapter 3 views a husband's lack of economic resources and a wife's access to economic resources as destabilizing for marriage (Oppenheimer 1997). Studies consistently find that husbands of high socioeconomic position are less likely to experience marriage breakdown than husbands of low socioeconomic status (Ono 1998; South 2001). The results in Chapter 6 also provide support for this argument. By extension, I expect that husbands with lower levels of education compared to more highly educated men would be more likely to experience separations initiated by their wives.

For wives, the evidence from previous studies investigating the social determinants of who initiates separation suggests that when wives have better access to economic resources that there is an increased risk of wife-initiated separation (England,

Sayer and Allison 2005; Kalmijn and Poortman 2006) and that wives are more likely to initiate separation when a couple has financial difficulties (Kalmijn and Poortman 2006). Even though wife's higher level of education is consistently found to reduce the likelihood of marriage breakdown in the international literature (Jalovaara 2003; South 2001), based on the results for women's education in Chapter 6 I expect that women with higher levels of education will more likely to initiate separation than women with lower levels of education. This is because more educated women are likely to face fewer obstacles in obtaining employment than less educated women.

## **Methods**

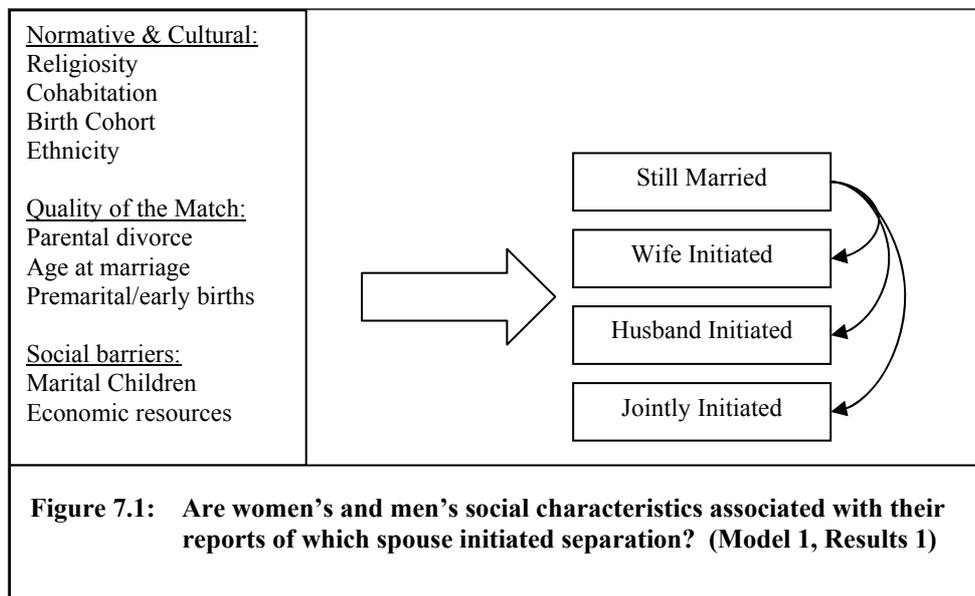
### ***Measures***

To investigate these relationships I examine three 'types' of marital breakdown: husband-initiated, wife-initiated and jointly initiated. Only those covariates that significantly improved the fit of the models presented in Chapter 6, based on the Wald and likelihood ratio tests, are included in this analysis. Therefore, the models include birth cohort, ethnic background, parental divorce, cohabitation before marriage, age at marriage, children, religiosity and education. All models also include controls for missing values and the polynomial term for duration dependence. Mother's and father's occupations and gender role attitudes are excluded because the inclusion of those measures did not significantly improve the general fit of the model estimated in Chapter 6. The dependent variable in this analysis indicates which spouse initiated separation, coded 1 = *Wife initiated*, 2 = *Husband initiated* and 3 = *Jointly initiated*.

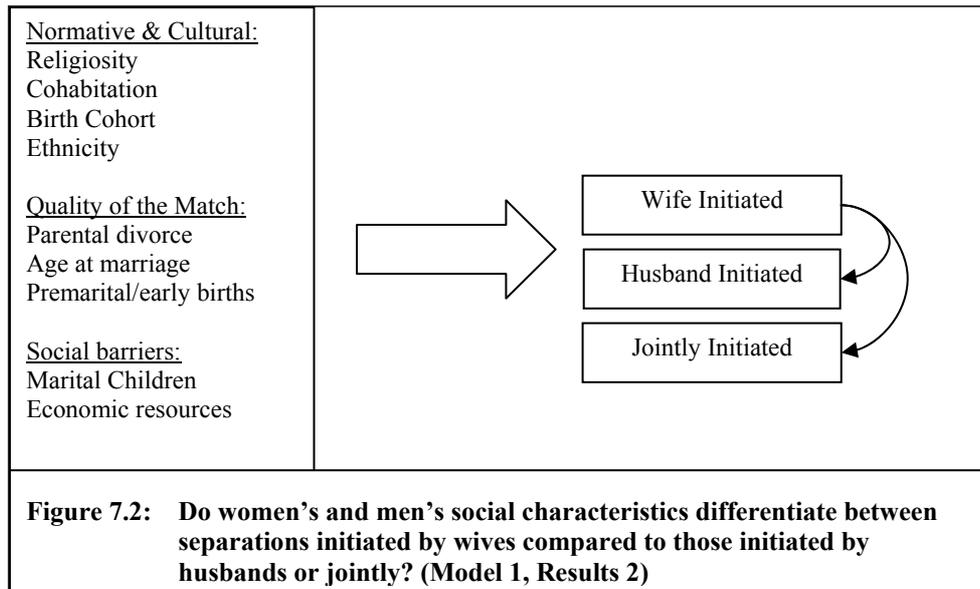
### ***Analytic Approach***

My analysis proceeds in two stages. First, I estimate and plot baseline hazards for wife, husband and jointly initiated separation. Second, I estimate a discrete time event history model with competing risks for which spouse initiated separation. In this model I also

adjust for clustering on repeated observations for individuals. I present two sets of results from this model. The first, presented in Table 7.2 (for women), and Table 7.3 (for men) uses *still married* as the reference category, and reports estimates for the conditional probabilities of experiencing a wife-initiated separation versus remaining married, a husband initiated separation versus remaining married or a jointly initiated separation versus remaining married. These comparisons are illustrated in Figure 7.1.



For the second set of results I re-estimate the same model taking *wife initiated* separation as the contrast group. In this case, the odds indicate the conditional probabilities of a husband-initiated separation versus a wife-initiated separation or a jointly initiated separation versus a wife-initiated separation. These estimates address the question of whether different characteristics significantly increase or decrease the likelihood of reporting one type of separation rather than another, and analysis is run separately for women and men. These comparisons are illustrated in Figure 7.2.



Finally, I estimate a pooled model, interacting gender with all covariates, to formally test for gender differences in social characteristics associated with each type of separation. For example, to clarify whether the association between women’s social characteristics and the likelihood of a wife-initiated separation are different to the association between men’s social characteristics and a wife-initiated separation. I indicate significant gender interactions in the Tables and only report significant findings in the results. The results of this model are reported in Appendix 6, Table A6.1.

### Results

The baseline model examining whether there are differences between men’s and women’s reports of who initiated separation is presented in Table 7.1. The differences between men’s and women’s reports of wife-, husband-, and jointly initiated separation are statistically significant. Overall, these results confirm the patterning of reporting bias described in Chapter 5. Women are significantly more likely to report a wife-initiated separation than men, and men are significantly more likely to report a husband-initiated or jointly initiated separation than women.

**Table 7.1: Differences between men's and women's reports of who initiated separation**

	Wife Initiated			Husband Initiated			Jointly Initiated		
	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se
Men's Reports	-			-			-		
Women's Reports	1.75***	0.56	.07	0.69***	-0.37	.10	0.71***	-0.35	.08
N					8,993				
Marriage-years					186,313				
Number of Separations		985			446			618	

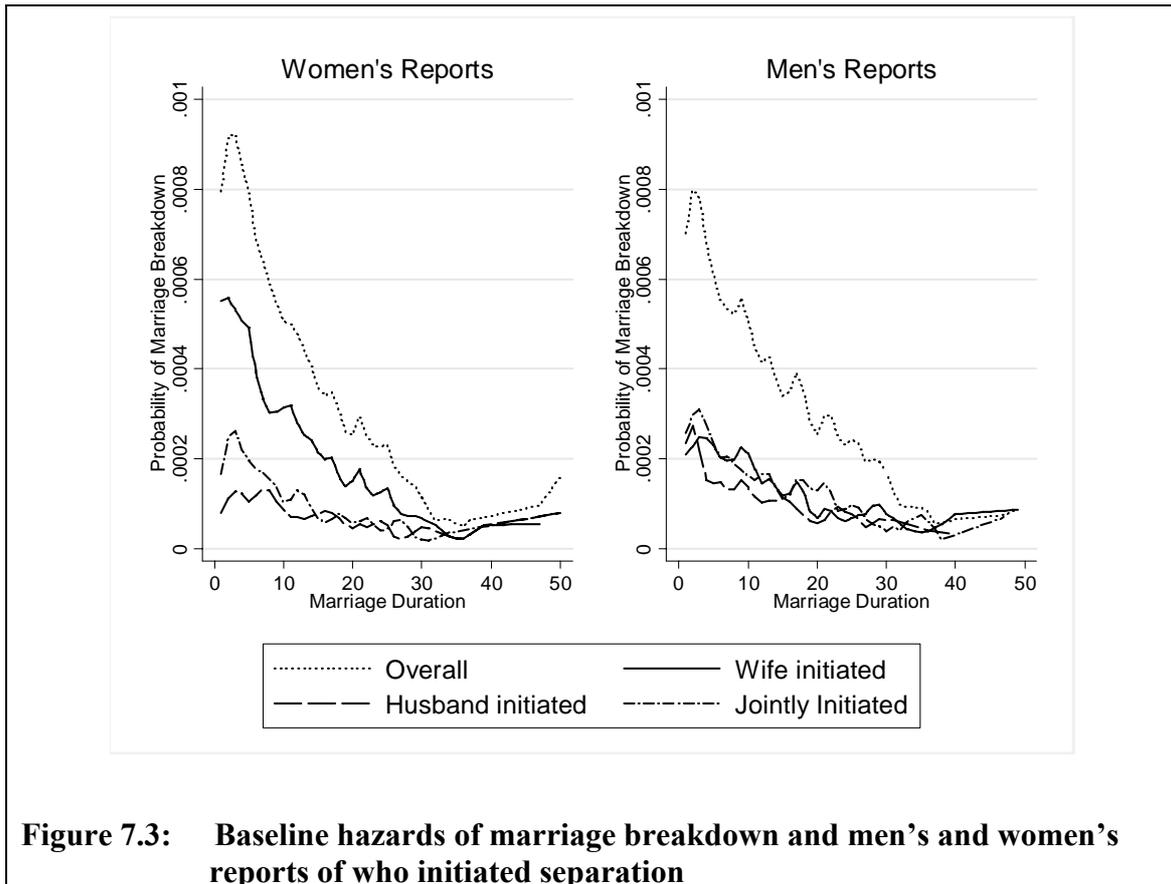
\*\*\*p&lt;.001

Note: The model also includes the fifth order polynomial for duration dependence.

Second, to determine if there are differential effects of who initiates separation on the rate, and timing, of marital separation, the hazard rates for each type of marriage breakdown over the marriage duration are examined. Figure 7.3 shows the baseline (unadjusted) probabilities for overall marriage breakdown and men's and women's reports of who initiated separation. The dotted line shows the patterning of overall marriage breakdown for men and women. (These are the baseline hazards previously shown in Figure 5.2). The probability of marriage breakdown is high in the first few years of marriage and then declines steadily to plateau after around 30 years of marriage.

While overall rates of marriage breakdown are similar for men and women, there are some subtle differences in the timing of separations initiated by wives and husbands according to men's and women's reports. For men, during the first few years of marriage, the probability of reporting a wife-initiated separation is lower than a husband- or jointly initiated separation. After that the probability of a wife-initiated separation is slightly higher than that for a husband-initiated separation. For women, on the other hand, the probability of reporting a wife-initiated separation is higher than

reporting a husband-initiated separation until around 30 years of marriage. The patterning for jointly initiated separations is similar for men and women, with an increasing probability in the first few years of marriage followed by a steep decline and plateauing after about 30 years of marriage.



Note: The raw conditional probabilities have been smoothed with a locally weighted regression of the probability of marriage breakdown on marriage duration (StataCorp 2003).

### *Social characteristics and which spouse initiated separation*

Next I examine the association between social characteristics and women's and men's reports of who initiated separation in their first marriage relative to still married. In Table 7.2 (for women) and 7.3 (for men) the odds ratio, the log odds and the standard error of the log odds, are presented for each covariate. All results are discussed in

relation to the odds ratio. When the odds ratio is greater than 1 the risk of divorce increases as the covariate increases, conversely the risk of divorce decreases when the odds ratio is less than 1.

The results in Table 7.2 show the associations between women's social characteristics and their reports of who initiated separation relative to staying married. Overall, few women's characteristics are associated with their reports of husbands initiating separation. At first glance, the patterning of association for women's characteristics appears to be different for separations initiated by wives compared to husbands or jointly.

Of the social characteristics that operate through normative and cultural mechanisms, birth cohort, religiosity and ethnic background are all associated with women's reports of who initiated separation. Overall, regardless of who initiated separation, women in older cohorts are less likely to experience marriage breakdown than younger cohorts. Religiosity is significantly associated with separation initiated by wives and jointly initiated separation, with the risk of wife- and jointly initiated separation, compared to staying married, declining with women's increased religiosity. There is no association between women's religiosity and separations initiated by husbands.

**Table 7.2: Discrete time event history models with competing risks of women's reports of who initiated separation relative to still married by social characteristics**

Predictors	Wife Initiated			Husband Initiated			Jointly Initiated		
	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se
<u>Normative &amp; Cultural:</u>									
Birth Cohort:									
< 1925	0.34***	-1.08	.26	0.34*	-1.08	.44	0.16**	-1.82	.56
1926 – 1930	0.36***	-1.03	.26	0.16**	-1.86	.58	0.63	-0.46	.33
1931 – 1935	0.49***	-0.71	.22	0.48	-0.73	.38	0.46*	-0.78	.34
1936 – 1940	0.52**	-0.65	.21	0.84	-0.18	.31	0.66	-0.41	.29
1941 – 1945	0.88	-0.13	.17	0.94	-0.06	.29	0.42**	-0.87	.32
1946 – 1950	1.00			1.00			1.00		
1951 – 1955	0.87	-0.14	.16	1.24	0.22	.26	1.27	0.24	.22
1956 – 1960	1.14	0.13	.15	1.43	0.36	.26	1.07	0.07	.23
1961 – 1965	1.28	0.25	.16	1.05	0.05	.31	1.00	-0.002	.26
1966 – 1970	1.15	0.14	.18	0.82	-0.20	.40	1.45*	0.37	.27
> 1971	1.28	0.24	.22	0.33	-1.11	.77	1.40	0.34	.33
Cohabit prior to marriage <sup>a</sup>	1.28*	0.25	.11	1.28	0.24	.22	1.36	0.31	.17
Religiosity <sup>b</sup>	0.94***	-0.05	.01	0.98 <sup>c</sup>	-0.02	.02	0.96*	-0.05	.02
Ethnicity:									
Australian	1.00			1.00			1.00		
Overseas Born – English	1.29* <sup>c</sup>	0.26	.12	1.03	0.03	.23	1.19	0.17	.19
Overseas Born – NESB	0.75*	-0.29	.13	0.62*	-0.48	.24	0.88	-0.12	.19
<u>Quality of the Match:</u>									
Parents Ever Divorced <sup>a</sup>	1.64***	0.50	.10	1.42	0.35	.19	1.49*	0.40	.15
Age at marriage	0.91*** <sup>c</sup>	-0.09	.01	0.98	-0.02	.02	0.95**	-0.05	.02
Pre-marital birth	2.29***	0.83	.15	1.36	0.31	.32	2.51*** <sup>c</sup>	0.92	.22
Early birth	1.27	0.24	.16	0.94	-0.07	.31	2.07***	0.73	.21
<u>Social Barriers:</u>									
First Child born in marriage <sup>tv</sup>	0.37***	-0.99	.15	0.51*	-0.67	.29	0.33***	-1.10	.21
Highest Level of Education:									
Bachelor Degree or higher	1.00			1.00			1.00		
Diploma	1.00	-0.001	.16	0.98	-0.02	.28	0.44*** <sup>c</sup>	-0.82	.27
Trade or Certificate	0.96 <sup>c</sup>	-0.04	.13	0.97	-0.03	.23	0.81	-0.21	.18
Yr 12 or less	0.84 <sup>c</sup>	-0.17	.12	0.77	-0.26	.22	0.51*** <sup>c</sup>	-0.67	.18
Number of respondents				4883					
Marriage-years				101232					
Number of separations		665			201			281	
Goodness of fit LR Chi2 (df)					1112.97 (90)				

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Note: Table does not include dummies for missing values or the controls for duration dependence and reporting bias.

<sup>a</sup> 0 = No, 1 = Yes; <sup>b</sup> Scale ranging from 0 = Not important to 10 = Very important. <sup>c</sup> Results of pooled gender interaction model (Appendix 6, Table A6.1) indicate that this is statistically different ( $p < .05$ ) than the same characteristic for men (Table 7.3). <sup>tv</sup> Indicates that measure is time-varying.

The results for ethnic background indicate that, compared to Australian born women, immigrant women from English speaking countries are at significantly greater risk of a wife-initiated separation, rather than staying married. In contrast women from non-English speaking countries have a reduced risk of separations initiated by both husbands and wives. Women's ethnicity is not significantly associated with jointly initiated separation.

Social characteristics that affect the quality of the match all increased risk of one, or both, spouses initiating separation rather than staying married. Mostly, these factors are associated with increased odds of wife- or jointly initiated separation, rather than husband-initiated separation. Women whose parents divorced report an increased risk of wife- and jointly initiated separation relative to staying married, but there is no evidence that a wife's parental divorce is associated with an increased risk of separation initiated by her husband. Similarly, marrying later significantly decreases a woman's risk of separation initiated by herself or jointly, but is not associated with whether her husband initiates separation. Women who had a premarital birth have significantly increased odds of reporting wife- or jointly initiated separation relative to staying married, but premarital birth is not associated with reports of husbands initiating separation. Early birth significantly increases the risk of reporting a jointly initiated separation, but not separations initiated by husbands or wives.

Social barriers are also important. The results show that when the first child is born within the marriage there is a reduced likelihood of all types of separation, although the magnitude of this association is smaller for women's reports of husbands initiating separation, than wife- or jointly initiated separations. Finally, women's education is only significantly associated with jointly initiated separation, where women

with a diploma, or less than year 12 education, report a significantly lower risk of jointly initiated separation than women with a Bachelor's degree.

Overall, few women's characteristics are associated with their reports of separations initiated by husbands. This may, in part, be due to the reporting bias in the dependent variable, with women over reporting separations initiated by wives, and under reporting separations initiated by husbands. Such a bias would result in fewer significant associations between women's characteristics and husband-initiated separations.

The results for men are presented in Table 7.3. Of the normative and cultural factors birth cohort, religiosity and cohabitation are associated with who initiates separation reported by men. The association between birth cohort and separation is similar to that for women where, irrespective of their reports of who initiated separation, men born in older cohorts have a lower risk of marriage breakdown than the reference cohort. Men's religiosity is significantly and negatively associated with husband- and jointly initiated separations, but is not associated with men's reports of separations initiated by wives. Men who cohabited before marriage report a greater risk of all types of separation. Men's ethnic background is not associated with which spouse initiated separation. Yet, the results of the gender interaction model (Appendix 6, Table A6.1) show that the lower risk wife-initiated separation reported by men from English speaking countries is significantly different from the large increased risk of women from English speaking countries reporting a wife-initiated separation (Table 7.2).

**Table 7.3: Discrete time event history models with competing risks of men's reports of who initiated separation relative to still married by social characteristics**

Predictors	Wife Initiated			Husband Initiated			Jointly Initiated		
	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	Se	Odds	$\beta$	se
<u>Normative &amp; Cultural:</u>									
Birth Cohort:									
< 1925	0.28**	-1.29	.39	0.39*	-0.94	.42	0.25***	-1.34	.39
1926 ]– 1930	0.34**	-1.09	.33	0.48*	-0.74	.37	0.25***	-1.37	.36
1931 – 1935	0.73	-0.31	.27	0.77	-0.26	.31	0.40**	-0.92	.31
1936 – 1940	0.62	-0.47	.26	0.75	-0.29	.29	0.84	-0.16	.23
1941 – 1945	0.79	-0.24	.23	0.94	-0.06	.25	0.77	-0.27	.21
1946 – 1950	1.00			1.00			1.00		
1951 – 1955	1.14	0.13	.20	1.11	0.10	.23	0.95	-0.05	.21
1956 – 1960	1.02	0.02	.21	1.07	0.06	.25	1.15	0.14	.21
1961 – 1965	1.37	0.32	.22	1.10	0.09	.26	1.37	0.32	.22
1966 – 1970	1.01	0.01	.28	0.96	-0.04	.32	1.11	0.10	.28
> 1971	1.10	0.10	.50	0.81	-0.21	.56	1.18	0.16	.42
Cohabit prior to marriage <sup>a</sup>	1.43*	0.36	.15	1.64**	0.49	.18	1.37*	0.32	.16
Religiosity <sup>b</sup>	0.98	-0.02	.24	0.92*** <sup>c</sup>	-0.08	.02	0.95**	-0.05	.02
Ethnicity:									
Australian	1.00			1.00			1.00		
Overseas Born – English	0.94 <sup>c</sup>	-0.22	.18	0.89	-0.11	.20	0.80	-0.22	.18
Overseas Born – NESB	1.02	-0.13	.17	1.03	0.03	.20	0.91	-0.10	.17
<u>Quality of the Match:</u>									
Parents Ever Divorced <sup>a</sup>	1.42*	.34	.15	1.10	0.09	.19	1.33	0.28	.15
Age at marriage	0.98 <sup>c</sup>	-.02	.02	0.95*	-0.05	.02	0.95**	-0.05	.02
Pre-marital birth	1.54	0.43	.23	2.36***	0.86	.23	1.23 <sup>c</sup>	0.20	.26
Early birth	1.54*	0.43	.19	1.26	0.23	.24	1.96***	0.67	.18
<u>Social Barriers:</u>									
First Child born in marriage <sup>iv</sup>	0.47***	-0.76	.22	0.50**	-0.69	.26	0.31***	-1.18	.19
Highest Level of Education:									
Bachelor Degree or higher	1.00			1.00			1.00		
Diploma	1.60* <sup>c</sup>	0.47	.24	1.93**	0.66	.24	1.38 <sup>c</sup>	0.32	.22
Trade or Certificate	1.68*** <sup>c</sup>	0.52	.18	1.11	0.11	.21	1.22	0.20	.17
Yr 12 or less	1.44	0.36	.19	1.31	0.27	.21	1.28 <sup>c</sup>	0.24	.17
Number of respondents				4110					
Marriage-years				85081					
Number of separations		320		245			337		
Goodness of fit LR Chi2 (df)				1125.56 (90)					

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Note: Table does not include dummies for missing values or the controls for duration dependence and reporting bias.

<sup>a</sup>0 = No, 1 = Yes; <sup>b</sup> Scale ranging from 0 = Not important to 10 = Very important. <sup>c</sup>Results of pooled gender interaction model (Appendix 6, Table A6.1) indicate that this is statistically different at  $p < .05$  than the same characteristic for women (Table 7.2). <sup>iv</sup>Indicates that measure is time-varying.

All factors affecting the quality of the match are associated with men's reports of which spouse initiated separation. Men whose parents divorced compared to men whose parents stayed married, report an increased risk of wives initiating separation but parental divorce is not linked to a husband- or jointly initiated separation. Premarital and early births also increase the risk of separation. A premarital birth increases the risk of men reporting a husband-initiated separation, but not a wife- or jointly initiated separation. Early birth increases the risk of wife- and jointly initiated separation, but not a husband-initiated separation. Older age at marriage significantly reduces the risk of husband- and jointly initiated separations, but not separations initiated by wives. The results of the gender interaction model suggest that the small, non-significant, association between age at marriage and men's reports of a wife-initiated separation and the large negative association between age at marriage and women's reports of a wife-initiated separation, are significantly different.

Both factors theorised to be barriers to ending marriage, the presence of children and education, were significantly associated with men's reports of who initiated separation. Consistently, irrespective of who initiated separation, having a first child born in marriage reduces the risk of separation. Finally, men with diploma and trade/certificate levels of education are more likely than men with a bachelor degree or higher qualification to report that their wives initiated separation. Men with a diploma qualification are more likely to initiate separation than men with a bachelor degree or higher. The gender interactions suggest that the difference between lower educated men's increased risk of wife- and jointly initiated separation, and lower educated women's decreased chances of wife- and jointly initiated separation are significantly different.

*Wife-initiated separation contrasted with husband- and jointly initiated separations*

Next, I investigate whether the differences between separations initiated by wives and husbands are statistically significant. In some respects, this second set of results provides a better test of the differences between the likelihood of wife- compared to husband-initiated separation. The significance of the effects for the results presented in Table 7.2 and Table 7.3 depend, in part, on the number of events observed for each type of separation. Therefore, the effects of social characteristics on a wife-initiated separation are more likely to be significant than for a husband or jointly initiated separation, particularly for women. This next set of results tests for differences between the equations and provides important information about differences between separations initiated by wives compared to husbands or jointly. I re-estimate the same model, but the contrast category on the dependent variable is wife-initiated separation, indicating the conditional probability of a husband-initiated separation versus a wife-initiated separation or a jointly initiated separation versus a wife-initiated separation. For brevity, only statistically significant results are presented in Table 7.4. The results of the full model for men and women are presented in Appendix 6, Table A6.2.

The results for women are presented on the left hand side, in the first six columns, of Table 7.4. Only two characteristics significantly differentiate between women's reports of separations initiated by wives relative to separations initiated by husbands or jointly; age at marriage and education. The findings for age at marriage suggest that older age at marriage reduces women's likelihood of reporting separation initiated by wives but not husbands. In addition the gender interaction model indicates that the difference between women's reports of a an **increased** risk of wife-, compared to husband-initiated separation, and men's reports of a **lower** risk of wife-, compared to husband-initiated separation, is statistically significant. This provides strong additional support for the finding reported in Table 7.4, that women's older age

at marriage significantly reduced the risk of separations initiated by wives, but had no significant association for separations initiated by husbands. Women's education differentiates between wife- and jointly initiated separations, but not husband-initiated separations. Compared to women with Bachelor degree or higher, women with diplomas or less than high school education, have significantly lower odds of reporting jointly initiated separation than a wife-initiated separation.

**Table 7.4: Competing risks model, contrasting wife-initiated separation by selected social characteristics for Women and Men**

	Women's reports						Men's reports					
	Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated				Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated			
	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	Se	Odds	$\beta$	se
<u>Normative &amp; Cultural:</u>												
Religiosity <sup>a</sup>	1.03	0.03	.02	1.01	0.01	.02	0.93*** <sup>c</sup>	-.06	.03	0.96	-.04	.02
<u>Quality of the Match:</u>												
Age at marriage	1.06* <sup>b</sup>	.06	.03	1.04	.04	.02	0.97	-0.03	.03	0.97	-0.03	.02
<u>Social Barriers:</u>												
Highest Level of Education:												
Bachelor Degree or higher	1.00			1.00			1.00			1.00		
Diploma	0.98	-0.17	.33	0.44**	-0.82	.32	1.21	0.19	.34	0.86	-0.15	.32
Trade or Certificate	1.01	0.01	.26	0.85	-0.17	.22	0.66	-0.41	.28	0.72	-0.32	.25
Yr 12 or less	0.92	-0.09	.25	0.61*	-0.50	.21	0.91	-0.09	.28	0.89	-0.12	.26
Number of respondents			4883						4110			
Marriage-years			101232						85081			
Number of separations	200			279			244			334		
Goodness of fit LR Chi2 (df)			1112.97 (90)						1125.56 (90)			

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Note: Table only reports covariates that significantly differentiated between female initiated and either male or jointly initiated separation full model is presented in (Appendix 6, Table A6.2).

<sup>a</sup>Scale ranging from 0 = *Not important* to 10 = *Very important*; <sup>b</sup>Pooled gender interactions model (Appendix 6, Table A6.1) indicates that this is statistically different from men's reports of a husband compared to a wife- initiated separation; <sup>c</sup> Results of pooled gender interaction model (Appendix 6, Table A6.1) indicate that this is statistically different from women's reports of a husband- compared to a wife-initiated separation

The results for men's reports are presented in the right hand side of Table 7.4, in the final six columns. The only social factor that distinguishes between men's reports of wives or husbands initiating separation is religiosity, where more religious

men have a reduced risk of reporting husbands initiating separation compared to wives than less religious men. The gender interactions further indicate that the significant, negative association between men's religiosity and husband-initiated separation is statistically different from the small non-significant association between women's religiosity and husband-initiated separation. Overall, even though the results of the first analysis indicated differences between wife-initiated and husband- or jointly initiated separation for several social characteristics, the results of this analysis suggest that most were not statistically significant.

### **Discussion**

In this chapter, I explored gender differences in the association between social characteristics and which spouse initiated separation. This advances existing knowledge of the processes of marriage breakdown, because the vast majority of research in the field treats marriage breakdown as uniform. The implicit assumption of most previous research is that there are no differences between separations initiated by wives compared to husbands, or that all separations are jointly initiated.

The main gender difference observed in the results is that women's characteristics are strongly associated with their reports of wife-initiated separation and not husband-initiated separation but this trend is not mirrored in men's reports. Men's characteristics are relatively evenly associated with their reports of both husband- and wife-initiated separation. This result suggests that separations initiated by wives are associated with both men's and women's characteristics but separations initiated by husbands are primarily associated with men's characteristics.

This finding is consistent with qualitative research which finds that in some circumstances wives initiate separation because their husbands are unhappy, or because they do not want their children to be exposed to a bad marriage, not because they themselves are necessarily unhappy with the marriage (Hackstaff, 1999; Walzer

& Oles, 2003). Thus it appears that wives greater monitoring of and responsibility for the quality of relationships paradoxically extends to taking responsibility for ending the marriage in circumstances where they perceive that their husband or children are being adversely affected (Walzer & Oles, 2003). It is also worth noting that part of the failure to find significant predictors of wife- rather than husband-initiated separations for women may be because there are only a small number of separations initiated by husbands reported by women in the sample.

The findings also suggest, however, that some social characteristics vary the likelihood of husband's initiating separation compared to wives. Men's ethnic background is not significantly associated with any specific type of separation. In contrast, women born overseas in English speaking countries have an increased likelihood of reporting a wife-initiated separation, but not husband-initiated separation. This implies that immigrant women from English speaking countries are taking the initiative to separate. It also provides support for the conclusions drawn in Chapter 6, where I argued that the decreased risk of marriage breakdown for men and the increased risk of marriage breakdown for women from English speaking backgrounds may be due to wives initiating separation. This group of women mainly comprise immigrants from New Zealand, the U.K. and U.S.A., and good evidence exists that many of these women are married to Australian men (ABS 1999b). Therefore, not only are there likely to be cultural differences in expectations of marriage that add strains to the relationship, but there are stressors associated with migrating to a foreign country (Jones 1994). These factors may combine to increase the likelihood of wives from English speaking countries initiating separation.

In contrast, women from non-English speaking backgrounds report a significantly lower risk of separations initiated by both husbands and wives. This may be due to higher rates of intra-ethnic marriage among migrants from non-English

speaking backgrounds which places less cultural strain on the relationship (Jones 1994). Further, non-English speaking migrant populations in Australia often retain cultural practises of their country of birth, including adherence to traditional gender norms governing marriage and family (Bracher et al. 1993).

As expected, cohabitation prior to marriage does not differentiate between wives and husbands initiating separation. I find that cohabitation prior to marriage increases the risk of all types of separation for both men and women, although according to women's reports this is only significant for wife-initiated separation. This finding is similar to that of Kalmijn and Poortman (2006). In contrast, the results reported by England, Sayer and Allison (2005) suggest that in marriages where wives had ever cohabited (not just prior to the current marriage), there was an increased risk of wives initiating separation, and in marriages where the husband had ever cohabited there was an increased risk of jointly initiated separation. The difference between their results and mine may be due to differences in cohabitation measures, where the measure I use only indicates cohabitation with their marriage partner whereas the measure used by England, Sayer and Allison is a measure of whether the respondent had *ever* cohabited.

Men's religiosity decreased the likelihood of reporting husband-initiated separation, and women's religiosity reduced the likelihood of reporting wife-initiated separation. These results do not suggest differences between husband- and wife-initiated separations, but rather imply that religious beliefs and practices shape an individual's, as opposed to their spouse's, decisions about continuing their marriage. Although, the results of the gender interaction model (Appendix 6, Table A6.1) indicate that the association between religiosity and the chance of reporting a husband-initiated separation rather than a jointly initiated separation are weaker for

men than women. Therefore, the magnitude of the association between religiosity and marriage breakdown appears to be much greater for husbands compared to wives.

Some but not all, measures for quality of the match suggested an increased likelihood of wife-initiated separation rather than husband- or jointly initiated separation. Both women and men whose parents divorced have an increased likelihood of reporting wife-initiated separation, but parental divorce is not significantly associated with husband-initiated separation. This provides some support for the argument that wives are more likely to initiate separation in difficult marriages, regardless of whether the instability is associated with parental divorce on the husband's or wife's side. This finding is similar to that of England, Sayer and Allison (2005). They report that marriages where wives had divorced parents have an increased risk of wife-initiated separation, but not an increased risk of husband- or jointly initiated separation. Husband's parental divorce is not associated with which spouse initiated separation.

According to women's reports older age at marriage reduces the risk of wife- and jointly initiated separation and according to men's reports older age at marriage reduces the risk of husband and jointly initiated separation. Similar to religion these results imply that it is the age of the respondent and not their partner which increases the risk of initiating separation. In addition women who marry younger are significantly more likely to report a wife-initiated separation than men who marry younger. These results are consistent with those of England, Sayer and Allison (2005), who find that wife's older age at marriage reduces the likelihood of wife, and jointly initiated separations, but wife's age at marriage was not significantly associated with husband's wanting to end the marriage.

Why might women, compared to men, have an increased tendency to initiate separation when they marry at younger ages? One possible explanation is the

“maturity” explanation proposed earlier. Where young age at marriage is associated with poor mate selection and wife’s marital satisfaction is tied more strongly to the intimate and emotional qualities of the relationship than husband’s therefore women who marry at younger ages have an increased likelihood of initiating separation (Moore and Waite 1981; Teti and Lamb 1989; Wolcott and Hughes 1999). However, this argument is not fully supported here. The results show an increased risk of all types of separation for men who marry at younger ages which suggests that the maturity hypothesis applies both to husbands and wives who marry at younger ages.

The additional likelihood of women who marry at a younger age compared to men who marry at a younger age to initiate separation may be related to perceptions of prospects in the remarriage market. Much of women’s bargaining power in the marriage market is tied to their youth and beauty while these qualities are not valued as much in men (Cohen 1987; England and Farkas 1986). Research finds that the prospects of remarriage after divorce are greater when men and women are younger when they divorce, but this is particularly the case for women (Hughes 2000; Sweeney 1997). From this it follows that women who marry at younger ages may be more likely to initiate separation, and to initiate early in marriage, because they want to enhance their remarriage prospects and do not want to waste their youth on a ‘bad’ marriage.

The findings for premarital pregnancy and birth are more mixed. Women who have a premarital birth report a significantly increased risk of wife-initiated separation and men who have a premarital birth report a significantly increased risk of husband-initiated separation. This patterning of results implies a selection effect where premarital birth may reflect a weaker adherence to traditional norms surrounding marriage for the spouse who had a premarital birth, but this effect may not necessarily exist for the other partner (Bracher et al. 1993). In addition, however, the results of

the gender interaction model imply that women who have a premarital birth are significantly more likely than men to report jointly initiated separation. This may be due to gender differences in child custody arrangements of premarital children. Women are more likely to have custody of premarital children and bring the children into a new relationship. Step-family research indicates that the presence of non-biological children in the household, particularly if they are not the husband's, is destabilising for marriage (Coleman, Ganong and Fine 2000; Morgan and Rindfuss 1985). Although, this finding contrasts to England, Sayer and Allison (2005), who find that the presence of a non-biological child in the marriage reduces the risk of wife- and jointly initiated separation. These contradictory findings may be due to differences in measures. In my measure I do not know if the premarital birth is to the marriage partner or another partner. Given these mixed results the association between premarital birth and which spouse initiates separation is an issue that needs to be investigated in more detail.

The results for early birth provide better support for the expectation that wives will be more likely to initiate separation. For men I find that an early birth significantly increases the risk of wife-initiated separation but not husband-initiated separation, although an early birth is not significantly associated with women's reports of wife- or husband-initiated separation. The results also indicate that an early birth significantly increased the risk of jointly initiated separation for both men and women which suggests that in some situations both spouses realise that they made a poor choice of marriage partner.

Finally, social barriers are important factors in the decision to separate but the results do not suggest that husbands or wives are more likely to take the initiative to end the relationship. As expected, children born within marriage reduce the risk of marriage breakdown and this association is consistent for both men and women

irrespective for all types of initiator status. Only examining whether or not the oldest child was born in marriage does not take into account other factors that may vary the effects of children on husband's and wife's decision to separate or remain married. Previous research has found that the likelihood of marriage breakdown varies depending on the number of children, the ages of children and the gender composition of children (Heaton 1990; Morgan, Lye and Condran 1988; Waite and Lillard 1991). These issues are dealt with in detail in the next chapter.

Using education as an indicator of socioeconomic position there is little support for a specialisation trading argument. The results indicate that women of lower levels of education have a reduced likelihood of jointly initiated separations, but not separations initiated by husbands or wives. Even though the association is in the expected direction, a specialisation trading argument would predict that women of higher levels of education would have an increased risk of wife-initiated separation, not jointly initiated separation. The results for men's education provide mixed support for the specialisation trading argument. As expected men with lower education levels are more likely to report their wives initiated separation but men with diploma level education also have an increased risk of husband-initiated separation, when the argument would predict no association.

These results contrast with those of Kalmijn and Poortman (2006), who find good support for a specialisation trading argument. They found that when wives have high levels of education there is an increased risk of wife-initiated separation, and reduced risk of husband-initiated separation. In contrast, when husbands have high levels of education this was positively associated with husbands initiating separation and negatively associated with wives initiating separation.

My findings also differ from those of England, Sayer and Allison (2005). They find that wife's education is significantly associated with couples reports of

“other” separations (which included jointly initiated and separations where couples disagreed with who initiated separation). But their findings suggest that higher levels of education reduce the likelihood of “other” separation, not increase it, as my results suggest. England, Sayer & Allison (2005) also did not find any association between Husband’s education and which spouse initiated separation. It is possible that these inconsistencies may be due to differences in model covariates; England, Sayer and Allison (2005) include measures of income. On the other hand, it may reflect genuine national differences in the association between education and marriage breakdown. For example, previous Australian research has shown that women with higher levels of education have an increased risk of marriage breakdown (Bradbury and Norris 2005), but research from the U.S. (South 2001; Tzeng and Mare 1995) suggests that more educated women have a reduced risk of marriage breakdown.

### **Conclusion**

Even though most theoretical explanations of marriage breakdown indicate circumstances where one spouse is more likely to initiate separation than the other, very little research examines which spouse initiates separation. Virtually all previous research treats marriage breakdown as a single event, but this approach may be overlooking some important gender differences in the process of marriage breakdown. Overall the results of the analysis in this chapter suggest that according to women’s reports their ethnic background, age at marriage, parental divorce, early birth and level of education are all factors that differentiate between wife-, husband- or jointly initiated separation, although only ethnicity, age at marriage and education were significant. For men, parental divorce and level of education differentiated between the likelihood of reporting separation initiated by wives compared to husbands (or vice versa) and religiosity significantly reduced the risk of a husband-initiated compare to a wife-initiated separation.

As the nature of gender relations within marriage and families continues to change, it is important for researchers, counsellors and policy makers to better understand gender differences in the correlates of marriage breakdown. At the moment very little is known about which partner initiates marital separation and under what circumstances, but understanding those processes is essential to developing our understanding of why marriages break down. The findings of this chapter suggest that sociostructural factors are important predictors of which partner initiates separation, but the main gender difference is that wives are more likely to initiate separation on the basis of their husbands as well as their own social characteristics. This only completes a small part of the puzzle and a great deal more research is needed to better understand why women, compared to men, are twice as likely to initiate marital separation. In Chapter 8 I take a step in this direction and examine the association between the number, age and gender composition of marital children and which spouse initiates separation. Many gender differences in the alternatives, costs and benefits of marriage arise when children are born, and children are therefore likely to factor differently in husbands' and wives' decisions to separate or remain married.

## Chapter 8

### The conditions of unconditional love: which spouse initiates marital separation when there are children involved?

---

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I undertake a detailed investigation of the role that marital children play in increasing or decreasing the risk of marital breakdown and the decisions of husbands and wives to initiate separation. A large body of research examines the association between children and marriage breakdown (c.f. Amato and Previti 2003; Andersson 1997; Andersson and Woldemicael 2001; Becker, Landes and Michael 1977; Bose and South 2003; Bracher et al. 1993; Bumpass, Martin and Sweet 1991; Cherlin 1977; Corley and Woods 1991; Diekmann and Schmidheiny 2004; Heaton 1990; Jacobson 1950; Katzev, Warner and Acock 1994; Lillard and Waite 1993; Mizell 2003; Mizell and Steelman 2000; Moore and Waite 1981; Thornton 1977; White 1990). But a number of unanswered questions remain about the complex effects of children on marriage breakdown. The majority of research does not take into account which spouse is more or less likely to initiate separation when there are children involved, even though most explanations for the association between children and marriage breakdown predict that one spouse will be less or more likely to initiate than the other.

#### **Background**

Only two studies examine the effects of children on who initiates separation and their findings are inconsistent. England, Sayer and Allison (2005) find no association between marital children and which spouse initiated separation, although if wives had a premarital birth there was a lower risk of wives initiating separation. In contrast

Kalmijn and Poortman (2006) find that marital children are associated with which spouse initiated separation. Having a child aged under 12 reduced the likelihood of both husbands and wives initiating separation; there was no effect when the youngest child was aged 12 to 18; and when all children had moved out of home there was an increased risk of both husbands and wives initiating separation. When the youngest child was aged under 6 husbands are significantly less likely than wives to initiate separation.

Moreover, research has identified several ways in which children are associated with marriage breakdown including the birth timing of children relative to marriage, number of children born, ages of children and the gender composition of children (Andersson 1997; Andersson and Woldemicael 2001; Heaton 1990; Morgan, Lye and Condran 1988; Waite and Lillard 1991). But the studies by England, Sayer and Allison (2005) and Kalmijn and Poortman (2006) only include the age of children and/or the birth timing of children. This means that other aspects of the relationship between children and marriage breakdown such as the number and gender composition have yet to be investigated.

In previous chapters the association between birth timing of children relative to marriage (whether or not children were born in or prior to marriage) and marriage breakdown have been examined. The results in Chapter 6 suggest that premarital and early births increase the risk of marriage breakdown whereas children born within marriage reduce the likelihood of marriage breakdown for both men and women. In Chapter 7, I investigated this association further for men's and women's reports of which spouse initiated marital separation. These results suggest that even though both factors increase the risk of marriage breakdown, the mechanisms are different. The association between premarital birth and marriage breakdown appears to operate through a selection mechanism. Women who have a premarital birth report a

significantly increased risk of wife-initiated separation and men who have a premarital birth report a significantly increased risk of husband-initiated separation. In addition, women report a greater likelihood of jointly initiated separation. This may be because women typically have custody of premarital children and bring them into the marriage which destabilises the marriage.

In Chapter 7 the results for men, but not for women, indicate that an early birth significantly increases the risk of wife- or jointly initiated separation but not husband-initiated separation. This may be because early birth may encourage a couple to marry when they otherwise would not or introduce additional strains in the developmental stages of the marriage and thereby destabilise marriage. This is likely to increase the risk of wife-initiated rather than husband-initiated separation because women tend to monitor relationships more closely than men and are more likely to respond to relationship quality issues by initiating separation (Walzer and Oles 2003).

In Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, the models also include a time varying indicator for when the first child was born in the marriage. The findings suggest that irrespective of which spouse initiated separation, children born within marriage consistently reduce the likelihood of marriage breakdown, but we know from previous research that this association is likely to vary depending on the number, age and gender of children. In the remainder of this chapter, I extend the analysis in Chapter's 6 and 7 and undertake a more detailed investigation of the associations between marital children and marriage breakdown. Broadly I address the research questions posed at the end of Chapter 4, but the main social characteristics of interest in this chapter relate to the number, age and gender composition of marital children.

### **Number of children, marriage breakdown and which spouse initiates separation**

Becker (1981) argues that children are investments in marital capital and that additional investments (i.e. each additional child) should result in a decreasing risk of

divorce as the number of children in the marriage increases. The evidence from previous research only partially supports this explanation. The relationship between cumulative fertility and marriage breakdown is U-shaped, where couples with no children and couples with more than three children, have higher rates of dissolution than small and medium families (Andersson 1997; Becker, Landes and Michael 1977; Heaton 1990). This suggests that having one or more children signifies a commitment to the marital relationship and is indicative of a successful marriage (Beck-Gernsheim 2002) but having a large family appears to introduce stresses and strains that attenuate any benefits from having more children (Heaton 1990).

Furthermore, the number of children may constrain wives and husbands differently when deciding whether to separate. From a bargaining perspective, the more children born in marriage the more likely that wives will limit their paid work for longer periods of time, thereby undermining their relative power within marriage (Brinig and Allen 2000). Additionally, in Australia women typically gain primary custody of children after divorce (Qu 2004). This is also the case in most other comparable developed nations such as the U.S. (Cancian and Meyer 1998), Canada (Juby, Le Bourdais and Marcil-Gratton 2005) and the U.K. (Smart and Neale 1999). Therefore, the post-divorce experiences of mother's are likely to be more difficult than men's or those of women without children. From this it follows that wives will be less likely to initiate separation as the number of children increases. Men with larger families on the other hand may feel a greater obligation to support the family and may be constrained by the thought of losing custody of their children (Poortman and Seltzer 2005; Twenge, Campbell and Foster 2003). But they have typically not invested as much time and effort into raising children and do not have the same post-divorce responsibilities for children and therefore may not be as constrained by number of children compared to wives.

**Age of children: Birth of children and the presence of preschool children**

Research shows that in the years when children are born, and before children attend school, the risk of marriage breakdown is low (Bracher et al. 1993; Heaton 1990; Waite and Lillard 1991). This is possibly because young children require greater investments of time and energy, particularly before they start school, which makes separating an unattractive option (Cherlin 1977; Heaton 1990; Waite and Lillard 1991).

Nevertheless the relationship between age of children and marital breakdown is likely to be different for men and women. Within the exchange bargaining framework, young children reduce wife's marital power by limiting participation in the paid work force (Brinig and Allen 2000). Baxter's (Baxter 2005b; Baxter 2005c) research into employment transitions after birth in a sample of Australian women has shown that the majority of women take time out of work in the year after a first, or higher order, birth and that women with young children are less likely to be in the work force or working part-time than women without young children. Husbands, on the other hand, do not change their work force attachment when children are born (Gjerdingen and Center 2005). Wives are therefore more likely to be economically dependent on husbands during this intensive child rearing phase (Cherlin 1977; Heaton 1990; Becker 1981), and this dependency is particularly acute in the years around the birth of children (Heaton 1990).

In addition women may not want to end the marriage and have the added burden and expense of childcare during intensive child rearing years (Cherlin 1977). Australian research has found that women's views of being a 'good mother' are often tied to providing as much maternal care as possible and reducing the amount of time children spend in non-maternal child care, particularly when children are infants and toddlers (Hand 2005; McDonald, Bradley and Guthrie 2005). Therefore, the prospect

of having to increase work force contact when children are young may act as a deterrent to ending the marriage for some wives. This feeling may be further exacerbated by the difficulties faced in finding long day care places for very young children in some inner city regions of Australia (Fisher and Patulny 2004). Hence, due to the expense, availability and norms about using child care for young children, mother's may be less likely to initiate separation around the years in which children are born and when preschool aged children are present.

Furthermore, because women typically have primary custody of children after marriage breakdown (Cancian and Meyer 1998; Qu 2004) they are more likely than men to experience trouble re-partnering (Becker, Landes and Michael 1977). This may be particularly acute when children are younger. For example, Sweeney (1997) reports that divorced women have a significantly reduced likelihood of remarriage when they have a child aged 6 and under compared to women with no children, but finds no disadvantage to remarriage for women with children aged over 6. For men, on the other hand, having a child aged 6 and under is not significantly associated with remarriage. All of these circumstances act as a deterrent to wives ending marriages when their children are infants and during early child-rearing years.

Around the years when children are born and when they are younger, husbands tend to have less involvement in their care than wives (Kalmijn 1999). This period of childrearing is also characterised by lower levels of marital satisfaction by both men and women (Twenge, Campbell and Foster 2003). But husbands are not as burdened by the commitment to intensive child rearing as women during this time and it may therefore be easier for them to leave. On the other hand husband's concern over losing custody of young children could be a deterrent to ending the marriage. The results of the study by Kalmijn and Poortman (2006) support this possibility, they find husbands are significantly less likely to initiate separation than wives when there

are preschool children present. Taken together this evidence indicates that the presence of preschool children will reduce the risk of separation initiated by both husbands and wives, but may act as more of a deterrent for wives.

**Age of children: The presence of older children and young adults**

As children age they rely less on their parents and consequently their protective effect on marriage diminishes. For example, Huber & Spitze (1980) using data from a sample of married couples in the U.S. find that when the youngest child is aged 6 to 11 there is a significant positive association with the wife thinking about leaving the marriage. And in some studies older children have been found to increase the likelihood of marriage breakdown (Waite and Lillard 1991).

From a bargaining perspective, the decreased dependence of older children removes several major barriers to women staying in an unsatisfactory marriage. Australian research shows that by the time their youngest child is in school the majority of women, who were working prior to the birth of their children, have returned to the work force (Baxter 2005c). Furthermore, when children attend school concerns over the availability and costs of day care are substantially reduced. On the other hand, even though school aged and teenage children require less intensive childcare, teenage children can be difficult to manage in terms of discipline and are also more expensive than younger children (Twenge, Campbell and Foster 2003). Therefore, women may be less likely to initiate separation when faced with the prospect of raising teenage children alone.

Contrasting processes may occur for husbands. Prior research indicates that men become more involved with parenting as children get older (Kalmijn 1999). There is both direct and indirect evidence that older children have a different association with men's post-divorce experiences than younger children. For example, Sweeney (1997) found that children aged 13 and over reduced the chances of

remarriage for men, possibly because former husbands have a better chance of gaining post-divorce custody when children are older (Cancian and Meyer 1998; De Vaus 2004; Juby, Le Bourdais and Marcil-Gratton 2005). Hence husbands may be less likely to initiate separation when children are older, because they play a greater role in older children's lives, have greater attachment to them and are therefore more likely to perceive a greater loss of parenting role if they divorce (Poortman and Seltzer 2005). Although this could also have the opposite effect where fathers may not be as deterred from initiating separation because they are more likely to have custody of teenage children (De Vaus 2004).

### **Gender composition of children**

Relatively recently, a debate has emerged in relation to the association between the sex composition of children and the likelihood of marriage breakdown. The seminal study published by Morgan, Lye and Condran (1988) found that couples who had one child had a statistically significant, albeit small, increased risk of marriage breakdown if they had a daughter rather than a son. They further found that in two child families the risk of disruption was lowest for couples with two sons, followed by those with one son and one daughter while the highest observed risk of marriage breakdown was couples with two daughters. Overall they concluded that daughters increased the risk of marriage breakdown in one and two child families. To explain this finding, Morgan et al (1988) propose a father involvement hypothesis, where fathers play a greater role in raising sons than daughters, which in turn increases husband's investment in families with sons compared to families with daughters and creates additional dependence between spouses thereby increasing marital solidarity and stability.

Subsequent research investigating this issue has produced mixed results that vary across nations. The gender composition of children may be associated with

marital stability because of culturally defined preferences for children of a particular gender (Lundberg 2005). Within countries or cultures that value sons over daughters, such as South and East Asia, there may be greater marital stability associated with having male children. For example, Bose and South (2003) found that in India, having at least one son reduces the risk of marital separation irrespective of religion, caste or region. They attribute their results, in part, to a historical cultural preference for sons in India.

In developed nations the findings are more mixed. Research from Sweden found little support for the notion that daughters are related to higher divorce risks than sons (Anderrson & Waldemicael, 2001). Diekman & Schmidheiny (2004) conducted an 18 country comparison of the effects of the gender composition of children on divorce. Overall they found very few significant associations for any country. Canadian families with only one child had a reduced risk of divorce if that child was a son. Families with two children in Estonia, France and the United States showed patterns similar to that found by Morgan et al (1988). Divorce was lowest in families with two sons, followed by those with one son and one daughter, and highest in families with two daughters. To date only one Australian study has examined the association between the gender composition of children and marriage breakdown. That study found no association between the gender composition of children and marriage breakdown in a sample of 2,078 Australian women (Bracher et al. 1993) Further there is little evidence that a preference for sons exists in Australia, rather the evidence suggests that Australians have a preference for having a child of each sex (Gray and Evans 2005). Nevertheless, even though findings are mixed about whether sons reduce the risk of marriage breakdown, and when they do the magnitude of the association tends to be small (Morgan et al, 1988; Bose & South, 2003; Andersson &

Waldmichael, 2001), on balance the evidence tends to suggest that a predominance of sons decreases the risk of separation.

Research on the association between the gender of children and marriage breakdown also identifies several mechanisms whereby the gender composition of marital children may increase or decrease the likelihood of husbands initiating marital separation rather than wives, or vice versa. For instance, it has been argued that husbands have a greater involvement in raising boys than girls. This decreases the likelihood of divorce because men who are more involved in parenting will perceive a greater loss of parenting role if they divorce (Kalmijn 1999; Morgan, Lye and Condran 1988). Therefore, husbands may be less likely to initiate separation when they have more sons. Alternatively, Kalmijn (1999) found that more involved fathers are less likely to experience divorce because their wives are more satisfied with the relationship, and from this it follows that wives would also be less likely to initiate separation in families with more sons. It is also possible that wives may be less likely to initiate separation when they have more boys because they believe that boys need a father figure.

While there is little doubt that father involvement is important for marital stability the links between having boys and greater father involvement are tenuous. Research findings are mixed, with some studies reporting that fathers are more likely to be involved parents when they have boys. For example, Katzev, Warner and Acock (1994) and Morgan, Lye and Condran (1988) both using data from the U.S. find that fathers are more likely to be involved parents with sons rather than daughters. In contrast other research has found little or no difference in father's involvement in parenting on the basis of the gender composition of marital children (see for example comparing numerous developed countries Diekmann and Schmidheiny 2004; the Netherlands Kalmijn and Poortman 2006; and the U.S.

Mizell and Steelman 2000). Nevertheless, even though the evidence is inconclusive on whether fathers are more involved parents when they have sons, none of these studies finds greater father involvement when there is a predominance of daughters.

## **Methods**

### ***Time-varying Child Measures***

To examine the issues raised in this chapter I generate several time-varying children indicators<sup>29</sup>. The first time varying measure is a series of dummies for the number of children born in marriage. This measure was constructed by first developing a time varying continuous measure of number of children born, coded 0 in the marriage years when no children were born, 1 in the marriage year the first child is born, 2 in the marriage year when the second child is born, and so on for up to 14 children.

Given that previous research has found that the association between family size and marriage breakdown is not linear (Andersson 1997; Becker, Landes and Michael 1977; Heaton 1990), and due to the very small numbers of respondents who had more than five children, this measure was collapsed into a series of dummy variables: 0 = *Zero Children*, 1 = *1 Child*, 2 = *2 Children*, 3 = *3 Children*, 4 = *4 Children*, and 5 = *5 or more children*.

Second, to test the argument that marriage breakdown is unlikely to occur in those years in which children are born (Andersson 1997; Heaton 1990; Waite and Lillard 1991), I develop a variable indicating the marriage year in which the first child was born within the marriage. This dummy is coded 0 until the marriage-year the first child is born and is then coded 1 in the marriage-year when the first birth occurred and then coded 0 in the years following the first birth. In addition I include a second measure for all higher order births, coded 1 in the marriage-years when a higher order

---

<sup>29</sup> Children born prior to the marriage year (premarital births) were excluded from the calculation of all time varying children measures as the emphasis in this chapter is on marital children. Children born the same year as marriage (early births) were included in the calculation of the measures, as it is likely that these children were born within marriage. Both premarital birth and early birth remained in the models as controls.

birth occurred, and coded 0 if not. Separate measures for first and higher order births were included because evidence suggests that first births are different than higher order births in their association with marriage breakdown (Waite and Lillard 1991)

To investigate whether the dependency effect of children diminishes as they age, I include a set of time-varying measures that represent the ages and numbers of children within those age groups throughout the marriage. Measures include the number of preschool children (aged  $\leq 5$ ); number of children 6 to 12; number of children 13 to 18; and number of adult children (aged 18 +)<sup>30</sup>. These age ranges were selected to capture important stages in children's development that are also likely to reflect changes in levels of dependence on parents. The first age group broadly represents preschool children, the second represents children in primary school years, the third children in secondary school and the last group is children who have left compulsory schooling. The indicators are mutually exclusive. For example, in the marriage-year the first child turns 1 the first child is included in the number count of preschool children, and first birth becomes 0; when the first child turns 6 they are included in the number count of children aged 6-12, and they are taken out of the number count for preschool children, and so on until the child is aged over 18. This process is repeated for all children born within the first marriage. Table 8.1 presents an overview of the number and ages of children at various marriage durations. These figures indicate that most births occur within the first 5 years of marriage, and longer marriages are characterized by larger numbers of children and older children.

---

<sup>30</sup> Note that the indicator for adult children also includes children who may no longer be living at home because they are independent and have moved out of home.

**Table 8.1: Time-varying variables: number and ages of children born in first marriages at various marital durations <sup>a</sup>, by sex**

Years of Marriage	Men						
	0 - 2	3 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	16 - 20	20 - 30	30+
<i>Number of Children:</i>							
No Children (%)	0.80	0.39	0.13	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.02
One Child (%)	0.17	0.38	0.22	0.10	0.08	0.07	0.08
Two Children (%)	0.02	0.19	0.39	0.38	0.35	0.34	0.28
Three Children (%)	<0.01	0.04	0.18	0.28	0.30	0.35	0.28
Four Children (%)	0.00	<0.01	0.06	0.13	0.15	0.17	0.18
Five or more Children (%)	0.00	<0.01	0.01	0.05	0.08	0.10	0.16
<i>Number and ages of children:</i>							
First Birth (%)	0.15	0.13	0.04	0.005	<0.001	<0.001	0.00
Higher order birth (%)	0.03	0.13	0.15	0.06	0.02	0.002	0.00
Number preschool children (Mean)	0.04	0.58	1.25	0.72	0.23	0.04	0.001
Number children 6-12 (Mean)	0.002	0.002	0.37	1.58	1.22	0.30	0.01
Number children 13-18 (Mean)	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	0.08	1.17	0.96	0.08
Number adult children (Mean)	0.00	0	<0.001	0.001	0.02	1.49	3.00
Marriage- Years (N)	8001	10384	15695	12890	10373	14921	12367
Years of Marriage	Women						
	0 - 2	3 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	16 - 20	20 - 30	30+
<i>Number of Children:</i>							
No Children (%)	0.80	0.38	0.13	0.06	0.04	0.04	0.03
One Child (%)	0.17	0.39	0.22	0.11	0.09	0.08	0.09
Two Children (%)	0.02	0.19	0.39	0.39	0.36	0.34	0.29
Three Children (%)	<0.01	0.04	0.18	0.28	0.29	0.29	0.28
Four Children (%)	0.00	<0.01	0.06	0.12	0.15	0.15	0.17
Five or more Children (%)	0.00	<0.01	0.01	0.05	0.08	0.10	0.14
<i>Number and ages of children:</i>							
First Birth (%)	0.14	0.13	0.04	0.005	<0.001	<0.001	0.00
Higher order birth (%)	0.03	0.13	0.15	0.06	0.02	0.003	0.00
Number preschool children (Mean)	0.04	0.59	1.25	0.72	0.24	0.04	0.001
Number children 6-12 (Mean)	0.001	0.002	0.37	1.58	1.22	0.32	0.01
Number children 13-18 (Mean)	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	0.08	1.18	0.96	0.09
Number adult children (Mean)	0.00	0	<0.001	0.001	0.02	1.48	2.92
Marriage- Years (N)	9515	13015	18406	15110	12234	17706	15422

<sup>a</sup> Details of respondents with missing data on any children, respondents with children that have died and those that have had a premarital birth are excluded from the calculation of the time-varying measures, but respondents with children born the same year of marriage (early birth) are included.

Finally I develop a series of measures for the gender composition of children born in the marriage. In the marriage years when there is one child (Parity 1) the measure indicates whether the child is a *girl* with a referent of *boy*. When a second child is born (Parity 2) the measure is coded: 1 = 2boys; 2= 1 boy and 1 girl; and 3 = 2 girls. The reference group is 2 boys. The final measure is for marriages with more than three children (Parity 3+) and indicates whether there are more boys than girls, this measure is coded: 1 = all boys; 2 = at least 2 boys; 3 = less than 2 boys; and 4 = no boys. The reference group is all boys. The respondent is right-censored, from each parity measure, when the next child is born. For example, a respondent is scored “0” on all parity measures until the first child is born then they are allocated a score for Parity 1 depending on whether the child is a girl or a boy. When a second child is born, that respondent is then coded “0” for Parity 1 and are allocated the relevant Parity 2 score depending on whether the second child was a boy or a girl. A similar process is followed for Parity 3, if a third birth occurs. The distribution of these measures is shown in Table 8.2.

**Table 8.2: Gender composition of children within first marriages for women and men**

	<b>Women Marriage – years</b>	<b>Men Marriage - years</b>
<i>Parity 1:</i>		
Boy	7228	6211
Girl	6177	5361
<i>Parity 2:</i>		
2 Boys	6078	5398
1 Boy, 1 Girl	14825	12909
2 Girls	6275	5046
<i>Parity 3 +:</i>		
All Boys	2975	2640
At least 2 Boys	11334	9498
Less than 2 Boys	9212	7536
No Boys	4297	4015
Total	83850	72026

***Analytic approach***

In this chapter I undertake three separate analyses, one for each set of covariates. Therefore, in the first analysis I examine the number of children, in the second I examine the age and number of children, and in the third I examine the gender composition of children. I estimate separate models for each set of covariates due to the strong correlations between them and this multicollinearity makes it difficult to separate the different effects of the variables when all are modelled simultaneously. For each separate analyses (or set of covariates) I estimated two models. First, a discrete-time survival model (Model 1) was estimated to establish the patterning of association between the child measures and marriage breakdown. The first model estimated is:

$$h(t)=\Pr(T = t_i | T \geq t_i, \mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}(t))$$

(Box-Steffensmeir and Jones 2004: 71).

Where the probability of failure ( $T = t_i$ ) is conditional on survival ( $T \geq t_i$ ) as well as the covariates ( $\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}(t)$ ). The difference between this model, and the one described in Chapter 5 is the inclusion of the time-varying covariates ( $\mathbf{x}(t)$ ) into the model.

Following the analytic approach used in Chapter 6, I also pool the men's and women's samples and re-estimate this model including gender interactions with all children measures to formally test for gender differences. As explained in Chapter 6, in the gender interactions model I also control for clustering within households as the still married men and women are from the same household. Second a discrete-time survival model with competing risks, taking into account initiator status of separation (Model 2) was estimated including the time varying child measures. Other than the

inclusion of the time varying child measures, the analysis proceeds in the same way as the analysis in Chapter 7<sup>31</sup>. The second model estimated is:

$$h_k(t) = \Pr(T = t_i | T \geq t_i, \mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}(t))$$

(Box-Steffensmeir and Jones 2004: 167).

This is similar to the first model, but with  $k$  possible outcomes. Following the analytic approach in Chapter 7, I re-estimate the competing risks model with wife-initiated separation as the contrast category to formally test whether the differences between husband- and wife-initiated separations are statistically significant. All models include controls for birth cohort, ethnicity, religiosity, cohabitation, parental divorce, age at marriage, premarital birth, early birth, education, missing values where relevant, the polynomial term for duration dependence. All analyses were conducted separately for men and women.

## Results

### *Number of children*

In Tables 8.3 and 8.4 I present the results of the first analysis examining the associations between number of children and marriage breakdown and which spouse initiated separation. The results of the first model predicting marriage breakdown are presented in first three columns. The results of the second model predicting which spouse initiated separation are presented in the last nine columns. The results for Model 1 and Model 2 are presented as odds ratios, coefficients (log-odds) and the standard error of the coefficient. For Model 2 there are three sets of results; one for each type of initiator status. All results are discussed in relation to the odds ratios.

---

<sup>31</sup> Similar to the modelling approach used in Chapter 7, I ran pooled gender interactions models for all competing risks analysis in this chapter. I did not find that the gender interactions added anything to the substantive results. This may be because marital children are a product of the couple, and are therefore shared characteristics and unlikely to differentiate between men's and women's reports.

The theory and previous research implies that each additional child further decreases the risk of marriage breakdown until there are 3 children but there is little or no additional decrease in risk when fourth or higher order children are born (Andersson 1997; Becker 1981; Becker, Landes and Michael 1977; Heaton 1990). To investigate this possibility I undertake pair-wise comparisons by estimating five separate models each with a different contrast group; the contrast in the first model was zero children, in the second model one child, in the third model two children, in the fourth model three children, and in the fifth model four children. The goal of this strategy was to formally test whether each additional child represented a significant increase or decrease in the risk of divorce relative to the previous number of children. For example, does having two children rather than one child significantly increase or decrease the risk of marriage breakdown. Given this, rather than presenting the results of all five models I present the odds and coefficients relating to the pair-wise comparisons, indicating the difference in divorce risk between having 0 or 1 child, 1 or 2 children, 2 or 3 children, 3 or 4 children, and 4 or 5 (or more) children.

The results for women are presented in Table 8.3. Model 1 indicates that having one child compared to no children significantly reduces the likelihood of marriage breakdown. Even though there is an additional reduction in the likelihood of marriage breakdown for each additional child none are statistically significant. The results for Model 2 suggest that wives are much less likely to initiate separation when there is one child as opposed to no children, but there are no differences for any additional children. There is a reduced likelihood of jointly initiated separation when there are two children compared to one child. In addition there is a significantly increased risk of wife- compared to jointly initiated separation with two relative to one child. Finally, when there are four relative to three children there is a reduced risk of husband-initiated separation relative to remaining married.

**Table 8.3: Women, number of children, risk of marriage breakdown and reports of who initiated separation**

	Model 1			Wife Initiated			Model 2			Husband Initiated			Jointly Initiated		
	Odds	$\beta$	Se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se
<i>Comparison Model 1</i>															
Zero <sup>tv</sup> to One <sup>tv</sup> Child	0.75**	-0.29	.10	0.65**	-0.42	.13	0.88	-0.12	.24	0.88	-0.12	.19			
<i>Comparison Model 2</i>															
One <sup>tv</sup> to Two <sup>tv</sup> Children	0.85	-0.16	.10	1.02	0.03	.13	0.73 <sup>b</sup>	-0.31	.22	0.62*	-0.48	.19			
<i>Comparison Model 3</i>															
Two <sup>tv</sup> to Three <sup>tv</sup> Children	0.96	-0.04	.09	0.87	-0.14	.12	1.25	0.22	.20	0.99	-0.01	.20			
<i>Comparison Model 4</i>															
Three <sup>tv</sup> to Four <sup>tv</sup> Children	0.80	-0.23	.15	0.91	-0.10	.19	0.44*	-0.80	.37	0.93	-0.08	.31			
<i>Comparison Model 5</i>															
Four <sup>tv</sup> to Five + <sup>tv</sup> Children	0.87	-0.14	.25	0.75	-0.29	.33	1.30	0.6	.56	0.93	-0.07	.49			
Number of Respondents		4883						4883							
Marriage-years		101232						101232							
Number of separations		1068			619			186			263				
Goodness of fit LR Chi2 (df)		941.56 (30)						1042.54 (90)							

\*p&lt;.05, \*\*p&lt;.01, \*\*\*p&lt;.001

Note: Respondents with children who have died had their data excluded from the time varying variables due to lack of detailed information (such as the order of birth) about the child who died, and premarital births are not included in the time varying variables.

<sup>a</sup>All models include controls for having a premarital birth, early birth, a child who has died, missing data on children, birth cohort, ethnic background, parental divorce, cohabitation, age at marriage, religiosity, education, duration dependence (5<sup>th</sup> order polynomial) and time since separation. <sup>b</sup> The difference between this coefficient and the coefficient for wife-initiated separation is statistically significant at P<.05 (see Appendix 7, Table A7.1). <sup>tv</sup>Indicates that measure is time varying

The results for men are presented in Table 8.4. Referring to Model 1 there is a lower risk of marriage breakdown when there is one child compared to no children, but there are no additional benefits of having two, or more children. The results of Model 2 indicate a reduced risk of jointly initiated separation when there is one child relative to having no children. The only other finding of note is that when there are three, rather than two children there is a reduced risk of husband-initiated separation, compared to a wife-initiated separation.

In contrast to previous research the results for both men and women suggest that once the first child is born any **additional** children do not provide any significant additional reductions in the risk of marriage breakdown. This may be due to differences in the modelling approaches used. Previous studies measure number of children as a series of dummies with a referent of no children and do not undertake pair-wise comparisons with other contrast categories. In relation to which partner initiated separation, there is no consistent patterning that suggests wives are less likely to initiate separation than husbands as the number of children increases. If anything, the evidence suggests an **increased** tendency for wives to initiate.

**Table 8.4: Men, Number of children, risk of marriage breakdown and reports of who initiated separation**

	Model 1						Model 2					
	Marriage Breakdown			Wife Initiated			Husband Initiated			Jointly Initiated		
	Odds	$\beta$	Se	Odds	$\beta$	Se	Odds	$\beta$	Se	Odds	$\beta$	se
<i>Comparison Model 1</i>												
Zero <sup>tv</sup> to One <sup>tv</sup> Child	0.69**	-0.36	.11	0.70	-0.35	.19	1.03	0.04	.21	0.51***	-0.67	.19
<i>Comparison Model 2</i>												
One <sup>tv</sup> to Two <sup>tv</sup> Children	0.81	-0.21	.11	0.79	-0.23	.19	0.77	-0.26	.20	0.85	-0.16	.19
<i>Comparison Model 3</i>												
Two <sup>tv</sup> to Three <sup>tv</sup> Children	1.03	0.03	.10	1.25	0.23	.17	0.73 <sup>b</sup>	-0.31	.21	1.08	0.08	.17
<i>Comparison Model 4</i>												
Three <sup>tv</sup> to Four <sup>tv</sup> Children	0.98	-0.02	.15	0.99	-0.01	.23	1.33	0.29	.29	0.78	-0.24	.26
<i>Comparison Model 5</i>												
Four <sup>tv</sup> to Five + <sup>tv</sup> Children	0.96	-0.04	.23	0.99	-0.01	.35	0.86	-0.15	.45	1.02	0.02	.41
Number of Respondents	4110						4110					
Marriage-years	85081						85081					
Number of separations	894			316			244			334		
Goodness of fit LR Chi2 (df)	621.78 (30)						680.74 (90)					

\*p&lt;.05, \*\*p&lt;.01, \*\*\*p&lt;.001

Note: Respondents with children who have died had their data excluded from the time varying variables due to lack of detailed information (such as the order of birth) about the child who died, and premarital births are not included in the time varying variables.

<sup>tv</sup>Indicates that measure is time varying. <sup>a</sup>All models include controls for having a premarital birth, early birth, a child who has died, missing data on children, birth cohort, ethnic background, parental divorce, cohabitation, age at marriage, religiosity, education, duration dependence (5<sup>th</sup> order polynomial) and time since separation. <sup>b</sup>The difference between this coefficient and the coefficient for wife-initiated separation is statistically significant at P<.05 (Appendix 7, Table A7.1).

***Age and number of children***

Next I examine the association between ages and number of children in each age group and marriage breakdown and which spouse initiated the break-up. In this analysis I build on the previous analysis and take into account not just how many children were born within marriage but whether the 'dependence' effect of those children changes as they get older. The results of this second analysis for women are presented in Table 8.5. The results of Model 1 indicate the likelihood of marriage breakdown is substantially reduced in the marriage-years where a first or higher order birth occurs, with a 62 percent reduced likelihood of marriage breakdown in years when a first birth occurs, and a 45 percent reduced likelihood for a second or higher order birth. This shows that having an infant substantially reduces the risk of marriage breakdown. Having preschool children and children aged under 12 also significantly reduces the likelihood of marriage breakdown for women. This association diminishes for children aged 13 to 18 and then becomes non significant for adult children. Further, the interpretation of these coefficients is multiplicative and therefore the chance of dissolution could be quite small depending on the number of children in each age group. For example, if a woman has 3 preschool children she has a 36 percent ( $1 - 0.86^3 = 36$ ) lower likelihood of marriage breakdown compared to 14 percent for a woman with only 1 preschool child.

**Table 8.5: Women, age and number of children, risk of marriage breakdown and who initiated separation**

	Model 1						Model 2					
	Marriage Breakdown			Wife Initiated			Husband Initiated			Jointly Initiated		
	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se
First birth <sup>tv</sup>	0.38***	-0.96	.20	0.20***	-1.63	.34	1.08 <sup>c</sup>	0.08	.35	0.49*	-0.71	.35
Higher order birth <sup>tv</sup>	0.55***	-0.60	.15	0.49***	-0.71	.20	0.99 <sup>c</sup>	0.01	.29	0.42**	-0.86	.33
Number of preschool children <sup>tv</sup>	0.86**	-0.15	.05	0.84**	-0.17	.06	0.93	-0.07	.11	0.87	-0.14	.10
Number of children aged 6-12 <sup>tv</sup>	0.86**	-0.15	.05	0.87*	-0.14	.07	0.85	-0.17	.11	0.85	-0.16	.10
Number of children aged 13-18 <sup>tv</sup>	0.86* <sup>b</sup>	-0.15	.07	0.84	-0.17	.09	0.87	-0.14	.14	0.90	-0.10	.14
Number of Adult children <sup>tv</sup>	0.97	-0.03	.08	1.17	0.16	.11	0.66* <sup>c</sup>	-0.42	.17	0.93	-0.07	.17
Number of Women	4883						4883					
Marriage-years	101232						101232					
Number of separations	1132			653			200			279		
Goodness of fit LR Chi2 (df)	1053.16 (36)						1239.03 (108)					

\*p&lt;.05, \*\*p&lt;.01, \*\*\*p&lt;.001

Note Respondents with children who have died had their data excluded from the time varying variables due to lack of detailed information (such as the order of birth) about the child who died, and premarital births are not included in the time varying variables.

<sup>a</sup>All models include controls for having a premarital birth, early birth, a child who has died, missing data on children, birth cohort, ethnic background, parental divorce, cohabitation, age at marriage, religiosity, education, duration dependence (5<sup>th</sup> order polynomial) and time since separation. <sup>b</sup>Results of the pooled gender interaction model (Appendix 7, Table A7.2) indicate that this coefficient is significantly different from the coefficient for men (Table 8.6). <sup>c</sup>The difference between this coefficient and the coefficient for wife-initiated separation is statistically significant at P<.05 (Appendix 7, Table A7.3). <sup>tv</sup>Indicates that measure is time varying.

Model 2 in Table 8.5 examines the associations between the child measures and women's reports of which spouse initiated separation. Overall, the results indicate that children significantly reduce the likelihood of separations initiated by wives but not those initiated by husbands or jointly. The marriage-year(s) in which the birth of first and higher order children occur reduces the likelihood of wife- and jointly initiated separation, relative to staying married, but the associations with husband-initiated separation are not significant. In addition, the odds of wife-initiated separation, compared to a husband-initiated separation are significantly lower in years when first and higher order children are born. Generally, the number of children aged from preschool to 18 significantly reduces the risk of wife-initiated separations, but not husband- or jointly initiated separations. The only exception is that women are significantly less likely to report a husband-initiated separation when they have adult children. Therefore, according to women's reports, each additional adult child significantly diminishes the odds of a husband- rather than a wife-initiated separation.

The models for men are presented in Table 8.6. The results of Model 1, examining overall marriage breakdown for men are listed in the first column. The likelihood of marriage breakdown is low in the years of marriage in which children are born. In the year when the first child is born the risk is 69 percent lower, and 31 percent lower in years when higher order births occur. Preschool children and school children reduce the likelihood of marriage breakdown until the age of 12, but children aged 13 and over are not significantly associated with marriage breakdown for men.

**Table 8.6: Men, age and number of children, risk of marriage breakdown and who initiated separation <sup>a</sup>**

	Model 1						Model 2					
	Marriage Breakdown			Wife Initiated			Husband Initiated			Jointly Initiated		
	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se
First birth <sup>tv</sup>	0.31***	-1.16	.24	0.31**	-1.15	.13	0.49	-0.72	.19	0.20***	-1.59	.09
Higher order birth <sup>tv</sup>	0.69*	-0.37	.16	0.62	-0.47	.17	0.76	-0.28	.21	0.71	-0.35	.19
Number of preschool children <sup>tv</sup>	0.81***	-0.21	.06	0.81*	-0.21	.07	0.95	-0.05	.10	0.71***	-0.35	.07
Number of children aged 6-12 <sup>tv</sup>	0.91*	-0.10	.05	0.95	-0.06	.08	0.79*	-0.23	.09	0.95	-0.05	.08
Number of children aged 13-18 <sup>tv</sup>	0.99 <sup>b</sup>	-0.01	.07	1.20	0.18	.13	0.81 <sup>c</sup>	-0.21	.11	0.93	-0.07	.10
Number of Adult children <sup>tv</sup>	0.94	-0.06	.08	1.11	0.11	.14	0.99	-0.01	.16	0.75 <sup>c</sup>	-0.29	.10
Number of Men		4110						4110				
Marriage-years		85081						85081				
Number of separations		894			316			244			334	
Goodness of fit LR Chi2 (df)		677.70 (36)					788.11 (108)					

\*p&lt;.05, \*\*p&lt;.01, \*\*\*p&lt;.001

Note Respondents with children who have died had their data excluded from the time varying variables due to lack of detailed information (such as the order of birth) about the child who died, and premarital births are not included in the time varying variables.

<sup>a</sup>All models include controls for having a premarital birth, early birth, a child who has died, missing data on children, birth cohort, ethnic background, parental divorce, cohabitation, age at marriage, religiosity, education, duration dependence (5<sup>th</sup> order polynomial) and time since separation. <sup>b</sup>Results of the pooled gender interaction model (Appendix 7, Table A7.2) indicate that this coefficient is significantly different from the coefficient for women in Table 8.5. <sup>c</sup>The difference between this coefficient and the coefficient for wife-initiated separation is statistically significant at P<.05 (full model presented in Appendix 7, Table A7.3).

<sup>tv</sup>Indicates that measure is time varying.

The results of Model 2 indicate that wife- or jointly initiated separations, relative to staying married, are significantly lower in the year the first child is born than other years. Initiator status is not significantly associated with a higher order birth according to men's reports. The presence of preschool children significantly reduces the risk of men reporting a wife- or jointly initiated separation, but not a husband-initiated separation. And, in contrast to the results for women, the presence and number of children aged 6 to 12 significantly reduces the risk of a husband-initiated separation relative to a wife-initiated separation. This difference is statistically significant. Finally, each additional adult child significantly reduces the risk of a jointly initiated separation compared to a wife-initiated separation.

Together, the results for men and women provide strong evidence that the risk of marriage breakdown is lower in the years when children are born, and when there are preschool children present. I also find evidence that in the years when children are born, or preschool children are present, there is a decreased likelihood of wives initiating separation. The only finding not consistent with this conclusion is that according to men's reports a higher order birth does not significantly reduce the risk of wife-initiated separation. Finally, in the years when children are born and when young children are present husbands do not have a decreased likelihood of initiating separation. This is consistent for both men's and women's reports. In addition, according to women's reports, compared to wives, husbands have a significantly increased likelihood of initiating separation in the years when a first or higher order birth occurs. Overall these findings suggest a low risk of both husband- and wife-initiated separation when infants and young children are present, but significantly lower for women.

Older children did not necessarily increase the risk of marriage breakdown, although this varies according to men's and women's reports. For women children

significantly reduce the risk of marriage breakdown up until the age of 18. In contrast for men, the decrease in risk of divorce is attenuated when there are children aged 6 to 12 and having teenage children is not significantly associated with marriage breakdown. Like women though, the presence of adult children is not significantly associated with marriage breakdown. Further, according to men's reports, the presence and number of school age and teenage children do not significantly reduce the likelihood of wives initiating separation, and the presence of a child over the age of 13 increases the risk of wife-initiated separation (although this is not significant). According to women's reports, on the other hand, the presence of a child aged 6 to 12 significantly reduces the risk of wives initiating separation, but teenagers do not.

Finally, there is also evidence that older children reduce the risk of husbands initiating separation. For women, the presence of adult children significantly reduces the risk of husbands initiating separation compared to wives. According to men's reports, the presence of children aged 6 to 12 significantly reduces the risk of a husband initiated separation, and the presence of children aged 13 to 18 significantly reduces the risk of husbands initiating separation relative to wives.

### ***Gender composition of children***

In the final analyses I examine the association between the gender composition of marital children, marriage breakdown and which partner initiates separation. Three separate analyses were undertaken. First, I examine the effect between the parity 1 measure, comparing having a girl rather than a boy on marital breakdown and which spouse initiates separation. Second, I examine the parity 2 measure, comparing the effect of having 2 boys to having either two girls or one child of each gender on marriage breakdown and which spouse initiates separation. Third, I examine the parity 3 measure that compares having more girls than boys on marriage breakdown and which spouse initiates separation. For each set of analysis I estimate Model 1 and

Model 2, and all analysis is run separately for men and women. The results for women are presented in Table 8.7. None of the gender composition measures are significantly associated with marriage breakdown or which spouse initiated separation for women.

The results for men are presented in Table 8.8. When there is one child there are no significant associations between gender composition and marriage breakdown, but there are some significant associations when there are two or more children. Men with two children have a marginally significant ( $p < .10$ ) increase in the risk of marriage breakdown when the gender composition comprises one child of each sex, relative to having 2 sons. In contrast when men had three or more children there was a decreased risk of marriage breakdown when they had at least 1 or more girls relative to having all boys. According to men's reports, with two children there is a marginally significant increase in the risk of wife-initiated separation when there is 1 boy and 1 girl compared to 2 boys, but the association with husband- and jointly initiated separation is not significant. When there are three children there is only a marginally significant decrease in the likelihood of wife- and jointly initiated separation when there are at least 2 boys, but not husband-initiated separation. None of the other gender composition dummies for 3 or more children were significantly associated with initiator status.

**Table 8.7: Women, Gender composition of children, marriage breakdown and who initiated separation**

	Model 1						Model 2					
	Marriage Breakdown			Wife Initiated			Husband Initiated			Jointly Initiated		
	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se
<i>Parity 1<sup>iv</sup> model:</i>												
Boy	1.00			1.00			1.00			1.00		
Girl	0.92	-0.09	.15	0.98	-0.02	.21	0.85	-0.16	.37	0.85	-0.16	.27
<i>Parity 2<sup>iv</sup> model</i>												
2 Boys	1.00			1.00			1.00			1.00		
1 Boy, 1 Girl	1.00	<-0.001	.14	1.12	0.12	.19	0.85	-0.11	.31	0.83	-0.19	.29
2 Girls	0.97	-0.03	.17	1.18	0.17	.22	0.91	-0.10	.38	0.56	-0.59	.38
<i>Parity 3 or more<sup>iv</sup> model:<sup>b</sup></i>												
All boys	1.00			-			-			-		
At least 2 Boys	0.97	-0.04	.21	-			-			-		
Less than 2 Boys	0.89	-0.11	.22	-			-			-		
No boys	0.99	-0.01	.25	-			-			-		
Number of Women	4883						4883					

Note Respondents with children who have died had their data excluded from the time varying variables due to lack of detailed information (such as the order of birth) about the child who died. Numbers vary between this table and the age of youngest child table due to differences in missing information about youngest children compared to oldest children.

<sup>a</sup>All models include controls for having a child who has died, missing data on children, birth cohort, ethnic background, parental divorce, cohabitation, age at marriage, religiosity and education. I also include a fifth order polynomial expression to adjust for duration dependence and a control for time since separation. <sup>b</sup>The Parity 3 multinomial logistic regression model for women did not converge therefore the model results are not reported. Further analysis indicates the lack of model convergence was due at least in part to the very small numbers in some cells (Appendix 6, Table A6.8). <sup>iv</sup>Indicates that measure is time varying.

**Table 8.8: Men, Gender composition of children, marriage breakdown and who initiated separation**

	Model 1						Model 2					
	Marriage Breakdown			Wife Initiated			Husband Initiated			Jointly Initiated		
	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se
<i>Parity 1<sup>iv</sup> model:</i>												
Boy	1.00			1.00			1.00			1.00		
Girl	0.80	-0.21	.17	0.83	-0.18	.28	0.77	-0.27	.30	0.84	-0.18	.31
<i>Parity 2<sup>iv</sup> model:</i>												
2 Boys	1.00			1.00			1.00			1.00		
1 Boy, 1 Girl	1.40 <sup>‡</sup>	0.34	.17	1.68 <sup>‡</sup>	0.52	.31	1.60	0.47	.33	1.09	0.09	.27
2 Girls	1.28	0.25	.21	1.46	0.38	.38	1.36	0.30	.40	1.13	0.12	.33
<i>Parity 3 or more<sup>iv</sup> model:</i>												
All boys	1.00			1.00			1.00			1.00		
At least 2 Boys	0.57**	-0.55	.20	0.42 <sup>‡</sup>	-0.86	.32	1.05	0.05	.46	0.57 <sup>‡</sup>	-0.56	.33
Less than 2 Boys	0.68 <sup>‡</sup>	-0.39	.21	0.67	-0.40	.31	0.74	-0.30	.48	0.65	-0.43	.34
No boys	0.59*	-0.52	.25	0.51	-0.66	.38	0.61	-0.49	.61	0.68	-0.38	.39
Number of Men		4110					4110					

‡p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Note Respondents with children who have died had their data excluded from the time varying variables due to lack of detailed information (such as the order of birth) about the child who died. Separate models were estimated for each Parity measure.

<sup>a</sup>All models include controls for having a child who has died, missing data on children, birth cohort, ethnic background, parental divorce, cohabitation, age at marriage, religiosity, education, duration dependence (5<sup>th</sup> order polynomial) and time since separation. <sup>iv</sup>Indicates that measure is time varying.

Overall, the results of models estimating the associations between the gender composition of children and marriage breakdown do not provide evidence of a preference for sons or daughters. The gender composition of marital children is not significantly associated with marriage breakdown or initiator status for women. For men, there is no consistent evidence that having sons, or more sons than daughters, reduces the risk of marriage breakdown. The results contradict the expectation that having a child of each sex reduces the risk of marriage breakdown. For men, there is an increased risk of marriage breakdown when there are two children, one of each sex. When there are three or more children there is a decreased risk of marriage breakdown when there are children of each sex relative to having only boys; although there is also a decreased risk of marriage breakdown when there are only girls relative to having only boys. Finally, there is mixed support for the expectation that more sons will result in a reduced likelihood of wives and husbands initiating separation. When there are two children and they are of mixed gender, there is an increased risk of wives initiating separation. On the other hand when there are three or more children having all boys is associated with an increased risk of wives initiating separation relative to having at least one girl. Gender composition of children is not significantly associated with men's reports of a husband-initiated separation.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this chapter add to the evidence for the importance of children for marital stability. In addition I have shown that there is a relationship between children and who initiates marital breakdown. This has been overlooked in most previous studies on the effects of children on marriage breakdown. In general, young children reduce the likelihood of marriage breakdown, but both men's and women's reports suggest that the odds of wives initiating separation, compared to husbands, are very low in the years when children are born and before they attend school. This

finding is intuitively sensible. When children are young the time and effort required for their care is greater, women are typically primary carers for children and limit their paid work force contact. This increases wives dependency on marriage and reduces their alternatives to marriage. In addition, the costs (both emotional and financial) and availability of nonmaternal child care for young children may make alternatives to the marriage less attractive for wives. Husbands on the other hand may have lower levels of attachment to young children than wives (Kalmijn 1999), and tend to have similar levels of paid employment before and after children are born (Gjerdingen and Center 2005). Men, therefore, do not face the same constraints as women with young children. The results also reflect this, where young children tend not to be significantly associated with marriage breakdown for husband's, and relative to wives, husbands are more likely to initiate in the years when children are born.

The story for older children is more complex. While overall the protective effect of children on marriage diminishes as children age it is unclear whether this is due to changes in the likelihood of wife's or husband's initiating separation. There are also some contradictions between men's and women's reports. For example, I find that the presence of teenage children reduces the odds of women reporting a wife-initiated separation. This suggests that, according to women having teenage children limits wives initiating separation, possibly because the added difficulties of parenting and the financial expenses associated with teenage children makes separation an unattractive alternative to the marriage. However, this finding for women is contradicted by men's reports which indicate an increased likelihood of wives initiating separation when there are children aged 13 to 18 present, although this is not significant.

On the other hand the evidence consistently suggests that husbands are less likely to initiate separation as children reach school age and older. According to

men's reports, husbands, compared to wives, are less likely to initiate separation when children are aged 6 to 12, when children are aged 13 to 18, and when children become adults. Furthermore, women's reports indicate that husbands are significantly less likely to initiate when their children are adults. These findings are consistent with arguments that fathers tend to be more involved with older children and therefore have greater attachment to children as they get older (Kalmijn 1999).

In some respects the findings here are inconsistent with other studies. England, Sayer and Allison (2005) find that the number and age of children were not significantly associated with which spouse most wanted the marriage to end. This may be because they had a more comprehensive range of socioeconomic indicators in their models which may have accounted for any differences in the impact of children. On the other hand, Kalmijn and Poortman (2006) report that younger children and children aged 6 to 12, decreased the likelihood of marriage breakdown, but found that this association was stronger for husband-initiated than wife-initiated separation. They reach different conclusions than those here. Kalmijn and Poortman (2006) argue their evidence suggests that men seem to base their divorce decision to a greater extent than women on the social costs of losing contact with their children. While I find evidence of this for older children, there is no support for this conclusion for younger children. The reason for this difference between the Netherlands and Australia is not immediately apparent as post-separation and post-divorce child custody arrangements are similar in each country. In Australia around 12 percent of children live with their father following separation and divorce (De Vaus 2004) and in the Netherlands this figure is around 10 percent (Statistics Netherlands, Steenbink and Sprangers 2006). This requires further investigation.

The number of children does not differentiate between men and women or the likelihood of a wife- rather than a husband-initiated separation. Overall, I find that

once the first child is born, any additional children do not significantly reduce the risk of marriage breakdown. This is in contrast to the theoretical and empirical literatures which suggest a U-shaped association between number of children and marriage breakdown. These differences in results are due to differences in the analytic approaches used here and in previous studies. I estimate five separate models treating each dummy as the contrast group and report the difference between each additional child and the previous number of children whereas other research treats number of children as a series of dummies with a referent of having no children. When I estimate the models using a similar approach to that in previous studies, I also find a broadly curvilinear association<sup>32</sup>. The approach used here better captures the theory, because the theory implies an additional benefit for each additional child, but that is not properly measured by using a series of dummies with a referent of no children. In relation to which partner initiated separation, there is no consistent patterning that suggests wives are less likely to initiate separation than husbands as the number of children increases. If anything the evidence suggests a slight increased tendency for wives to initiate as the number of children increases.

---

<sup>32</sup> When I include number of children in the models as a series of dummies with a referent of zero children, I obtain similar findings to those of previous research. For women (Appendix 7, Table A7.4), each additional child, up to 5 or more, decreases the risk of marriage breakdown by an additional 10 to 20 percent. Having one, or more, child is strongly and significantly associated with a lower likelihood of wife initiated separation. Moreover, each additional child is associated with an additional decrease in the likelihood of women reporting a wife initiated separation. The likelihood of women reporting a jointly initiated separation is lower when there is more than one, but less than 5 children. This patterning is similar to findings of previous studies. The number of children is not generally associated with women's reports of husbands initiating separation; only when there are four children is there a significant decrease in the likelihood of husband initiated separation. This implies that, relative to having no children, each additional child reduces the risk of marriage breakdown. For men (Appendix 7, Table A7.5), the results indicate a 32 percent reduced risk of marriage breakdown for one child compared to zero children, and an additional 13 percent lower risk for two children compared to zero children, but there are no substantial additional reductions in the likelihood of marriage breakdown for 3 or more children for men. This pattern of association accords closely with previous research. According to men's reports, there is only a significantly reduced likelihood of wife-initiated separation with two children compared to zero, but that benefit disappears with three or more children. Similarly there is only a significantly reduced likelihood of husband initiated separation when there three children compared to zero, but not less than three or four or more children. In contrast the likelihood of men reporting a jointly initiated separation is 50 percent less for one child, around 55 percent less for two or three children and 65 percent less for four or more children compared to zero children.

I find little evidence to suggest that gender composition of children is an important predictor of marriage breakdown. Gender of children is not associated with marriage breakdown for women. There are only a handful of parity measures for child gender which are significantly associated with men's reports and most are only marginally significant. Further, the patterning of results for men does not suggest any favouring of sons over daughters, or any particular combination of sons and daughters. Overall, this analysis leads to similar conclusions to those reached in other studies, that in developed western countries gender composition of children has little impact on family stability (Andersson and Woldemicael 2001; Lundberg 2005).

### **Conclusion**

Overall the results in this chapter suggest that the presence of marital children reduce the risk of marriage breakdown. The balance of evidence suggests that wives are less likely to initiate when children are younger and husbands are less likely to initiate when children are older, but overall children are a deterrent to the decision to separate for men and women. The added level of 'commitment' that children entail for marriage has probably contributed in part to delayed fertility where people are having children later and fewer children (Beck-Gernsheim 2002). This suggests an "avoidance" of the additional commitment of children in marriage. In a society where a culture of divorce prevails (Hackstaff 1999) and the management of risk of marriage breakdown is important (Beck-Gernsheim 2002) avoiding the commitment of children keeps the door open to divorce if marriage turns out to be unsatisfactory.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusions

---

The main purpose of this thesis was to develop our understanding of gender differences in the sociostructural predictors of marriage breakdown. Most explanations for marriage breakdown imply that gender is important for understanding why some marriages end and others remain intact. Neoclassical economics (Becker 1973; Becker 1981; Becker, Landes and Michael 1977) and functional (Parsons 1956) explanations for marriage breakdown suggest that a successful marriage is dependent on complementary divisions of labour, but the division of labour is gendered whereby men concentrate on paid employment and women on domestic labour. The stability of marriage therefore depends on husbands' and wives' ability to successfully perform their roles which in turn depends on their social characteristics. Under the functional and neoclassical perspectives any deviation from this role specialisation results in lower returns of the marriage for both spouses and therefore implies that the decision to separation is made jointly. From social exchange (Levinger 1965; Levinger 1976; Levinger and Moles 1979) and exchange bargaining (Lundberg and Pollack 1996; McElroy 1990) perspectives spouses' social characteristics influence their preferences within marriage and their alternatives to marriage and thereby influence divorce threat points. Therefore these perspectives allow for different threat points for husbands and wives which suggests the possibility of circumstances where one spouse is likely to take the initiative to end the marriage and that these circumstances may differ for husbands and wives. The research literature on gender and family life finds that gender is an important form of stratification in marriage and family life, often to the disadvantage of women.

Numerous studies also find that women are more likely to initiate separation than men.

Despite good empirical and theoretical reasons for investigating which spouse initiates separation most research to date only investigates gender differences between men's and women's characteristics and marriage breakdown. In this thesis I take two approaches to investigating gender differences in the social determinants of divorce. First, similar to approaches in previous research I examine gender differences in the associations between men's and women's social characteristics on marriage breakdown. Second, building on previous research I examine gender differences in the predictors of which spouse initiated separation. To date most divorce research has largely overlooked this latter issue and we know little about the marital contexts in which the decision to separate is taken.

### **Key Findings**

Overall, the analysis in this thesis indicated three main findings: first, that sociostructural factors are important for understanding why some marriages break down and others remain intact; second, wives are more likely to initiate marital separation than husbands; and third, while some gender differences in the social correlates of which spouse initiated separation are present, in general men and women tend to end their marriages under similar circumstances. The main gender difference is that husbands' characteristics are associated with women ending marriages, but wives' characteristics are not related husbands' decisions to end their marriages.

#### ***1. Sociostructural factors are important for understanding marriage breakdown.***

At the broadest level, the results of this study add to the already large body of evidence that social characteristics are important for understanding why some marriages breakdown whereas other's remain intact. Based on a review of the theoretical and empirical literatures, three main mechanisms were identified whereby

social characteristics can influence marriage breakdown: normative and cultural factors that either shape or reflect a person's attitudes and beliefs towards marriage and divorce; social characteristics which influence the quality of the match; and social factors which limit alternatives to marriage and deter divorce. There is strong evidence that social characteristics either increase or decrease the probability of divorce through each of these mechanisms.

Both men and women are less likely to experience marriage breakdown if their normative and cultural social characteristics such as religiosity, birth cohort, ethnic background, cohabitation before marriage reflect more traditional family organisation and greater commitment to the institution of marriage. Similarly, social characteristics that imply a poorer mate selection process such as young age at marriage or early birth, or decrease the ability of both or one spouse to negotiate relationship such as parental divorce, tend to increase the risk of marriage breakdown for men and women. Marital children operate as a barrier to marriage breakdown for both men and women. However, level of education operates differently for men and women. Men with higher levels of education have a lower risk of marriage breakdown than lower educated men, but higher levels of education for women increases the risk of marriage breakdown compared to lower educated women.

Further, in discussing the results it became apparent that some characteristics influence marriage breakdown through more than one mechanism. For example, ethnic background may cause disruption because of differences in normative and cultural expectations of marriage, or because migration places additional stress and strains on a relationship thereby increasing the likelihood of disruption. This suggests that sociostructural predictors of divorce operate in both direct and indirect ways to influence marriage outcomes and pursuing some of these complexities is an important direction for future research. Theorising marriage breakdown in terms of mechanisms

therefore enables cumulative advances in research in the field, because finding patterns associated with variables such as ethnic background directs attention to additional mechanisms which may explain these associations.

Consistent with previous studies that examine differences in the association between husbands' and wives' social characteristics and marriage breakdown I find some gender differences (Heaton and Blake 1999). For women, young age at marriage and having migrated from an English speaking country is associated with an increased risk of marriage breakdown compared to men. For men, having lower levels of education is associated with greater risk of marriage breakdown compared to more educated men, but for women this association is the opposite where less educated women have a lower risk of marriage breakdown. International research suggests that it is the relative characteristics of couples, not just the individual characteristics that each partner brings to the relationship which contributes to marriage breakdown. Unfortunately, testing this further was outside the scope of this project and not possible with current data, but this is an important direction for future research.

## ***2. Women are more likely to initiate separation than men***

Overall, I find that women are more likely to initiate marital separation than men, but there are important differences between men's and women's reports of who initiated separation. Women are significantly more likely to report wife-initiated separation, than men, and conversely, men are significantly more likely to report husband- or jointly initiated separation, than women. The baseline hazards also indicate gender differences where, according to women's reports, wives are much more likely to initiate early in marriage, than husbands. According to men's reports, however, the three types of separation are very similar across marriage duration.

This ego-enhanced reporting bias is similar to that found in other studies (Kalmijn and Poortman 2006; Wang and Amato 2000) but if we accept that the truth is somewhere in the middle, then wives are still more likely to initiate separation than husbands. In total, taking into account both men's and women's reports, I find that around 70 percent of separations are initiated by either the husband or wife. Of these separations 69 percent were wife-initiated and 31 percent were husband-initiated. These overall figures are similar to those of the other two comparable studies. In the U.S. England, Sayer and Allison (2005) found that 77 percent of separations are initiated unilaterally and of these 69 percent are initiated by wives. In the Netherlands Kalmijn and Poortman (2006) report that 90 percent of separations are initiated unilaterally with 68 percent of these initiated by wives. The consistent finding across all studies, and countries, is that around two-thirds of unilateral separations are initiated by wives.

### ***3. Gender differences in the decision to separate, or remain married***

One of the key issues to be addressed in this thesis was whether men and women end their marriages under different circumstances. More particularly, do some conditions result in wives ending marriages, while other conditions cause husbands to initiate separation? The answer is both "yes" and "no". I find that for some social characteristics the patterning of association suggests that wives are more likely to initiate than husbands, while other characteristics are associated with husbands initiating separation. Women are more likely to initiate separation than comparable men when they migrate from English speaking countries, when they marry young and when they have higher levels of education. Women are only less likely to initiate separation than men when children are under the age of 5. Men with higher levels of attachment to religion are less likely to initiate separation than comparable women and men are less likely to initiate than women when teenage and older children are

present. Although there are exceptions, the general pattern is that where there are significant gender differences they point to an increased likelihood of women initiating separation.

Overall, however, there are few significant gender differences and when differences are found they are often in the magnitude of the effect rather than in the direction of the effect. Essentially similar characteristics are associated with men and women ending their relationships. The main gender difference observed is that according to women's reports very few women's social characteristics are associated with husband's initiating separation; this is true of the analysis in both Chapter 7 and Chapter 8. This patterning is not evident for men, whose characteristics are more evenly associated with their reports of both husband's and wife's initiating separation. What this suggests is that wives initiate on the basis of their husbands' characteristics, whereas men initiate mainly on the basis of their own characteristics. This is consistent with family research investigating gender differences in marriage and family life, which finds that women's perceptions of relationship quality and satisfaction are tied more to intimacy and emotional qualities of the relationship. Women also take more responsibility for, and spend more time, investing in the maintenance of the relationship and family life (England and Farkas 1986; Steil 1997). I suggest that it is these two mechanisms that explain the main finding of this thesis.

Qualitative research investigating gender differences in the divorce process finds that some wives initiate separation because their partner is unhappy, or because they do not want their children to be exposed to a bad marriage rather than because they themselves are necessarily unhappy with the marriage; whereas husbands tend to initiate separation when they are unhappy (Hackstaff, 1999; Walzer & Oles, 2003). Therefore, women are more likely to initiate separation because they are more

sensitive to and aware of relationship problems. There is good evidence that this is the case. Research has found that women have more complaints about their marriages than men (Amato and Previti 2003; Burns 1984; Ponzetti et al. 1992). Second, from a social exchange perspective, because women typically invest more in marital relationships than men, they are more likely than them to feel that they are not getting satisfactory returns from marriage, and are therefore more likely to end the relationship. Finally, because women take greater responsibility for the maintenance of relationships, it is also likely that this entails taking responsibility for ending an unsatisfactory marriage. For example, in some marriages husbands indirectly end the marriage by behaving in ways, such as openly having an affair or spending more time with their friends than their families, that forces the hand of their wives to end the marriage (Hetherington and Kelly 2002; Hopper 1993; Walzer and Oles 2003). Therefore, women are more likely to initiate for multiple reasons to do with their perceptions of marital satisfaction and quality, their investments in relationships and their greater responsibility for marriage and family life. Men on the other hand tend to initiate when they are unhappy with the relationship but tend not to monitor their wives happiness or unhappiness with the marriage (Walzer and Oles 2003). Hence, men are more likely than women to report that they “don’t know” why their marriage ended (Amato and Previti 2003; Wolcott and Hughes 1999).

More broadly, the conclusions drawn here suggest that even though men tend to have more power over decisions and greater control over resources in marital relationships, their characteristics do not more strongly predict whether the marriage ends or remains intact. Both Giddens (1992) and Beck-Gersheim (2002) argue that the tensions between relationship ideals of equality and the realities of power distribution within marriage that continue to favor men, generate marital instability. This is because, wives find it more difficult within marital and societal structures,

such as labor markets, to negotiate for their preferences within marriage, and the threat of divorce is a bargaining tool to regain some of that balance. As Giddens (1992: 190) argues:

“Intimacy should not be understood as an interactional description, but as a cluster of prerogatives and responsibilities that define agendas of practical activity. The importance of rights as means for the achievement of intimacy can easily be seen from the struggle of women to achieve equal status in marriage. The right of women to initiate divorce, to take one instance, which seems only a negative sanction, actually has a major equilibrating effect. Its balancing consequences do more than empower escape from an oppressive relationship, important though this is. They limit the capability of the husband to impose his dominion and thereby contribute to the translation of coercive power into egalitarian communication.”

### **Limitations of this study and future directions for research**

There were some limitations to the current research. The use of retrospective cross-sectional data, had advantages in that I was able to include a large number of marriages over a long period of time. But this strategy also had some disadvantages. For marriages that had ended prior to the survey I only had data on one spouse, whereas marriage breakdown inevitably involves the characteristics of both spouses. The use of longitudinal couple data would allow characteristics of both spouses to be taken into consideration when predicting marriage breakdown and which partner initiated separation. The most ideal data for research into gender differences in marriage breakdown is longitudinal data on both partners in a couple. The HILDA

survey currently provides 5 years of longitudinal data on couples. As further waves are collected over time this survey will offer ideal data for further investigation of the issues raised and examined in this thesis.

In addition, couple data on which spouse initiated the break-up would enable a better understanding of, and therefore allow me to better control for, the reporting bias evident in the dependent variable. This is important, because it is likely that the reporting bias resulted in Type II errors for some characteristics where I did not find significant associations with marriage breakdown. In part of the failure to find significant predictors of husband-initiated separations may be because there are a small number of separations initiated by husbands reported in the sample. Only 201 women and 245 men reported husband-initiated separations, out of 8,993 respondents over 186,313 marriage years; a husband-initiated separation is thus a relatively rare event and even in a comparatively large dataset there is still limited statistical power. Further, as a rare event other idiosyncratic factors which are not represented in general models of marital disruption may be important determinants of husband-initiated separation. For example, the results of this study were relatively unsatisfactory in uncovering why husbands initiate separation and further research is required to better understand the circumstances under which men make the decision to end their marriages.

Finally, the analysis in this thesis was limited by the range of covariates included in the models, and the findings suggest two important directions for future research. First, investigating the association between psychosocial aspects of marriage such as relationship satisfaction and quality and which partner ends the marriage, would give further insight into the process of marriage breakdown including whether or not wives are more likely to initiate separation when their husbands are unhappy. Moreover, incorporating both sociostructural and psychosocial measures

into the analysis will provide some insight into how these factors interact with, and moderate, each other. Second, examining the association between socioeconomic characteristics not included in this study such as employment status and income and which spouse initiates marital separation will develop our knowledge of the circumstances whereby economic resources increase or decrease the likelihood of one partner initiating the break up over the other. Further, combining measures of economic resources with other aspects of the division of labour within the household such as housework and child care hours will enable a better test of divorce threat points within the exchange bargaining theoretical framework. This is an important direction for future research as the work-life collision and the consequent stress and strains for family life is being blamed, at least in part, for women's greater propensity to initiate separation as they are more likely to feel the time squeeze than men (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission 2005). But no research, to date, has investigated the association between divisions of paid and unpaid work and which spouse initiates separation. Pursuing this line of research will provide answers to many of the additional questions raised in this thesis.

### **Policy Implications**

From this, and other research, we know that social contexts and individual social characteristics are important for understanding marriage and marriage breakdown. We also know that women are more likely to initiate separation than men, even though women are also more likely to face economic hardship after marriage breakdown. But what can be done to regulate people's life course pathways and does anything need to be done? The crude divorce rate has stabilised over the last three decades in Australia and the majority of divorces are relatively amicable, with most separated and divorced people moving on successfully with their lives, albeit in changed and often more complex circumstances (Funder and Australian Institute of Family

Studies. 1996; Funder, Weston and Harrison 1993). Nevertheless, good marriages increase the health and well-being of adults and children, and it is widely believed that many marriages that end in divorce may have survived with better support (Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. 1998; Waite and Lehrer 2003).

Some argue that divorce is too easy, that individualism and feminism have gone too far, and that these forces are undermining the foundations of family life (see for example, Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. 1998: 55 - 64). Implicit in these arguments is that a return to previous, more traditional models of marriage and family life entailing a husband-father breadwinner and a wife-mother homemaker will solve the 'divorce problem'. However, it is likely that divorce rates in Australia were kept 'artificially' low in the earlier half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century through cultural norms and divorce and labour market policies that reinforced women's dependence on marriage, and men. These forces would have kept many unhappy, unproductive marriages together. It is not plausible to return to policies that reinforced women's dependence on men and marriage for several reasons.

First, Australian research indicates that men's wages have declined over the last few decades and greater proportions of employed men are working casually and part-time. In contrast women's wages have increased and more women are working full time (Birrell, Rapson and Monash University. Centre for Population and Urban Research. 1998). Many families would find it very difficult to survive financially without the earnings of women, so policies that restrict women's work force participation are not good for the sustainability of family life (Oppenheimer 1994). Further, the evidence on whether or not women's work force participation increases the risk of marriage breakdown is far from clear, but women's paid work can help

stabilise family life (Ono 1998; Oppenheimer 1994; Oppenheimer 1997). In relation to this, the normative and cultural climate surrounding women's employment has changed, and continues to change, where the role of employee is now an accepted and expected part of women's life course. Recent U.S. research shows that men consider women's socioeconomic prospects when looking for a marriage partner (Sweeney and Cancian 2004).

Second, there have also been cultural changes in expectations of marriage and family life, with a more egalitarian relationship ideal emerging in which both spouses in a marriage share in paid and unpaid work and constantly negotiate arrangements that suit both their needs (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1992), although research suggests that most marital relationships fall far short of this ideal (Gross and Simmons 2002). Finally, restricting women's access to alternatives to marriage trapped some women and children in physically and emotionally abusive situations (Nock, Wright and Sanchez 1999). While it is not always easy to leave an abusive relationship, women have more options within the current climate.

So, given that it is impossible to go back, how do we go forward? Currently, there is policy pressure in two main directions that, it is believed, will help preserve marriage and family life and reduce marriage breakdown: the first is to implement labour market, and work place, reforms that take the pressure off marriage and family life; and the second is to amend marriage and divorce legislation and policy. An example of the first, is the recent discussion paper *Striking the Balance: Women, men, work and families* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission 2005). Acknowledging that dual income households have become the norm and that women's work force participation is essential to household financial stability and the Australian economy, the report recommends a range of work and labour market

related reforms designed to help couples balance work, marriage, and family life. Some of the recommendations include improving both men's and women's access to flexible work arrangements and parental leave entitlements, increasing affordable day care places, and tax incentives for dual part-time employed households. Recent changes to the industrial relations laws appear at first glance to have had the opposite effect on work life balance, particularly for those in part time and casual employment (Pocock 2005).

There has also been pressure to change marriage legislation and divorce policy in ways designed to reduce the rate of divorce. Following the lead of some U.S. states, the possibility of introducing alternative, more strict, marriage contracts, such as covenant marriage, in Australia was flagged some years ago (Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. 1998: 202). Covenant marriage contracts differ from regular marriage contracts in several ways; couples are required to undertake pre-marriage counselling; participate in marriage counselling before being allowed to divorce; and divorce cannot be obtained until two years of separation have passed, unless extenuating circumstances can be proved, such as abuse or adultery (Brinig 1998; Nock, Wright and Sanchez 1999; Sanchez et al. 2002). In the U.S. covenant marriage did not replace current marriage laws, but rather is an alternative option for those wanting to make a stronger statement about their marriage (Rosier and Feld 2000). Research on the U.S. laws indicates that covenant marriage has not been as popular as proponents would have expected (Rosier and Feld 2000) and even though it was reported that up to 20 States considered introducing covenant marriage legislation, the latest indications are that only 3 states have introduced the new marriage laws (Hawkins et al. 2002). There have not been any renewed suggestions to change the marriage laws in Australia.

Over the last decade or so, the primary policy direction for divorce prevention in Australia, and other developed Western countries such as the U.S., has been to focus on encouraging couples to use pre-marriage education and marriage counselling services (Halford and Simons 2005; Markman and Halford 2005). This direction is being driven by good evidence that skills-based premarital education can increase marital quality and reduce the likelihood of divorce in couples from a broad range of backgrounds (Stanley et al. 2006) and that high quality marriage counselling can help couples work through relationship difficulties (Markman and Halford 2005). The problem has been in encouraging couples to participate, particularly couples with the highest risk of divorce. Recent Australian research by Halford, O'Donnell, Lizzio and Wilson (2006) indicates that couples most at risk of divorce are also the least likely to seek help when their marriage is troubled. Unfortunately, the results of this study are based on a survey of people divorcing in Queensland, Australia, which only achieved a seven percent response rate. Therefore, while this study provides some basic information about possible associations the results cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the broader population. Further investigation into the links between social risk factors, premarital education, marriage counselling, and marriage breakdown in Australia is needed. While the research in my thesis is useful for identifying at risk groups in the community, it does not make the links between social characteristics and marriage education and counselling. Beyond identifying at risk groups, marketing and information campaigns need to be targeted to these groups to encourage participation in premarital education, and marriage counselling during marriage.

Despite the positive policy directions for marriage education and counselling, there are some contradictions in modern Australian society that are likely to limit the success of these attempts to reduce marriage breakdown. On the one hand the

Australian government is seeking to strengthen marriage and families and encouraging couples to stay together. On the other hand current labour market policies encourage competition and individualism in the pursuit of workplace success. Work intensification and polarized working hours are now a feature of Australian family life in many couple households (Western, Baxter and Chesters Forthcoming). These two forces are inherently contradictory. Encouraging and supporting couples to deal with marital issues at a dyadic level, without changing other structural features of modern society, including, but not limited to, work and labour market policies, may limit the impact of policy initiative in preventing marriage breakdown. A key theme driving this thesis has been to illustrate how strongly marriage outcomes are linked to broader social structures and that gender differences in the opportunities and constraints of those structures is also important for understanding why some marriages end while others remain intact. There cannot be change in marriage and marriage outcomes without complementary changes in the broader social and structural fabric of Australian society.

## Bibliography

---

- ABS. 1971. *Demography, Catalogue 3101.0*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- . 1979-1993. "Divorces, Australia. Catalogue No. 3307.0." Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- . 1994-2001. "Marriages and Divorces, Australia. Catalogue No. 3310.0." Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- . 1998. "Standard Australian Classification of Countries (SACC)." Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- . 1999a. "Special article: Divorce in the nineties." Pp. 121-126 in *Marriages and Divorces, Australia*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- . 1999b. "Special article: Divorces by Country of Birth." Pp. 113-120 in *Marriages and Divorces, Australia*, edited by ABS. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- . 2000. "Special article: Lifetime marriage formation and marriage dissolution patterns in Australia." Pp. 84-91 in *Marriages and Divorces, Catalogue Number 3310.0*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- . 2001. "Special Article: Divorces involving children." Pp. 101-108 in *Marriages and Divorces, Catalogue Number 3310.0*. Canberra: Australian bureau of Statistics.
- . 2002. "Marriages and divorces, Australia. Catalogue No. 3310.0." Pp. v. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- . 2005a. "Australian Historical Population Statistics. Catalogue No. 3101.0.55.001 [electronic product]." Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- . 2005b. "Births, Australia. Cat. No. 3301.0." Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- . 2005c. "Divorces, Australia. Catalogue no. 3307.0.55.001 [electronic product]." Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- . 2005d. "Marriages, Australia. Catalogue No. 3306.0.55.001 [electronic product]." Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- Agresti, Alan. 2002. *Categorical Data Analysis*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.
- Allison, Paul D. 1984. *Event history analysis : regression for longitudinal event data*. Beverly Hills ; London: Sage Publications.
- Amato, Paul R. 1996. "Explaining the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58:628-640.
- . 2000. "The consequences of divorce for adults and children." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62:1269-1287.
- Amato, Paul R., and Alan Booth. 1995. "Changes in Gender Role Attitudes and Perceived Marital Quality." *American Sociological Review* 60:58-66.
- Amato, Paul R., and Denise Previti. 2003. "People's Reasons for Divorcing: Gender, Social Class, the Life Course, and Adjustment." *Journal of Family Issues* 24:602-626.
- Andersson, Gunnar. 1997. "The Impact of Children on Divorce Risks of Swedish Women." *European Journal of Population / Revue europeenne de demographie* 13:109-145.
- Andersson, Gunnar, and Gebremariam Woldemicael. 2001. "Sex composition of children as a determinant of marriage disruption and marriage formation:

- evidence from Swedish register data." *Journal of Population Research* 18:143 - 153.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2001. "Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED)." Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. 1998. "To Have and To Hold: Strategies to strengthen marriage and relationships." Canberra: The Committee.
- Aveling, Marian, and Joy Damousi. 1991. *Stepping out of History: documents of women at work in Australia*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Axinn, William G., Lisa D. Pearce, and Dirgha Ghimire. 1999. "Innovations in Life History Calendar Applications." *Social Science Research* 28:243 - 264.
- Baker, Maureen. 2001. *Families, Labour and Love*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.
- Baxter, Janeen. 2002. "Patterns of change and stability in the gender division of household labour in Australia, 1986 - 1997." *Journal of Sociology* 38:399-424.
- . 2003. "Families and Households." in *The Cambridge handbook of social sciences in Australia*, edited by Riaz Hassan, Ian McAllister, and Steve Dowrick. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2005a. "To marry or not to marry: marital status and the household division of labor." *Journal of Family Issues* 26:300 - 321.
- Baxter, Janeen, Belinda Hewitt, and Mark Western. 2005. "Post-familial Families and the Domestic Division of Labour: A view from Australia." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 36:583 - 600.
- Baxter, Jennifer. 2005b. "Mother's employment transitions following childbirth." *Family Matters* 71:11 - 17.
- . 2005c. "Women's work transitions around childbearing, Discussion Paper DP - 021." in *Negotiating the Life Course Discussion paper series*. Canberra: Research School of Social Sciences, The Australian National University.
- Beck, Ulrich, and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. 1995. *The Normal Chaos of Love*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Becker, Gary S. 1973. "A theory of Marriage: Part I." *The Journal of Political Economy* 81:813-846.
- . 1981. *A Treatise on the Family*. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press.
- Becker, Gary S., Elisabeth M. Landes, and Robert T. Michael. 1977. "An Economic Analysis of Marital Instability." *The Journal of Political Economy* 85:1141-1188.
- Beck-Gernsheim, Elisabeth. 2002. *Reinventing the Family: in search of new lifestyles*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bernard, Jessie. 1972. *The future of marriage*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Berney, L.R., and D.B. Blane. 1997. "Collecting Retrospective Data: Accuracy of recall after 50 years judged against historical records." *Social Science & Medicine* 45:1519 - 1525.
- Bianchi, Suzanne M., Melissa Milkie, Liana C. Sayer, and John P. Robinson. 2000. "Is anyone doing the housework? Trends in the gender division of household labour." *Social Forces* 79:191 - 228.
- Birrell, Robert, Virginia Rapson, and Monash University. Centre for Population and Urban Research. 1998. *A not so perfect match : the growing male/female divide 1986-1996*. Clayton, Vic.: Centre for Population and Urban Research Monash University.

- Bittman, Michael, Paula England, Nancy Folbre, Liana C. Sayer, and George Matheson. 2003. "When does gender trump money? Bargaining and time in household work." *American Journal of Sociology* 109:186 - 214.
- Bittman, Michael, and Jocelyn Pixley. 1997. *The Double Life of the Family: Myth, Hope and Experience*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Black, Leora E., Matthew M. Eastwood, Douglas H. Sprenkle, and Elaine Smith. 1991. "An exploratory analysis of the construct of leavers versus left as it relates to Levinger's social exchange theory of attractions, barriers, and alternative attractions." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 15:127-139.
- Blau, Francine D, Marianne A Ferber, and Anne E Winkler. 2006. *The economics of Women, Men and Work*. New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- Blau, Peter M. 1964. *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Blood, Rober O., and Donald M. Wolfe. 1960. *Husbands and Wives: the dynamics of married living*. New York: The Free Press.
- Blossfeld, Hans-Peter, and Sonja Drobnic (Eds.). 2001. *Careers of couples in contemporary societies: from male breadwinner to dual earner families*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Booth, Alan, and John N. Edwards. 1992. "Starting Over: Why Remarriages Are More Unstable." *Journal of Family Issues* 13:179-194.
- Bose, Sunita, and Scott J. South. 2003. "Sex composition of children and marital disruption in India." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 65:996 - 1006.
- Box-Steffensmeir, Janet M., and Bradford S. Jones. 2004. *Event History Modelling: a guide for social scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bracher, Michael, Gigi Santow, S. Philip Morgan, and James Trussell. 1993. "Marriage Dissolution in Australia: Models and Explanations." *Population Studies* 47:403-425.
- Bradbury, B., and K. Norris. 2005. "Income and Separation." *Journal of Sociology* 41:425 - 446.
- Braver, Sanford L., Marnie Whitely, and Christine Ng. 1993. "Who Divorced Whom? Methodological and Theoretical Issues." *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 20:1-19.
- Breen, Richard, and Lynn Prince Cooke. 2005. "The Persistence of the Gendered Division of Domestic Labour." *European Sociological Review* 21:43 - 57.
- Brinig, Margaret F. 1998. "Economics, law, and covenant marriage." *Gender Issues* 16:4 - 33.
- Brinig, Margaret F., and Douglas W. Allen. 2000. ""These boots are made for walking": Why most divorce filers are women." *American Law and Economics Review* 2:126 - 169.
- Broomhill, Ray, and Rhonda Sharp. 2005. "The Changing Male Breadwinner Model in Australia: a New Gender Order?" *Labour & Industry* 16:103 - 127.
- Brown, Prudence, Barbara J. Felton, Victor Whiteman, and Roger Manela. 1980. "Attachment and distress following marital separation." *Journal of Divorce* 3:303-317.
- Buehler, Cheryl A., M. Janice Hogan, Beatrice E. Robinson, and Robert J. Levy. 1985. "The parental divorce transition: Divorce-related stressors and well-being." *Journal of Divorce* 9:61-81.
- Bumpass, Larry L., Teresa Castro. Martin, and James A. Sweet. 1991. "The Impact of Family Background and Early Marital Factors on Marital Disruption." *Journal of Family Issues* 12:22-42.

- Burns, Ailsa. 1980a. *Breaking up : separation and divorce in Australia*. Melbourne: Nelson.
- . 1980b. "Divorce and the Children." *Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage & Family* 2:17-26.
- . 1981. "Divorce and the Children." *Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage & Family* 2:17-26.
- . 1984. "Perceived Causes of Marriage Breakdown and Conditions of Life." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 46:551-562.
- Burns, Ailsa, and Rosemary Dunlop. 2000. "Parental divorce, personal characteristics and early adult intimate relationships: A longitudinal Australian study." *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 33:91-109.
- Call, Vaughn R. A., and Tim B. Heaton. 1997. "Religious Influence on Marital Stability." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36:382 - 392.
- Cancian, Maria, and Daniel R. Meyer. 1998. "Who gets custody?" *Demography* 35:147 - 157.
- Carmichael, Gordon A., Andrew Webster, and Peter F. McDonald. 1996. *Divorce Australian style : a demographic analysis*. Canberra, A.C.T.: Research School of Social Sciences Australian National University.
- Castles, Francis G. 2004. *The future of the welfare state: crisis myths and crisis realities*. Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press.
- Cherlin, Andrew. 1977. "The Effect of Children on Marital Dissolution." *Demography* 14:265-272.
- . 1978. "Remarriage as an Incomplete Institution." *American Journal of Sociology* 84:634-650.
- Cherlin, Andrew J. 1992. *Marriage, divorce, remarriage*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Cohen, Lloyd. 1987. "Marriage, divorce, and quasi rents; or, "I gave him the best years of my life"." *Journal of Legal Studies* 16:267 - 303.
- Colburn, Kenneth, Phylis L. Lin, and Mary C. Moore. 1992. "Gender and the divorce experience." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 17:87-108.
- Coleman, Marilyn, Lawrence Ganong, and Mark Fine. 2000. "Reinvestigating Remarriage: Another Decade of Progress." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62:1288-1307.
- Cooke, Lynn Prince. 2004. "The gendered division of labor and family outcomes in Germany." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 66:1246 - 1259.
- Corley, Charles J., and A. Yvonne Woods. 1991. "Socioeconomic, Sociodemographic and Attitudinal Correlates of the Tempo of Divorce." *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 16:47-68.
- Craig, Lyn. 2006. "Children and the revolution: a time-diary analysis of the impact of motherhood on daily workload." *Journal of Sociology* 42:125 - 143.
- Day, Lincoln H. 1964. "Patterns of divorce in Australia and the United States." *American Sociological Review* 29:509-522.
- De Vaus, D. A. 1997. "Divorce." in *Australian family profiles : social and demographic patterns*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- . 2002. "Marriage and mental health." *Family Matters* 62:26-32.
- . 2004. *Diversity and change in Australian families: statistical profiles*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- De Vaus, D. A., and Janeen Baxter. 2005. "Editor's introduction to the special issue: Life pathways: insights from longitudinal research." *Journal of Sociology* 41:339 - 342.

- De Vaus, D. A., L. Qu, and R. E. Weston. 2003. "Premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability." *Family Matters* 65:34-39.
- DeMaris, Alfred, and Vanindha Rao. 1992. "Premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability in the United States: A reassessment." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54:178-190.
- Diekmann, Andreas, and Kurt Schmidheiny. 2004. "Do parents of girls have a higher risk of divorce? An eighteen country study." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 66:651 - 660.
- Dixson, Miriam. 1999. *The Real Matilda: Women and identity in Australia - 1788 to the present*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.
- Dubas, Judith S., and Jan R. M. Gerris. 2002. "Longitudinal changes in the time parents spend in activities with their adolescent children as a function of age, pubertal status, and gender." *Journal of Family Psychology* 16:415 - 427.
- Duran-Aydintug, Candan. 1995. "Former Spouses Exiting Role-Identities." *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 24:23-40.
- Edwards, John N., and Janice M. Saunders. 1981. "Coming Apart: A Model of the Marital Dissolution Decision." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 43:379 - 389.
- Emerson, Richard M. 1976. "Social Exchange Theory." *Annual Review of Sociology* 2:335 - 362.
- Emery, Robert E. 1994. *Renegotiating family relationships : divorce, child custody, and mediation*. New York: Guilford Press.
- England, Paula, and George Farkas. 1986. *Households, Employment, and Gender*. New York: Aldine.
- England, Paula, Liana C. Sayer, and Paul D. Allison. 2005. "He left, she left: Gains to marriage, relative resources and divorce initiation." in *Population Association of America annual meeting*. Philadelphia, USA.
- Faulkner, Rohnda A., Maureen Davey, and Adam Davey. 2005. "Gender-related predictors of change in marital satisfaction and marital conflict." *The American Journal of Family Therapy* 33:61 - 83.
- Ferree, Myra Marx. 1990. "Beyond Separate Spheres: Feminism and Family Research." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 52:866 - 884.
- . 1991. "The gender division of labor in two-earner households: dimensions of variability and change." *Journal of Family Issues* 12:158 - 180.
- Finlay, Henry. 1999. "Lawmaking in the Shadow of the Empire: Divorce in colonial Australia." *Journal of Family History* 24:74-109.
- Finlay, Henry Alan. 2005. *To have but not to hold: a history of attitudes to marriage and divorce in Australia*. Sydney: The Federation Press.
- Firth, Ann. 2000. "The Breadwinner, his Wife and their Welfare: Identity, Expertise and Economic Security in Australian Post-War Reconstruction." *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 50:491 - 508.
- Fisher, Karen, and Roger Patulny. 2004. "Impact of staff ratios on under 2 year olds in children's services: Report number 11/04." in *Report*. Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre.
- Fox, Greer Litton, and Velma McBride Murry. 2000. "Gender and families: feminist perspectives and family research." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62:1160 - 1172.
- Frisco, Michelle L., and Kristi Williams. 2003. "Perceived housework equity, marital happiness and divorce in dual-earner households." *Journal of Family Issues* 24:51 - 73.

- Funder, Kathleen, and Australian Institute of Family Studies. 1996. *Remaking families : long-term adaptation of parents and children to divorce*. Melbourne, Vic.: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Funder, Kathleen, R. E. Weston, and Margaret Harrison. 1993. *Settling down : pathways of parents after divorce*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Gauthier, Anne H., Timothy M. Smeeding, and Frank F. Furstenberg. 2004. "Are parents investing less time in childre? Trends in selected countries." *Population and Development Review* 30:647 - 671.
- Geoghegan, Hanbury C. 1888. *Divorce Extension Justified*. Melbourne: George Robertson.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gigy, Lynn, and Joan B. Kelly. 1992. "Reasons for divorce: Perspectives of divorcing men and women." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 18:169-187.
- Gilding, Michael. 2001. "Changing Families in Australia." *Family Matters* 60:6 -11.
- Gjerdingen, Dwenda K., and Bruce A. Center. 2005. "First-time parents' postpartum changes in employment, childcare, and housework responsibilities." *Social Science Research* 34:103 - 116.
- Glezer, Helen. 1997. "Cohabitation and marriage relationships in the 1990s." *Family Matters* 47:5-9.
- Gottman, John M., and Clifford I. Notarius. 2002. "Marital Research in the 20th Century and a Research Agenda for the 21st Century." *Family Process* 41:159-197.
- Gray, E, and A Evans. 2005. "Parity progression in Australia: What role does sex of existing children play?" *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 40:505 - 520.
- Gray, Janice D., and Roxane C. Silver. 1990. "Opposite sides of the same coin: Former spouses' divergent perspectives in coping with their divorce." *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 59:1180-1191.
- Greenstein, Theodore N. 1995. "Gender ideology, marital disruption, and the employment of married women." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57:31-42.
- Gross, Neil, and Solon Simmons. 2002. "Intimacy as a Double-Edged Phenomenon? An Empirical Test of Giddens." *Social Forces* 81:531 - 555.
- Hachen, David S., Jr. 1988. "The Competing Risks Model: A Method for Analyzing Processes with Multiple Types of Events." *Sociological Methods and Research* 17:21-54.
- Hackstaff, Karla. 1999. *Marriage in a culture of divorce*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Halford, W.K. 2000. "Australian Couples in Millenium Three." Pp. 118. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Halford, W.K., Charlotte O'Donnell, Alf Lizzio, and Keithia L. Wilson. 2006. "Do couples at high risk of relationship problems attend premarriage education?" *Journal of Family Psychology* 20:160 - 163.
- Halford, W.K., and Michele Simons. 2005. "Couple Relationship Education in Australia." *Family Process* 44:147 - 159.
- Hall, David R. 1996. "Marriage as a pure relationship: Exploring the link between premarital cohabitation and divorce in Canada." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 27:1-12.

- Hall, David R., and John Z. Zhao. 1995. "Cohabitation and divorce in Canada: Testing the selectivity hypothesis." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57:421-427.
- Hand, Kelly. 2005. "Mothers views on using formal care." *Family Matters* 70:10 - 17.
- Hawkins, Alan J., Steven L. Nock, Julia C. Wilson, Laura Sanchez, and James D Wright. 2002. "Attitudes about covenant marriage and divorce: Policy implications from a three-state comparison." *Family Relations* 51:166 - 175.
- Heaton, Tim B. 1990. "Marital Stability throughout the Child-Rearing Years." *Demography* 27:55-63.
- . 1991. "Time-Related Determinants of Marital Dissolution." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53:285-295.
- Heaton, Tim B., and Stan L. Albrecht. 1991. "Stable unhappy marriages." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 53:747 - 758.
- Heaton, Tim B., Stan L. Albrecht, and Thomas K. Martin. 1985. "The Timing of Divorce." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 47:631-639.
- Heaton, Tim B., and Ashley M. Blake. 1999. "Gender Differences in Determinants of Marital Disruption." *Journal of Family Issues* 20:25-45.
- Heaton, Tim B., and Vaughn R. A. Call. 1995. "Modeling Family Dynamics with Event History Techniques." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 57:1078-1090.
- Hemminki, K., and X. Li. 2003. "Lifestyle and Cancer: Effect of Widowhood and Divorce." *Cancer epidemiology, biomarkers & prevention* 12:899-904.
- Hetherington, E.Mavis, and John Kelly. 2002. *For better, or for worse: divorce reconsidered*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Hewitt, Belinda, Janeen Baxter, and Mark Western. 2005. "Marriage Breakdown in Australia: The social correlates of separation and divorce." *Journal of Sociology* 41:163 - 183.
- Hoem, Jan M. 1997. "Educational Gradients in Divorce Risks in Sweden in Recent Decades." *Population Studies* 51:19-27.
- Hoffman, Saul D., and Greg J. Duncan. 1995. "The Effect of Incomes, Wages, and AFDC Benefits on Marital Disruption." *The Journal of Human Resources* 30:19-41.
- Hopper, Joseph. 1993. "The rhetoric of motives in divorce." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 55:801-813.
- Huber, Joan, and Glenna Spitze. 1980. "Considering Divorce: An expansion of Becker's Theory of Marital Instability." *The American Journal of Sociology* 86:75-89.
- Hughes, Jody. 2000. "Repartnering After Divorce: marginal mates and unwedded women." *Family Matters* 55:16 - 21.
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission. 2005. "Striking the Balance: Women, men, work, and family." Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission.
- Jacobson, Paul H. 1950. "Differentials in Divorce by Duration of Marriage and Size of Family." *American Sociological Review* 15:235-244.
- Jalovaara, Marika. 2003. "The Joint Effects of Marriage Partners' Socioeconomic Positions on the Risk of Divorce." *Demography* 40:67-81.
- James, Margaret. 1985. "Not bread but a stone: women and divorce in colonial Victoria." in *Families in Colonial Australia*, edited by Patricia Grimshaw, Chris McConville, and Ellen McEwan. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Jones, Frank. L. 1994. "Are Marriages that Cross Ethnic Boundaries more likely to end in Divorce?" *Journal of the Australian Population Association* 11:115-132.

- Joung, I. M. A., K. Stronks, H. van de Mheen, F. W. A. van Poppel, J. B. W. van der Meer, and J. P. Mackenbach. 1997. "The Contribution of Intermediary Factors to Marital Status Differences in Self-Reported Health." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59:476-490.
- Juby, Heather, Celine Le Bourdais, and Nicole Marcil-Gratton. 2005. "Sharing roles, sharing custody? Couples' characteristics and children's living arrangements at separation." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 67:157 - 172.
- Kalmijn, Matthijs. 1999. "Father involvement in childrearing and perceived stability of marriage." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 61:409 - 421.
- Kalmijn, Matthijs, and Anne-Rigt Poortman. 2006. "His or her divorce? The gendered nature of divorce and its determinants." *European Sociological Review* 22:201 - 214.
- Katzev, Aphra R., Rebecca L. Warner, and Alan C. Acock. 1994. "Girls or boys? Relationship of child gender to marital instability." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 56:89 - 100.
- Khoo, Siew-Ean, and Zhongwei Zhao. 2001. "A Decomposition of Immigrant Divorce Rates in Australia." *Journal of Population Research* 18:68-77.
- Kiernan, Kathleen E, and Andrew Cherlin. 1999. "Parental Divorce and Partnership Dissolution in Adulthood: Evidence from a British Cohort Study." *Population Studies* 53:39 - 48.
- Kincaid, Stephen B., and Robert A. Caldwell. 1991. "Initiator status, family support, and adjustment to marital separation: A test of an interaction hypothesis." *Journal of Community Psychology* 19:79-88.
- . 1995. "Marital separation: Causes, coping, and consequences." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 22:109-128.
- Kitson, Gay C. 1982. "Attachment to the spouse in divorce: A scale and its application." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 44:379-393.
- Knoester, Chris, and Alan Booth. 2000. "Barriers to Divorce: When Are They Effective? When Are They Not?" *Journal of Family Issues* 21:78-99.
- Kurdek, Lawrence A. 2005. "Gender and marital satisfaction early in marriage: a growth curve approach." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 67:68 - 84.
- Laflamme, Darquise, Andree Pomerleau, and Gerard Malcuit. 2002. "A comparison of fathers' and mothers' involvement in childcare and stimulation behaviours during free-play with their infants at 9 and 15 months." *Sex Roles* 47:507 - 518.
- Levinger, George. 1965. "Marital Cohesiveness and Dissolution: An Integrative Review." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 27:19-28.
- . 1976. "A Social Psychological Perspective on Marital Dissolution." *Journal of Social Issues* 32:21-47.
- . 1979. "A Social Psychological Perspective on Marital Dissolution." in *Divorce and Separation: context, causes and consequences*, edited by George Levinger and Oliver C. Moles. New York: Basic Books.
- Levinger, George, and Oliver C. Moles (Eds.). 1979. *Divorce and Separation: Context, causes, and consequences*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lillard, Lee A., Michael J. Brien, and Linda J. Waite. 1995. "Premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital dissolution: A matter of self-selection?" *Demography* 32:437-457.
- Lillard, Lee A., and Linda J. Waite. 1993. "A joint model of marital childbearing and marital disruption." *Demography* 30:653 - 681.
- . 1995. "'Til death do us part: Marital disruption and mortality." *American Journal of Sociology* 100:1131-1156.

- Lundberg, Shelly. 2005. "Sons, daughters, and parental behaviour." *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 21:340 - 356.
- Lundberg, Shelly, and Robert A Pollack. 1996. "Bargaining and distribution within households." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 10:139 - 158.
- Manser, Marilyn, and Murray Brown. 1980. "Marriage and household decision-making: a bargaining analysis." *International Economic Review* 21:31 - 44.
- Markman, Howard J., and W.K. Halford. 2005. "International perspectives on couple relationship education." *Family Process* 44:139 - 146.
- McDonald, Paula K., Lisa M. Bradley, and Diane Guthrie. 2005. "Good mothers, bad mothers: exploring the relationship between attitudes towards nonmaternal childcare and mothers labour force participation." *Journal of Family Studies* 11:62 - 82.
- McDonald, Peter. 2000. "Gender equity, social institutions and the future of fertility." *Journal of Population Research* 17:1-16.
- McDonald, Peter F., and Institute of Family Studies (Australia). 1986. *Settling up : property and income distribution on divorce in Australia*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J. ; Sydney ; London: Prentice-Hall.
- McElroy, Marjorie B. 1990. "The empirical content of Nash-bargained household behavior." *The Journal of Human Resources* 25:559 - 583.
- McLanahan, Sara, and Larry L. Bumpass. 1988. "Intergenerational Consequences of Family Disruption." *American Journal of Sociology* 94:130 - 152.
- Milkie, Melissa, Suzanne M. Bianchi, Marybeth J. Mattingly, and John P. Robinson. 2002. "Gendered division of childrearing: ideals realities, and the relationship to parental well-being." *Sex Roles* 47:21 - 38.
- Mitchell, Deborah. 1998. "Life-course and Labour Market Transitions: Alternative to the breadwinner welfare state." in *Gender and Institutions: Welfare, work and citizenship*, edited by Moira Gatens and Alison Mackinnon. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Mizell, C.A. 2003. "Racial variations in the effects of sons versus daughters on the disruption of the first marriage." *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 38:41 - 60.
- Mizell, C.A, and Lala Carr Steelman. 2000. "All my children: the consequences of sibling group characteristics on the marital happiness of young mothers." *Journal of Family Issues* 21:858 - 887.
- Molm, Linda D., and Karen S. Cook. 1995. "Social Exchange and Social Networks." in *Sociological Perspectives on Social Psychology*, edited by Karen S. Cook, Gary A. Fine, and James S. House. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Moore, John Hammond. 1981. *Over-sexed, over-paid, & over here: Americans in Australia 1941-1945*. St. Lucia ; London ; New York: University of Queensland Press.
- Moore, Kristin A., and Linda J. Waite. 1981. "Marital Dissolution, Early Motherhood and Early Marriage." *Social Forces* 60:20-40.
- Morgan, Philip S., and Ronald R. Rindfuss. 1985. "Marital Disruption: Structural and Temporal Dimensions." *The American Journal of Sociology* 90:1055-1077.
- Morgan, S. Philip, Diane N. Lye, and Gretchen A. Condran. 1988. "Sons, Daughters, and the risk of marital disruption." *The American Journal of Sociology* 94:110 - 129.
- Mueller, Charles W., and Hallowell Pope. 1977. "Marital Instability: A Study of Its Transmission between Generations." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 39:83 - 93.

- Murphy, John. 2002. "Breadwinning: Accounts of Work and Family Life in the 1950s." *Labour & Industry* 12:59 - 75.
- Murphy, M.J. 1985. "Demography and Socio-economic influences on Recent British Marital Breakdown Patterns." *Population Studies* 39:441-460.
- Nazio, Tiziana, and Hans-Peter Blossfeld. 2003. "The diffusion of cohabitation among young women in West Germany, East Germany and Italy." *European Journal of Population / Revue europeenne de demographie* 19:47 - 82.
- Neff, Lisa A., and Benjamin R. Karney. 2005. "Gender differences in Social Support: A question of skill or responsiveness?" *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 88:79 - 90.
- Nock, Steven L, James D Wright, and Laura Sanchez. 1999. "America's divorce problem." *Social science and Public Policy* 36:43 - 52.
- Ono, Hiromi. 1998. "Husbands' and wives' resources and marital dissolution." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60:674-689.
- Oppenheimer, Valerie Kincade. 1994. "Women's Rising Employment and the Future of the Family in Industrial Societies." *Population and Development Review* 20:293-342.
- . 1997. "Women's Employment and the Gain to Marriage: The Specialization and Trading Model." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23:431-453.
- Ozdowski, Seweryn A., and John Hattie. 1981. "The Impact of Divorce Laws on Divorce Rate in Australia: A Time Series Analysis." *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 16:3-17.
- Parsons, Talcott. 1956. "The American Family: its relation to personality and to the social structure." in *Family Socialization and Interaction Process*, edited by T. Parsons and R.F Bales. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Parsons, Talcott, and R.F Bales. 1956. *Family socialization and interaction process*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Pettit, Ellen J., and Bernard L. Bloom. 1984. "Whose Decision Was It? The Effects of Initiator Status on Adjustment to Marital Disruption." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 46:587-595.
- Phillips, Julie A., and M. M. Sweeney. 2005. "Premarital cohabitation and marital disruption among White, Black and Mexican American Women." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 67:296 - 314.
- Pocock, Barbara. 2005. "Work/Care Regimes: Institutions, Culture and Behaviour and the Australian Case." *Gender, Work and Organization* 12:32 - 49.
- Ponzetti, James J., Anisa M. Zovkovic, Rodney M. Cate, and Ted L. Huston. 1992. "Reasons for Divorce: A comparison between former partners." *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 17:183-201.
- Poortman, Anne-Rigt, and Judith A. Seltzer. 2005. "Parent' expectations about child rearing after divorce: does anticipating difficulty deter divorce?" in *On-Line Working Paper Series*. California: University of California, Center for population research.
- Powers, Edward A., Willis J. Goudy, and Pat M. Keith. 1978. "Congruence between panel and recall data in longitudinal research." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 42:380 - 389.
- Previti, Denise, and Paul R. Amato. 2003. "Why stay married? Rewards, barriers and marital stability." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 65:561 - 573.
- Qu, L. 2004. "Children's living arrangements after parental separation." *Family Matters* 67:4 - 7.
- Quick, John, and Robert Randolph Garran. 1901. *The Annotated Constitution of the Australian Commonwealth*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.

- Rao, A.B.S.V.Ranga, and K Sekhar. 2002. "Divorce: Process and Correlates a cross-cultural study." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 33:541 - 563.
- Rauer, Amy J., and Brenda L. Volling. 2005. "The role of husbands' and wives' emotional expressivity in the marital relationship." *Sex Roles* 52:577 - 587.
- Reiger, Kerreen, M. 1985. *The Disenchantment of the HHome: Modernizing the Australian family 1880 - 1940*. Melbourne: Oxford Univeristy Press.
- Roden, Michael. 1989. "Covariates of divorce in Australia: An analysis using proportional hazards models." *Journal of the Australian Population Association* 6:145-163.
- Rogers, Stacy J. 2004. "Dollars, dependency and divorce: Four perspectives on the role of Wive's income." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 66:59 - 74.
- Rogers, Stacy J., and Paul R. Amato. 2000. "Have Changes in Gender Relations Affected Marital Quality?" *Social Forces* 79:731-753.
- Rogers, Stacy J., and Danielle D. DeBoer. 2001. "Changes in wives' income: Effects on marital happiness, psychological well-being, and the risk of divorce." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 63:458-472.
- Rokach, Rachel., Orna. Cohen, and Solly. Dreman. 2004. "Who pulls the trigger? Who intitates divorce among over 45-year-olds." *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 42:61 - 83.
- Rosier, Katherine Brown, and Scott L. Feld. 2000. "Covenant marriage: A new alternative for traditional families." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 31:385 - 394.
- Ryan, Edna, and Anne Conlon. 1989. *Gentle Invaders: Australian women at work*. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin.
- Safilios-Rothschild, Constantina. 1970. "The Study of Family Power Structure: A Review 1960 - 1969." *Journal of Marrage and the Family* 32:539 - 552.
- Sanchez, Laura, and Constance T. Gager. 2000. "Hard Living, Perceived Entitlement to a great marriage and marital dissolution." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 62:708 - 722.
- Sanchez, Laura, Steven L Nock, James D Wright, and Constance T. Gager. 2002. "Setting the clock forward or back? Covenant marriage and the "divorce revolution"." *Journal of Family Issues* 23:91 - 120.
- Sandberg, John F., and Sandra L. Hofferth. 2005. "Changes in time with parents: a correction." *Demography* 42:391 - 395.
- Sarantakos, Sotirios. 1994. "Trial Cohabitation on Trial." *Australian Social Work* 47:13-25.
- Sayer, Liana C., and Suzanne M. Bianchi. 2000. "Women's Economic Independence and the Probability of Divorce: A Review and Reexamination." *Journal of Family Issues* 21:906-943.
- Sayer, Liana C., Melissa Milkie, and John P. johnson. 2004. "Are parents investing less in children? Trends in mothers' and fathers' time with children." *American Journal of Sociology* 110:1 - 43.
- Schoen, Robert. 1992. "First Unions and the Stability of First Marriages." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 54:281-284.
- Simon, Robin W. 2002. "Revisiting the Relationships among Gender, Marital Status, and Mental Health." *American Journal of Sociology* 107:1065-1096.
- Singer, Judith D., and John B. Willett. 2003. *Applied Longitudinal Data Analysis: Modelling Change and Event Occurence*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Smart, Carol. 2000. "Divorce and changing family practices in a post-traditional society: moral decline or changes to moral practices?" *Family Matters* 56:10 - 19.

- Smart, Carol, and Bren Neale. 1999. *Family Fragments?* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Smyth, Bruce. 2005. "Time to rethink time? the experiences of time with children after divorce." *Family Matters* 71:4 - 10.
- Smyth, Bruce, Catherine Caruna, and Anna Ferro. 2005. "Father - Child contact after separation: profiling five different patterns of care." *Family Matters* 67:20 - 27.
- Smyth, Bruce, and R. E. Weston. 2000. "Financial living standards after divorce : a recent snapshot." Pp. 26 in *Research paper / Australian Institute of Family studies, no. 23*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- South, Scott J. 1995. "Do you need to shop around? Age at marriage, spousal alternatives, and marital dissolution." *Journal of Family Issues* 16:432 - 449.
- . 2001. "Time-Dependent Effects of Wives' Employment on Marital Dissolution." *American Sociological Review* 66:226-245.
- Spanier, Graham B., and Robert F. Casto. 1979. "Adjustment to separation and divorce: An analysis of 50 case studies." *Journal of Divorce* 2:241-253.
- Spanier, Graham B., and Frank F. Furstenberg. 1982. "Remarriage after divorce: A longitudinal analysis of well-being." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 44:709-720.
- Stanley, Scott M., Paul R. Amato, Christine A. Johnson, and Howard J. Markman. 2006. "Premarital education, marital quality, and marital stability: Findings from a large, random household survey." *Journal of Family Psychology* 20:117 - 126.
- StataCorp. 2003. "Stata Statistical Software, Release 8.0." College Station: Texas: Stata Corporation.
- Statistics Netherlands, Nic Steenrbink, and Arno Sprangers. 2006. "Six out of ten divorces involve children." Pp. Print out of Statistics Netherlands Web magazine: <http://cbs.nl>. Voorberg/Heerlen: Statistics Netherlands.
- Steil, Janice M. Ingham. 1997. *Marital equality : its relationship to the well-being of husbands and wives*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Stewart, Donald E., and Margaret Harrison. 1982. *Divorce in Australia*. Melbourne: Institute of Family Studies.
- Stone, Lawrence. 1990. *Road to divorce : England 1530-1987*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Summers, Anne. 1975. *Damned Whores and God's Police: the colonization of women in Australia*. Ringwood: Penguin.
- Sweeney, M. M., and Maria Cancian. 2004. "The changing importance of white women's economic prospects for assortive mating." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 66:1015 - 1028.
- Sweeney, M. M., and A. V. Horwitz. 2001. "Infidelity, initiation, and the emotional climate of divorce: are there implications for mental health?" *Journal of health and social behavior* 42:295-309.
- Sweeney, M. M., and Julie A. Phillips. 2004. "Understanding racial differences in marital disruption: recent trends and explanations." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 66:639 - 650.
- Sweeney, Megan M. 1997. "Remarriage of Women and Men after Divorce: The Role of Socioeconomic Prospects." *Journal of Family Issues* 18:479-502.
- . 2002. "Remarriage and the Nature of Divorce: Does It Matter Which Spouse Chose to Leave?" *Journal of Family Issues* 23:410-440.
- Teachman, Jay D. 2002a. "Childhood living arrangements and the intergenerational transmission of divorce." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64:717-729.

- . 2002b. "Stability across Cohorts in Divorce Risk Factors." *Demography* 39:331-351.
- . 2004. "The Childhood Living Arrangements of Children and the Characteristics of Their Marriages." *Journal of Family Issues* 25:86 - 111.
- Teti, Douglas M., and Michael E. Lamb. 1989. "Socioeconomic and Marital Outcomes of Adolescent Marriage, Adolescent Childbirth, and Their Co-Occurrence." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 51:203-212.
- The Melbourne Institute for Social and Economic Research. 2005. "HILDA survey annual report 2005." Melbourne: The University of Melbourne.
- The Parliament of the Commonwealth, . 1959. *Matrimonial Causes Act, 1959*. Canberra: The Government Printer of Australia.
- . 2003. "Every Picture Tells A Story: Report on the inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of separation." Canberra: House of Representatives.
- Thompson, Linda, and Graham B. Spanier. 1983. "The end of marriage and acceptance of marital termination." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 45:103 - 113.
- Thompson, Linda, and Alexis J. Walker. 1989. "Gender in Families: Women and Men in Marriage, Work, and Parenthood." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 51:845-871.
- . 1995. "The place of feminism in family studies." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 57:847 - 865.
- Thornton, Arland. 1977. "Children and Marital Stability." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 39:531-540.
- Thornton, Arland., and Willard L. Rodgers. 1987. "The Influence of Individual and Historical Time on Marital Dissolution." *Demography* 24:1-22.
- Thornton, Arland., and Linda Young-DeMarco. 2001. "Four decades of trends in attitudes toward family issues in the United States." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 63:1009 - 1037.
- Twenge, Jean M., Keith W. Campbell, and Craig A. Foster. 2003. "Parenthood and marital satisfaction: a meta-analytic review." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 65:574 - 583.
- Twomey, Christina. 1997. "'Without Natural Protectors': Responses to Wife desertion in Gold-Rush Victoria." *Australian Historical Studies* 28:22 - 46.
- Tzeng, Jessie M., and Robert D. Mare. 1995. "Labor Market and Socioeconomic Effects on Marital Stability." *Social Science Research* 24:329-351.
- United Nations. 2005. *Demographic Yearbook*. New York: United Nations Publications.
- Vannoy, Dana. 2000a. "Roles in the divorce process and identity strength." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 32:101-118.
- . 2000b. "Roles in the divorce process: Marital quality and relationship intimacy: A research note." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 32:119-124.
- Waite, Linda J., and Evelyn L. Lehrer. 2003. "The Benefits from Marriage and Religion in the United States: A Comparative Analysis." *Population and Development Review* 29:255-275.
- Waite, Linda J., and Lee A. Lillard. 1991. "Children and Marital Disruption." *American Journal of Sociology* 96:930-953.
- Walter, James. 2001. "Designing Families and Solid Citizens: The dialectic of Modernity and the Matrimonial Causes Bill, 1959." *Australian Historical Studies* 32:40 - 56.
- Walzer, Susan, and Thomas P Oles. 2003. "Accounting for divorce: Gender and uncoupling narratives." *Qualitative Sociology* 26:331 - 349.

- Wang, Hongyu, and Paul R. Amato. 2000. "Predictors of divorce adjustment: Stressors, resources, and definitions." *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 62:655-668.
- Ware, Helen. 1975. "Immigrant Fertility: Behaviour and Attitudes." *International Migration Review* 9:361 - 378.
- Watson, N., and M. Wooden. 2002a. "The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey: Wave 1 survey methodology." Pp. 21. Melbourne: The University of Melbourne.
- Watson, Nicole, and Mark Wooden. 2002b. "Assessing the Quality of the HILDA Survey Wave 1 Data." Melbourne: Department of Family and Community Services, and The University of Melbourne.
- Western, Mark, Janeen Baxter, and Jenny Chesters. Forthcoming. "Australian Families: Just managing." in *The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes: The second report*, edited by D. Denmark, G. Meagher, S. Wilson, T. Phillips, and Mark Western. Sydney: The University of New South Wales Press.
- White, Lynn K. 1990. "Determinants of Divorce: A Review of Research in the Eighties." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52:904-912.
- Wolcott, Ilene, and Jody Hughes. 1999. *Towards understanding the reasons for divorce*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Wolfinger, Nicholas H. 1999. "Trends in the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce." *Demography* 36:415-420.
- . 2000. "Beyond the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce: Do People Replicate the Patterns of Marital Instability They Grew up With?" *Journal of Family Issues* 21:1061 - 1086.
- Yamaguchi, K. 1991. *Event History Analysis*. California: Sage.
- Yamaguchi, K., and Linda R. Ferguson. 1995. "The stopping and spacing of childbirths and their birth-history predictors: Rational-choice theory and event-history analysis." *American Sociological Review* 60:272 - 298.
- Yodanis, Carrie. 2005. "Divorce culture and marital gender equality: A cross-national study." *Gender & Society* 19:644 - 659.

**Appendix 1: Summary of literature considering which spouse initiated separation.**

**Table A1.1: Summary of previous empirical research examining which spouse initiated separation**

<b>Studies using small non-representative samples of separated and divorce people considering initiator status of separation:</b>				
<b>Author, Year</b>	<b>Sample &amp; Study type</b>	<b>Initiator Status Measure</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>	
1	(Black et al. 1991)	45 Divorced Couples (90 respondents), cross sectional data, Indiana U.S.  Quantitative	“Leaver” [initiator] “Left” [non-initiator]	Leavers had more positive attitudes to divorce than those who were left.  There were no differences between leavers and those who were left in the perceived attractions to remain married.  There were no differences between leavers and those who were left in expressed barriers to divorce.  Leavers perceive significantly more alternatives to the marriage than those who were left.
2	(Gigy and Kelly 1992)	Divorce Mediation Project (n=437 Divorcing couples), cross sectional data from a 5-wave longitudinal study, California U.S.  Quantitative	Perceived degree of control over the decision to divorce	The number of reasons for divorce was not associated with perceived degree of control over the decision to divorce for men or women.
3	(Hopper 1993)	30 interviews with divorcing men and women, cross sectional data, Colorado U.S.  Qualitative	Initiators Non-initiators	Respondents had no difficulties in identifying the ‘initiator’ and ‘non-initiator’ in their marriage break up.  Both initiators and non-initiators were aware of marital problems and seriously contemplated divorce.  Both initiators and non-initiators had multiple complaints about their marriages.  Both initiators and non-initiators report an intense ambivalence and indecision towards their marriage.  No differences between initiators and non-initiators prior to separation, therefore the decision to divorce is <u>arbitrary</u> .
4	(Kincaid and	56 Separated and Divorced Couples,	“Whose decision was it to	Initiators reported higher levels of communication difficulties in the marriage

	Caldwell 1995)	cross sectional data, Michigan U.S.	separate?"	than non-initiators.
		Quantitative	Mine Partners Mutual (classified as "initiators")	Initiators reported more reasons for the separation than non-initiators. Initiators reported more 'events' as precipitating the separation than non-initiators.
5	(Vannoy 2000a)	Sample of Catholic Divorced Women (n=411), cross sectional data, U.S.	Who most wanted the marriage to end? Who Physically left? Who initiated legal proceedings?  "Initiator" (respondent) "Saver" (former husband)	Women who were classified as being more 'nurturing' were more likely to be initiators than women who were classified as being more 'self-attending'. Women who most wanted the marriage to end describe themselves as having less determination, less unity, less moral worth and less autonomy than women who didn't. Women who initiated the physical separation describe themselves as having less self-determination, unity and autonomy than women who didn't. Women who initiated the legal proceedings describe themselves as having less moral worth than those who didn't.
6	(Vannoy 2000b)	Sample of Catholic Divorced Women (n=411), cross sectional data, U.S.	As above	Women who initiated physical separation report less relationship intimacy in their marriage than non-initiators. Women who initiated legal proceedings for divorce report less relationship intimacy in their marriage than non-initiators.
7	(Rokach, Cohen and Dreman 2004)	Interviews with 9 women and 6 men who divorced after age 45, cross sectional data, Israel.	Who filed for divorce?  Yes (initiator) No (non-initiator) Mutual (both)	The evidence does not support a definitive profile of a divorce initiator. The narratives demonstrate that deciding to divorce in later life is a shared process, with contributions by both sides, rather than one individual's initiative.
<b>Small non-representative samples of separated and divorce people considering gender differences in initiator status of separation:</b>				
	<b>Author, Year</b>	<b>Sample &amp; Study type</b>	<b>Initiator Status Measure</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>
8	(Thompson and Spanier 1983)	210 separated and divorcing persons, Pennsylvania, U.S.	Who first suggested getting separated or divorced?	Women were more likely to initiate separation. Men are more likely to initiate if they recall the marriage as lacking in

	Quantitative	Me Spouse Both	<p>companionship and harmony, they are more likely to say their former wives initiated when they recall greater companionship, harmony and personal commitment to marriage. These factors were not associated with initiation for women.</p> <p>Both men and women report less perceived disapproval from friends and their parents if they initiated, rather than if their spouse initiated or if both initiated.</p> <p>Women with higher levels of education were no more likely to initiate separation than women with lower levels of education.</p>
9	(Pettit and Bloom 1984)  Quantitative	144 recently separated husbands and wives, 3-wave longitudinal data, Boulder, U.S.  “Initiator” (included mutual decisions) “Non-initiator”	<p>Initiators had more complaints about their former spouse than non-initiators.</p> <p>Female initiators had more complaints about their former spouse than male initiators.</p> <p>Female initiators had more complaints about their former spouse than female non-initiators, but male initiators had fewer complaints about their former spouse than non-initiators.</p>
10	(Wolcott and Hughes 1999)  Quantitative	Divorce Transitions Project, (n=650 separated and divorced people), cross sectional data, Australia  Who initiated the separation?  Mostly me We both did Mostly him/her	<p>The main reason for divorce was associated with who made the decision to separate for both men and women.</p> <p>Women are more likely than men to report they initiated separation when verbal and physical abuse characterised the marital relationship</p>
11	(Walzer and Oles 2003)  Qualitative	Interviews with 13 men and 12 women in upstate New York, U.S., who filed legal documents relating to divorce.  Who identifies as the initiator and non-initiator in respondents divorce?	<p>Gender is important for understanding ‘initiator’ narratives.</p> <p>Women do not always account for ending their marriage by using the assertive language of self-fulfilment usually identified with “initiators”</p> <p>Several women initiators justified divorce as a last-resort response to men’s behaviour with the consequences of men’s behaviour for children figuring prominently.</p> <p>Women take a disproportionate responsibility for the well-being of the family, and that responsibility extends to initiating divorce under some circumstances.</p>

---

**Studies using large population samples considering gender differences in initiator status of separation:**

<b>Author, Year</b>	<b>Sample &amp; Study type</b>	<b>Initiator Status Measure</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>
12 (Rogers 2004)	Marital Stability Over the Life Course, USA representative population sample, 17 years 1980 – 1997. N = 1,704  Quantitative	Which spouse first discussed getting a divorce?  Divorced, wife discussed first (wife-initiated) Divorced, husband discussed first (husband-initiated) Continuously married	There is a linear association between wives actual income and the risk of both husbands and wives initiating separation.  There is a curvilinear association between wives proportion contribution to household income and the risk of both husbands and wives initiating separation. When wives earn between 50 and 60 percent of household income the risk of divorce is highest.  Remarriage increased the risk of husband and wife-initiated separation.  Number of children was positively associated with wives initiating separation.  Spouses higher level of education decreased the odds of wife-initiated separation.  Men had decreased odds of reporting wife-initiated separation.  Older age at marriage decreased the odds of wife-initiated separation.
13 (England, Sayer and Allison 2005)	National Survey of Families and Households, USA representative population sample, 2 waves of data.  Quantitative	Wife wanted divorce more Husband wanted divorce more “Other” (including jointly and situations where couples didn’t agree)	Wives who earn an income (no matter how small) have increased odds of initiating separation. This may be an ‘employment’ effect rather than an income effect. There is no association between wives income and husbands initiating separation.  Older age at marriage for wives reduced the risk of wife- and jointly initiated separation. If wives were 3 or more years older than husbands that increased the risk of husband initiated separation  Wives with premarital children were less likely to initiate separation. Premarital birth increased the risk of ‘other’ separation.  When wives had greater than primary school education they were less likely to

---

---

14 (Kalmijn and Poortman 2006)	Divorce in the Netherlands survey 1998, first marriages of 942 men, 1293 women. Retrospective data with proxy data on former spouses.	Wife took initiative (female divorce) Husband took initiative (male divorce) Both took initiative	report a jointly initiated separation. Husband's education was not associated with which spouse initiated separation.
			Wives who experienced parental divorce were more likely to initiate separation, parental divorce for husbands was not associated with which spouse initiated separation.
			Wives who cohabited prior to marriage had an increased risk of wife initiated separation only; husbands who cohabited increased the risk of jointly initiated separation only.
			Both wives and husbands beliefs that they are better off divorced increased the risk of all 'types' of initiation.
			For women, wives working hours significantly increases the odds of female divorce, but not male divorce
			Financial difficulties increase the risk of all types of divorce, but this association is strongest for female divorce.
			Couples with young children are less likely to divorce, but the odds of a male divorce are significantly greater than a female divorce.
			Age at marriage does not differentiate between the different types of separation. The time taken to get acquainted significantly reduces the odds of female divorce compared to a male divorce. When the husband is younger the couple are more likely to divorce; male divorce is significantly more likely than female divorce.

---

**Appendix 2: Supplementary analysis for Chapter 5**

**Table A2.1: Discrete time event history model including the 154 immigrants who separated or divorced before migrating to Australia, by sex**

	Women			Men		
	Odds	$\beta$	se	Odds	$\beta$	se
<b>Temporal</b>						
<i>Birth Cohort:</i>						
< 1925	0.32***	-1.14	.19	0.31***	-1.17	.22
1926 – 1930	0.37***	-0.99	.19	0.38***	-0.97	.20
1931 – 1935	0.49***	-0.70	.16	0.65**	-0.43	.16
1936 – 1940	0.62**	-0.47	.14	0.74*	-0.31	.14
1941 – 1945	0.76*	-0.28	.12	0.86	-0.15	.13
1946 – 1950 (ref group)	1.00			1.00		
1951 – 1955	0.99	0.01	.11	1.14	0.13	.12
1956 – 1960	1.11	0.10	.11	1.06	0.06	.13
1961 – 1965	1.27	0.12	.12	1.34*	0.29	.13
1966 – 1970	1.19	0.17	.13	1.14	0.14	.17
> 1971	1.16	0.15	.17	0.99	-0.007	.26
<i>Ethnicity:</i>						
Australian Born	1.00			1.00		
Overseas Born – English	1.47***	0.39	.08	0.99	-0.006	.10
Overseas Born – NESB	1.01	0.14	.09	1.08	0.08	.10
Religiosity	0.96***	-0.04	.01	0.96***	-0.04	.01
Gender roles	1.03	0.03	.02	1.03	0.03	.02
Cohabited prior to marriage	1.34***	0.29	.08	1.45***	0.37	.09
<b>Psychosocial disruption</b>						
<i>Fathers Occupation:</i>						
Manager/Administrator	1.00			1.00		
Professional	1.06	0.06	.10	1.29*	0.26	.11
White Collar	1.02	0.02	.12	1.13	0.12	.14
Blue Collar	1.07	0.07	.09	1.17	0.16	.10
Never Worked	1.47	0.39	.51	1.42	0.35	.72
<i>Mothers Occupation:</i>						
Manager/Administrator	1.00			1.00		
Professional	1.45	0.37	.20	1.31	0.27	.24
White Collar	1.45	0.37	.20	1.19	0.17	.23
Blue Collar	1.23	0.21	.20	1.17	0.16	.23
Never Worked	1.17	0.16	.19	1.13	0.13	.23
Parents Ever Divorced	1.50***	0.41	.07	1.30**	0.26	.09
Age at marriage	0.93***	-0.08	.01	0.96***	-0.04	.01
Premarital Birth	2.31***	0.84	.11	1.79***	0.59	.13
Early birth	1.30*	0.26	.11	1.70***	0.53	.11
<b>Social Barriers</b>						
First child born in marriage <sup>tv</sup>	0.36***	-1.03	.10	0.40***	-0.91	.12
<i>Highest Level of Education:</i>						

Bachelor Degree or Higher	1.00			1.00		
Diploma	0.93	-0.08	.12	1.51**	0.41	.13
Trade or Certificate	0.96	-0.04	.09	1.32**	0.28	.10
Year 12 or less	0.78**	-0.25	.09	1.31*	0.27	.11
Number of Respondents	4974			4173		
Marriage-Years	101891			85534		
Number of Events	1238			965		

\* significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\* significant at  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* significant at  $p > .001$ .

Note: Analysis also includes polynomial for duration dependence and controls for missing values on some measures.

<sup>iv</sup> Indicates that measure is time varying

**Table A2.2: Cox Proportional Hazards Models of Model presented in Table 6.1.**

	Women		Men	
	Hazard	(diff) <sup>a</sup>	Hazard	(diff) <sup>a</sup>
<b>Normative and Cultural:</b>				
<i>Birth Cohort:</i>				
< 1925	<b>0.27***</b>	<b>-.03</b>	<b>0.26***</b>	<b>-.03</b>
1926 – 1930	<b>0.36***</b>	<b>-.01</b>	<b>0.33***</b>	<b>-.02</b>
1931 – 1935	<b>0.45***</b>	<b>-.03</b>	<b>0.63**</b>	<b>+.01</b>
1936 – 1940	0.59***		<b>0.72*</b>	<b>-.01</b>
1941 – 1945	0.75*		<b>0.85</b>	<b>+.02</b>
1946 – 1950 (reference group)	1.00		1.00	
1951 – 1955	<b>1.02</b>	<b>+.01</b>	<b>1.06</b>	<b>-.04</b>
1956 – 1960	1.15		<b>1.16</b>	<b>-.07</b>
1961 – 1965	<b>1.26</b>	<b>+.08</b>	<b>1.39</b>	<b>+.02</b>
1966 – 1970	<b>1.27</b>	<b>+.07</b>	<b>1.21</b>	<b>+.01</b>
> 1971	<b>1.28</b>	<b>+.04</b>	<b>.91</b>	<b>-.06</b>
<i>Ethnicity:</i>				
Australian Born	1.00		1.00	
Overseas Born – English	<b>1.12</b>	<b>-.06</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>-.02</b>
Overseas Born – NESB	<b>0.81*</b>	<b>+.01</b>	<b>0.97</b>	<b>+.05</b>
Religiosity	<b>0.97***</b>	<b>+.01</b>	0.96***	
Gender role	1.03		1.04*	
Cohabited prior to marriage	<b>1.23**</b>	<b>-.10</b>	<b>1.31**</b>	<b>-.13</b>
<b>Psychosocial Disruption:</b>				
<i>Fathers Occupation:</i>				
Manager/Administrator	1.00		1.00	
Professional	<b>1.09</b>	<b>+.03</b>	<b>1.27*</b>	<b>-.06</b>
White Collar	<b>1.05</b>	<b>+.02</b>	<b>1.02</b>	<b>-.05</b>
Blue Collar	1.08		<b>1.18</b>	<b>-.04</b>
Never Worked	<b>1.18</b>	<b>-.45</b>	<b>1.01</b>	<b>+.18</b>
<i>Mothers Occupation:</i>				
Manager/Administrator	1.00		1.00	
Professional	<b>1.37</b>	<b>-.15</b>	1.17	<b>-.12</b>
White Collar	<b>1.48</b>	<b>+.02</b>	<b>1.08</b>	<b>-.09</b>
Blue Collar	<b>1.17</b>	<b>-.11</b>	<b>1.01</b>	<b>-.14</b>
Never Worked	<b>1.50</b>	<b>+.30</b>	<b>1.02</b>	<b>-.11</b>
Parents Ever Divorced (1=yes)	<b>1.38***</b>	<b>-0.13</b>	<b>1.21*</b>	<b>-.03</b>
Age at marriage	0.93***		0.96***	
Premarital childbirth	<b>2.50***</b>	<b>+.15</b>	<b>1.41***</b>	<b>-.37</b>
Early birth	<b>1.29***</b>	<b>-.03</b>	<b>1.35***</b>	<b>-0.32</b>
<b>Social Barriers:</b>				
Child born in marriage <sup>tv</sup>	0.37***		<b>0.37***</b>	<b>-0.04</b>
<i>Highest Level of Education:</i>				
Bachelor Degree or Higher	1.00		1.00	

Diploma	<b>0.97</b>	<b>+0.07</b>	<b>1.71***</b>	<b>-.010</b>
Trade or Certificate	<b>1.04</b>	<b>- 0.07</b>	<b>1.41**</b>	<b>+0.02</b>
Year 12 or less	<b>0.85</b>	<b>+0.06</b>	1.39**	
Number of Respondents	4883		4110	
Number of Failures	1147		902	

\* significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\* significant at  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* significant at  $p > .001$ .

<sup>a</sup>Indicates the difference between the odds ratios calculated using the discrete time event history model presented in Table 6.1 and the hazard rate calculated using the Cox Proportional Hazards model presented here. <sup>iv</sup>Indicates measure is time varying.

**Appendix 3: Published paper based on Chapter 6**

**Hewitt, B., Baxter, J., Western, M.** (2005) Marriage Breakdown in Australia: the social correlates of separation and divorce. *Journal of Sociology* 41(2): 163-183.

# Marriage breakdown in Australia



## The social correlates of separation and divorce

---

**Belinda Hewitt and Janeen Baxter**

*School of Social Science, University of Queensland*

**Mark Western**

*School of Social Science and University of Queensland Social Research Centre*

### **Abstract**

Marriage breakdown through separation and divorce is a pervasive feature of Australian society. But little research investigates the social factors associated with marital breakdown in Australia. This study builds on and extends Australian research by using survival analysis models to examine patterns of association among temporal, life-course, attitudinal and economic factors associated with marital breakdown. Using data from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, we find marital breakdown in Australia is socially patterned in similar ways to other Western countries. But our findings point to several directions for future research into marriage breakdown in Australia, and we identify certain unique features of Australian marriage breakdown that warrant a more detailed investigation, such as the relationship between ethnic origin and the risk of marital breakdown.

**Keywords:** divorce, gender, life-course, marriage breakdown

The increase in divorce rates in all Western countries over the last century is well documented (Cherlin, 1992; White, 1990). Australia is no exception. At the turn of the 20th century, divorce was virtually non-existent, but by the end of the 20th century it was estimated that 32 percent of Australian marriages would end in divorce (ABS, 2000). Moreover, official divorce statistics tend to under-represent marriage breakdown because many marriages end in permanent separation and never proceed to divorce, or do not

proceed to divorce for several years, and in these circumstances marriage breakdown is not officially recorded until divorce is awarded (ABS, 1999a, 2000). While divorce rates have levelled off since the early 1980s, marital separation and divorce continue to be a pervasive feature of Australian society and the subject of extensive government policy. Despite this, however, only a handful of Australian studies have examined marriage breakdown.

## **Australian divorce research**

A small but important body of work on marriage breakdown has emerged in Australia over the last few decades. The Australian literature, however, is dominated by descriptive studies of the demographic trends in divorce (Carmichael et al., 1996; De Vaus, 1997; Ozdowski and Hattie, 1981; Stewart and Harrison, 1982) and research into post-marriage breakdown processes (Funder, 1996; Funder et al., 1993; McDonald, 1986; Smyth and Weston, 2000). Overall, these studies provide little explanatory information about the social factors associated with marital breakdown. Only a few researchers have investigated this issue. For example, Wolcott and Hughes (1999) investigate separated and divorced peoples' perceptions of why their marriages failed. Burns (1984) also examined marital breakdown by investigating the reasons respondents gave for their separation/divorce. But both these studies only sampled separated and divorced people and therefore provide no comparison of characteristics with people who remained married. Moreover, the main emphasis of the research was the respondent's perception of why the relationship ended, with neither study able to fully investigate the broader social correlates of marriage breakdown.

Several Australian studies have examined the impact of structural factors on marital dissolution (Bracher et al., 1993; De Vaus et al., 2003; Jones, 1994; Sarantakos, 1994), but all have significant limitations. Bracher et al. (1993) investigated the temporal and life-course determinants of divorce in Australia, but only include women in their sample. Jones (1994) compared divorce rates of mixed-ethnic marriages with ethnically homogeneous marriages, but did not include any other explanatory variables in the analysis. De Vaus et al. (2003) conducted a detailed examination of the effects of cohabitation on the likelihood of marriage breakdown within eight years of marriage, but did not specifically identify other life-course variables (even though they were included in the models). Similarly, Sarantakos (1994) focused on the impact of cohabitation on marital quality and marriage dissolution, paying little attention to other structural factors. Therefore, while previous research provides important background information and raises key issues, there is still a large gap in our understanding of divorce processes in Australia.

Furthermore, separation and divorce has recently received much policy attention in Australia. Most policy initiatives, however, focus on preventing marriage breakdown by providing funding for individual and relationship counselling services (Australian Government, 2004). These strategies are worthwhile but have limitations. The risk factors for marital breakdown extend beyond couple and individual dynamics where these policy initiatives are concentrated. There is much scope for research to complement these strategies by identifying broader structural factors associated with divorce to aid in the identification of 'at risk' groups who can be targeted in prevention campaigns (Halford, 2000).

In this article we overview international research, primarily from the United States, that has identified a broad range of structural determinants of marriage breakdown, including temporal, economic, demographic and social factors (White, 1990). Using this framework we build on and extend Australian research into the social correlates of marriage breakdown using data from a large, nationally-representative Australian population survey. We also take account of possible gender differences in the patterns of association. Previous research has found that marriage breakdown is a gendered process, where women are more likely to end a relationship and have different reasons for ending relationships (Amato and Previti, 2003; Heaton and Blake, 1999).

## **Social correlates of marital breakdown**

The social correlates of marriage breakdown include temporal, life-course, attitudinal and economic factors. Temporal factors associated with marriage breakdown reflect the influence of historical time, such as the social contexts and broad social trends that impact on marital breakdown (Thornton and Rodgers, 1987). Life-course factors relate to the timing of specific life events that precede marital breakdown. The characteristics commonly used in studies taking a life-course approach can be grouped into two main categories, those relating to family background, and those measuring relationship and fertility histories (White, 1990). Some attitudinal factors, such as attitudes towards gender roles and religious beliefs, have also been found to be associated with marriage breakdown. Finally, an economic argument asserts that socio-economic factors influence whether a marriage continues or ends, where the husband's lack of socio-economic resources and a wife's access to socio-economic resources are destabilizing forces for marriage.

## **Temporal correlates of marital breakdown**

It is well established in the literature on marriage breakdown that recent generations are more likely to separate and legally divorce than older generations (Bracher et al., 1993; Heaton, 1991). This is attributed to major

social changes such as changes in attitudes towards marriage and divorce, legislative changes to divorce law (such as the introduction of 'no fault' divorce) and women's increased participation in paid employment. Several measures have been used to capture the influence of historical time on divorce including age, marriage cohort and birth cohort (Bracher et al., 1993; Heaton, 1991; Thornton and Rodgers, 1987). The most common measure is respondents' birth cohort, which captures the combined effects of historical context (i.e. morals, values, beliefs and economic conditions) during formative childhood years and ageing (Heaton, 1991). Previous research finds that birth cohort has a curvilinear association with divorce, where older cohorts are less likely to divorce than younger cohorts, but younger cohorts have shorter marriage durations and have therefore been at risk of separation or divorce for less time than older cohorts and are therefore also less likely to be divorced. Typically, cohorts in the middle of the age distribution have the highest rates of marriage breakdown (Bracher et al., 1993).

### **Life-course correlates of marital breakdown**

#### **Family background**

The main family background factors associated with marriage breakdown include race and ethnicity (Bracher et al., 1993; De Vaus et al., 2003; Tzeng and Mare, 1995), socio-economic status of parents (Bumpass et al., 1991; Wolfinger, 1999) and parental divorce (Amato, 1996; Teachman, 2002). While most racial differences have been found in the USA, where blacks are more likely to divorce than whites (Tzeng and Mare, 1995), Australian studies have identified ethnic background as a significant correlate of divorce. For example, De Vaus (1997) found that immigrants born in English-speaking countries had higher rates of divorce than people born in Australia, but immigrants with a non-English-speaking background were less likely to divorce. Further, Jones (1994) found that mixed-ethnic marriages had higher divorce rates than ethnically homogeneous marriages. Parents' socio-economic status has also been found to be associated with divorce, although findings are inconsistent in terms of the direction of the association, with some studies finding a positive association (Wolfinger, 1999) and others a negative association (Bumpass et al., 1991).

The most consistent family-of-origin factor associated with divorce is parental divorce, where respondents whose parents separated or divorced are more likely to experience marital dissolution themselves (Amato, 1996; Teachman, 2002; Wolfinger, 1999). Amato (1996) found that the main causal mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of divorce is the increased likelihood that children of divorce exhibit behaviours that interfere with the maintenance of mutually rewarding intimate relationships, primarily due to lack of appropriate relationship role modelling.

### **Relationship and fertility history**

Researchers have found that age at marriage, cohabitation prior to marriage, pre-marital childbirth, and the presence and ages of children, all have a strong association with marital breakdown. In Australia, people who marry under the age of 25 have an increased risk of divorce compared with those who marry after age 25, irrespective of the year they married (ABS, 2000). It is believed that these marriages face greater risk because the couple are less likely to have developed the maturity and social skills required to negotiate a long-term marital relationship, and often do not have access to adequate socio-economic and financial resources (Teti and Lamb, 1989; Wolcott and Hughes, 1999).

Research has also shown that those who cohabit prior to marriage are more likely to separate and divorce than those who do not (De Vaus et al., 2003; DeMaris and Rao, 1992; Sarantakos, 1994). The main explanation for this finding is a selection effect, where people who cohabit are less conventional in their beliefs and have lower levels of commitment to marriage, thus predisposing them to divorce (Lillard et al., 1995). Alternatively, couples who cohabit before marriage have spent a greater amount of time in the relationship than those who did not cohabit, and this is a determining factor in the higher rates of dissolution for marriages preceded by cohabitation (DeMaris and Rao, 1992).

Several fertility patterns are associated with divorce. Pre-marital childbirth and pregnancy increase the risk of divorce (Bracher et al., 1993; Bumpass et al., 1991; Waite and Lillard, 1991). This is because pre-marital childbirth may encourage marriage with an unsuitable partner, or the presence of a child early in marriage may add strain in the developmental stages of the relationship (Waite and Lillard, 1991). In contrast, children born within a marriage reduce the likelihood of divorce (Bracher et al., 1993; Ono, 1998; Waite and Lillard, 1991). It is thought that the birth of children within marriage indicates commitment to the marriage and increases its stability (Sayer and Bianchi, 2000). However, the relationship between children and marriage breakdown has been found to vary depending on the ages of children, whereby younger children reduce the risk of marriage breakdown and older children have little or no association with the likelihood of dissolution (Ono, 1998; Waite and Lillard, 1991).

### **Attitudinal factors and marital breakdown**

The two most common attitudinal measures used in separation and divorce research are religion and attitudes towards work and family gender roles. Previous research has found that religious affiliation has a strong negative association with marriage breakdown (Bracher et al., 1993; Bumpass et al., 1991), where more religious people are found to have more traditional views of, and stronger commitment to marriage (Lillard et al., 1995). Studies that have investigated the effect of attitudes towards gender roles on

divorce tend to find that more traditional attitudes (i.e. the belief that the primary male role is in the workforce and the primary female role is in the home) are associated with more stable marriages (Greenstein, 1995; Heaton and Blake, 1999).

### **Economic correlates of marital breakdown**

The main structural explanation for the increase in marriage breakdown in Western countries is the overall improvement in women's socio-economic position relative to men's over the last few decades of the 20th century. There are two mechanisms whereby economic resources are seen to contribute to marital instability. First, it is argued that a wife's independent economic resources give her confidence that she could survive economically should the marriage end, thereby removing any financial barriers to leaving an unhappy marriage (Cherlin, 1992). The other mechanism is underpinned by an idealized view of household production where the male head of household specializes in paid employment and the female head of household specializes in domestic labour (Oppenheimer, 1997). Any deviation from this household specialization-trading model, such as women's participation in the paid work force, results in lower returns from marriage and therefore destabilizes the marriage. Both theories view a husband's lack of economic resources and a wife's access to economic resources, or economic independence, as destabilizing for marriage (Ono, 1998; Sayer and Bianchi, 2000).

Researchers have tested the economic independence hypothesis using a broad range of socio-economic measures that include employment status, hours of work, income, education, work experience and access to welfare (Hoffman and Duncan, 1995; Sayer and Bianchi, 2000; South, 2001; Tzeng and Mare, 1995). Irrespective of the measure(s) used, there is no consistent association between economic independence and marriage breakdown. Given this mixed support, some researchers have argued that there may be scenarios where the economic contributions of wives provide resources and offer financial stability in uncertain labour markets and thereby increase marital stability (Ono, 1998; Sayer and Bianchi, 2000). Alternatively, as the paid employment of married women increases and becomes 'normal', the impact of women's workforce participation on marriage breakdown may be attenuated (Jalovaara, 2003).

In this paper we draw on these literatures to investigate the temporal, life-course, attitudinal and economic factors associated with marital breakdown in Australia. We build on and extend Australian divorce research in important ways. First, we systematically examine the social correlates of marriage breakdown in Australia, thereby filling an important gap in our knowledge base. Second, we use a large nationally representative sample from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey that provides detailed marital histories for respondents. Third, we

use discrete time survival analysis that enables the time-dependent nature of marital breakdown to be taken into account when estimating the association between characteristics and the likelihood of marital breakdown.

## **Methods**

### **Data**

The data come from the first wave (2001) of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, an Australian national panel survey comprising 7692 households and 13,969 individuals. Households were selected using a multi-stage sampling approach, and a 66 percent response rate was achieved (Watson and Wooden, 2002a). Within households, data were collected from each person aged over 15 years (where available) using face-to-face interviews and self-completed questionnaires, and a 92 percent response rate was achieved (Watson and Wooden, 2002a). Overall the HILDA sample is representative of Australian households, although, there are some characteristics of individuals in the HILDA sample that differ from the Australian population. Specifically, women are over-represented, unmarried people are under-represented and immigrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds are under-represented. However, the discrepancies are not large and are unlikely to compromise the overall quality of the data (Watson and Wooden, 2002b).

### **The analytic sample**

Our analytic sample includes all respondents who have ever married ( $N = 9632$ ). However, we apply further restrictions to the sample. People whose marriages ended less than one year prior to the survey are excluded ( $N = 97$ ), because previous research indicates that most marriages that reconcile tend to do so within the first year of separation and there is a risk of over-estimating marital breakdown by including this group in the sample (Bumpass et al., 1991). Further, under the 1975 Family Law Act, the only ground for divorce is irreconcilable differences evidenced by one year of marital breakdown (Stewart and Harrison, 1982). Therefore all separated respondents in our sample are considered permanently separated and are legally eligible to divorce (even if they have not). Second, we exclude people who married in the year of the survey ( $N = 163$ ), because the smallest time-unit of marriage duration observed in this study is one year and this group of respondents had married less than one year prior to the survey. Third, only first marriages are considered because evidence shows that higher-order marriages have an increased risk of ending and the determinants of marriage breakdown in higher-order marriages tend to be different from those for first marriages (Booth and Edwards, 1992). Comparing the differences between first and higher-order marriages is outside the scope of this study. Finally, respondents with missing data on their marital history or

current marital status were dropped from the sample ( $N = 221$ ). The final sample comprises 9151 first marriages, 4175 male respondents and 4976 women. We are also restricted to only including respondents' characteristics in our analytic sample. The HILDA marital history data do not provide information on respondents' spouse(s) from former marriage(s). This is a limitation for this research because the characteristics of both partners are likely to be relevant to the breakdown of marriage.

### **Dependent variable**

We use retrospective marriage histories to construct our dependent variable, marital breakdown, which is coded 0 if the respondent is still in their first marriage and 1 if their first marriage has ended in separation (for at least one year) or divorce. While most (85 percent) respondents in our sample who have separated from their first marriage have gone on to legally divorce, we include separation as well as divorce as our indicator of marriage breakdown because excluding it would underestimate the prevalence of marriage breakdown in our sample by 15 percent.

### **Independent variables**

Table 1 describes the independent variables. We include temporal, life-course (family background and relationship and fertility history), attitudinal and socio-economic measures in our analyses. The temporal measure is birth cohort of respondent. It consists of 11 five-year cohorts, with the oldest cohort born prior to 1925 and the youngest born after 1971. Birth cohort is included in the model as a series of dummy variables, with the middle cohort (1946–50) chosen as the reference category to accommodate the curvilinear relationship between divorce and birth cohort.

We have three family background measures. The first is respondent's ethnicity, coded as (1) Australian-born, (2) Overseas-born – English-speaking, and (3) Overseas-born – NESB (non-English-speaking background), with Australian-born as the reference group. We also include a measure of mother's and father's occupational status, each with five categories: (1) Managers and administrators, (2) Professionals, (3) White collar, (4) Blue collar and (5) Never worked. The reference category is managers and administrators, and a dummy for missing values for mother and father's occupations is included. The final measure of family background is a dummy for parental divorce (1 = yes).

There are four measures of relationship and fertility history. We include a dummy for cohabitation prior to marriage (1 = yes), and a dummy for whether or not the respondent had a child prior to marriage (1 = yes). Age at marriage is included as a continuous variable. The final measure is whether or not any children were born within the marriage (1 = yes). A dummy is also included for missing values on the child measures.

**Table 1:** Description of covariates, by sex

	<i>Males (N = 4175)</i>		<i>Females (N = 4976)</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>(SD)<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>(SD)</i>
<b>Temporal</b>				
<i>Birth cohort</i>				
< 1925	.06		.08	
1926–30	.06		.05	
1931–35	.06		.06	
1936–40	.08		.07	
1941–45	.09		.08	
1946–50	.11		.10	
1951–55	.12		.11	
1956–60	.13		.13	
1961–65	.13		.13	
1966–70	.10		.11	
> 1971	.06		.08	
<b>Life course: family of origin</b>				
<i>Ethnicity</i>				
Australian born	.70		.72	
Overseas born – English	.13		.11	
Overseas born – NESB	.17		.17	
<i>Father's occupation</i>				
Manager/administrator	.21		.19	
Professional	.21		.22	
White collar	.10		.11	
Blue collar	.44		.44	
Never worked	<.01		<.01	
Missing	.04		.04	
<i>Mother's occupation</i>				
Manager/administrator	.02		.03	
Professional	.15		.15	
White collar	.25		.26	
Blue collar	.23		.24	
Never worked	.29		.28	
Missing	.06		.04	
Parents ever divorced (1 = yes)	.13		.16	
<b>Life course: relationship and fertility history</b>				
Cohabited prior to marriage (1 = yes)	.30		.28	
Pre-marital birth (1 = yes)	.06		.08	
Age at marriage	25.42	(5.0)	22.81	(4.5)
Child born in marriage (1 = yes)	.86		.87	
<b>Attitudinal</b>				
Religiosity	4.5	(3.6)	5.5	(3.5)
<b>Socio-economic measure</b>				
<i>Highest level of education</i>				
Bachelor degree or higher	.19		.20	
Diploma	.10		.08	
Trade or certificate	.35		.22	
Year 12 or less	.34		.47	
Missing	.02		.03	

Note: <sup>a</sup> Standard Deviations are only reported for continuous measures.

Our attitudinal measure is religiosity, which indicates the importance of religion to the respondent, measured by a scale ranging from 0 (not important) to 10 (very important).

Education is our measure of socio-economic position. We use education because previous research has shown that it is a relatively stable indicator of socio-economic position that tends to be established early in adulthood and changes very little after marriage (Tzeng and Mare, 1995). Other measures of socio-economic position, such as occupation and income, are more volatile during marriage and retrospective data are not available. Level of education consists of four categories (1) Bachelor degree or higher, (2) Diploma, (3) Trade/Certificate, and (4) Year 12 or less. Bachelor degree or higher is the reference group and a dummy variable for missing values is also included.

Finally, we include a fifth-order polynomial specification for length of marriage to summarize the curvilinear pattern of duration dependence between length of marriage and marital breakdown. This allows us to control for the fact that the probability of separating varies over the length of the marriage.

### **Analytic approach**

Our dependent variable, marital breakdown, is an event that is time-dependent. We therefore use a discrete time survival analysis modelling approach, which takes into account this time-dependency (Singer and Willett, 2003). To do this we constructed a marriage-year data set, where each respondent contributes one person-year to the dataset for every year they are married. The dependent variable is coded 0 in years that a respondent is married and 1 in the year they separate. Respondents who remain married until surveyed are coded 0 only on the dependent variable and treated as censored. If a respondent's marriage ended in an interval due to the death of a spouse the case was treated as censored. In other words, one-year marriage intervals were included for that respondent until the onset of widowhood. Logistic regression is then used to predict the likelihood that a marriage will end given that it did not end in the previous year. Likelihood ratio and Wald tests were used to establish whether each independent variable was associated with marital breakdown. All analyses were run separately for men and women.

## **Results**

Figure 1 plots the unadjusted probability of marital breakdown by duration of marriage, separately for men and women.<sup>1</sup> This graph demonstrates a broadly curvilinear association between length of marriage and marital breakdown. The conditional probability of marital breakdown increases within the first five years of marriage and then declines at a decreasing rate



Figure 1: Probability of marriage breakdown, by sex

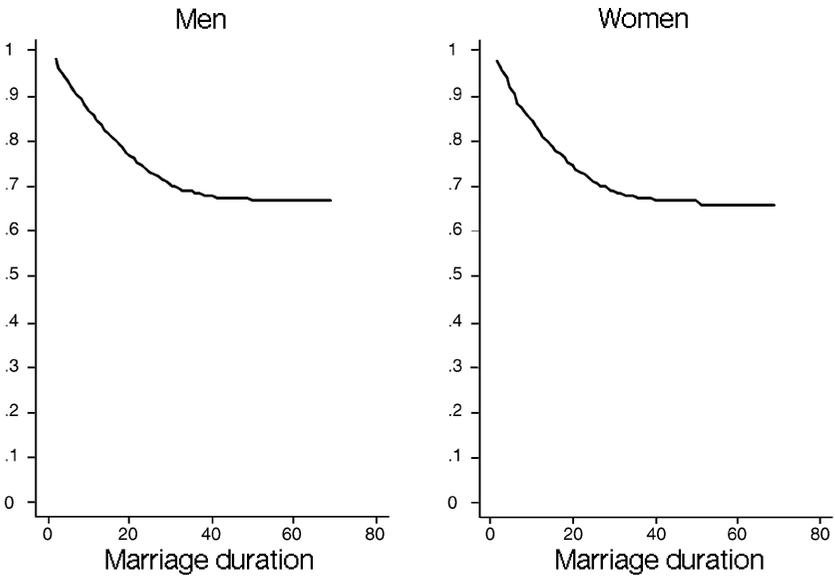


Figure 2: Survival estimates of marriage breakdown, by sex

**Table 2:** Discrete time event history model predicting the probability of marital breakdown as a function of various structural characteristics,<sup>a</sup> by sex

	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
<b>Temporal</b>		
<i>Birth cohort</i> <sup>b, c</sup>		
< 1925	0.28**	0.30**
1926–30	0.36**	0.36**
1931–35	0.60**	0.48**
1936–40	0.66**	0.61**
1941–45	0.83	0.75*
1946–50 (reference group)	–	–
1951–55	1.12	0.97
1956–60	1.09	1.04
1961–65	1.38*	1.16
1966–70	1.18	1.28
> 1971	0.89	1.17
<b>Life course: family of origin</b>		
<i>Ethnicity</i> <sup>c</sup>		
Australian born	–	–
Overseas born – English	0.93	1.42**
Overseas born – NESB	1.07	1.02
<i>Fathers occupation</i>		
Manager/administrator	–	–
Professional	1.22	1.09
White collar	1.04	1.07
Blue collar	1.15	1.09
Never worked	1.69	1.15
<i>Mothers occupation</i>		
Manager/administrator	–	–
Professional	1.21	1.34
White collar	1.07	1.42
Blue collar	1.02	1.19
Never worked	1.03	1.14
Parents ever divorced (1 = yes) <sup>b, c</sup>	1.32**	1.37**
<b>Life course: relationship and fertility history</b>		
Cohabited prior to marriage (1 = yes) <sup>b, c</sup>	1.41**	1.31**
Pre-marital birth (1 = yes) <sup>b, c</sup>	1.63**	2.31**
Age at marriage <sup>b, c</sup>	0.94**	0.92**
Child born in marriage (1 = yes) <sup>b, c</sup>	0.15**	0.15**
<b>Attitudes</b>		
Religiosity <sup>b, c</sup>	0.96**	0.96**

**Table 2:** Continued

	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
<b>Socio-economic position</b>		
<i>Highest level of education</i> <sup>b, c</sup>		
Bachelor degree or higher	–	–
Diploma	1.65**	0.99
Trade or certificate	1.33**	1.04
Year 12 or less	1.31*	0.83*
Number of respondents	4175	4976
Marriage-years	85390	101903
Number of events	967	1240

\* significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\* significant at  $p < .01$ .

<sup>a</sup> Models also include polynomial terms for duration dependence.

<sup>b</sup> Likelihood ratio tests indicate that the inclusion of this variable in the model resulted in a significant improvement in the overall fit of the model at  $p < .05$  for **men**.

<sup>c</sup> Likelihood ratio tests indicate that the inclusion of this variable in the model resulted in a significant improvement in the overall fit of the model at  $p < .05$  for **women**.

in subsequent years. In any given year, the conditional probability of separation is very low for both women and men. This graph also shows that men and women have very similar patterns of marriage duration and probability of marital breakdown.

While the probability of a marriage ending in any given year is small, the cumulative effect of marriage breakdown adds up over time. Figure 2 plots the estimated unadjusted survival probabilities, the cumulative probability of marriages staying intact at the end of particular durations. We can see that the survival probabilities drop steadily within the first 25 years or so of marriage for women and men – this is when most marriages break down – the survival function then flattens out, and after 35 or 40 years the proportion staying married is constant and does not drop below 67 percent. This figure estimated from the HILDA data accords closely with the ABS estimate of the rate of marital breakdown of 32 percent (ABS, 2000).

The discrete time models are presented in Table 2. We present odds ratio estimates for all predictors except the polynomial terms for duration dependence and missing values. As expected, we find that people in older cohorts have a lower risk of marital breakdown than more recent birth cohorts. People born in cohorts prior to the reference cohort (1946–50) have significantly lower odds of marital breakdown than those born in (or after) the reference cohort. Women and men born after the reference cohort also tend to have increased odds of separation, by comparison to the baseline category, although these differences are not statistically significant, except for men in the 1961–5 cohort. The likelihood ratio test indicates that the inclu-

sion of birth cohort in the model significantly improves the overall fit of the model.

Women born overseas in English-speaking countries have 42 percent higher odds of marital breakdown than women born in Australia, but there is no significant association between ethnicity and marital breakdown for men. Further, the likelihood ratio tests indicate that the inclusion of ethnicity in the model significantly improves the fit of the model for women, but not for men. Neither father's nor mother's occupation, had a significant association with marital breakdown for men or women. In contrast, parental divorce has a significant association with marital breakdown for both men and women. Men with divorced parents have 32 percent higher odds of separating than men whose parents stayed married, while women with divorced parents have a 37 percent increase in the odds of separation, compared to women whose parents did not divorce.

Relationship and fertility measures are strongly associated with the risk of marital breakdown for men and women. Respondents who cohabited before marriage have odds of marital breakdown that are 41 percent higher for men and 31 percent higher for women than they are for respondents who did not cohabit. This risk is around 7 percent higher for men than it is for women  $((1.41-1.31)/1.31*100 = 7.6\%)$ . Having a child prior to marriage is also positively associated with marital breakdown for men and women. For men, having a child before marriage is associated with a 63 percent increase in the odds of the marriage breakdown. For women the odds of breakdown are almost two and half times greater (2.3), if there is a pre-marital child.<sup>2</sup> Age at marriage has an inverse association with the risk of marital breakdown, where older age at marriage is associated with reduced risk of marital breakdown. Further, the effect of this variable is relatively large; an additional year's delay in age at marriage results in a reduction in the odds of marital breakdown of almost 6 percent per year for men and 9 percent per year for women. Therefore, if we compare a man who married at age 18 with a man who married at age 28, the older man's odds of marriage breakdown are only 46 percent of those of the younger man  $(0.94^{10} = 0.54; 1-0.54 = 46)$ , net of other things. Even more pronounced, a woman who marries at 28 has odds of marital breakdown that are 57 percent lower than an 18-year-old's  $(0.92^{10} = 0.43; 1-0.43 = 57)$ . The birth of the first child within marriage also has an inverse association with the risk of marital breakdown, reducing the odds of marital breakdown for both men and women by 85 percent.

Religiosity has a significant negative association with the risk of marital breakdown. Movement up (or down) the scale by one unit results in a 4 percent decrease (or increase) in the risk of divorce for both men and women. Respondents who answered 0 on the scale (religion is not important) have 33 percent greater odds of marital breakdown than those who answered 10 (religion is very important).

Education is significantly associated with the risk of marital breakdown for both men and women, and the associations differ in the expected directions. For men, higher education is associated with decreased likelihood of separation and divorce. Men with diplomas have 65 percent higher odds of separation than men with degrees. Men with a trade certificate or partial or completed high school have odds that are about 30 percent higher than men with degrees. For women the relationship between education and separation is much weaker, but women with Year 12 or less education are significantly less likely to experience separation and divorce than women with a bachelor's degree or higher qualifications. The differences between women with diplomas or trade/certificate qualifications and women with a bachelor degree or higher are not statistically significant.

## Discussion

This article builds on and extends previous Australian divorce research by undertaking a detailed investigation of the association between structural characteristics and the risk of marital breakdown. Overall our analysis confirms that the patterns of association between temporal, life-course, attitudinal and economic factors identified in the international literature exist in Australia. Nevertheless, we identify some characteristics unique to the Australian context, and highlight areas that require further research.

Our finding that female immigrants from English-speaking countries have a higher risk of marital breakdown is comparable with previous Australian research. De Vaus (1997) found that immigrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds were less likely to divorce than people born in Australia, and immigrants from English-speaking countries were more likely to divorce than Australians, although De Vaus did not differentiate between men and women. We can speculate about possible scenarios that may explain our finding that immigrant women from English-speaking backgrounds have a higher risk of marital breakdown. For example, the majority of English-speaking female immigrants who divorce in Australia were married to an Australian man (ABS, 1999b). Other Australian research indicates that Australian men whose wives are overseas-born have a higher divorce rate than Australian men with Australian wives (Jones, 1994). This may be due to different cultural expectations of marriage, which place a strain on the relationship, but women with an English-speaking background may not have the same barriers to workforce participation experienced by women from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Therefore, using an economic independence argument, immigrant women from English-speaking countries may be better positioned to cope economically if they want leave an unsatisfactory marriage with an Australian partner.

Our findings contrast slightly with another Australian study by Bracher et al. (1993), who found that women from non-English-speaking countries,

specifically southern Europe, were significantly less likely to divorce than women born in Australia. They argue that this is probably due to stronger family orientation and more traditional sex-roles that characterize southern European immigrants to Australia, which act to strengthen marriages (Bracher et al., 1993: 413). We did not find any significant effects for women from non-English-speaking backgrounds, although our category differed from Bracher et al.'s (1993) study and included women from all non-English-speaking backgrounds, not just southern Europe. In addition, the difference between our findings and Bracher et al.'s (1993) may be due in part to the representativeness of the HILDA sample, where people born in non-English-speaking countries are under-represented (Watson and Wooden, 2002b). The association between ethnicity and marital breakdown in Australia warrants a more thorough investigation.

In contrast to international research (Bumpass et al., 1991; Wolfinger, 1999), we find no association between parents' socio-economic background and marital breakdown. This is, however, consistent with other Australian research (Bracher et al., 1993: 414). Parental divorce, on the other hand, had a strong significant positive association for both men and women. Research finds that the main causal mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of divorce is that children of divorced parents are not as well equipped to negotiate long-term relationships compared to children whose parents remained married (Amato, 1996). There is some Australian evidence in support of this explanation. A longitudinal Australian study by Burns and Dunlop (2000) examined the extent to which personal qualities of children of divorced parents, reported by parents and the children themselves, predict the quality of their early adult relationships. It found that children of divorced parents had more behavioural problems compared with children of intact families, which in turn had a negative impact on the quality of their intimate relationships 10 years later.

We find that cohabitation is strongly positively associated with marital breakdown, a finding that agrees with prior Australian (Sarantakos, 1994), US (Amato, 1996; Bumpass et al., 1991) and Canadian (Hall and Zhao, 1995) research. In contrast to these previous studies, one Australian study by De Vaus et al. (2003) found that the impact of cohabitation on divorce in younger birth cohorts was not significant. They conclude that the normalization of cohabitation prior to marriage may have attenuated the association in younger cohorts to the degree that there is no difference in the propensity to divorce between those who cohabit and those who do not. De Vaus et al.'s (2003) finding suggests that despite the growing rate of cohabitation in younger generations (Glezer, 1997), it may not continue to exert the large positive influence on divorce that it has in the past.

We found that young age at marriage and a pre-marital childbirth significantly increase the likelihood of marriage breakdown. However, we anticipate that the impact of these factors on divorce rates will diminish

over time given recent demographic trends in Australia towards later marriages and later births (ABS, 2000; Carmichael et al., 1996). In contrast, the birth of the first child within marriage reduced the risk of marital breakdown for both men and women. Further research is needed to investigate whether the effect of children on marriage breakdown varies depending on the ages of the children (Ono, 1998; Waite and Lillard, 1991).

Our results also provide some tentative support for an economic explanation for divorce. Men with bachelor degrees or higher are less likely to experience marital breakdown than men with lower levels of educational attainment, net of other things, suggesting that marriages where the husband has a high socio-economic position are more stable. We also find that women in the lowest education group have lower odds of marital breakdown than women with a bachelor degree or higher qualification, which supports an economic independence argument that women with higher socio-economic position are more likely to leave an unsatisfactory marriage. This finding only applies to women at the either end of the educational gradient, and it also contradicts other studies that find better-educated women are less likely to separate or divorce (Tzeng and Mare, 1995).

These findings on the economic determinants of divorce need to be interpreted with some caution though, because we are limited in our ability to examine these arguments. First, we only examine the effects of one measure of socio-economic position, education, where other measures may provide different results. We were restricted to education because there were no retrospective data available on occupation, income and employment histories. Even though retrospective data were not available for education, previous research indicates that it is fairly stable in that most education is completed early in adulthood and changes very little after marriage (Tzeng and Mare, 1995). The other indicators mentioned tend to be more volatile during marriage and can change dramatically after divorce, especially for women (Heaton, 1991). Second, a more complete test of the economic hypothesis would examine the ways in which respondents' socio-economic position relative to their partner determined the risk of marital breakdown. We could not fully explore this issue because socio-economic data were not collected on the respondent's partner in first marriages that had ended. This latter point is also a broader limitation of the article. The marriage histories in the HILDA data do not include information on former spouses; we therefore cannot effectively control for the joint effects of husbands' and wives' characteristics.

This article points to several directions for future research into the breakdown of marriage in Australia including more detailed investigations of the association between ethnicity, the presence and ages of children, and the relative influence of partner's characteristics and socio-economic position on the likelihood of marital breakdown. Further, the overall patterning and

determinants of marriage dissolution tend to be similar for men and women and therefore our results do not provide any insight into the most salient gender difference in the divorce literature, that most marriages are ended by women (Amato and Previti, 2003; Burns, 1984; Wolcott and Hughes, 1999). This invites the question: 'Why do women, rather than men, tend to initiate marital separation?' We are pursuing this question in subsequent research.

## Notes

The data used for this research come from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, which is funded by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) and conducted by the Melbourne Institute for Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne. The research findings are the product of the researchers and the views expressed should not be attributed to FaCS or the Melbourne Institute.

1. The raw conditional probabilities have been smoothed with a kernel density estimator.
2. We do not know if the pre-marital child is the child of the current partner or lived with the respondent in their first marriage. Gender differences in both these variables could help explain the gender difference in the association between having a child before marriage and marital breakdown.

## References

- ABS (1999a) 'Special Article: Divorce in the Nineties', pp. 121–6 in *Marriages and Divorces, Australia*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- ABS (1999b) 'Special Article: Divorces by Country of Birth', pp. 113–20 in *Marriages and Divorces, Australia*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- ABS (2000) 'Special Article: Lifetime Marriage Formation and Marriage Dissolution Patterns in Australia', pp. 84–91 in *Marriages and Divorces* (Catalogue No. 3310.0). Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- Amato, P.R. (1996) 'Explaining the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58: 628–40.
- Amato, P.R. and D. Previti (2003) 'People's Reasons for Divorcing: Gender, Social Class, the Life Course, and Adjustment', *Journal of Family Issues* 24: 602–26.
- Australian Government (2004) *A New Approach to the Family Law System: Implementation of Reforms*, Discussion paper. Canberra: Attorney-General's Department.
- Booth, A. and J.N. Edwards (1992) 'Starting Over: Why Remarriages Are More Unstable', *Journal of Family Issues* 13: 179–94.
- Bracher, M., G. Santow, S.P. Morgan and J. Trussell (1993) 'Marriage Dissolution in Australia: Models and Explanations', *Population Studies* 47: 403–25.
- Bumpass, L.L., T. Castro Martin and J.A. Sweet (1991) 'The Impact of Family Background and Early Marital Factors on Marital Disruption', *Journal of Family Issues* 12: 22–42.
- Burns, A. (1984) 'Perceived Causes of Marriage Breakdown and Conditions of Life', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 46: 551–62.

- Burns, A. and R. Dunlop (2000) 'Parental Divorce, Personal Characteristics and Early Adult Intimate Relationships: A Longitudinal Australian Study', *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 33: 91–109.
- Carmichael, G.A., A. Webster and P.F. McDonald (1996) *Divorce Australian Style: A Demographic Analysis*. Canberra: Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University.
- Cherlin, A.J. (1992) *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- De Vaus, D.A. (1997) 'Divorce', *Australian Family Profiles: Social and Demographic Patterns*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- De Vaus, D.A., L. Qu and R.E. Weston (2003) 'Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Stability', *Family Matters* 65: 34–9.
- DeMaris, A. and V. Rao (1992) 'Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Stability in the United States: A Reassessment', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54: 178–90.
- Funder, K. (1996) *Remaking Families: Long-term Adaptation of Parents and Children to Divorce*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Funder, K., R.E. Weston and M. Harrison (1993) *Settling Down: Pathways of Parents after Divorce*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Glezer, H. (1997) 'Cohabitation and Marriage Relationships in the 1990s', *Family Matters* 47: 5–9.
- Greenstein, T.N. (1995) 'Gender Ideology, Marital Disruption, and the Employment of Married Women', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57: 31–42.
- Halford, W. K. (2000) *Australian Couples in Millenium Three* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Hall, D. R. and J. Z. Zhao (1995) 'Cohabitation and Divorce in Canada: Testing the Selectivity Hypothesis', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57: 421–7.
- Heaton, T.B. (1991) 'Time-related Determinants of Marital Dissolution', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53: 285–95.
- Heaton, T.B. and A.M. Blake (1999) 'Gender Differences in Determinants of Marital Disruption', *Journal of Family Issues* 20: 25–45.
- Hoffman, S.D. and G.J. Duncan (1995) 'The Effect of Incomes, Wages, and AFDC Benefits on Marital Disruption', *Journal of Human Resources* 30: 19–41.
- Jalovaara, M. (2003) 'The Joint Effects of Marriage Partners' Socioeconomic Positions on the Risk of Divorce', *Demography* 40: 67–81.
- Jones, F.L. (1994) 'Are Marriages that Cross Ethnic Boundaries More Likely to End in Divorce?', *Journal of the Australian Population Association* 11: 115–32.
- Lillard, L.A., M.J. Brien and L.J. Waite (1995) 'Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Dissolution: A Matter of Self-selection?', *Demography* 32: 437–57.
- McDonald, P.F. (ed.) (1986) *Settling Up: Property and Income Distribution on Divorce in Australia*. Sydney: Prentice-Hall.
- Ono, H. (1998) 'Husbands' and Wives' Resources and Marital Dissolution', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60: 674–89.
- Oppenheimer, V.K. (1997) 'Women's Employment and the Gain to Marriage: The Specialization and Trading Model', *Annual Review of Sociology* 23: 431–53.
- Ozdowsky, S.A. and J. Hattie (1981) 'The Impact of Divorce Laws on Divorce Rate in Australia: A Time Series Analysis', *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 16: 3–17.
- Sarantakos, S. (1994) 'Trial Cohabitation on Trial', *Australian Social Work* 47: 13–25.

- Sayer, L.C. and S.M. Bianchi (2000) 'Women's Economic Independence and the Probability of Divorce: A Review and Reexamination', *Journal of Family Issues* 21: 906–43.
- Singer, J.D. and J.B. Willett (2003) *Applied Longitudinal Data Analysis: Modeling Change and Event Occurrence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smyth, B. and R.E. Weston (2000) *Financial Living Standards after Divorce: A Recent Snapshot*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- South, S.J. (2001) 'Time-dependent Effects of Wives' Employment on Marital Dissolution', *American Sociological Review* 66: 226–45.
- Stewart, D.E. and M. Harrison (1982) *Divorce in Australia*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Teachman, J.D. (2002) 'Childhood Living Arrangements and the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce', *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64: 717–29.
- Teti, D.M. and M.E. Lamb (1989) 'Socioeconomic and Marital Outcomes of Adolescent Marriage, Adolescent Childbirth, and their Co-occurrence', *Journal of Marriage and Family* 51: 203–12.
- Thornton, A. and W.L. Rodgers (1987) 'The Influence of Individual and Historical Time on Marital Dissolution', *Demography* 24: 1–22.
- Tzeng, J.M. and R.D. Mare (1995) 'Labor Market and Socioeconomic Effects on Marital Stability', *Social Science Research* 24: 329–51.
- Waite, L.J. and L.A. Lillard (1991) 'Children and Marital Disruption', *American Journal of Sociology* 96: 930–53.
- Watson, N. and M. Wooden (2002a) *The Household, Income and Labor Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey: Wave 1 Survey Methodology*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.
- Watson, N. and M. Wooden (2002b) *Assessing the Quality of the HILDA Survey Wave 1 Data*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.
- White, L.K. (1990) 'Determinants of Divorce: A Review of Research in the Eighties', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52: 904–12.
- Wolcott, I. and J. Hughes (1999) *Towards Understanding the Reasons for Divorce*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Wolfinger, N.H. (1999) 'Trends in the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce', *Demography* 36: 415–20.

## Biographical notes

**Belinda Hewitt** is a Research Assistant and PhD candidate at the School of Social Science, University of Queensland. Her PhD thesis examines the structural determinants of separation and divorce in Australia, and this article reports some of the findings from that work. Her most recent publications investigate the impact of marriage breakdown on health in the elderly and the impact of household composition on housework hours for men and women. *Address:* Sociology, School of Social Science, University of Queensland, St Lucia QLD 4072. [email: b.hewitt@uq.edu.au]

**Janeen Baxter** is Professor of Sociology and Head of the Sociology Program in the School of Social Science at the University of Queensland. *Address:* School of Social Science, University of Queensland, St Lucia QLD 4072. [email: j.baxter@uq.edu.au]

**Mark Western** is Associate Professor of Sociology in the School of Social Science at the University of Queensland, and Director of the University of Queensland Social Research Centre. *Address:* School of Social Science and University of Queensland Social Research Centre, University of Queensland, St Lucia QLD 4072. [email: m.western@uq.edu.au]

**Appendix 4: Supplementary analysis for Chapter 6**

**Table A4.1: Likelihood ratio tests comparing main model in Chapter 6 (Table 6.1) with models excluding each of the covariates.**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
	LR - test (df)	LR - test (df)
<i>Main Model (Lr chi2 (df))</i>	<i>606.64 (41)</i>	<i>992.33 (41)</i>
Excluding Birth cohort	81.01 (10) ***	99.02 (10) ***
Excluding Father's Occupation	9.28 (5)	7.64 (5)
Excluding Mother's Occupation	2.66 (5)	10.10 (5)
Excluding Ethnicity	5.51 (2)	8.84 (2) *
Excluding Parental Divorce	4.87 (1) *	27.60 (1) ***
Excluding Cohabitation prior to marriage	21.24 (1) ***	12.66 (1) ***
Excluding Age at marriage	14.73 (1) ***	57.93 (1) ***
Excluding Premarital birth	17.40 (1) ***	46.39 (1) ***
Excluding Early birth	19.06 (1) ***	6.35 (1) *
Excluding First child born in marriage	44.91 (1) ***	78.92 (1) ***
Excluding Religiosity	17.44 (1) ***	22.40 (1) ***
Excluding Gender role attitudes	3.94 (2)	4.01 (2)
Excluding Education	18.73 (4) ***	9.10 (4)

**Table A4.2: Gender interactions for discrete time event history model presented in Table 6.1**

	$\beta$	se
<b>Main Effects</b>		
Female	1.44*	.51
<b>Normative and Cultural:</b>		
<i>Birth Cohort:</i>		
< 1925	-1.23***	.23
1926 – 1930	-1.05***	.20
1931 – 1935	-0.47**	.17
1936 – 1940	-0.32*	.14
1941 – 1945	-0.17	.13
1946 – 1950 (reference group)	-	
1951 – 1955	0.08	.12
1956 – 1960	0.06	.13
1961 – 1965	0.27*	.13
1966 – 1970	0.13	.17
> 1971	-0.08	.27
<i>Ethnicity:</i>		
Australian Born	-	
Overseas Born – English	-0.25*	.11
Overseas Born – NESB	-0.08	.10
Religiosity	-0.04***	.01
Gender role	0.04	.02
Cohabited prior to marriage	0.34***	.09
<b>Psychosocial Disruption:</b>		
<i>Fathers Occupation:</i>		
Manager/Administrator	-	
Professional	0.28*	.12
White Collar	0.08	.14
Blue Collar	0.19	.10
Never Worked	-0.20	.10
<i>Mothers Occupation:</i>		
Manager/Administrator	-	
Professional	0.26	.25
White Collar	0.15	.24
Blue Collar	0.15	.24
Never Worked	0.12	.24
Parents Ever Divorced (1=yes)	.22*	.10
Age at marriage	-0.04***	.01
Premarital childbirth	0.59***	.14
Early birth	0.54***	.11
<b>Social Barriers:</b>		
Child born in marriage <sup>tv</sup>	-0.91***	.12

---

<i>Highest Level of Education:</i>		
Bachelor Degree or Higher	-	
Diploma	0.48***	.13
Trade or Certificate	0.33**	.11
Year 12 or less	0.33**	.11
<b><u>Gender Interactions</u></b>		
<b>Normative and Cultural:</b>		
<i>Birth Cohort:</i>		
< 1925 x female	0.06	.30
1926 – 1930 x female	-0.07	.28
1931 – 1935 x female	-0.26	.24
1936 – 1940 x female	-0.20	.21
1941 – 1945 x female	-0.11	.18
1951 – 1955 x female	0.07	.17
1956 – 1960 x female	-0.10	.17
1961 – 1965 x female	-0.08	.18
1966 – 1970 x female	0.09	.21
> 1971	0.32	.32
<i>Ethnicity:</i>		
Overseas Born – English x female	0.41**	.14
Overseas Born – NESB x female	-0.15	.14
Religiosity x female	0.005	.01
Gender role x female	-0.003	.03
Cohabited prior to marriage x female	-0.05	.12
<b>Psychosocial Disruption:</b>		
<i>Fathers Occupation:</i>		
Professional x female	-0.22	.15
White Collar x female	-0.05	.19
Blue Collar x female	-0.11	.14
Never Worked x female	0.71	1.13
<i>Mothers Occupation:</i>		
Professional x female	0.17	.33
White Collar x female	0.25	.32
Blue Collar x female	0.11	.32
Never Worked x female	0.06	.31
Parents Ever Divorced x female	0.20	.12
Age at marriage x female	-0.03*	.01
Premarital childbirth x female	0.24	.18
Early birth x female	-0.29	.16
<b>Social Barriers:</b>		
Child born in marriage <sup>tv</sup> x female	-0.08	.16
<i>Highest Level of Education:</i>		
Diploma x female	-0.59**	.18
Trade or Certificate x female	-0.37*	.15

---

---

Year 12 or less x female	-0.56***	.15
Number of Respondents	8,883	
Marriage-Years	186313	
Number of Events	2047	

---

\* significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\* significant at  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* significant at  $p > .001$ .

Note: Analysis also includes polynomial for duration dependence and controls for missing values on some measures.

<sup>tv</sup> Indicates that measure is time varying

**Table A4.3: The predicted probability<sup>a</sup> of cohabiting with partner prior to marriage by birth cohort and sex**

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
<b>Birth Cohort:</b>		
<1930	0.01	0.02
1931 – 1940	0.02	0.04
1941 – 1950	0.07	0.12
1951 – 1955	0.21	0.24
1956 – 1965	0.37	0.43
1966>	0.51	0.53

a The predicted probabilities presented here were obtained from a logistic regression of cohabitation on birth cohort.

**Table A4.4: Results of discrete time model with an interaction between cohort and cohabitation predicting the risk of marriage breakdown, by sex**

	Women		Men	
	$\beta$	se	$\beta$	se
<b>Main Effects:</b>				
<i>Birth Cohort:</i>				
< 1930	-		-	
1931 – 1940	0.56**	.16	0.77***	.17
1941 – 1950	0.99***	.15	1.03***	.16
1951 – 1955	1.13***	.17	1.21***	.19
1956 – 1965	1.28***	.16	1.38***	.18
1966>	1.32***	.20	1.45***	.25
Cohabited prior to marriage	1.97***	.48	0.80	.17
<b>Interactions</b>				
1931 – 1940 x cohabit	-3.22**	1.11	-0.43	.82
1941 – 1950 x cohabit	-1.57**	.52	-0.24	.74
1951 – 1955 x cohabit	-1.70**	.51	-0.35	.75
1956 – 1965 x cohabit	-1.68**	.49	-0.52	.74
1966> x cohabit	-1.72**	.51	-0.69	.77
Number of Respondents	4883		4110	
Marriage-Years	101232		85081	
Number of Events	1,147		902	

\* significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\* significant at  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* significant at  $p > .001$ .

Note: Models also include controls for ethnicity, parent's occupation, parental divorce, children, age at marriage, attitudinal measures and education.

**Appendix 5: Published paper based on Chapter 7**

**Hewitt, B.**, Western, M. & Baxter, J. (2006) Who Decides? The Social Characteristics of Who Initiates Marital Separation. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 68: 1165 – 1177.

BELINDA HEWITT *The University of Queensland*

MARK WESTERN *The University of Queensland Social Research Centre\**

JANEEN BAXTER *The University of Queensland\*\**

---

## Who Decides? The Social Characteristics of Who Initiates Marital Separation

*This study investigates gender differences in the associations between social characteristics and men's and women's reports of which spouse initiated marital separation. Using retrospective data on 9,147 first marriages from the Household Income and Labor Dynamics in Australia survey (2001), we find that some social characteristics differentiated between separations initiated by wives compared to husbands, but few differences were statistically significant. The main gender difference is that wives are more inclined than husbands to initiate separation on the basis of their husbands' as well as their own social characteristics. Our findings indicate that taking account of which spouse initiates separation is important for improving our understanding of gender differences in the processes of marriage breakdown, but more research is required.*

One of the main influences of feminist perspectives on family research has been to highlight differences in men's and women's experiences of marriage and family life (Ferree, 1990;

Thompson & Walker, 1995). Researchers have found gender differences in the divisions of paid and unpaid labor and child care (Baxter, Hewitt, & Western, 2005; Bittman, England, Folbre, Sayer, & Matheson, 2003), in the importance of intimacy and emotional qualities of relationships (Steil, 1997), and in some aspects of the divorce process (Heaton & Blake, 1999). Many studies find that wives are more likely to end their marriage than husbands (Amato & Previti, 2003; Braver, Whitely, & Ng, 1993) and that men are more likely to indicate they "don't know" why their marriage ended (Amato & Previti, 2003). These gender differences in marriage dissolution further suggest that the processes associated with marital separations initiated by wives are different from those initiated by husbands, but little research has examined the factors that predict who initiates a separation (Rogers, 2004).

Most research on who initiates a marital breakup examines people's perceptions and attitudes toward their previous marital relationship after they have already separated or divorced (Black, Eastwood, Sprenkle, & Smith, 1991; Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995; Pettit & Bloom, 1984). From these retrospective reports, we know that compared to noninitiators, the spouse who initiated the breakup has more positive attitudes to divorce, perceives more alternatives to the marriage (Black et al., 1991), and gives more reasons for why their marriage ended (Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995). The only reported gender difference is that wives who initiate separation cite more reasons for their marriage breakdown than

---

School of Social Science, The University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Queensland 4072, Australia (b.hewitt@uq.edu.au).

\*The University of Queensland Social Research Centre and School of Social Science, Building GPN3, The University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Queensland 4072, Australia.

\*\*School of Social Science, The University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Queensland 4072, Australia.

*Key Words:* event history analysis, gender, marital separation.

do husbands who initiate separation (Pettit & Bloom, 1984). Yet husbands and wives also bring different resources to marriage and anticipate different financial and custodial experiences after divorce (Poortman & Seltzer, 2005). Consequently, men and women experience different constraints when leaving marital relationships, constraints shaped by their sociostructural characteristics (Breen & Cooke, 2005). In this article, we develop and test several hypotheses about the conditions whereby women's and men's sociostructural characteristics may be differentially associated with their reports of who initiated separation.

### BACKGROUND

Social characteristics associated with marriage breakdown include temporal influences, family background characteristics, relationship and fertility histories, socioeconomic characteristics, beliefs, and attitudes (Bumpass, Martin, & Sweet, 1991; Hewitt, Baxter, & Western, 2005). Overall, these factors can either increase or decrease the likelihood of marital disruption through normative and cultural mechanisms concerning the durability of marriage, psychosocial processes that facilitate or undermine the negotiation of relationships, and social and economic variables that represent barriers to terminating marriage. As these factors positively or negatively influence the perceived costs and benefits of the marriage versus divorce, they are likely to be associated with who initiates separation. Moreover, research has indicated that men and women have different experiences of marriage and family life, and therefore some of these divorce mechanisms may operate differently for wives and husbands, changing the likelihood of which partner initiates a separation.

#### *Normative and Cultural Mechanisms*

Social characteristics that influence marriage breakdown through normative and cultural beliefs include religiosity, cohabitation, birth cohort, and ethnic background. Men and women with higher levels of attachment to religion are less likely to divorce because they tend to have stronger commitment to, and more traditional views of, marriage (Call & Heaton, 1997). People who cohabit prior to marriage have an increased risk of marriage breakdown partly because they have lower levels of commitment to the institu-

tion of marriage than those who do not cohabit (Lillard, Brien, & Waite, 1995). Previous research shows that older and younger birth cohorts are less likely to divorce than those in middle cohorts (Bracher, Santow, Morgan, & Trussell, 1993). Among older cohorts, low rates of divorce reflect historically specific norms and values about the permanence of marriage, and for younger age cohorts, lower rates of divorce reflect shorter marriage durations and less time at risk of marital disruption. Ethnic background is also associated with marriage breakdown. Australian research has shown that compared to those born in Australia, immigrants from non-English-speaking countries are less likely to experience marriage breakdown, whereas immigrants from English-speaking countries are more likely to experience marriage breakdown (Bracher et al., 1993; Hewitt et al., 2005). In contrast, U.S. research finds racial differences in rates of marriage breakdown, where Blacks are more likely to divorce than Whites (Tzeng & Mare, 1995). All these normative and cultural influences change the likelihood of marital disruption, but there is little evidence to suggest they will differ for men and women and so are unlikely to change the likelihood of one partner initiating rather than the other.

Hypothesis 1: Social factors that operate through normative and cultural influences on marriage breakdown will not vary the likelihood of wife- or husband-initiated separation.

#### *Psychosocial Disruption*

Other social characteristics undermine the successful negotiation of relationships and thereby increase the risk of marriage breakdown. For example, compared to adult children of parents who remained married, adult children of divorced parents have an increased risk of marriage breakdown because they are more likely to exhibit interpersonal behaviors (such as jealousy, anger, poor communication) that interfere with the successful negotiation of relationships (Amato, 1996). In addition, those who marry at younger ages tend to have less maturity and life experience to negotiate a marital relationship, which increases the risk of marriage breakdown (Bumpass et al., 1991). And finally, premarital or unplanned pregnancies and births increase the risk of marriage breakdown because a couple may decide to marry when they otherwise would not or the

presence of a young child early in marriage may add stress and strains in the developmental stages of the relationship (Waite & Lillard, 1991). These characteristics that undermine the successful negotiation of marriage may increase the likelihood of a wife initiating separation because wives monitor their relationships more closely and their marital satisfaction depends more than their husbands on intimacy and emotional qualities of the marriage (Steil, 1997).

Hypothesis 2: Social factors that disrupt marriage through psychosocial processes will increase the likelihood of wives initiating separation compared to husbands.

### *Constraining Factors*

Social factors that represent barriers to ending a marriage include children born within marriage and access to economic resources. The decision to have children signals a commitment to the marriage and the relationship (England & Farkas, 1986), and most research finds that children born within marriage reduce the likelihood of separation and divorce (Heaton, 1990; Waite & Lillard, 1991). The number of children and the presence of young children, however, may influence wives and husbands differently in their decisions to remain married. For example, when preschool-aged children are present, wives may be less likely than husbands to initiate separation because women typically take on the role of primary carer for young children and have an increased dependence on husbands for financial security during this intensive childrearing phase (Heaton, 1990). Similarly, larger numbers of children would restrict women's ability to leave.

Hypothesis 3: The presence of younger children and a greater number of children will reduce the risk of separation initiated by wives compared to husbands.

One of the main explanations for the growth in marriage breakdown is the improvement of women's socioeconomic position relative to men's over the last century. A specialization and trading model promotes an idealized view of household production where the male head of household specializes in paid employment and the female head of household specializes in domestic labor (Oppenheimer, 1997). Any deviation from this household model, such as wom-

en's participation in the paid workforce, results in lower returns to marriage and therefore destabilizes the marriage. Hence, within this framework, a husband's lack of economic resources or a wife's access to economic resources is destabilizing (Oppenheimer, 1997). Studies consistently find that husbands of high socioeconomic status are less likely to experience marriage breakdown than husbands of low socioeconomic status (Ono, 1998; South, 2001). By extension, husbands of low socioeconomic position may be more likely to experience separations initiated by their wives because, for women, there are reduced benefits to staying married. Empirical evidence is less conclusive on whether wives' workforce participation and income increase the risk of marriage breakdown, some studies finding a positive association (South, 2001), some finding no association (Bracher et al., 1993), and others reporting a negative association (Ono, 1998). The association also varies depending on which indicator of socioeconomic position is used, for example, higher levels of education are consistently found to be negatively associated with marriage breakdown for both husbands and wives (Jalovaara, 2003; South, 2001). Despite the mixed evidence, if the specialization-trading model holds true, wives of stronger socioeconomic position may feel they would cope financially should their marriage end and therefore be more inclined to initiate separation. In addition, wives who have a stronger economic position are less likely to be satisfied with unequal divisions of household labor and power within marriage (Rogers, 2004). Even though it could also be argued that a wife's high socioeconomic position frees her husband to initiate separation if he thought his wife would be financially secure, the specialization-trading model views women as the major active agents; therefore, we argue it is wives who under these circumstances will be more likely than husbands to initiate separation (Rogers, 2004).

Hypothesis 4: Men's lower socioeconomic position and women's higher socioeconomic position will increase the likelihood of wife-initiated separation.

In this study, we use retrospective information on 9,147 first marriages from an Australian national household panel survey. Our outcome is a measure of women's and men's reports of who initiated separation in their first marriages; in the event of

marriage breakdown, we identify three possible “types” of separation: wife initiated, husband initiated, and jointly initiated. Some of the theoretical arguments imply an increase or decrease in the likelihood of one type of separation rather than remaining married, but other arguments imply an increase or decrease in the likelihood of one type of separation compared to another. We investigate both of these possibilities. First, we use competing risks event history modeling to investigate whether men’s and women’s social characteristics, including birth cohort, parental divorce, ethnic background, cohabitation, age at marriage, children, religiosity, and education, are associated with their reports of whether they stayed married or experienced a wife-, husband-, or jointly initiated separation from their first marriage. Second, we investigate whether social characteristics are differentially associated with separations initiated by wives compared to those initiated jointly or by husbands.

## METHOD

### *Data*

The data come from the first wave (2001) of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey, a panel survey comprising 7,692 households and 13,969 individuals. Households were selected using a multistage sampling approach, and a 66% response rate was achieved (Watson & Wooden, 2002). Within households, data were collected from each person aged over 15 years using face-to-face interviews and self-completed questionnaires, and a 92% response rate was achieved (Watson & Wooden, 2002). Overall, the sample is representative of Australian households, but women are overrepresented, and unmarried people and immigrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds are underrepresented. These discrepancies are not large and are unlikely to compromise the overall quality of the data.

### *Analytic Sample*

Our initial sample includes all respondents who report being married at some time prior to the survey ( $n = 9,632$ ). We also apply further restrictions to the sample. First, people whose marriages ended in separation less than 1 year prior to the survey are excluded ( $n = 97$ , 1%) because previous research indicates that most marriages that

reconcile tend to do so within the first 12 months of separation and we may overestimate marriage breakdown by including this group (Bumpass et al., 1991). Second, we exclude people who married in the year of the survey ( $n = 163$ , 1.6%) because the smallest time unit of marriage duration observed in this study is 1 year. Third, only first marriages are considered because the processes leading to separation in higher order marriages are different from those associated with first marriage breakdown (Booth & Edwards, 1992). Finally, respondents with missing data on their marital history or current marital status were dropped from the sample ( $n = 225$ , 2.3%). The analytic sample comprises 9,147 first marriages from 4,173 men and 4,974 women.

Our analytic sample is also limited because we do not have information on the respondent’s former spouse. Therefore, although the breakdown of a marriage inevitably involves two people and the characteristics of both may be relevant to the marriage dissolution, we are only able to include the respondent’s characteristics. Nevertheless, this limitation does not affect our ability to explore the association between social characteristics and men’s and women’s reports of who initiated separation.

### *Outcome Measure*

We use retrospective marriage histories to construct a measure of who initiated separation. In the event of separation, respondents were asked, “Whose decision was it to finally separate?” The response categories were mostly mine, mostly partner’s, and joint. We coded these responses into three types of separation. Men who answered mostly partner’s were coded 1 = *wife initiated*, and those who answered mostly mine were coded 2 = *husband initiated*. Women who responded mostly mine were coded 1 = *wife initiated*, and women who answered mostly partner’s were coded 2 = *husband initiated*. If either men or women answered joint, that response was coded 3 = *jointly initiated*. In this final category, both spouses were considered to play a major role in the final decision to separate from the marriage. People still in their first marriage were coded 0 = *still married*.

Two methodological issues relating to the measurement of initiator status have been identified in the literature. First, defining initiator status is difficult, and several aspects of the breakdown of a marriage can potentially be construed as

“initiation.” Prior studies use a variety of measures for initiator status, but a study by Braver et al. (1993), which examined three different measures of initiator status, found that they are not necessarily interchangeable. For example, the spouse who first suggested divorce is not necessarily the same spouse who filed the legal papers for divorce. Our measure indicates the partner who made the final decision to separate from the marriage, and this person is not always the same partner who filed for divorce, physically left the relationship, or first raised the issue of divorce.

A second methodological issue is the potential for systematic bias in the reporting of initiator status. Research finds an ego-enhancing bias in reports of who initiated separation, with respondents more likely to report they initiated the separation than their former spouses (Amato & Previti, 2003). Further, research investigating the level of consistency in the reporting of initiator status between former spouses shows that there is close, but not perfect, agreement between reports; Braver et al. (1993) found that 70% of former spouses agreed on who initiated the marriage breakdown, and Sweeney (2002) found agreement in 80% of cases.

Overall, 23% of men and 25% of women in our sample have separated or divorced from their first marriage. Of these, men report a wife-initiated separation in 35% of cases, a husband-initiated separation in 27%, and a jointly initiated separation in 38% of cases. Women report a wife-initiated separation in 58% of cases, a husband-initiated separation in 17% of cases, and a jointly initiated separation in 25% of cases. These reports suggest some bias, with each gender claiming they initiated separation more than the other gender claims and men reporting joint separation more frequently than women. Overall, however, both men’s and women’s reports suggest that more wives than husbands initiated separation.

These discrepancies support the possible existence of an ego-enhanced reporting bias. To the extent that this measurement error is random, it biases the associations between the covariates and initiator status toward 0, making it more difficult to find statistically significant associations. The bias thus works against rather than in favor of our expectations. Further analysis was undertaken to better understand the nature of the bias in our sample. On the basis of the assumption that recall bias would be greater for those who had been separated longer, we examined the effects

of time since separation on the differences between male and female responses to who initiated the separation. Our results showed no significant differences in the reporting of initiator status for men and women who had separated within 2 years prior to the survey, but there were significant differences between men and women separated longer than 2 years prior to survey. To adjust for this bias, we include a dummy control, coded 1 = *separated fewer than 2 years* and 0 = *not separated or separated 2 or more years*, in our analysis.

### Analyses

We estimate a discrete time event history model with competing risks; the competing risk is who initiated separation. To do this, we constructed a marriage year data set where each respondent contributes one person year to the data set for every year of marriage. The dependent variable is coded 0 in years that a respondent is married and coded 1 = *wife initiated*, 2 = *husband initiated*, or 3 = *jointly initiated* in the year they separate. The model is estimated using a multinomial logistic regression. For each dependent variable, the other types of initiator status are treated as a competing event (Box-Steffensmeier & Jones, 2004). Respondents who remain married until surveyed are coded 0 on the dependent variable and treated as censored. If a respondent’s marriage ended in an interval because of widowhood, the case was treated as censored. We also adjust standard errors for clusters associated with having repeated observations for each respondent.

### Explanatory Variables

Birth cohort is measured in 5-year cohorts, with the oldest cohort born before 1925 and the youngest born after 1971; the middle cohort (1946 – 1950) is the reference category. We include respondent’s ethnicity, coded 1 = *Australian born*, 2 = *overseas born—English-speaking country*, and 3 = *overseas born—non-English-speaking country*, with Australian born as the reference group. An indicator for whether a respondent’s parents had divorced, against a referent of parents who had not, was also included. The indicator for whether the respondent cohabited is coded 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*. Age at marriage is a continuous variable. We have several children measures. First, we indicate

whether the respondent had a premarital birth against a referent category of not having had a premarital birth; second, we have a similar indicator for an early birth (first child born the same year as marriage). We include three time-varying child measures. One indicates when the first child was born in the marriage, another indicates the number of children aged 5 years and under, and the third indicates the total number of children. Our final child measure is a control for respondents with missing values for children, coded 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*. To examine the importance of religion to the respondent, we include a scale ranging from 0 = *religion not important* to 10 = *religion very important*. Finally, we capture socioeconomic position with highest level of education attained, using four categories based on the Australian Standard Classification of Education (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001): 1 = *Year 12 or less* (high school diploma or less), 2 = *trade or certificate* (attained a trade qualification or certificate beyond high school), 3 = *undergraduate or associate diploma* (tertiary qualification beyond high school but not bachelor level), and 4 = *bachelor degree or higher*. Year 12 or less is the reference group, and a dummy for missing values is included.

Divorce is a time-dependent event. In our sample, the association between the probability of separation and marriage duration increases in the first 5 years of marriage and then declines at a decreasing rate (Hewitt et al., 2005). To control for this change in probability, we include a quadratic term in all models. Further, as indicated earlier, we include a control for time since separation. The descriptive statistics for all variables are presented in Table 1.

## RESULTS

The results presented in Table 2 show the associations between men's and women's social characteristics and their reports of who initiated separation relative to staying married. We present relative risk ratios, which have a similar interpretation to odds ratios. When the relative risk ratio is greater than 1, the risk of divorce is increasing as the covariate increases; conversely the risk of divorce is decreasing when the relative risk ratio is less than 1.

The first three columns of Table 2 present results relating to women's reports. Overall, the re-

sults indicate that few women's characteristics are associated with their reports of husbands initiating separation; only birth cohort and parental divorce are associated with women's reports of separations initiated by husbands. In contrast, all factors (except number of preschool children) are associated with women's reports of wife-initiated separation.

Of the social characteristics that operate through normative and cultural mechanisms, birth cohort, religiosity, and ethnic background are associated with women's reports of who initiated separation. Consistently, regardless of who initiated separation, women in older cohorts are less likely to experience marriage breakdown than those in younger cohorts. Cohabiting prior to marriage increases the risk of wife- and jointly initiated separation. Religiosity is significantly associated with separation initiated by wives and jointly. Relative to staying married, the odds of wife- and jointly initiated separation decline with women's increased religiosity. The results for ethnic background indicate that, compared to Australian-born women, immigrant women from English-speaking countries are at significantly greater risk of a wife- or jointly initiated separation, relative to staying married. Women's ethnicity is not significantly associated with husbands initiating separation.

Factors that operate through psychosocial processes are all associated with who initiates separation. Parental divorce and premarital and early births all increase the risk of separation. Women whose parents divorced have an increased risk of reporting all types of separation, and those who had a premarital birth or early birth have significantly increased odds of a wife- or jointly initiated separation relative to staying married. In contrast, older age at marriage significantly decreases a woman's reports of separation initiated by herself or jointly.

Having a first child born within marriage reduces the likelihood of women reporting separations initiated by wives. Similarly, the number of children born within marriage reduces the likelihood of separations initiated by wives or jointly. The number of preschool children is not associated with who initiates separation. In general, women with higher levels of education are more likely to experience marriage breakdown, but few of these associations are significant. Women's education is only significantly associated with wife- and jointly initiated separation, where women with tertiary qualifications (a bachelor's degree or diploma) are more likely to report

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Social Characteristics for Women and Men

	Women (n = 4,973)			Men (n = 4,173)		
	M	SD	Range	M	SD	Range
Normative and cultural						
Birth cohort						
<1925	0.07	0.25		0.06	0.23	
1926 – 1930	0.05	0.23		0.06	0.24	
1931 – 1935	0.06	0.23		0.06	0.24	
1936 – 1940	0.07	0.25		0.08	0.27	
1941 – 1945	0.08	0.28		0.09	0.30	
1946 – 1950	0.10	0.30		0.11	0.32	
1951 – 1955	0.11	0.32		0.12	0.32	
1956 – 1960	0.13	0.34		0.13	0.34	
1961 – 1965	0.13	0.34		0.13	0.33	
1966 – 1970	0.11	0.31		0.10	0.30	
>1971	0.09	0.28		0.06	0.23	
Cohabited prior to marriage <sup>a</sup>	0.28	0.45		0.30	0.46	
Religiosity <sup>b</sup>	5.52	3.55	1 – 10	4.49	3.58	1 – 10
Ethnicity						
Australian born	0.72	0.45		0.70	0.46	
Overseas born: English-speaking country	0.11	0.31		0.13	0.33	
Overseas born: non-English-speaking country	0.17	0.37		0.17	0.38	
Psychosocial disruption						
Parents ever divorced	0.16	0.37		0.14	0.34	
Age at marriage	22.81	4.57	16 – 53	25.42	4.96	16 – 62
Premarital birth	0.07	0.25		0.06	0.24	
Early birth	0.06	0.24		0.07	0.26	
Missing values for children	0.09	0.28		0.06	0.23	
Constraining factors						
First child born in marriage <sup>c</sup>	0.96	0.20		0.96	0.20	
Number of preschool children <sup>c</sup>	0.28	0.60	0 – 5	0.28	0.60	0 – 5
Number of children <sup>c</sup>	2.44	1.54	0 – 14	2.35	1.58	0 – 14
Highest level of education						
Year 12 or less	0.47	0.50		0.34	0.47	
Trade or certificate	0.22	0.41		0.35	0.48	
Undergraduate diploma	0.09	0.28		0.09	0.30	
Bachelor's degree or higher	0.19	0.40		0.20	0.40	
Missing	0.03	0.18		0.02	0.13	

<sup>a</sup>0 = no, 1 = yes. <sup>b</sup>Scale indicating the importance of religion, ranging from 0 = not important to 10 = very important.

<sup>c</sup>Measure is time varying, the mean and standard deviation are expressed as a proportion (or mean) over total marriage years.

a wife-initiated separation and women with trade or certificate qualifications or a bachelor's degree report a greater risk of jointly initiated separation than women with Year 12 or less education.

The results for men are presented in the last three columns of Table 2. In contrast to women's reports, men's social characteristics are more evenly associated with their reports of separations initiated by wives and husbands. Of the normative and cultural factors, birth cohort, reli-

giosity, and cohabitation are associated with who initiates separation reported by men. Ethnic background, however, is not. Men born in older cohorts have a lower risk of experiencing a marriage breakdown than those in younger cohorts, and this does not differ depending on who initiated separation. Men who cohabited before marriage are more likely to initiate separation than men who did not, but cohabitation is not related to reports of wife- or jointly initiated separations.

Table 2. The Association Between Social Characteristics and Men's and Women's Reports of Who Initiated Separation Relative to Still Married

	Women's Reports						Men's Reports					
	Wife Initiated		Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated		Wife Initiated		Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated	
	RRR	SE	RRR	SE	RRR	SE	RRR	SE	RRR	SE	RRR	SE
Normative and cultural												
Birth cohort												
<1925	0.36***	0.09	0.44*	0.18	0.16**	0.09	0.30**	0.11	0.41*	0.17	0.27***	0.10
1926 – 1930	0.35***	0.09	0.16**	0.09	0.65	0.20	0.39**	0.12	0.54	0.19	0.29***	0.10
1931 – 1935	0.54**	0.11	0.51	0.19	0.52*	0.17	0.82	0.22	0.83	0.24	0.40**	0.12
1936 – 1940	0.62*	0.11	0.90	0.27	0.67	0.19	0.70	0.17	0.77	0.22	0.83	0.18
1941 – 1945	0.86	0.13	1.07	0.30	0.47*	0.14	0.89	0.20	1.05	0.24	0.73	0.15
1946 – 1950	1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00	
1951 – 1955	0.82	0.12	1.27	0.32	1.27	0.27	1.28	0.20	1.05	0.24	1.00	0.19
1956 – 1960	1.06	0.15	1.42	0.37	1.02	0.22	1.11	0.23	0.93	0.22	1.06	0.21
1961 – 1965	1.20	0.18	1.04	0.32	1.04	0.26	1.51	0.32	0.99	0.25	1.28	0.26
1966 – 1970	1.09	0.19	0.95	0.36	1.62	0.41	1.28	0.33	0.88	0.27	1.12	0.30
>1971	1.61*	0.31	0.52	0.34	1.64	0.52	1.19	0.59	0.91	0.49	2.19*	0.81
Cohabit prior to marriage <sup>a</sup>	1.31**	0.13	1.33	0.27	1.40*	0.23	1.54**	0.23	1.65**	0.29	1.34	0.20
Religiosity <sup>b</sup>	0.95***	0.01	1.00	0.02	0.96*	0.02	0.99	0.02	0.93***	0.02	0.95**	0.02
Ethnicity												
Australian born	1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00	
Overseas born: English-speaking country	1.64***	0.17	1.26	0.26	1.54**	0.25	1.01	0.16	1.17	0.21	1.13	0.18
Overseas born: non-English-speaking country	0.97	0.11	0.78	0.16	1.11	0.19	0.98	0.16	1.20	0.22	1.10	0.17
Psychosocial disruption												
Parents ever divorced	1.71***	0.16	1.43*	0.26	1.49**	0.22	1.49**	0.21	1.20	0.21	1.37*	0.20
Age at marriage	0.91***	0.01	0.97	0.02	0.95**	0.02	0.98	0.02	0.95**	0.02	0.96*	0.01
Premarital birth	1.97***	0.32	1.53	0.52	2.14**	0.51	1.19	0.31	2.61***	0.67	0.87	0.23
Early birth	1.46**	0.20	0.81	0.24	1.74*	0.36	1.62**	0.30	1.57*	0.34	2.33***	0.41
Constraining factors												
First child born in marriage <sup>c</sup>	0.76*	0.09	1.01	0.25	0.88	0.18	0.67*	0.12	0.89	0.19	0.53***	0.09
Number of preschool children <sup>c</sup>	1.04	0.08	1.15	0.16	1.16	0.15	0.86	0.09	1.05	0.14	0.85	0.10
Number of children <sup>c</sup>	0.88*	0.05	0.84	0.08	0.80*	0.07	1.00	0.04	0.84*	0.07	0.93	0.05

Note: Table does not report dummies for missing values, the quadratic expression for marriage duration, or the control for reporting bias. RRR = relative risk ratio. LR = likelihood ratio.

<sup>a</sup>0 = no, 1 = yes. <sup>b</sup>Scale indicating the importance of religion, ranging from 0 = not important to 10 = very important. <sup>c</sup>Measure is time varying. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

Table 2. Continued

	Women's Reports				Men's Reports			
	Wife Initiated		Husband Initiated		Wife Initiated		Husband Initiated	
	RRR	SE	RRR	SE	RRR	SE	RRR	SE
Highest level of education:								
Year 12 or less	1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00	
Trade or certificate	1.15	0.11	1.31	0.31	1.17	0.15	0.82	0.13
Undergraduate/associate diploma	1.31*	0.18	1.27	0.23	1.06	0.21	1.39	0.16
Bachelor degree or higher	1.30*	0.14	1.28	0.27	0.73	0.13	0.78	0.16
<i>n</i>		4,974		4,174		4,174		4,174
Marriage years		101,891		85,534		258		360
Number of separations	706	211	299	334				
Goodness of fit LR $\chi^2$ ( <i>df</i> )		1,146.34 (96)		1,156.47 (96)				

Note: Table does not report dummies for missing values, the quadratic expression for marriage duration, or the control for reporting bias. RRR = relative risk ratio. LR = likelihood ratio. <sup>a</sup>0 = no, 1 = yes. <sup>b</sup>Scale indicating the importance of religion, ranging from 0 = not important to 10 = very important. Measure is time varying. \**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

Men's religiosity is significantly and negatively associated with husband- and jointly initiated separations, but not their reports of separations initiated by wives.

All the psychosocial disruptive factors are associated with who initiates separation for men. Men whose parents divorced report an increased risk of wife- and jointly initiated separations compared to men whose parents stayed married, but parental divorce is not linked to men's reports of husband-initiated separation. Older age at marriage significantly reduces the risk of husband- and jointly initiated separation for men. A premarital birth increases the risk of separation initiated by husbands, and early birth significantly increases the risk of all types of separation.

Of the barriers to ending marriage, having a first-born child in marriage, number of children, and education are significantly associated with men's reports of who initiates separation. Men whose first child is born within marriage have a significantly lower likelihood of reporting separations initiated by wives or jointly. Each additional child significantly reduces the risk of men reporting either a husband- or jointly initiated separation. Overall, men with bachelor's degrees or higher are less likely to experience marriage breakdown than those with Year 12 or less, but none of the associations are significant.

The results presented in Table 3 show the associations between men's and women's social characteristics and their reports of a husband- or jointly initiated separation relative to a wife-initiated separation. For brevity, we present only statistically significant results. The results for women's reports are presented in the first two columns; comparing husband- and wife-initiated separation, only religiosity and age at marriage are statistically different. Older age at marriage and greater religiosity for women increase the risk of a husband initiating separation. There are also significant differences by women's education levels. Compared to women with Year 12 or less education, women with bachelor's degrees have significantly greater odds of reporting jointly initiated separations; hence, more educated women are more likely to report jointly initiated separations. The results for men's reports are presented in the final two columns of Table 3. The only factors that significantly distinguish between wives or husbands initiating separation are religiosity and premarital birth; compared to reporting a wife-initiated separation, more religious men are less likely and men who had

Table 3. Social Characteristics Significantly Associated with Husband- or Jointly Initiated Separation Relative to Wife-Initiated Separation

	Women's Reports				Men's Reports			
	Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated		Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated	
	RRR	SE	RRR	SE	RRR	SE	RRR	SE
Normative and cultural								
Religiosity <sup>a</sup>	1.05*	0.02	1.02	0.02	0.93*	0.03	0.96	0.02
Psychosocial disruption								
Age at marriage	1.08**	0.03	1.04	0.02	—	—	—	—
Premarital birth	—	—	—	—	2.20*	0.79	0.74	0.27
Constraining factors								
Highest level of education								
Year 12 or less	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Trade or certificate	1.13	.23	1.29	.23	—	—	—	—
Undergraduate/associate diploma	0.97	0.28	0.68	0.20	—	—	—	—
Bachelor degree or higher	0.98	0.24	1.52*	0.31	—	—	—	—
<i>n</i>		4,974				4,174		
Marriage years		101,891				85,534		
Number of separations		211		299		258		360
Goodness of fit LR $\chi^2$ ( <i>df</i> )								
		1,146.34 (96)				1,156.47 (96)		

Note: Table only reports covariates that significantly differentiated between wife-initiated and either husband- or jointly initiated separation. Table does not report dummies for missing values, the quadratic expression for marriage duration, or the control for reporting bias. RRR = relative risk ratio. LR = likelihood ratio.

<sup>a</sup>Scale indicating the importance of religion, ranging from 0 = not important to 10 = very important.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

a premarital birth are more likely to report a husband-initiated separation.

## CONCLUSIONS

Prior research investigating gender differences within marriage and family life finds that men's and women's experiences vary across a range of social and marital factors, and so it is also likely that husbands and wives end their marriages under different circumstances. Using retrospective Australian data, we assess which sociostructural characteristics differentiate between separations initiated by wives as compared with husbands. Overall, we find little support for our hypotheses. Our findings indicate that even though most sociostructural characteristics are associated with who initiates separation, they do not consistently predict whether it is the husband or wife who initiates the breakup.

As expected, we find few gender differences in normative and cultural factors, although men's religiosity is associated with a reduced likelihood

of husband-initiated separation and women's religiosity is associated with a reduced likelihood of wife-initiated separation. These results imply that religious beliefs and practices shape an individual's but not their spouses' marriage decisions. Consequently, these are not gender differences per se.

Our expectation that the social factors that influence marriage breakdown through psychosocial disruption will increase the likelihood of separations initiated by wives rather than husbands was not supported. Even though women who marry at younger ages are significantly more likely to report a wife-initiated compared to a husband-initiated separation, the general trend is that older age at marriage reduces the risk of separation for both men and women. In contrast to our expectations, for men, a premarital birth increases the risk of reporting separation initiated by husbands compared to wives. This finding suggests a selection effect, where men who have a premarital birth also have certain traits that predispose them to initiate marital separation such as a lack of commitment to relationships (Bracher et al., 1993).

Our third hypothesis that more and younger children will reduce the likelihood of wives initiating separation compared to husbands is also not supported. Rather, we find that children are not associated with women's reports of separations initiated by husbands, but according to men's reports, premarital birth, early birth, and number of children are all associated with husband-initiated separation. This pattern of reporting is also repeated more broadly in our results. Women's characteristics are strongly associated with their reports of wife-initiated but not husband-initiated separations, but this trend is not mirrored in men's reports. Men's characteristics are relatively evenly associated with their reports of both husband- and wife-initiated separation. Hence, our results suggest that separations initiated by wives are associated with both men's and women's characteristics, but separations initiated by husbands are primarily associated with men's characteristics.

This result is consistent with findings from qualitative research that in some circumstances wives initiate separation because their husbands are unhappy or because they do not want their children to be exposed to a bad marriage, not because they themselves are necessarily unhappy with the marriage (Hackstaff, 1999; Walzer & Oles, 2003). Thus, it appears that wives' greater monitoring of and responsibility for the quality of relationships paradoxically extends to taking responsibility for ending the marriage in circumstances where they perceive that their husband or children are being adversely affected (Walzer & Oles, 2003). It is also worth noting that part of the failure to find significant predictors of wife- rather than husband-initiated separations for women may be because only a small number of separations initiated by husbands were reported by women in our sample.

Finally, using education as our indicator of socioeconomic position, we find little or no support for a specialization-trading argument. This finding should be viewed cautiously, however, as education may not be the best indicator of economic resources. Previous research indicates that education operates differently in predicting divorce than other indicators such as employment status, actual income, or partner's relative incomes (Jalovaara, 2003; South, 2001). Because employment status and income are more direct measures of economic resources, using these measures would provide a more robust test of the specialization-trading model.

There were some limitations to the current research. We used retrospective cross-sectional data for marriages that had ended prior to survey, and we had data only from one spouse. The use of longitudinal couple data would allow characteristics of both spouses to be taken into consideration when predicting which partner initiates the marital breakup. It would also enable a better understanding of, and allow us to better control for, the reporting bias evident in our dependent variable. Our study was also limited by the range of covariates included in the models, and our findings suggest two important directions for future research. First, a more direct investigation of the association between psychosocial aspects of marriage, such as relationship satisfaction and quality, and which partner ends the marriage would give further insight into whether wives are more likely to initiate separation when their husbands are unhappy. Second, examining the association between socioeconomic characteristics not included in this study, such as employment status and income, and who initiates marital separation will develop our knowledge of the circumstances whereby economic resources increase or decrease the likelihood of one partner initiating the breakup over the other.

As the nature of gender relations within marriages and families continues to change, it remains important for researchers, counselors, and policymakers to better understand gender differences in the correlates of marriage breakdown. Currently, very little is known about which partner initiates marital separation and under what circumstances, but understanding those processes is essential to developing our understanding of why marriages break down. The findings of this study suggest that socio-structural factors are important predictors of which partner initiates separation, but the main gender difference we find is that wives are more likely to initiate separation on the basis of their husbands' as well as their own social characteristics. Our findings only complete a small part of the puzzle. A great deal more research is needed to better understand why women, compared to men, are twice as likely to initiate marital separation.

#### NOTE

The data used for this research come from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey, which is funded by the Australian Commonwealth Department of

Family and Community Services (FaCS) and conducted by the Melbourne Institute for Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne, Australia. The research findings are the product of the researchers, and the views expressed should not be attributed to FaCS or the Melbourne Institute. This research was supported by funding from the Australian Research Council (ARC) Grant DP020830 and an ARC Linkage Grant LP0454966. We would also like to thank Lynn Prince Cooke, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier versions of the manuscript.

## REFERENCES

- Amato, P. R. (1996). Explaining the intergenerational transmission of divorce. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58, 628 – 640.
- Amato, P. R., & Previti, D. (2003). People's reasons for divorcing: Gender, social class, the life course, and adjustment. *Journal of Family Issues*, 24, 602 – 626.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2001). *Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED)* (Catalogue No. 1272.0). Canberra: Author.
- Baxter, J., Hewitt, B., & Western, M. (2005). Post-familial families and the domestic division of labour: A view from Australia. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 36, 583 – 600.
- Bittman, M., England, P., Folbre, N., Sayer, L. C., & Matheson, G. (2003). When does gender trump money? Bargaining and time in household work. *American Journal of Sociology*, 109, 186 – 214.
- Black, L. E., Eastwood, M. M., Sprenkle, D. H., & Smith, E. (1991). An exploratory analysis of the construct of leavers versus left as it relates to Levinger's social exchange theory of attractions, barriers, and alternative attractions. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 15, 127 – 139.
- Booth, A., & Edwards, J. N. (1992). Starting over: Why remarriages are more unstable. *Journal of Family Issues*, 13, 179 – 194.
- Box-Steffensmeir, J. M., & Jones, B. S. (2004). *Event history modelling: A guide for social scientists*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Bracher, M., Santow, G., Morgan, S. P., & Trussell, J. (1993). Marriage dissolution in Australia: Models and explanations. *Population Studies*, 47, 403 – 425.
- Braver, S. L., Whitely, M., & Ng, C. (1993). Who divorced whom? Methodological and theoretical issues. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 20, 1 – 19.
- Breen, R., & Cooke, L. P. (2005). The persistence of the gendered division of domestic labour. *European Sociological Review*, 21, 43 – 57.
- Bumpass, L. L., Martin, T. C., & Sweet, J. A. (1991). The impact of family background and early marital factors on marital disruption. *Journal of Family Issues*, 12, 22 – 42.
- Call, V. R. A., & Heaton, T. B. (1997). Religious influence on marital stability. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36, 382 – 392.
- England, P., & Farkas, G. (1986). *Households, employment, and gender*. New York: Aldine.
- Ferree, M. M. (1990). Beyond separate spheres: Feminism and family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 52, 866 – 884.
- Hackstaff, K. (1999). *Marriage in a culture of divorce*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Heaton, T. B. (1990). Marital stability throughout the child-rearing years. *Demography*, 27, 55 – 63.
- Heaton, T. B., & Blake, A. M. (1999). Gender differences in determinants of marital disruption. *Journal of Family Issues*, 20, 25 – 45.
- Hewitt, B., Baxter, J., & Western, M. (2005). Marriage breakdown in Australia: The social correlates of separation and divorce. *Journal of Sociology*, 41, 163 – 183.
- Jalovaara, M. (2003). The joint effects of marriage partners' socioeconomic positions on the risk of divorce. *Demography*, 40, 67 – 81.
- Kincaid, S. B., & Caldwell, R. A. (1995). Marital separation: Causes, coping, and consequences. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 22, 109 – 128.
- Lillard, L. A., Brien, M. J., & Waite, L. J. (1995). Premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital dissolution: A matter of self-selection? *Demography*, 32, 437 – 457.
- Ono, H. (1998). Husbands' and wives' resources and marital dissolution. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 674 – 689.
- Oppenheimer, V. K. (1997). Women's employment and the gain to marriage: The specialization and trading model. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23, 431 – 453.
- Pettit, E. J., & Bloom, B. L. (1984). Whose decision was it? The effects of initiator status on adjustment to marital disruption. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 46, 587 – 595.
- Poortman, A. R., & Seltzer, J. A. (2005). *Parent's expectations about child rearing after divorce: Does anticipating difficulty deter divorce?* (CCPR-03-05). Los Angeles: University of California, Center for population research.
- Rogers, S. J. (2004). Dollars, dependency and divorce: Four perspectives on the role of Wives' income. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 66, 59 – 74.
- South, S. J. (2001). Time-dependent effects of wives' employment on marital dissolution. *American Sociological Review*, 66, 226 – 245.

- Steil, J. M. I. (1997). *Marital equality: Its relationship to the well-being of husbands and wives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sweeney, M. M. (2002). Remarriage and the nature of divorce: Does it matter which spouse chose to leave? *Journal of Family Issues*, 23, 410 – 440.
- Thompson, L., & Walker, A. J. (1995). The place of feminism in family studies. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 847 – 865.
- Tzeng, J. M., & Mare, R. D. (1995). Labor market and socioeconomic effects on marital stability. *Social Science Research*, 24, 329 – 351.
- Waite, L. J., & Lillard, L. A. (1991). Children and marital disruption. *American Journal of Sociology*, 96, 930 – 953.
- Walzer, S., & Oles, T. P. (2003). Accounting for divorce: Gender and uncoupling narratives. *Qualitative Sociology*, 26, 331 – 349.
- Watson, N., & Wooden, M. (2002). *The Household, Income And Labor Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey: Wave 1 survey methodology* (HILDA Project Technical Paper Series, No. 1/02). Melbourne, Australia: University of Melbourne.

**Appendix 6: Supplementary analysis for Chapter 7**

**Table A6.1: Social characteristics interacted with gender by reports of who initiated separation (supplementing Tables 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3)**

	Baseline category equals still married						Baseline category equals wife initiated			
	Wife Initiated		Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated		Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated	
<b>Predictors</b>	$\beta$	se	$\beta$	se	$\beta$	se	$\beta$	se	$\beta$	se
Female		2.67	-1.68	1.06	-0.17	.84	-5.02	1.31	-3.52	1.13
Birth Cohort:										
< 1925	-1.28**	.39	-0.94*	.42	-1.37**	.39	0.35	.57	-0.08	.55
1925 - 1930	-1.09**	.33	-0.74*	.37	-1.37***	.36	0.36	.50	-0.28	.49
1931 - 1935	0.31	.27	-0.26	.31	-0.92**	.31	0.05	.41	-0.61	.41
1936 - 1940	-0.47	.26	-0.29	.29	-0.16	.23	0.19	.39	0.27	.34
1941 - 1945	-0.24	.22	-0.06	.25	-0.27	.21	0.18	.34	-0.03	.31
1946 - 1950 (ref)										
1951 - 1955	0.13	.20	0.10	.23	-0.05	.21	-0.03	.31	-0.19	.28
1956 - 1960	0.02	.21	0.06	.25	0.14	.21	0.04	.33	0.11	.30
1961 - 1965	0.32	.22	0.09	.26	0.32	.22	-0.23	.35	-0.005	.31
1966 - 1970	0.01	.28	-0.04	.32	0.10	.28	-0.05	.43	0.09	.40
> 1971	0.10	.50	-0.21	.56	0.16	.42	-0.31	.74	0.07	.65
Ethnicity:										
Australian										
Overseas Born - ESB	-0.22	.18	-0.11	.20	-0.22	.18	0.11	.27	0.001	.26
Overseas Born - NESB	-0.13	.17	0.03	.20	-0.10	.17	0.16	.26	0.03	.24
Parental Divorce <sup>a</sup>	0.34*	.15	0.09	.19	0.28	.15	-0.24	.24	-0.05	.21
Cohabit prior to marriage <sup>b</sup>	0.36*	.15	0.49**	.18	0.32*	.16	0.14	.23	-0.04	.22
Age at marriage	-0.02	.02	-0.05**	.02	-0.05**	.02	-0.03	.03	-0.03	.02
Pre-marital birth	0.43	.23	0.86***	.23	0.20	.26	0.43	.33	-0.23	.35
Early birth	0.43*	.19	0.23	.24	0.67***	.18	-0.20	.30	0.25	.26
First child born in marriage	-0.76*	.22	-0.69**	.26	-1.18***	.19	0.07	.33	-0.42	.28
Religiosity <sup>c</sup>	-0.02	.02	-0.08***	.02	-0.05**	.02	-0.06	.03	-0.04	.02
Highest Level of Education:										
Bachelor Degree or higher										

Diploma	0.47*	.24	0.66**	.24	0.32	.22	0.19	.34	-0.15	.32
Trade or Certificate	0.52**	.18	0.11	.21	0.20	.17	-0.41	.28	-0.32	.25
Yr 12 or less	0.36	.19	0.27	.21	0.24	.17	-0.09	.28	-0.12	.26
<b><u>Gender Interactions</u></b>										
<i>Birth Cohort:</i>										
< 1925 x female	0.21	.47	-0.13	.61	-0.45	.68	-0.34	.78	-0.65	.82
1926 – 1930 x female	0.06	.42	-1.12	.69	0.91	.49	-1.19	.81	0.85	.64
1931 – 1935 x female	-0.40	.35	-0.47	.49	0.15	.46	-0.08	.60	0.54	.58
1936 – 1940 x female	-0.18	.33	0.11	.42	-0.24	.37	0.28	.54	-0.07	.49
1941 – 1945 x female	0.11	.28	-0.002	.38	-0.61	.38	-0.12	.47	-0.72	.47
1951 – 1955 x female	-0.28	.25	0.11	.35	0.30	.30	0.39	.43	0.57	.39
1956 – 1960 x female	0.11	.26	0.30	.36	-0.07	.31	0.18	.45	-0.18	.41
1961 – 1965 x female	-0.07	.27	-0.05	.41	-0.32	.34	0.02	.49	-0.25	.44
1966 – 1970 x female	0.13	.33	-0.16	.51	0.27	.39	-0.29	.61	0.14	.51
> 1971 x female	0.15	.54	-0.90	.95	0.18	.54	-1.05	1.09	0.03	.76
<i>Ethnicity:</i>										
Imm-ESB x female	0.48*	.22	0.15	.30	0.39	.26	-0.33	.37	-0.09	.34
Imm – NESB x female	-0.16	.22	-0.50	.31	-0.03	.25	-0.34	.38	0.14	.34
Parental Divorce x female	0.16	.18	0.09	.19	0.11	.21	0.10	.32	-0.05	.28
Cohabit x female	-0.11	.19	0.49	.18	-0.004	.23	-0.14	.33	-0.11	.30
Age at marriage x female	-0.07	.02	-0.05	.02	-0.005	.02	0.10	.04	0.06	.03
<i>Children</i>										
Pre-marital birth x female	0.40	.28	-0.55	.40	0.72	.34	-0.95	.48	0.32	.44
Early birth x female	-0.18	.25	-0.29	.39	0.05	.27	-0.10	.46	0.24	.37
First child born in marriage x female	-0.23	.26	0.02	.39	0.08	.28	0.25	.45	0.31	.37
Religiosity x female	-0.03	.02	-0.08	.02	0.01	.03	0.09	.04	0.04	.03
<i>Highest Level of Education:</i>										
Diploma x female	-0.47	.29	-0.65	.24	-1.14	.35	-0.21	.47	-0.67	.45
Trade / Cert x female	-0.56*	.22	0.11	.21	-0.41	.24	0.42	.38	0.16	.33
< Year 12 x female	-0.54*	.22	0.27	.21	-0.92	.25	0.004	.38	-0.38	.34

**Table A6.2: Full results of models predicting the association between social characteristics and women’s and men’s reports of husband and jointly initiated separations compared to wife-initiated separations.**

Predictors	Women’s Reports				Men’s Reports			
	Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated		Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated	
	Odds	se	Odds	se	Odds	se	Odds	se
<u>Normative &amp; Cultural:</u>								
Birth Cohort:								
< 1925	1.00	.51	0.48	.29	1.41	.81	0.92	.51
1926 – 1930	0.44	.28	1.76	.74	1.43	.71	0.76	.37
1931 – 1935	0.98	.43	0.94	.38	1.05	.43	0.54	.22
1936 – 1940	1.60	.60	1.27	.46	1.20	.46	1.36	.46
1941 – 1945	1.07	.35	0.47	.17	1.20	.40	0.97	.30
1946 – 1950	1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00	
1951 – 1955	1.43	.43	1.47	.39	0.97	.30	0.83	.23
1956 – 1960	1.25	.38	0.94	.26	1.04	.34	1.12	.34
1961 – 1965	0.82	.29	0.78	.24	0.80	.28	1.00	.31
1966 – 1970	0.71	.31	1.26	.40	0.95	.41	1.09	.44
> 1971	0.26	.21	1.10	.44	0.74	.55	1.07	.70
Cohabit prior to marriage <sup>a</sup>	1.00	.23	1.07	.22	1.15	.27	0.96	.21
Religiosity <sup>b</sup>	1.03	.03	1.00	.02	0.93*	.03	0.96	.02
Ethnicity:								
Australian	1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00	
Overseas Born – English	0.80	.21	0.92	.20	1.11	.30	1.00	.26
Overseas Born – NESB	0.83	.23	1.19	.28	1.17	.31	1.03	.25
<u>Psycho-Social disruption:</u>								
Parents Ever Divorced <sup>c</sup>	0.86	.18	0.90	.16	0.78	.19	0.95	.20
Age at marriage	1.07**	.03	1.04	.03	0.97	.03	0.97	.02
Pre-marital birth	0.59	.21	1.09	.28	1.53	.51	0.79	.28
Early birth	0.74	.25	1.63	.42	0.82	.25	1.28	.33
<u>Social Barriers:</u>								
First child born in marriage	1.39	.44	0.90	.22	1.07	.36	0.65	.18
Highest Level of Education:								
Bachelor Degree or higher	1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00	
Diploma	0.99	.32	0.44**	.14	1.21	.41	0.86	.28
Trade or Certificate	1.01	.27	0.85	.18	.66	.18	0.72	.18
Yr 12 or less	0.92	.23	0.61*	.13	.91	.26	0.89	.23
Number of respondents								
Marriage-years	101232				85081			
Number of separations	200		279		244		334	
Goodness of fit LR Chi2 (df)								
	1112.97 (90)				1125.56 (90)			

**Appendix 7: Supplementary analysis for Chapter 8**

**Table A7.1: Wife-initiated separation as baseline for number of children for women (supplementing Table 8.3) and men (supplementing Table 8.4).**

	Women's Reports				Men's Reports			
	Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated		Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated	
	$\beta$	se	$\beta$	se	$\beta$	se	$\beta$	se
<i>Number of Children<sup>1</sup>:</i>								
Zero to One	0.30	.27	0.30	.23	0.39	.29	-0.32	.27
One to Two	-0.34	.26	0.51*	.23	-0.30	.28	0.06	.26
Two to Three	0.36	.24	0.13	.24	-0.53*	.27	-0.14	.24
Three to Four	-0.71	.42	0.02	.36	0.30	.37	-0.23	.35
Four to Five +	0.56	.65	0.22	.59	-0.14	.57	0.03	.54
<u>Controls</u>								
<i>Normative &amp; Cultural:</i>								
Birth Cohort:								
< 1925	-		-		-		-	
1926 – 1930	-0.82	.75	1.40	.66	0.06	.66	-0.19	.66
1931 – 1935	0.01	.56	0.77	.66	-0.26	.61	-0.53	.60
1936 – 1940	0.45	.52	1.04	.63	-0.12	.59	-0.38	.56
1941 – 1945	0.07	.50	0.10	.64	-0.10	.57	0.04	.55
1946 – 1950	0.01	.49	0.88	.60	-0.33	.57	0.04	.55
1951 – 1955	0.38	.49	1.22	.59	-0.33	.57	-0.10	.55
1956 – 1960	0.22	.49	0.76	.60	-0.32	.59	0.14	.56
1961 – 1965	-0.18	.52	0.59	.61	-0.53	.60	0.06	.58
1966 – 1970	-0.34	.58	1.07	.62	-0.44	.66	0.12	.63
> 1971	-1.44	.88	0.90	.67	-0.59	.89	0.49	.79
Cohabit prior to marriage <sup>a</sup>	-0.03	.22	0.09	.19	0.12	.22	-0.02	.20
Religiosity <sup>b</sup>	0.03	.02	0.01	.02	-0.06	.03	-0.03	.02
Ethnicity:								
Australian	-		-		-		-	
Overseas Born – English	-0.26	.25	-0.05	.21	0.15	.27	0.04	.25
Overseas Born – NESB	-0.23	.28	0.11	.23	0.14	.26	0.09	.24
<i>Psycho-Social disruption:</i>								
Parents Ever Divorced <sup>c</sup>	-0.14	.21	-0.12	.18	-0.27	.24	-0.35	.34
Age at marriage	0.06	.02	0.04	.02	-0.03	.02	-0.02	.02
Pre-marital birth	-0.41	.35	0.11	.26	0.51	.32	-0.35	.34
Early birth	-0.37	.35	0.40	.26	-0.24	.31	0.34	.26
<i>Social Barriers:</i>								
Highest Level of Education:								
Bachelor Degree or higher	-		-		-		-	
Diploma	-0.02	.32	-0.84	.32	0.21	.33	-0.13	.32
Trade or Certificate	0.02	.25	-0.18	.21	-0.40	.27	-0.27	.24
Yr 12 or less	-0.08	.23	-0.51	.20	-0.06	.28	-0.09	.25
Number of respondents	4883				4110			
Marriage-years	101232				85081			
Number of separations	201		281		245		337	
Goodness of fit LR Chi2 (df)	1156.20 (105)				737.16 (105)			

**Table A7.2: Age and number of children pooled gender interactions model (supplementing Tables 8.5 and 8.6).**

	Model 1				Model 2			
	Marriage Breakdown		Wife Initiated		Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated	
	$\beta$	se	$\beta$	Se	$\beta$	se	$\beta$	se
First Birth	-1.13***	.24	-1.18**	.42	-0.69	.40	-1.14	.42
Higher Order Birth	-0.36*	.16	-0.45	.27	-0.21	.27	-0.36	.26
Number of Preschool children	-0.21***	.05	-0.15	.08	-0.09	.10	-0.36***	.09
Number of children aged 6-12	-0.11*	.05	-0.06	.08	-0.24*	.10	-0.07	.08
Number of children aged 13-18	-0.01	.06	0.14	.09	-0.22	.13	-0.06	.10
Number of Adult children	<-0.001	.06	0.25**	.09	-0.24	.13	-0.20	.12
<b>Controls:</b>								
Female	1.22**	.47	3.03***	.71	-0.64	.96	-0.39	.92
Birth Cohort:								
< 1925	-		-		-		-	
1925 - 1930	0.14**	.27	0.17	.44	0.28	.49	0.008	.49
1931 – 1935	0.74***	.25	0.95*	.40	0.77	.46	0.44	.45
1936 – 1940	0.94***	.23	0.77	.39	0.78	.44	1.22**	.39
1941 – 1945	1.02***	.23	1.00**	.38	1.00*	.43	1.09**	.39
1946 – 1950	1.19***	.23	1.23**	.37	1.03*	.42	1.30**	.39
1951 – 1955	1.26***	.23	1.37***	.38	1.14**	.43	1.28**	.40
1956 – 1960	1.29***	.24	1.30**	.39	1.10*	.44	1.45***	.40
1961 – 1965	1.46***	.24	1.56***	.39	1.14*	.45	1.63***	.41
1966 – 1970	1.36***	.26	1.45**	.43	1.08*	.49	1.52**	.44
> 1971	1.59***	.33	1.43*	.59	1.15	.66	2.03***	.52
Ethnicity:								
Australian	-		-		-		-	
Overseas Born – ESB	-0.16	.11	-0.22	.18	-0.08	.20	-0.18	.18
Overseas Born – NESB	-0.09	.10	-0.17	.17	-0.003	.19	-0.08	.16

Parental Divorce <sup>a</sup>	0.26**	.09	0.36*	.15	0.09	.19	0.27	.15
Cohabit prior to marriage <sup>b</sup>	0.40***	.09	0.38*	.15	0.50**	.17	0.36	.14
Age at marriage	-0.03**	.009	-0.01	.01	-0.04	.02	-0.03	.02
Pre-marital birth	0.33*	.13	0.35	.22	0.73**	.22	-0.11	.26
Early birth	0.49***	.11	0.38*	.19	0.30	.24	0.72	.17
Religiosity <sup>c</sup>	-0.04***	.01	-0.02	.02	-0.08***	.02	0.05**	.02
Highest Level of Education:								
Bachelor Degree or higher	-		-		-		-	
Diploma	0.43**	.13	0.42	.23	0.64**	.24	0.30	.22
Trade or Certificate	0.30**	.11	0.50**	.18	0.11	.21	0.23	.17
Yr 12 or less	0.30**	.11	0.34	.19	0.32	.20	0.27	.17
<b><u>Gender Interactions</u></b>								
First Birth x female	0.28	.30	-0.10	.51	0.71	.52	0.72	.55
Higher Order Birth x female	-0.22	.21	-0.23	.33	0.21	.39	-0.49	.42
Number of Preschool children x female	0.08	.07	-0.15	.08	0.07	.13	0.25*	.12
Number of children aged 6-12 x female	-0.11	.04	-0.06	.08	0.09	.12	-0.07	.10
Number of children aged 13-18 x female	-0.01	.06	0.14	.09	0.07	.16	-0.07	.14
Number of Adult children x female	-0.15*	.08	0.25	.09	0.04	.14	-0.02	.13
<i>Birth Cohort:</i>								
1926 – 1930 x female	0.05	.37	-0.18	.54	-1.08	.84	1.34	.75
1931 – 1935 x female	-0.24	.34	-0.59	.49	-0.41	.66	0.68	.74
1936 – 1940 x female	-0.20	.32	-0.32	.48	0.08	.62	0.25	.68
1941 – 1945 x female	-0.08	.31	-0.07	.46	-0.07	.59	-0.09	.70
1946 – 1950 x female	-0.02	.30	-0.20	.45	-0.07	.59	0.58	.66
1951 – 1955 x female	-0.06	.30	-0.48	.45	0.05	.59	0.82	.66
1956 – 1960 x female	0.04	.31	-0.13	.46	0.20	.60	0.47	.67
1961 – 1965 x female	-0.13	.31	-0.30	.47	-0.13	.63	0.26	.68

1966 – 1970 x female	0.01	.34	-0.25	.51	-0.30	.69	0.78	.70
> 1971 x female	<-0.001	.41	0.11	.66	-1.22	1.05	0.44	.78
<i>Ethnicity:</i>								
Imm-ESB x female	0.37**	.14	0.49	.22	0.09	.30	0.39	.25
Imm – NESB x female	-0.21	.14	-0.13	.21	-0.50	.31	-0.09	.25
Parental Divorce x female	0.26**	.09	0.15	.18	0.28	.26	0.14	.21
Cohabit x female	-0.09	.12	-0.09	.18	-0.23	.26	0.03	.21
Age at marriage x female	-0.03**	.009	-0.07	.02	0.02	.03	-0.008	.02
<i>Children</i>								
Pre-marital birth x female	0.24	.18	0.26	.26	-0.51	.39	0.78*	.33
Early birth x female	-0.13	.16	-0.07	.25	-0.36	.40	-0.004	.27
Religiosity x female	0.005	.01	-0.02	.02	0.06*	.03	0.01	.02
<i>Highest Level of Education:</i>								
Diploma x female	-0.66***	.18	-0.46	.28	-0.66	.37	-1.14	.35
Trade / Cert x female	-0.41**	.14	-0.56	.22	-0.16	.30	-0.49*	.24
< Year 12 x female	-0.63***	.29	-0.53	.22	-0.57*	.29	-0.96***	.24

---

**Table A7.3: Age and number of children with wife-initiated separation as the contrast category (supplementing Tables 8.5 and 8.6).**

	Women's Reports				Men's Reports			
	Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated		Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated	
	$\beta$	se	$\beta$	se	$\beta$	se	$\beta$	se
<i>Ages and number of children</i>								
First Birth	1.34**	.45	0.06	.26	0.47	.59	-0.23	.59
Higher Order Birth	0.66	.35	0.41	.26	0.28	.38	0.13	.38
Number of Preschool children	0.09	.13	0.02	.11	0.15	.14	-0.14	.13
Number of children aged 6-12	-0.03	.13	-0.03	.12	-0.18	.14	-0.002	.12
Number of children aged 13-18	0.04	.17	0.08	.17	-0.38*	.17	-0.25	.15
Number of Adult children	-0.59**	.20	-0.24	.20	-0.12	.20	-0.40*	.18
<b>Controls</b>								
<i>Normative &amp; Cultural:</i>								
Birth Cohort:								
< 1925	-		-		-		-	
1926 – 1930	-0.76	.75	1.36*	.66	0.05	.66	-0.16	.66
1931 – 1935	0.09	.56	0.75	.66	-0.26	.61	-0.51	.60
1936 – 1940	0.53	.52	1.02	.63	-0.14	.59	0.41	.56
1941 – 1945	0.15	.50	0.07	.63	-0.13	.57	0.07	.55
1946 – 1950	0.08	.50	0.84	.59	-0.34	.57	0.06	.54
1951 – 1955	0.45	.49	1.18*	.59	-0.36	.58	-0.08	.55
1956 – 1960	0.28	.50	0.72	.60	-0.34	.59	0.16	.56
1961 – 1965	-0.12	.52	0.56	.61	-0.55	.60	0.09	.58
1966 – 1970	-0.27	.58	1.04	.62	-0.46	.66	0.15	.63
> 1971	-1.40	.88	0.88	.67	-0.62	.89	0.49	.79
Cohabit prior to marriage <sup>a</sup>	-0.02	.22	0.10	.19	0.13	.22	-0.02	.20
Religiosity <sup>b</sup>	0.04	.02	0.01	.02	-0.06*	.03	-0.03	.02
Ethnicity:								
Australian								
Overseas Born – English	-0.27	.25	-0.04	.21	0.14	.27	0.04	.26
Overseas Born – NESB	-0.23	.27	0.13	.23	0.16	.26	0.08	.24
<i>Quality of Match:</i>								
Parents Ever Divorced <sup>c</sup>	-0.15	.21	-0.12	.18	-0.27	.24	-0.08	.21
Age at marriage	0.06*	.02	0.04	.02	-0.03	.02	-0.02	.02
Pre-marital birth	-0.40	.35	0.06	.26	0.42	.31	-0.42	.34
Early birth	-0.31	.35	0.41	.26	-0.12	.31	0.34	.26
<i>Social Barriers:</i>								
Highest Level of Education:								
Bachelor Degree or higher	-		-		-		-	
Diploma	<0.001	.32	-0.84**	.32	0.22	.33	-0.13	.32
Trade or Certificate	0.01	.25	-0.20	.21	-0.38	.27	-0.27	.24
Yr 12 or less	-0.07	.23	-0.51*	.20	-0.05	.28	-0.09	.25
Number of respondents		4883				4110		
Marriage-years		101232				85081		
Number of separations	201		281		245		337	
Goodness of fit LR Chi2 (df)		1194.57 (108)				737.16 (105)		

**Table A7.4: Women, number of children (with a referent of zero children), risk of marriage breakdown and reports of who initiated separation (based on Table 8.3)**

	Model A			Model B <sup>b</sup>								
	Marriage Breakdown			Wife Initiated			Husband Initiated			Jointly Initiated		
	Odds	β	se	Odds	B	se	Odds	β	se	Odds	β	se
<i>Number of Children</i> <sup>t</sup>												
Zero children	-			-			-			-		
One child	0.75**	-0.29	.10	0.65**	-0.43	.13	0.89	-0.12	.24	0.88	-0.12	.19
Two children	0.64***	-0.45	.10	0.67**	-0.40	.13	0.65	-0.43	.24	0.54**	-0.48	.19
Three children	0.61***	-0.49	.12	0.58**	-0.54	.16	0.81	-0.21	.27	0.54**	-0.49	.22
Four children	0.49***	-0.71	.16	0.53**	-0.63	.21	0.36*	-1.01	.41	0.50*	-0.57	.31
Five + Children	0.43***	-0.85	.23	0.40**	-0.93	.32	0.47	-0.75	.51	0.46	-0.64	.45
Number of Respondents		4883						4883				
Marriage-years		101232						101232				
Number of separations		1068			619			186			263	
Goodness of fit LR Chi2 (df)		941.56 (30)						1042.54 (90)				

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Note Respondents with children who have died had their data excluded from the time varying variables due to lack of detailed information (such as the order of birth) about the child who died, and premarital births are not included in the time varying variables.

t Indicates that measure is time varying

a All models include controls for having a premarital birth, early birth, a child who has died, missing data on children, birth cohort, ethnic background, parental divorce, cohabitation, age at marriage, religiosity, education, duration dependence (5<sup>th</sup> order polynomial) and time since separation.

b The Model presents the relative risk ratios for type of separation by initiator-status versus remaining married. For each specific type of initiator status the other types represent competing risks.

**Table A7.5: Men, Number of children (with a referent of zero children), risk of marriage breakdown and reports of who initiated separation (based on Table 8.4)**

	Model A			Model B <sup>b</sup>							
	Marriage Breakdown			Wife Initiated			Husband Initiated		Jointly Initiated		
	Odds	β		Odds	β		Odds	β	Odds	β	
<i>Number of Children<sup>t</sup>:</i>											
Zero children	-			-			-		-		
One child	0.69**	-0.36	.11	0.70	-0.35	.19	1.04	-0.03	.21	0.51***	-0.67 .19
Two children	0.56***	-0.58	.12	0.56**	-0.58	.20	0.79	-0.22	.22	0.43***	-0.83 .19
Three children	0.58***	-0.54	.13	0.70	-0.36	.21	0.59*	-0.53	.26	0.47***	-0.75 .21
Four children	0.57**	-0.56	.17	0.69	-0.37	.27	0.78	-0.25	.31	0.37***	-1.00 .28
Five + children	0.55**	-0.60	.22	0.68	-0.38	.35	0.67	-0.40	.44	0.37*	-0.98 .38
Number of Respondents		4110						4110			
Marriage-years		85081						85081			
Number of separations		894			316			244			334
Goodness of fit LR Chi2 (df)		621.78 (30)						680.74 (90)			

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Note Respondents with children who have died had their data excluded from the time varying variables due to lack of detailed information (such as the order of birth) about the child who died, and premarital births are not included in the time varying variables.

t Indicates that measure is time varying

a All models include controls for having a premarital birth, early birth, a child who has died, missing data on children, birth cohort, ethnic background, parental divorce, cohabitation, age at marriage, religiosity, education, duration dependence (5<sup>th</sup> order polynomial) and time since separation.

b The Model presents the relative risk ratios for type of separation by initiator-status versus remaining married. For each specific type of initiator status the other types represent competing risks.