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**Divorce Motives in an Period of Rising Divorce:
Evidence From a Dutch Life-history Survey**

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Divorce Motives in an Period of Rising Divorce: Evidence From a Dutch Life-history Survey

Abstract

Using survey data on 1718 ever-divorced men and women in The Netherlands, we describe the motives people give for their divorce. We distinguish motives regarding four types of issues: (a) relational issues, (b) behavioral problems (e.g., substance abuse, violence), (c) problems about work and the division of labor, and (d) problems with friends or relatives. Our findings illustrate three important trends: the normalization of divorce, the psychologization of relationships, and the emancipation of women. Severe divorce motives (such as violence and infidelity) have become less important across divorce cohorts. Our interpretation of this finding is in terms of a threshold-hypothesis: when the threshold for divorce is higher, marriages that end in divorce will be more problematic. Further, we find that there has been a trend in the direction of more relational motives, particularly among women. We interpret this trend in terms of more general cultural trends in society such as a more individualistic and psychological approach to relationships. Another interesting finding is that problems in the realm of work and household labor have become more important motives for a divorce, particularly among women. This is consistent with the dramatic increase of emancipatory attitudes in the last decades, combined with a much slower change in the actual behavior of married couples.

Divorce Motives in an Period of Rising Divorce: Evidence From a Dutch Life-history Survey

Using data from a national survey among ever-divorced persons in the Netherlands, we examine what motivated people to end their marriage. What do ex-spouses themselves see as the reasons for their divorce, how have these reasons changed across divorce cohorts, and are there differences between men and women and between social and demographic categories? In answering these questions, we present a representative picture of the motives men and women in the recent and less recent past had to get divorced.

Motives to divorce should not be equated to the causes of divorce (Kitson, 1992). Causes of divorce are factors that increase the likelihood of divorce. We only speak of a cause of divorce if certain features or variables are present among divorced couples and not present, or to a lesser extent among married couples. The study of causes is always comparative and objective. Motives, in contrast, are reasons why former spouses themselves say they got divorced. There is no comparison with married couples and by definition, the information is subjective. Not every motive is a cause and not every cause is a motive. If divorcees refer to alcohol abuse in the marriage as a motive, it is not necessarily a cause, since there can also be alcohol abuse among intact couples. Similarly, many factors affecting the risk of divorce—many causes—are socio-structural in nature and people generally do not think of their personal lives in these terms. If socio-structural variables lead to divorce they do so indirectly and people are more likely to mention the direct reason than the underlying cause. In this connection, there is also a tendency not to regard restrictions as motives. Financial dependence on the husband might be viewed as a reason to stay together, but it is unlikely that financial independence will be cited as a reason for separating. Women's labor force participation can therefore be a cause of divorce without being reported as a motive.

Motives should also be distinguished from the legal grounds to divorce. Legal grounds to divorce are the motives that people report in court and that are accepted by the judge as legitimate. Many motives do not constitute legal grounds because judges are apt to view them as having no legal validity or as being irrelevant. In addition, there are legal grounds that are not motives simply because people do not tell the truth in court. Kitson (1992) reported that the reasons people give for their divorces do not resemble the formal legal grounds in the United States. Divorce legislation plays an important role in this respect. In The Netherlands before 1971, only a few reasons were accepted in court as a legal basis for divorce. The main one was adultery. Other valid reasons included desertion, a criminal offence, or severe physical violence. This law was liberalized in 1971 and irreconcilable differences (with no clear definition) were now sufficient for the court. Due to the rigid legislation in the pre-1971 period, widespread use was made of fictitious testimonies of adultery. In the Netherlands, this phenomenon was known as the "big lie" (Van Poppel & De Beer, 1993). The "big lie" illustrates that not all legal grounds for divorce are necessarily motives.

Another important distinction is that between the common-sense meaning of motives and motives in an ethnomethodological sense. Ethnomethodologists argue that motives are not simply personal assessments of the causes of an act. Rather, motives are elements of the stories that people tell about their lives. These stories are not necessarily fictitious, but they are constructed in a such a way that they help to make a person's life path seem logical to both the person telling the story and the audience that is listening to the story. This perspective has been applied to divorce and has shown that there can be a sharp contrast between the uncertainty that people feel toward the option of divorce before the divorce, and the decisiveness they feel about initiating the divorce after the divorce (Hopper, 1993). In addition, the costs and benefits of divorce can be viewed quite differently after the divorce is certain, with much more emphasis on the advantages of divorce and with a reframing of the advantages in terms of a relief of personal costs. In short, divorce motives can in part be seen as the personal explanations of divorce that people construct when they are asked about their divorce. It is not only that people want to understand their own behavior, it is also that they want to tell others that they did something for good reasons.

In this article, we focus on motives and not on causes or legal grounds for divorce. We asked respondents who were divorced at least once what motivated them to do so. We do not draw a comparison with married couples, nor do we ask what they said to the judge. Although motives are not necessarily related to the underlying causes of divorce, it is still relevant to assess how people themselves talk and feel about their divorce. Many good statistical studies have been done on the social and cultural determinants of divorce in Western societies (Berrington and Diamond, 1999; Diekmann and Klein, 1991; Manting, 1994; De Rose, 1992; Poortman & Kalmijn, 2002; South and Spitze, 1986; Waite and Lillard 1991), but little is known in these studies about people's own experiences. On the other hand, there is much interesting research on how people feel and experience life after divorce, but this is qualitative research and usually based on small and selective (*e.g.*, clinical) samples (*e.g.*, Weeda, 1991 for The Netherlands, and Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990 for the United States). Quantitative and large-scale statistical analyses of people's experiences have rarely been done.

We believe that this type of analysis may provide important additional clues into the nature of divorce. In addition to simply describing the motives, we also formulate and test a number of hypotheses on how couples differ in their divorce motives. We particularly focus on differences between divorce cohorts, between men and women, and between various social and demographic categories. In comparison to earlier quantitative studies of divorce motives we present a number of new elements. First, we look at divorce motives for another country, the Netherlands. The extended social security system of the Dutch welfare state might make that economic motives for divorce are less pronounced than in the United States. Second, we can investigate changes in divorce motives over a relatively long time interval of fifty years (divorces between 1949 and 1998). Third, we add to the theoretical understanding on differentiation in divorce motives by integrating old and new hypotheses.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Theoretically, we distinguish three types of motives respondents give for their divorce:

1. Motives related to the personal relationship between the spouses, e.g., they have grown apart, don't give each other enough attention, or can't talk to each other (relational motives).
2. Motives related to individual (behavioral) problems, e.g., alcohol or drug abuse, violence, leisure activities, spending pattern, and infidelity (behavioral motives).
3. Motives related to how the household is organized, e.g., the division of domestic labor, and the work the spouses do (division of labor motives).

In our analysis we will first give a description of the relative importance of these three types of motives. In our data we have a list of twenty divorce motives, and we will assess to what extent these divorce motives are covered by the three types of motives. We will relate the divorce motives to the following characteristics: the respondent's sex, the period when the divorce occurred, the couple's stage in the life course, educational level, religiosity, and urban versus rural residence. What these factors have in common is that they are known in the international literature on divorce as prominent determinants of divorce. Older divorce cohorts, couples with young children living at home, couples with a lower educational level, religious couples and couples in rural regions are less apt to get divorced (Berrington and Diamond, 1999; Diekmann and Klein, 1991; Manting, 1994; De Rose, 1992; Poortman & Kalmijn, 2002; South and Spitze, 1986; Waite and Lillard, 1991).

We have three hypotheses about how aspects social change has affected divorce motives: the threshold hypothesis, the psychologization hypothesis, and the emancipation hypothesis. These hypotheses do not only tell us how divorce motives have changed over time, but also how divorce motives are related to the set of prominent determinants of divorce.

First, divorce itself has become more normal. The divorce rate in The Netherlands has increased from 2 per 1000 married women in 1965 to 10 in 1985 and has since then fluctuated without revealing a trend. Life table estimates show that in the 1990s, one in four marriages would end in divorce, which although quite high is comparable to other Western European countries (Statistics Netherlands, 1999). There has also been a sharp rise in the public acceptance of divorce. In 1965 only 12 percent of the Dutch population felt that if a married couple with children cannot get along, it is better to get a divorce, a view held by 45 percent in 1995 (Social Cultural Planning Bureau, 1996). Trends in and levels of divorce in The Netherlands are similar to those in other Western European countries (Goode, 1993).

If divorce becomes more normal, we expect that its causes and effects will become less dramatic. In the 1950s and 1960s, the divorce threshold was higher and more serious motives were required before people took the step to end their marriage. Since then, the divorce threshold has declined and this implies that marriages with less serious motives can also divorce. This we call the threshold hypothesis. The notion of a divorce threshold can also be applied to the other characteristics

we examine in this article. Divorce is less common among couples with children living at home, among women with a low educational level, and among religious couples and couples in rural regions. We therefore expect the divorce motives to be more serious in these categories.

A second social change is what we call the psychologization of society (Bellah et al., 1985; Giddens, 1992; Brinkgreve and De Regt, 1999). Economic ties in primary relationships are believed to have become less important over time while emotional ties have become more important. The term psychologization not only pertains to ties between parents and children, it also applies to marriage. Increasing prosperity and the welfare state have given virtually everyone a certain extent of security and this has created room for the more emotional side of human relations. As a result, people find their internal well-being increasingly important and are more conscious of their psychological functioning. Accompanying these changes, people make higher demands of the quality of their conjugal relation and the psychosocial functioning of their spouse. Marriage should provide more than just material security. More and more importance is attached to matters such as understanding and communicating with each other and being sensitive to each other's needs and feelings in a relationship.

Based on these ideas, the hypothesis can be formulated that divorces are now expected to be more psychologically based than in the past. In other words, there will be growing emphasis on psychological or relational problems and less and less emphasis on practical or other external problems. We call this the psychologization hypothesis. Similar differences might be expected if we examine such factors as education, religion and urbanization. People with a higher level of education, people who live in urban regions and people who are not religious are probably more open to the psychologization of society and can be expected to more frequently cite relational divorce motives.

Women's liberation is the third social change that will play a role in divorce motives. Recent decades have witnessed a sharp decline in the inequality between men and women, both within and outside the family. Women's attitudes and ideas on gender roles became more egalitarian in the course of time, suggesting that women have also become more sensitive toward the way household labor is divided in marriage (Thornton & DeMarco, 2001). In addition, changes in the actual practice of marriage have been less marked than changes in attitudes, particularly when focusing on how much men contribute to domestic chores and child-rearing (Van der Lippe & Niphuis-Nell, 1994). This discrepancy may lead, together with growing sensitivity towards gender issues, to growing discontent about the division of labor in the home.

Our hypothesis is that motives related to how the household is organized have become increasingly important over time, especially for women. This can be expected to lead to growing dissatisfaction with the role of men in child-rearing and domestic chores and increasing dissatisfaction with men who spend too much time at work. This is the emancipation hypothesis. Given that there are also differences within periods of time in the acceptance of egalitarian ideas, we also expect motives related to the division of labor in the home to be more frequently cited by higher educated, urbanized, and non-religious women.

RESEARCH DESIGN

DATA

We analyze the survey *Divorce in the Netherlands*, a survey that was conducted in 1998 (Kalmijn and De Graaf, 1998) The survey is based on a stratified sample of married, divorced and remarried respondents between the ages of 30 and 75 from 19 municipalities in the Netherlands. The total number of respondents is 1,718 and these were divorce in the period 1949-1996. The overall percentages we present are weighted to make the sample comparable to the population of divorced persons with respect to age, sex, region, urbanization and marital status (remarried or not remarried).

MEASUREMENT

The respondents were interviewed at home using structured questionnaires and several open questions. To evaluate the motives, during the interview the respondents were given a list of possible motives and were asked: *Can you say whether the following issues played a role in your decision to get divorced?* For each motive separately, the respondent was asked to indicate whether that issue (a) *did not play a role*, (b) *played a role*, or (c) *played an important role*. On the average, the respondents cite 3.7 motives that played an important role and another 3.4 motives that played a role.

The socio-demographic characteristics are measured as follows (see Table 1 for frequencies):

- a. the period when the divorce occurred: 1949-1972, 1973-1984, 1985-1996
- b. the couple's life course stage at the time of the divorce: no children yet, youngest child younger than 18 (children living at home), youngest child older than 18 (empty nest stage)
- c. education: the educational level of the woman (college or university educated versus not college or university educated)
- d. religion: whether the respondent was a church member at the beginning of the marriage
- e. urbanization: based on the place where the respondent lived five years after the beginning of the marriage (or before that if the respondent was divorced early), broken down into non-urban and the rest (the emphasis is on the contrast between small rural communities and the rest).

(Table 1 about here)

METHOD

For each motive, we estimated a multivariate logistic regression model that simultaneously includes all the independent variables. Based on the estimated regression models, we calculated predicted percentages for each motive and for the various social and demographic groups. The percentages are calculated under the assumption that the respondents have average scores on the other independent variables. For example, we calculate how often violence is mentioned by lower and higher educated

women given that these women have average scores on religiosity, period, life course stage, and urbanization. As a result, the predicted differences in one respect, *e.g.*, between the various periods, are not attributable to differences in other respects, *e.g.*, period-differences in educational level, religiosity, and so forth. The differences between categories have been statistically tested for significance using the parameters from the logistic regression models (the Wald statistic). Differences between men and women have not been controlled for the effects of other variables since it is more interesting here to see the bivariate differences. In all the other models, sex is included as a control variable so that predicted percentages are basically the average for men and women.

POSSIBLE BIASES

The questions about motives are retrospective and the divorces occurred over quite a lengthy period, from 1949 to 1998. Hence, the divorce was long ago for some respondents and more recent for others. Our aim is to get a realistic picture of the divorce motives, but this picture can be biased in several directions. Recent divorces can present a problem. It is quite possible that recently divorced respondents might have a conception of their divorce that is more emotional than the motives they will have later on. Since we feel that this biases the picture of the motives, we have excluded the 1997 and 1998 divorces from our analysis.

The longer ago a divorce occurred, the more motives people are apt to forget. So many things will have happened in the lives of some of the respondents that their picture of the divorce is no longer vivid enough. If there is this kind of bias, declines in the relevance of a motive will be understated and increases in the relevance of a motive will be overstated. There is also another way trends can be weakened. After all, the same social processes that changed the motives themselves may influence the way people look back at the past.

FINDINGS

In Table 2 we present a factor analysis in which divorce 17 divorce motives are classified into clusters of motives. In this factor analysis we did not include the two motives that have to do with children since they are less (or not) relevant for couples without children. We assume that divorce motives that have to do with children represent a separate cluster. Further, we averaged reports of infidelity of respondent and infidelity of spouse as divorce motives. The factor analysis shows that the 17 divorce motives can be classified in five clusters of motives. Three of these clusters of motives correspond very well with the theoretical types we distinguish: relational motives (cluster I), behavioral motives (cluster II) and division of labor motives (cluster IV). Cluster III has only one important motive, *i.e.* infidelity of respondent or spouse. Cluster V has to do with similarity in tastes and preferences; religious dissimilarities, and problems with friend and relatives are important indicators of this cluster.

(Table 2 about here)

In Table 3, we present frequency distributions of the divorce motives the respondents mentioned. The figures make clear that relational motives are indicated most frequently. About 75 percent of the respondents say that 'growing apart', 'having not enough attention for each other' en 'not being able to talk to each other' has been a divorce motive. Directly related to this is the finding that about 40 percent of the respondents say that sexual problems have been a divorce motive. Almost half of the respondents indicate that personal problems of the former spouse played a role for the decision to divorce, and about one third of the respondents indicate that differences in taste and preferences have been a divorce motive.

(Table 2 about here)

The second group of motives includes relatively serious motives such as alcohol abuse, physical violence and infidelity. We view them as examples of behavioral problems during marriage. We did not ask questions about the problematic behavior of the respondents themselves, since we felt that this would yield an underestimation. Instead, we took a number of detours. As regards to alcohol and drug abuse, we asked about the former spouse rather than about the respondent. We believe these reports will on average be less biased than ego-reports. There may be bias too but there probably is both overestimation (due to resentment) and underestimation (due to shame). As regards to physical violence, we asked whether it played a role without explicitly asking who committed the violent acts. Although the validity of measures of socially undesirable behaviour will always be a point of discussion, we feel these strategies enabled us to eliminate a large part of the problem.

Although behavioral motives are mentioned by fewer respondents than relational motives, the numbers reporting these motives are certainly not trivial. For one fifth of the respondents (22 percent), alcohol and drug abuse are important divorce motives. One in six respondents (16 percent) cite physical violence as a reason for ending their marriage. Quite a few of the respondents (37 percent) also mention their ex-spouse's infidelity as a divorce motive.

For infidelity, we have both ego- and alter-reports. When comparing these, it is striking that infidelity is mentioned less frequently with respect to the respondents themselves than with respect to the former spouse. Only approximately 17 percent of the respondents cite their own infidelity as a divorce motive whereas no fewer than 37 percent refer to their ex-spouse's infidelity as a reason for ending the marriage. These numbers should in reality be the same, assuming that our sample is not seriously wrong. Virtually the same differences were observed earlier in the United States (South and Lloyd, 1995). The underlying reasons for these discrepancies might be either that the respondents are not willing to admit they were unfaithful themselves or that they erroneously suspect their ex-spouses

of infidelity. They can also view their own infidelity as a result rather than as a cause of a bad marriage and thus not report it as a motive.

The third category of motives pertains to how the household is organized. About one in three of the respondents refers to how the former spouse spent his or her leisure time and 33 percent of the respondents report problems the former spouse had with spending money as a motive. The division of labor in the home also failed to satisfy many of the respondents, be it in various ways. Almost a quarter of the respondents say that the division of the household chores was a divorce motive and 15 percent say their former spouse worked too much. Almost 30 percent refer to child-rearing as a divorce motive (for couples who had children). In the following section, we examine whether these motives play more of a role for women than for men.

The fourth category, social motives, consist of problems with each other's relatives and friends. These divorce motives are cited least frequently. Yet they are not unimportant, since one in five respondents say problems with the former spouse's friends played a role in the divorce and 15 percent mentions problems with inlaws.

To what extent are the motives correlated? To find this out, sum scores (i.e., the number of cited motives) have been made for each category and the correlations between the sum scores were calculated. The first striking thing about the correlation matrix is that all the correlations are positive and significant but not very strong (varying from 0.18 to 0.38). This indicates that the various types of motives do not occur simultaneously very often. At the same time, we observe that the correlation between relational and behavioral motives is rather weak, but it is not negative. Hence, we cannot regard behavioral and relational motives as opposite poles of the same continuum. Behavioral problems often lead to relational problems and relational problems may end in behavioral problems.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

In Table 2, we present divorce motives for men and women separately. The table reveals sizeable gender differences. In keeping with Jessie Bernard's (1976) classic distinction between *his* and *her* marriage, we can also speak of *his* and *her* divorce. First, we observe that virtually all the motives are cited more frequently by women than by men. It is unclear, however, whether men had fewer reasons to get a divorce, or whether men were more reticent in their responses to personal questions.

Since virtually all the motives are referred to more frequently by women, it is of particular importance to see where the differences are large and where they are small. Relational motives are cited more often by women than by men, but the differences are relatively small. Motives pertaining to how the household is organized exhibit somewhat larger differences. More often than men, women cite problems having to do with the division of labor, child-rearing, and how leisure time and money are spent. From the perspective of the emancipation hypothesis, this is to be expected. It is worth noting also that barely any men say their ex-wife worked too much, though quite a few of the women say their ex-husband did. So it is especially men's working too hard that women see as a problem.

Wife's work does not appear to be a problem in the eyes of men, as is sometimes suggested in the literature.

The greatest gender differences pertain to the behavioral motives. Judging from what the respondents say about their former spouse, infidelity on the part of men (42 percent) is more frequently a reason for divorce than infidelity on the part of women (32 percent). The same conclusion can be drawn from what the respondents say about themselves (infidelity among 22 percent of the men and among 11 percent of the women). Although men's infidelity is more often a problem, it does not seem to be the case that having a new partner is more often a reason for men to get a divorce than for women. A total of 18 percent of the men and 15 percent of the women say they had a new partner immediately after divorce, which is not a significant difference.

There are also considerable gender differences as regards to the most serious motives. The motive pertaining to physical violence is only rarely cited by men, perhaps because they are more frequently the perpetrators. The motive pertaining to alcohol and drug abuse of the former spouse is also cited much more frequently by women than men.

COHORT DIFFERENCES

Table 3 examines whether there have been changes in the cited divorce motives. To examine change, we present differences in motives between divorce cohorts and we do this separately for men and women. There are important changes in what motivated people to get divorced in the period covered by our data. The changes are more marked among women than among men. We see evidence in these changes supporting all three of our hypotheses.

(Table 3 about here)

The threshold hypothesis holds that rising divorce figures and increasing tolerance to divorce have lowered the divorce threshold leading to more frequent occurrences of relatively lighter motives. Our figures do indeed show that the more serious motives are cited less and less frequently. In the 1950s, husbands' infidelity (according to their ex-wives) was a reason for 54 percent of the divorces, but by the 1980s, it was only the case in 38 percent. Wives' infidelity (according to their ex-husbands) played a role in 35 percent of the divorces in the 1950s, and in 28 percent during the 1980s. The motive pertaining to physical violence is also cited less and less frequently; 45 percent of the women who got divorced in the 1950s cited physical violence as a divorce motive, and only 21 percent in the 1980s. There is also a slight reduction in women's references to alcohol and drug use as a divorce motive, but this reduction is not significant.

We should note that we cannot separate changes in the incidence of certain problems and changes in the sensitivity toward those problems. Our finding that infidelity and violence more often were motives in older cohorts can in theory be caused by a more frequent occurrence of infidelity and

violence in these cohorts, and not by a higher threshold. To test the threshold hypothesis more stringently, we would need to assess how the incidence of these problems in marriages (intact and broken) has changed over time. For the Netherlands, there are no trend studies of behavioral problems of married couples. For the United States a short term historical comparison suggests that marital violence has not changed between 1975 and 1985 (Straus and Gelles, 1986), but long term developments in intimate partner violence or infidelity are not available.

Another potential threat to our interpretation lies in the divorce legislation. After all, infidelity and violence were the only motives that were accepted as legal grounds for divorce in the more distant past. A first inspection of the figures in Table 3 shows that it is not likely that the downward trends is due to the divorce law of 1971 which made the “big lie” obsolete. To study this possibility more formally, we have estimated additional logistic regression equations for citing the ex-spouse’s infidelity and for referring to physical violence. The point of departure is the model that is also used for Table 3, with the divorce year, education, religion, urbanization and stage in the life course as independent variables. Men and women are included in the analysis and a dummy variable is included for gender. We compare the results of this model with two other models, one that only includes the years after 1971 and one that includes all the years and an additional dummy variable indicating whether the divorce occurred before or after the new legislation. The results of these models are shown in Table 4.

(Table 4 about here)

Focusing first on the model for infidelity, we see that the effect of the divorce year is as sizeable in the period after 1971 as in the entire period. After the new legislation as well, there is thus evidence of a decrease in the citing of adultery. In the third model, the effect of the divorce year is once again as sizeable as in the first model and the effect of the dummy variable is not significant. This shows that the decrease is linear and that beyond that, there is no discrete decrease in the citing of adultery after 1971. Similar analyses have been conducted for violence. The conclusions are identical. In all three models, there is a strong negative linear effect of the divorce year. The dummy variable now has the anticipated negative effect, but it is not statistically significant ($p = 0.16$).

The psychologization hypothesis receives support as well. Recently divorced women more frequently say they got divorced because they and their partner grew apart, didn’t give each other enough attention or could not talk to each other. Of the women who got divorced from 1949 to 1972, 69 percent say they could not talk well with their husband, among the more recently divorced women, this figure is as high as 80 percent. As regards to the three other indicators, the former spouse’s personal problems, differences in taste, and sexual problems, there is no evidence to support the psychologization hypothesis. Women do not mention these reasons any more frequently than they did in the past.

The male respondents provide less support for the psychologization hypothesis. The only statistically significant trend is that men increasingly cite their ex-wives' personal problems as a divorce motive. The men themselves do not cite relational motives any more frequently. Although the trends among the female respondents present clear evidence to support the psychologization hypothesis, it should be noted that in the older cohorts, relational motives were already more important than the other motives.

The findings also support the emancipation hypothesis. As is to be expected, the trends are mainly observed in the divorce motives of women. With increasing frequency, women refer to their husbands' working too much and to the division of labor in the home as divorce motives. These findings are consistent with the notion that for women, the value of marriage is based less and less on specialized gender roles in marriage. For 28 percent of the divorces in the 1980s, the husband working too much was cited as a divorce motive, as was only the case for 8 percent of the divorces of the 1950s and 1960s. There is the same trend with respect to the division of labor in the home. In the 1950s and 1960s problems related to the division of household labor were only cited as a divorce motive by 15 percent of the women, in the 1980s this was 30 percent.

LIFE COURSE DIFFERENCES

The divorce motives referred to above have a great deal to do with the couple's stage in the life course at the time of the divorce (see Table 5). We distinguish between the divorces of couples without children (usually young couples), couples with children who live at home, and couples with children who no longer live at home (empty nest stage). Table 5 clearly shows that couples with children who live at home cite more divorce motives than other couples. These motives have to do with violence, infidelity, the spouse's working too hard, the division of labor in the home, and spending habits. There are virtually no differences between couples without children and couples in the empty nest stage.

(Table 5 about here)

In short, there are stronger reasons motivating couples with children to get divorced than couples who get divorced at other stages of life. In the first instance, this would seem to confirm the threshold hypothesis. After all, it is still uncommon for couples to get a divorce if their children are young, so there has to be more wrong with the marriage for them to want to do so. However, the differences may also have to do with the fact that there are often more marital problems and tensions if there are children living at home.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION, RELIGION AND URBANIZATION

Education, religion and urbanization have often proven to be important determinants of demographic behavior. Highly educated, non-religious persons who live in cities in the Netherlands (and elsewhere)

are known as the ones who first adopted 'new' forms of demographic behavior (De Feijter, 1991). They marry late and have children late, they cohabit before marriage, combine work and children, and also have a high divorce risk. Therefore, one might expect that the motives for such 'modern' divorces are less serious than the motives for 'traditional' divorces. In contrast to this assertion, Table 6 shows that the divorce motives of these categories hardly differ. If there are any differences at all, they emerge most markedly in the comparison of the two educational groups. Respondents with a high educational level make more frequent references to growing apart, different tastes and preferences, and personal problems as their divorce motives, whereas those with a low educational level more frequently cite practical issues such as how money and leisure time are spent and alcohol abuse. The nature of the divorce thus seems to differ between educational groups. Better educated respondents are more focused on the psychological aspects of the relationship and lesser educated persons focus more on practical and tangible issues. Perhaps differences in the financial situation play a role in this connection. The religious-secular and urban-rural differences are weaker and less systematic, but tend towards the same direction as the differences in educational level. Religious people make more frequent references to money-related disagreements as a problem, for example, and urban people more often cite communication problems. The differences here are not systematic enough, however, to support the hypotheses.

CONCLUSIONS

How have divorce motives changed in the course of time? Has the increase in the incidence of divorce led to a different type of divorce? Our nationwide representative data on divorces in the period from 1949 to 1996 show that some of the serious divorce motives have become less important, in particular violence and infidelity. Most of the relational motives, however, such as growing apart, not getting enough attention, and not being able to talk to each other have become more important. These trends point to a lowered threshold as well as to the psychologization of relationships. We also see that women make more frequent references to the division of labor in the home and their former husbands' working too much as motives, which is clearly indicative of tendencies towards emancipation.

Does it matter whether there are children involved or not? Yes, the stage in the life course at the time of the divorce has a strong effect on the divorce motives. If there are children under the age of 18 involved, more motives are cited and there are more conflicts related to the divorce, and not only about the children. Couples without children and couples in the empty nest stage do not differ in their motives. We see these patterns as a confirmation of the threshold hypothesis: divorce is less common if there are children living at home, but if it does occur, there is more wrong with the marriage.

Do the three well-known determinants of demographic behavior—educational level, religion, and urbanization—affect the divorce motives? This is somewhat less clearly the case. There is a certain extent of support for the psychologization hypothesis in the differences between different educational groups. Better educated respondents refer more often to relational problems, and lesser

educated persons more refer to practical reasons. We note a similar but weaker pattern in the comparison between religious and non-religious persons.

In concluding, we discuss the contribution our findings make to insights into the causes of divorce. Knowing why people say they got divorced does not necessarily produce insights into the actual causes of divorce. It is nonetheless informative to ask people how they look back at the underlying reasons for their divorce. A number of important changes have emerged in this connection. Divorce has become more normal, and nowadays emotional problems are perhaps a sufficient reason to end a marriage. Women's liberation and the changes related to it and the increasing importance of the emotional relation are clearly expressed in the divorce motives as well. Interesting is that disapproval of women's labor force participation in marriage is hardly mentioned as a motive, in contrast to much theoretical work on divorce. If work is an issue, it is men working too much, not women being financially independent that is perceived as a problem.

Our findings also have implications for the more structural or sociological causes of divorce. Many of the thresholds to end a marriage such as financial dependence, housing problems, and community disapproval were structural in nature. Now that these thresholds are lower, what remains is perhaps increasingly related to the psychological functioning of the marriage. More precisely, what our findings suggest is that there is an interaction effect between marriage cohort and the type of divorce determinant we consider. Across cohorts, we would expect a decline in the effect of sociological factors on the risk of divorce and an increase in the the effects of psychological factors on divorce.

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Table 1: Distribution of all independent variables (*N*=1718)

	Unweighted	Weighted ^a
Age (mean)	49	49
New spouse		
Yes (married or unmarried)	54	63
Year of divorce		
1949-1972	8	9
1973-1984	37	35
1985-1996	55	56
Children at divorce		
No children	29	32
Children living at home (youngest child < 18)	64	62
Empty nest (youngest child > 18)	7	6
Education		
Wife higher education (high vocational or university)	21	19
Religion		
Respondent church member at beginning of marriage	51	50
Urbanization		
Not urban at beginning of marriage (CBS category 5)	11	9
Sex		
Female	60	50

^a Weighted for age, sex, region, urbanization, and marital status (remarried or single)

Table 2: Factor analyses of divorce motives in the Netherlands: unstandardized factor loadings (unweighted results; N=1718)^a

	I	II	III	IV	V
Growing apart	.709	-.143	.019	.080	-.014
Not enough attention	.715	.070	.066	.106	-.049
Not able to talk	.611	.102	-.094	-.019	.067
Sexual problems	.457	.032	.339	-.429	.046
Leisure activities of spouse	.076	.604	.194	.303	.006
Habits of spouse	.235	.553	.068	-.033	.062
Expenses of spouse	-.014	.655	.051	.122	.054
Physical violence	-.105	.665	-.109	-.139	.064
Alcohol or drugs problems of spouse	-.075	.791	.015	-.002	-.151
Personal problems of spouse	.235	.553	.068	-.033	.062
Infidelity of respondent or spouse	.054	-.018	.854	-.038	-.089
Spouse worked too many hours	.231	.049	-.001	.707	-.042
Division of household chores	.254	.202	-.120	.296	.278
Problems with friends of spouse	-.126	.170	.442	.057	.430
Problems with relatives of spouse	-.137	-.049	.129	.051	.727
Differences in taste and preferences	.302	.036	-.080	-.115	.530
Religious dissimilarities	.028	-.035	-.115	-.047	.542

^a The order of the items is not the order in which they appeared in the questionnaire. Items relating to children are not included in the analysis. Infidelity of respondent and spouse is averaged.

Table 3: Divorce motives in the Netherlands: percentage of respondents who answered “did play a role” or “did play an important role” by sex (weighted results; N=1718)

	All	Men	Women	Chi ² test ^a
RELATIONAL				
Growing apart	78	79	76	2,0
Not enough attention	74	69	78	16,2**
Not able to talk	73	68	78	20,7**
Sexual problems	42	41	44	1,8
BEHAVIORIAL				
Leisure activities of spouse	32	20	44	114,3**
Habits of spouse	53	42	63	78,0**
Expenses of spouse	33	25	40	44,6**
Physical violence	16	6	26	127,7**
Alcohol or drugs problems of spouse	22	9	36	172,5**
Personal problems of spouse	46	43	50	8,8**
INFIDELITY				
Infidelity of spouse	37	32	42	18,4**
Infidelity of respondent	17	22	11	35,0**
DIVISION OF LABOR				
Spouse worked too many hours	15	8	23	69,7**
Division of household chores	22	17	28	33,1**
OTHER				
Upbringing of children	28	20	35	31,0**
Disagreement about having children	15	15	15	0,0
Problems with friends of spouse	19	21	16	8,0**
Problems with relatives of spouse	15	17	14	2,1
Differences in taste and preferences	30	28	32	2,8
Religious dissimilarities	7	7	8	1,0

^a The Chi² test indicates whether the percentages of men and women are statistically different. Percentages are weighted like in Table 1. The sex differences are not controlled for the effects of the other socio-demographic characteristics ~ p < 0,10, * p < 0,05, ** p < 0,01.

Table 4: Divorce motives by sex and period of divorce: percentage of respondents who answered that motive “played a role” or “played an important role” (unweighted results; N=1718)

	Men				Women			
	1949-1972	1973-1984	1985-1996	Trend ^a	1949-1972	1973-1984	1985-1996	Trend ^a
RELATIONAL								
Growing apart	82	82	77	0	57	75	79	+
Not enough attention	70	65	72	0	67	74	81	+
Not able to talk	70	65	70	0	69	77	80	+
Sexual problems	34	39	43	0	43	44	44	0
BEHAVIORIAL								
Leisure activities of spouse	19	18	20	0	47	40	45	0
Habits of spouse	42	41	42	0	73	62	62	-
Expenses of spouse	31	24	25	0	50	40	39	-
Physical violence	5	8	5	0	45	26	21	-
Alcohol or drugs of spouse	7	12	8	0	39	35	34	0
Personal problems of spouse	33	41	46	+	55	50	50	0
INFIDELITY								
Infidelity of spouse	35	33	28	-	54	44	38	-
DIVISION OF LABOR								
Spouse worked too much	10	6	9	0	8	17	28	+
Division of household chores	16	13	19	0	15	25	30	+

^a Trend column indicates whether the linear effect of period is statistically significant. + of – indicates a significant increase or decrease, 0 indicates no linear trend. Percentages and tests are based on logistic regression models that control for the effects of urban residence, education, religion, life cycle stage.

Table 5: Sex differences in divorce motives by period of divorce: absolute difference between percentages of men and women who answered that motive “played a role” or “played an important role” (unweighted results; N=1718)

	Average difference per motive between men and women		
	1949-1972	1973-1984	1985-1996
Relational ^a	9.5	8.3	5.5
Behavioral ^a	28.7	18.2	17.5
Infidelity ^a	19.0	11.0	10.0
Division of labor ^a	1.5	11.5	15.0

^a Based on the percentages in Table 4. Absolute differences calculated for each item separately; the differences are averaged over the items within a type of motive.

Table 6: Divorce motives by family cycle at time of divorce: percentage of respondents who answered that motive "played a role" or "played an important role" (unweighted results; N=1718)

	No children	Children at home youngest child < 18	Empty nest youngest child > 18	Test ^a
RELATIONAL				
Growing apart	77	78	81	0
Not enough attention	72	75	65	0
Not able to talk	71	75	65	*
Sexual problems	42	43	35	0
BEHAVIORIAL				
Leisure activities of spouse	27	32	28	*
Habits of spouse	48	55	52	*
Expenses of spouse	31	40	34	*
Physical violence	9	15	8	*
Alcohol or drugs of spouse	18	20	19	0
Personal problems of spouse	45	48	41	0
INFIDELITY				
Infidelity of spouse	33	38	35	*
DIVISION OF LABOR				
Spouse worked too many hours	10	16	11	*
Division of household chores	21	23	14	*

^a Test indicates whether one or more contrasts are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Percentages and tests are based on logistic regression models that control for the effects of urban residence, education, religion, sex, marriage cohort.

Table 7: Divorce motives by education, religion, and urbanization: : percentage of respondents who answered that motive "played a role" or "played an important role" (unweighted results; N=1718)

	Education wife			Respondent religious			Urbanization		
	Low	High	Test ^a	No	Yes	Test ^a	Urban	Rural	Test ^a
RELATIONAL									
Growing apart	76	82	*	79	76	0	78	79	0
Not enough attention	74	73	0	73	74	0	74	72	0
Not able to talk	73	74	0	70	76	*	74	67	*
Sexual problems	42	43	0	43	41	0	42	42	0
BEHAVORIAL									
Leisure activities of spouse	31	26	*	27	33	0	30	29	0
Habits of spouse	53	50	0	51	54	0	52	52	0
Expenses of spouse	39	30	*	34	40	*	37	38	0
Physical violence	13	10	0	11	13	0	12	14	0
Alcohol or drugs of spouse	20	15	*	18	20	0	19	19	0
Personal problems of spouse	45	52	*	46	48	0	47	46	0
INFIDELITY									
Infidelity of spouse	37	35	0	36	37	0	36	36	0
DIVISION OF LABOR									
Spouse worked too much	13	14	0	14	13	0	13	16	0
Division of household chores	21	23	0	22	21	0	21	22	0

^a Test indicates whether one or more contrasts are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Percentages and tests are based on logistic regression models that control for the effects of urban residence, education, religion, life cycle stage, sex, marriage cohort.