Divorce Motives in a Period of Rising Divorce

Evidence From a Dutch Life-History Survey

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Using survey data on 1,718 ever-divorced men and women in the Netherlands, the authors describe the motives people give for their divorce. The authors distinguish motives regarding three types of issues: relational issues, behavioral problems, and problems about work and the division of labor. They observe three important trends: the normalization of divorce, the psychologization of relationships, and the emancipation of women. First, severe divorce motives (e.g., violence and infidelity) have become less important. The authors interpret this finding in terms of a threshold hypothesis: When the threshold for divorce is higher, marriages that end in divorce will be more problematic. Second, there has been a trend toward more relational and psychological motives, particularly among women. Third, problems in the realm of work and household labor have become more important motives for a divorce. This is consistent with the increase in emancipatory attitudes in the past decades.

Keywords: *divorce; motives; cohorts; life course; emancipation*

U sing data from a national survey of ever-divorced persons in the Netherlands, we examined 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 answer-

ing 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 speak of a cause of divorce only if certain features or variables are present among divorced couples and are not present or are present to a lesser extent among married couples. The study of causes is always comparative and objective. Motives, in contrast, are reasons given by former spouses them-selves for why they got divorced. There is no comparison with married cou-ples, and by definition, the information is subjective. Not every motive is a cause, and not every cause is a motive. If divorced people refer to alcohol abuse in the marriage as a motive, it is not necessarily a cause, because there can also be alcohol abuse among intact couples. Similarly, many factors affecting the risk of divorce—many causes—are sociostructural in nature, and people generally do not think of their personal lives in these terms. If sociostructural 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 rea-son 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 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 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 being adultery. Other valid reasons included desertion, a criminal offense, or severe physical violence. This law was liberalized in 1971, and irreconcilable differences (with no clear definition) were then sufficient for the court. Because of the rigid legis-lation in the pre-1971 period, widespread use was made of fictitious testimo-nies 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 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 studies have 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 & Diamond, 1999; De Rose, 1992; Diekmann & Klein, 1991; Manting, 1994; Poortman & Kalmijn, 2002; South & Spitze, 1986; Waite & 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 is 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).

Although quantitative and large-scale statistical analyses of people's experiences have not often been done, there are some important exceptions. A comparison of marital complaints of divorced women in a 1948 Detroit study (Goode, 1993) with a 1974 to 1975 Cleveland study shows that in 1948, divorce motives were more serious than in the 1970s study (Kitson, 1992; Kitson & Sussman, 1982). Nonsupport and drinking were replaced by personality, home life, and values as the most frequent complaints. Kitson (1992) concludes that this is because of "an increasing concern that marriages should be emotionally and sexually satisfying" (p. 126). Other studies (Bloom, Niles, & Tatcher, 1985; Burns, 1984) offer detailed descriptions of

the reasons divorced persons give for their marital breakdown and the correlates of these reasons with sex and demographic characteristics, but they do not offer an explanatory framework of individual differentiation or of historical developments.

We believe that new analyses of divorce motives may provide important additional clues into the nature of divorce. In addition to simply describing the motives, we 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 economic motives for divorce less pronounced than in the United States. Second, we investigate changes in divorce motives across a relatively long time interval of nearly 50 years (divorces between 1949 and 1996). Third, we add to the theoretical understanding of differentiation in divorce motives by integrating old and new hypotheses.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Although many types of divorce motives can be distinguished, we focus on three types that are most directly relevant to our hypotheses: (a) relational motives, defined as motives pertaining to the personal relationship between the spouses (e.g., having grown apart, not enough attention for each other), (b) behavioral motives, defined as motives related to individual behavioral problems (e.g., alcohol or drug abuse, violence), and (c) household organization motives, defined as motives related to the division of labor in the home (e.g., the division of domestic labor, the paid work the spouses do). 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 20 divorce motives, and we will assess to what extent these divorce motives are covered by the three types of motives.

In our empirical analyses, we relate these three types of divorce motives to 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, religious couples, and couples in rural regions are less apt to get divorced (Berrington & Diamond, 1999; De

Rose, 1992; Diekmann & Klein, 1991; Manting, 1994; Poortman & Kalmijn, 2002; South & Spitze, 1986; Waite & Lillard, 1991). In the Netherlands, the wife's educational level has a positive relation with divorce (Poortman & Kalmijn, 2002).

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

The first hypothesis is based on the finding that divorce itself has become more normal. The divorce rate in the Netherlands has increased from 2 per 1,000 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% 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% in 1995 (Social and Cultural Planning Office, 1998). 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; this implies that married people 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, among religious couples, and among couples in rural regions. We therefore expect the divorce motives to be more serious in these categories.

The second hypothesis is based on what has been called the psychologization of society (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Brinkgreve & de Regt, 1999; Giddens, 1992). Economic ties in primary relationships are believed to have become less important across time, whereas emotional ties have become more important. The term *psychologization* pertains not only 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 of the psychological 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 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 will cite relational divorce motives more frequently.

The third hypothesis is related to women's liberation. 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, 1994). This discrepancy, together with growing sensitivity toward gender issues, may lead 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 across 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 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 nonreligious women.

Research Design

Data

We analyze the survey "Divorce in the Netherlands," which was conducted in 1998 (Kalmijn & 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 divorced respondents is 1,718, and these were divorced in the period from 1949 to 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 a small number of open-ended questions. To evaluate the motives, during the interview, the respondents were given a list of 20 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 average, the respondents cited 6.6 motives out of the list, and of these, an average of 3.6 motives played an important role.

The sociodemographic characteristics are measured as follows (see Table 1 for frequencies):

- The period when the divorce occurred: 1949 to 1972, 1973 to 1984, 1985 to 1996
- 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 (which is approximately equal to the empty nest stage)
- Education: the educational level of the woman (college or university educated versus not college or university educated)
- Religion: whether the respondent was a church member at the beginning of the marriage
- Urbanization: based on the place where the respondent lived 5 years after the beginning of the marriage (or before that if the respondent was divorced early), broken down into nonurban and the rest (the emphasis is on the contrast between small rural communities and the rest)

Table 1
Distribution of All Independent Variables ($N = 1,718$)

Variable	Unweighted	Weighted[a]
Age (mean)	49	49
New spouse		
Yes (married or unmarried)	54	63
Year of divorce		
1949 to 1972	8	9
1973 to 1984	37	35
1985 to 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		
(Statistics Netherlands Category 5)	11	9
Sex		
Female	60	50

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

Method

For each motive, we estimated a multivariate logistic regression model that simultaneously includes all the independent variables. On the basis of the estimated regression models, we calculated predicted percentages for each motive and for the various social and demographic groups. The percentages are calculated with 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, that is, between the various periods, are not attributable to differences in other respects, for example, 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, because 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 the average for men and women.

Possible Biases

The questions about motives are retrospective, and the divorces occurred during 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. Both recent and older divorces can present a methodological problem. First, 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. Because we feel that this biases the picture of the motives, we have excluded the 1997 and 1998 divorces from our analysis.

Second, 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. The same social processes that changed the motives may influence the way people look back at the past. For example, a person who divorced several decades ago may now reinterpret his or her divorce in terms of relational problems, even if such problems would not have been reported at the time. These possible biases suggest that our test of the trend hypotheses is conservative.

Findings

In Table 2, we present a factor analysis in which 17 divorce motives are classified into clusters of motives. We limited the set of motives in the factor analysis to 17 out of the complete set of 20 motives for several reasons. First, we did not include the two motives that have to do with children in the factor analysis, because 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. Second, we averaged reports of the infidelity of the respondent and the spouse as divorce motives.

The factor analysis shows that the resulting set of 17 divorce motives can be classified in five clusters. Three of these clusters of motives correspond well with the theoretical types we distinguish: relational motives (Cluster I), behavioral motives (Cluster II), and household organization motives (Cluster

Table 2
Factor Analyses of Divorce Motives in the Netherlands:
Unstandardized Factor Loadings (Unweighted Results, *N* = 1,718)

Motive	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

Note: 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.

IV). In Cluster III, there is only one important motive, that is, infidelity of respondent or spouse. Cluster V has to do with similarity in tastes and preferences. Religious dissimilarities and problems with friends and relatives are important indicators of this cluster. In the remainder of our analyses, we focus on Clusters I (relational), II (behavioral), and IV (household organization). We also analyze infidelity (Cluster III) because it can be regarded as closely related to the concept of behavioral problems.

To what extent are the motives correlated? To find this out, sum scores (i.e., the number of cited motives) were made for each category, and the correlations between the sum scores were calculated. It is surprising that all three correlations are positive and significant, although not very strong ($r =$ 0.26 for relational and behavioral, $r = 0.12$ for relational and household, and $r = 0.04$ for behavioral and household). It is particularly interesting that the correlation between relational and behavioral motives 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.

In Table 3, we present frequency distributions of the divorce motives the respondents mention. The numbers make clear that relational motives are indicated most frequently. About 75% of the respondents say that "growing apart," "having not enough attention for each other," and "not being able to talk to each other" have been a divorce motive. Directly related to this is the finding that about 40% of the respondents say that sexual problems were a divorce motive.

The second type of motives, behavioral 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, because we felt that this would yield an underestimation. Instead, we took a number of detours. In regard 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, in the reports about the partner, but there probably is both overestimation (because of resentment) and underestimation (because of shame). In regard 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 behavior 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. We start with the most serious motives. For one fifth of the respondents (22%), alcohol and drug abuse are important divorce motives, and for one in six respondents (16%), physical violence is a reason for ending their marriage. Personal problems of the spouse are also mentioned quite frequently, by almost 50%. Other common motives that belong to this dimension are the habits of the spouse (53%), the expenses of the spouse (33%), and the leisure activities of the spouse (32%). These motives may also point to behavioral problems, although the connection is less direct than it is with violence or personal problems.

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 17% of the respondents cite their own infidelity as a divorce motive, whereas 37% 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 & Lloyd, 1995). The underlying reasons for these discrepancies might be either that the respondents are not willing to admit they

Table 3
Divorce Motives in the Netherlands: Percentage of
Respondents Who Answered That Motive Played a Role or
Played an Important Role by Sex (Weighted Results, *N* = 1,718)

Motive	All	Men	Women	χ^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
Behavioral				
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 χ^2 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 sociodemographic characteristics.
**$p < .01$.

were unfaithful themselves or that they erroneously suspect their ex-spouses of infidelity. Respondents 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 type of motives pertains to how the household is organized. The division of labor in the home 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% say their former spouse worked too much. For couples who had children, almost 30% refer to child

rearing as a divorce motive. In the following section, we examine whether these motives play more of a role for women than for men.

Gender Differences

The results in Table 3 reveal sizeable gender differences. In keeping with Jessie Bernard's (1976) classic distinction between "his" and "her" marriage, we can apparently speak of his and her divorce, as well. 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 these rather personal questions. Because 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 larger differences. More often than men, women cite problems having to do with the division of labor and child rearing. From the perspective of the emancipation hypothesis, this is to be expected. Important to observe is that barely any men say their ex-wife worked too much, although quite a few of the women say their ex-husband worked too much. So it is especially men's working too hard that women see as a problem. In the Netherlands, the classic hypothesis that wives' work can be a problem in the eyes of men (Cherlin, 1979) is apparently not supported by more subjective (i.e., motivational) data on the causes of divorce. In the United States, it has been shown that wives' employment affects divorce in unhappy marriages (Schoen, Astone, Rothert, Standish, & Kim, 2002). This makes it likely that wives' work is a problem for men, although it remains to be seen whether wives' employment is an important divorce motive in the United States.

The greatest gender differences pertain to the behavioral motives. This applies first 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 more frequently by women than by men (36% vs. 9%). The more open behavioral motives are also cited more often by women (habits of the spouse, expenses of the spouse, leisure activities of the spouse).

Judging from what the respondents say about their former spouse, we found infidelity on the part of men (42%) is also more frequently a reason for divorce than infidelity on the part of women (32%). The same conclusion can be drawn from what the respondents say about themselves (22% of the men

report their own infidelity as opposed to 11% of the women). Although men's infidelity is more often a motive, 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% of the men and 15% of the women say they had a new partner immediately after divorce. This difference is not statistically significant.

Cohort Differences

To examine change, we present differences in motives between divorce cohorts, and we do this separately for men and women (Table 4). 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.

The threshold hypothesis holds that rising divorce and increasing tolerance to divorce have lowered the divorce threshold, leading to less frequent occurrences of relatively heavy and behavioral motives. Our figures do indeed show that behavioral motives are cited less and less frequently. In the 1950s, husbands' infidelity (according to their ex-wives) was a reason for 54% of the divorces, but by the 1990s, it was the case only in 38%. Wives' infidelity (according to their ex-husbands) played a role in 35% of the divorces in the 1950s and in 28% during the 1990s. The motive pertaining to physical violence is also cited less and less frequently: 45% of the women who got divorced in the 1950s cited physical violence as a divorce motive and only 21% in the 1990s. There is also a reduction in women's references to alcohol and drug use as a divorce motive, but this reduction is not significant. Two other behavioral motives have changed as well: Fewer women in recent cohorts report habits of the spouse and expenses of the spouse as a motive for their divorce. An interesting exception to these trends is the rise in the frequency with which men report personal problems of their wife as a motive.

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 across 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

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 = 1,718)

Motive	Men				Women			
	1949 to 1972	1973 to 1984	1985 to 1996	Trend[a]	1949 to 1972	1973 to 1984	1985 to 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
Behavioral								
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 (+ or − 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, and life cycle stage.

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that the incidence of marital violence has not changed between 1975 and 1985 (Straus & Gelles, 1986), but long-term developments in intimate partner violence or infidelity are not well documented.

The psychologization hypothesis receives support, as well. Recently divorced women more frequently say they got divorced because they and their partner grew apart. Of the women who got divorced from 1949 to 1972, 57% say they had grown apart; among the more recently divorced women, this figure is as high as 79%. We also see that an increasing number of women report not receiving enough attention as a motive (from 67% to 81%), and we observe that more and more women report not being able to communicate in marriage as a motive (from 69% to 80%). We note that the initial percentages are already quite high, so the room for change is limited. It is therefore striking that three of the four indicators reveal a significant trend. Although the evidence supports the psychologization hypothesis for women, the story is different for men. None of the four indicators reveals a significant increase, and the only tendency we observe is a slight increase in the frequency of sexual problems (not significant). All in all, the male respondents provide no support for the psychologization hypothesis.

The findings also support the emancipation hypothesis. As was 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% of the divorces in the 1990s, the husband's working too much was cited as a divorce motive, as was the case for only 8% of the divorces of the 1950s and 1960s. The same trend exists for the division of labor in the home. In the 1950s and 1960s, problems related to the division of household labor were cited as a divorce motive by only 15% of the women; in the 1990s, this was 30%.

Because there are important differences between men and women, both in terms of the overall percentages (Table 3) and in terms of the trends (Table 4), it is important to analyze the role of gender in more detail. More specifically, we are interested in the question of whether gender differences converge or diverge. In Table 5, we present the absolute differences between male and female percentages, averaged across the items within a domain. The average differences are presented for the three cohorts separately. For relational motives, we see no evidence of a divergence, even though women increasingly report these motives whereas there is no trend for men. Perhaps this finding is because of the first relational item, which was quite frequently mentioned by men in the oldest cohort (and more often than by women in that cohort, as well). For behavioral motives, one would expect a convergence,

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, $N = 1,718$)

	Average Difference per Motive Between Men and Women		
Motive	1949 to 1972	1973 to 1984	1985 to 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.

and this is indeed what we find. Women have always reported more behavioral problems on the part of the spouse than did men. Because there is a decline in the frequency with which behavioral motives are mentioned by women, a convergence results. For household organization motives, the opposite trend occurs. Here, male and female trends diverge. Men and women start at the same level, but an increasing number of women report these motives whereas there is no trend for men. In sum, gender differences in divorce motives have remained strong, but the nature of these differences has shifted from behavioral problems to problems with paid and domestic work.

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 6). 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 6 clearly shows that couples with children who live at home cite more divorce motives than do 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.

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

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, $N = 1,718$)

Motive	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
Behavioral				
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	*

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

still relatively 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 urban residence have often proven to be important determinants of demographic behavior. Highly educated nonreligious 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, cohabit before marriage, combine careers and children, and 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 7 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. The clearest difference here is that lower-educated respondents emphasize behavioral motives. Lower-educated respondents more often report problems with leisure activities, money expenses, and alcohol and drug use. Perhaps such problems occur more often in the lower classes, which may be a reason why they are cited more often. We also expected the higher educated to emphasize relational problems because the higher educated are generally more receptive to the forces of psychologization. The data do not show that this is true in general. Of the four relational motives, only one is mentioned more often by higher-educated respondents.

The religious-secular and urban-rural differences are weaker and less systematic but tend toward the same direction as the differences in educational level. There is only weak evidence that urbanites more often cite relational motives, and there is weak evidence, as well, that religious people cite behavioral problems more often. The differences here are not systematic enough to support our 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? To answer these questions, we analyze a range of divorce motives. We formulated hypotheses about three types of motives: relational motives, behavioral motives, and household organization motives. A factor analysis of 17 items shows that these three dimensions do exist, although these are not the only dimensions. Items such as being unable to talk and having not enough time for each other belong to the relational dimension. Items such as violence, alcohol use, and spending habits belong to the behavioral dimension. Items such as complaints about the spouse's working too much and problems in dividing up domestic tasks form the third dimension. To test our hypotheses, we compare how the importance of these three dimensions has changed across time.

Our nationwide representative data on divorces in the Netherlands in the period from 1949 to 1996 show that some of the more serious divorce motives have become less important, in particular, violence and infidelity. Most of the relational motives, however, such as growing apart, not getting

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 = 1,718)

Motive	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
Behavioral									
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

Note: Percentages and tests are based on logistic regression models that control for the effects of urban residence, education, religion, life cycle stage, sex, and marriage cohort.

a. Test indicates whether one or more contrasts are statistically significant.

*p < .05.

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. The reasons for divorce appear to have shifted from behavioral problems to relational problems. We also see that women make more frequent references to the division of labor in the home and to their former husbands' working too much as motives, which is clearly indicative of tendencies toward emancipation. Important to note is that all three trends are primarily found in the reports of women, with the exception of the item on infidelity, which has increasingly been quoted by both men and women. Nevertheless, the evidence does not suggest that there has been a convergence between men and women. Her divorce has changed in nature, but his and her divorce are still different.

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 younger than 18 involved, more motives are cited, and there are more conflicts related to the divorce—and not only about the children. We see these patterns as additional 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 urban residence—affect the divorce motives? This is somewhat less clearly the case. There is some support for the threshold hypothesis in the differences between different educational groups. Less educated respondents refer more often to behavioral problems. The role of religion and urban versus rural residence is small and unsystematic.

In conclusion, 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 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's working too much, not women's financial independence, that is perceived as a problem. Analyses of divorce motives thus suggest a different story than the literature on the objective causes of divorce has provided.

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 effects of psychological factors on divorce.

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