

Father Involvement in Childrearing and the Perceived Stability of Marriage

The central hypothesis of this article, that large investments by fathers in childrearing are associated with high marital stability, is tested against two competing hypotheses about marital stability. The hypotheses are examined using data from a national survey of households in the Netherlands. Investments are measured with retrospective questions about the degree to which fathers were involved in childrearing tasks. Divorce is measured indirectly, with questions about husbands' and wives' perceptions of the stability of their marriage. Multivariate analyses indicate that when fathers are more involved in childrearing, they have a stabler marriage. When indicators of the wife's marital satisfaction are included, however, the effect of the father's involvement disappears. Involved fathers have stabler marriages, not because they have much investment to lose after a possible breakup, but because the wife is happier if the husband is strongly involved with the children.

One of the better-documented findings in the divorce literature is that couples with children are less likely to divorce than childless couples. The relationship between marital stability and number of children has been documented with vital statis-

tics early in this century (Van Zanten & Van den Brink, 1938) and has been confirmed in sophisticated multivariate analyses of large-scale survey data (Booth, Johnson, White, & Edwards, 1984; Heaton, 1990; Morgan, Lyle, & Condran, 1988; Waite & Lillard, 1991). Recent American analyses indicate that, after controlling for the duration of marriage, age at marriage, and educational attainment, the divorce rate for childless couples is almost 40% higher than for couples with one child and is about 60% higher than for couples with two children (Heaton, 1990). Similar differences are observed in other modern industrial societies, such as Germany (Diekmann & Klein, 1991) and the Netherlands (Manting, 1994).

A common interpretation of the association between children and divorce is that children function as "marital capital" (Becker, Landes, & Michael, 1977). According to this theoretical perspective, people produce a set of goods in a relationship that are more valuable inside than outside the relationship. The production of such goods can be seen as "investments [that] increase commitment and help lock the individual into his or her relationship" (Rusbult, 1983, p. 103; see also Weesie & Raub, 1995). Examples of relation-specific investments are a common circle of friends, knowledge of each other's personal traits, and the accumulation of shared life experiences. In marital relationships, children are probably the best example of such investments because both spouses have more to lose after a divorce when they have children. Divorced women with children have more difficulty entering the labor market than childless women and, con-

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sequently, experience a greater decline in economic well-being (Smock, 1994). Divorced women with children are also less likely to remarry, which further limits the chances of improving their living standard after divorce (Smock, 1990). The costs of divorce for men are primarily psychological and social. In most marital breakups, mothers get custody of the children. Fathers see their children infrequently after a divorce, and the contacts they maintain with them are less intense and of lower quality (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). In short, the expected costs of divorce are higher when couples have children. The high cost of divorce may not prevent marriages from breaking up, but it clearly provides both men and women incentives to work out marital problems and, in doing this, reduces the likelihood of divorce.

Although the notion of marital capital is a plausible interpretation of the relationship between divorce and number of children, it is not the only one. Some have argued that couples stay together not because they, themselves, have more to lose, but because they think a divorce would hurt their children. In this case, the effect of children on marital stability is believed to be temporary. Couples on the verge of a breakup may wait until their children leave the parental home (Glenn & McLanahan, 1982). There is some evidence supporting this. Among couples with children, the likelihood of divorce tends to increase when the children grow older (Waite & Lillard, 1991). Others have argued that the causal order is the other way around. Because children are so strongly connected to the relationship, the decision to have children depends on the faith that partners have in their marriage. As a result, the relationship between divorce and fertility is due to the effect of expected marital stability on the decision to have children, rather than on the bonding power of children, themselves (Lillard & Waite, 1993). It is difficult to examine such mutual causal influences conclusively, but a recent longitudinal analysis suggests that both effects are operating (Waite & Lillard, 1991).

In light of these competing hypotheses, some researchers have tried to examine the investment hypothesis more directly. Their studies generally focus on differences among couples with children and examine the influence of child characteristics on divorce. Morgan et al. (1988), for example, examined whether divorce is related to the sex of the child. Among couples with one child, those with a daughter appeared to have a 9% higher risk of divorce than those with a son. Among couples

with two children, those with two sons had the lowest risk of divorce, followed by couples with one son and one daughter. Couples with two daughters had the highest risk. Morgan et al. interpret these findings as evidence for the investment hypothesis. On average, fathers invest more in sons than in daughters, have closer ties to their sons, and hence have more to lose after a divorce when they have sons. Another child characteristic that has been studied is whose child it is. In their analysis of a small sample of second marriages, Becker et al. (1977) find that the risk of divorce is increased when the children who are living at home are not the biological children of the husband. Assuming that fathers invest more in their own children than in the children of someone else, this finding also can be interpreted as favoring the investment hypothesis.

Although these studies provide more direct tests of the investment hypothesis, they are based on assumptions about how much fathers invest in their children. It is not implausible that fathers invest more in sons than in daughters and more in biological children than in the children of someone else, but it would be preferable to measure such investments directly. This study examines the investment hypothesis in a new way. I follow, in part, the study of Morgan et al. (1988) by focusing on differences among couples with children, but I measure father's investments directly and relate such investments to the degree of marital instability. The central hypothesis in the analyses is that fathers who are more involved in childrearing will have more to lose when the marriage dissolves and will be less likely to divorce. In other words, I assume that the degree to which children function as marital capital varies among fathers, and I believe that such variations have an impact on the tie between father and mother. Because it is primarily the father who experiences a decline in the number of contacts with children after divorce, I limit the study to the investments of fathers and leave questions about the investments of mothers to future research.

Analyzing the relationship between fathers' investments in children and divorce is important for several reasons. First, the analysis may provide new insights into the mechanisms underlying the relationship between the number of children and divorce. Second, much attention in recent research has been given to the economic costs of divorce and, in particular, to the socioeconomic consequences of divorce for women. The analysis presented here shifts the focus to the social costs of divorce and examines the relevance of such costs

for men. Third, the dominant argument in recent theorizing on marriage and divorce is that increasing levels of women's education and labor-force participation have reduced the gains to marriage. In other words, low rates of marriage and high rates of divorce are attributed to a decline in sex-role differentiation. I introduce a more positive side of egalitarian sex roles within marriage by arguing that less sex-role differentiation within marriage, as indicated by the father's greater contribution to childrearing, also may have a stabilizing effect on marriage.

I examine this hypothesis by analyzing a large nationally representative sample of households in the Netherlands (Weesie, Kalmijn, Bernasco, & Giesen, 1995). My analysis is based on a selection of currently married or cohabiting couples with children living at home and whose first child is 6 years old or older. To measure the father's investments in children, the mother was asked questions about how they reared their first child from birth to elementary school. Because I do not have longitudinal data, I measure marital instability indirectly. Following the work of Booth, Johnson, and Edwards (1983), husbands and wives were asked in a self-administered questionnaire about their propensity to dissolve their marriage. The wording of the questions closely resembles that of Booth et al. The main difference is that both spouses were asked to report their propensity to divorce, and Booth et al. only asked one of the two partners. I would have preferred data on actual divorce, but panel data containing measures of paternal investments in children do not exist.

An analysis relying on proxy measures of stability has disadvantages that should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, perceived stability is not the same as actual divorce, although American research has shown that subjective measures of marital instability are a reasonable predictor of divorce. In a longitudinal study, Booth, Johnson, White, and Edwards (1985) show that couples who scored high on the index of perceived marital stability were nine times as likely to be divorced 3 years later than couples who scored low on the index. In addition, measures of perceived marital stability frequently have been used in recent analyses of divorce determinants, and such analyses generally lead to the same conclusions as analyses of actual divorce. Variables related to the likelihood of divorce are also related to the index of perceived marital stability (Amato & Booth, 1995; Janssen, Poortman, De Graaf, & Kalmijn, 1998; Webster, Orbach, & House, 1995).

A second disadvantage of using proxy measures is that the sample does not include couples who have already broken up. This may lead to sample selection bias in the estimates, but it is not known how strong such biases are and in what direction they affect the estimates. One solution to these problems is to use statistical models dealing with sample selection bias, but such methods require strong assumptions and sometimes can do more harm than good (Stolzenberg & Relles, 1990). However, the sample consists of couples whose children are still living at home. The number of divorced couples will not be high in this part of the population, hence selection bias should not be a great problem.

HYPOTHESES

The Investment Hypothesis

According to the investment hypothesis, there is a direct effect of father's participation in childrearing on the stability of marriage because fathers who invest a lot in their children have more to lose after a divorce than do other fathers. The underlying assumption is that prevailing custody arrangements imply a significant decline in the number of contacts between fathers and children. Studies in the Netherlands show that 1 year after a divorce, about 40% of the children do not see their father at all or see their father irregularly (Griffiths & Hekmen, 1985). Similar results are found in the United States (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Seltzer, 1991). Divorce also affects relationships with children later in the life course. Dutch and American studies indicate that contacts between parents and their grown children are more infrequent and of lower quality when the parents divorced while their children were living at home (Booth & Amato, 1994; Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990; Dykstra, 1997). This applies to both parents, but the negative effect is stronger for fathers than for mothers. For these reasons, I expect that fathers who are more attached to their children, as indicated and caused by higher levels of involvement in their upbringing, have more at stake in making the marriage work and are, therefore, less prone to divorce. Following this reasoning, the family is regarded as a triangular relationship in which the bond between father and child strengthens the bond between father and mother.

The assumption that fathers who participate more in childrearing have more to lose after a divorce can be qualified in a number of ways. Child-

rearing consists of a variety of tasks, and some of these strengthen the bond between father and child more than others do. Providing physical care when the child is young, for example, may have a weaker effect on the bond between father and child than participating in leisure activities with the child. The latter activities involve more social interaction with the child and are more likely to foster mutual affection between fathers and children. In general, aspects of childrearing that are more social in nature will probably have a stronger positive effect on marital stability.

A second qualification is that paternal involvement during marriage may also increase the number of contacts between fathers and children after divorce. Highly involved fathers may be more likely to get joint custody, for example, and their children may feel a stronger need to maintain contact with their father (Arditti & Keith, 1993). In other words, highly involved fathers will have more to lose if they don't see their children regularly after divorce, but they are also more likely to see their children frequently after a divorce than fathers who were not involved as much. Although the second tendency reduces the effect of father's involvement on marital stability, prevailing custody arrangements in the Netherlands suggest that this effect is weak. Joint custody, for example, is more common now, but it is still rare (Griffiths & Hekmen, 1985). In addition, there is some evidence in the U.S. that fathers' involvement in children's lives before divorce does not have the expected positive influence on children's visiting frequency after divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

The Satisfaction Hypothesis

The investment hypothesis argues that father's involvement in childrearing affects marital stability through the expected social costs of divorce for fathers. There are also other reasons, however, for such an effect. Childrearing requires time and energy, and couples have to decide who will do what. Traditionally, the wife contributes most to childrearing, but with the rapid rise in the number of married women who work for pay, such a distribution of effort is not taken for granted anymore. Women are less able and willing to carry the entire burden of childrearing, and now they expect men to do more (Barnett & Baruch, 1987; Presser, 1994). Because the distribution of household tasks has become an increasingly important issue in family life, it also may have implications for how a couple evaluates their marriage. In particu-

lar, one would expect that when men invest more in childrearing, women will be more satisfied with their marriage.

Harris and Morgan (1991), for example, show that there is a strong positive correlation between wives' reports of marital satisfaction and paternal involvement in child care. This correlation can be due to wives being happier if their husbands are more involved with the children, but it also might be due to husbands participating more because they are happy with their marriages. Harris and Morgan believe the first interpretation is more plausible. Recent longitudinal analyses support this claim, although the evidence is somewhat more indirect. Amato and Booth (1995), for example, show that when men develop more egalitarian sex-role attitudes during marriage, the number of tensions and conflicts in marriage declines. Taken together, these findings support a second, alternative hypothesis about the relationship between fathers and divorce: The more a husband participates in childrearing, the more satisfied the wife is with her marriage. Because marital satisfaction is an important cause of marital stability and divorce, part of the relationship between paternal investments and marital stability may be indirect. I call this the satisfaction hypothesis.

The Suppressor Hypothesis

What type of father invests much in childrearing? Earlier research has shown that the way husbands and wives divide household tasks depends on several social and cultural factors. Couples tend to have a more equal division of household labor when they are highly educated, when they are members of more recent birth cohorts, and when they have more liberal attitudes about sex roles (Greenstein, 1996; Presser, 1994). In addition, husbands do more household labor when their wives work, although this is not so much because their absolute contribution is higher but primarily because the contribution of wives is lower (Van der Lippe, 1994). Similar findings are observed when focusing on childrearing tasks (Barnett & Baruch, 1987; Harris & Morgan, 1991; Van Dijk & Siegers, 1996; Volling & Belsky, 1991).

These differences may have implications for the relationship between fathers' participation and marital stability. Many of these factors also affect the likelihood of divorce. For example, couples in which wives work for pay are more likely to divorce than couples in which wives do not, presumably because the wife is less financially de-

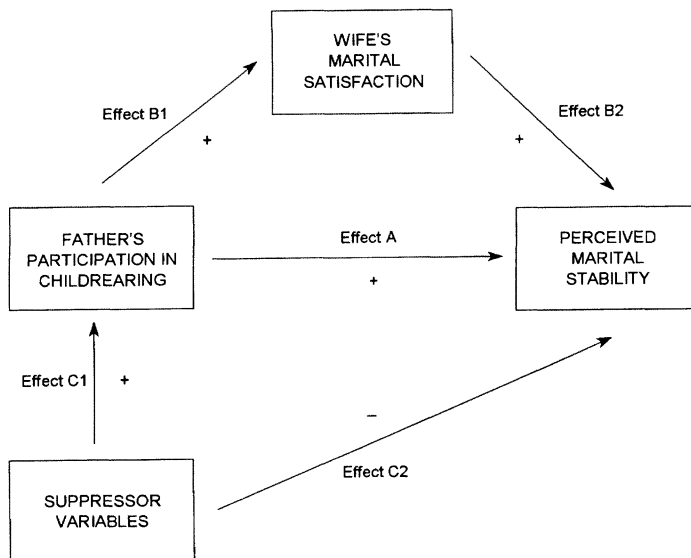
pendent on her husband and, consequently, will experience a less severe decline in economic well-being after divorce (Booth et al., 1984; Cherlin, 1979; Janssen et al., 1998; South & Spitze, 1986). Similarly, divorce is more likely among more highly educated couples. This effect occurs not only because more educated wives are more economically independent, but also because more educated husbands and wives are more likely to approve of divorce as a way to solve marital problems. In sum, both marital stability and the degree to which fathers invest in childrearing are affected by factors such as the level of education, women's participation in the labor force, and sex-role attitudes. Because these factors have a negative effect on stability and a positive effect on father's participation, they will suppress the relationship between father's investments and divorce. In other words, when these variables are controlled, the relationship between paternal investments and divorce should become stronger. This is my third hypothesis, the suppressor hypothesis. The three hypotheses are summarized in Figure 1. The investment hypothesis is represented by the direct effect of father's involvement on perceived marital stability (Effect A). The satisfaction hypothesis is represented by the (positive) indirect effect of father's involvement on stability through the marital satisfaction of the wife (Effect B1 and Effect B2). The suppressor hypothesis is represented by the positive effect of control variables on father's involve-

ment (Effect C1) and the negative effect of these variables on perceived marital stability (Effect C2).

DATA, MEASUREMENT, AND DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSES

My analysis is based on the survey, Households in the Netherlands, which used a probability sample from the noninstitutionalized population in the Netherlands in 1995 and oversampled couples and younger generations (Weesie et al., 1995). Information was obtained through a combination of personal interviews and self-administered questionnaires dealing with more sensitive aspects of family life, such as the quality of marriage. In married and cohabiting couples, both partners were interviewed, and both had to fill out a questionnaire. The interview covered a range of topics, and the median length of the couple interview was about 2 hours. For this analysis, I selected currently married or cohabiting couples who had at least one biological child, whose first child was 6 years old or older, and who had children living at home ($n = 563$). I applied the age criterion because I wanted to include information on parental involvement in the child's school. I excluded couples whose children had already left the home because information on childrearing in these cases refers to the more distant past, which reduces the validity of the childrearing measures. The original sample included cohabiting couples, but the subsample of couples with children at home primarily contains married couples (95%).

FIGURE 1. CAUSAL MODEL FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FATHERS' PARTICIPATION IN CHILDCARE AND PERCEIVED MARITAL STABILITY



Father Involvement in Childrearing

To assess father's participation in childrearing, the wife was asked how the first child was raised from birth to elementary school. Only one partner was asked to report on these issues for practical reasons. We wanted to cover a range of family topics, so we had to divide the topics between husband and wife. Asking only one partner raises questions about the validity of the measures. Theoretically, wives may be inclined to understate their husbands' involvement, and husbands may overstate their own involvement. Empirically, there is less reason for concern. Comparisons of husband and wife reports on the division of household labor, whether measured by diary methods or by survey questions, generally yield similar aggregate results (Gershuny, Godwin, & Jones, 1994; Van der Lippe, 1993). Furthermore, the agreement between husbands and wives is high. Van der Lippe (1993) found a Cohen's kappa of .62 among Dutch couples, which is reasonably high, and Gershuny et al. (1994) found correlations between .70 and .80 among British couples. Generalizations about the division of childrearing must be made with care, but I do not believe the effects are biased much by asking only one partner to report on these issues. In deciding which partner to ask, we chose the wife. Because husbands are more likely to work outside the home, husbands may be somewhat less aware of the things the mother does with the children than the wife is aware of the things the father does with the children.

The measures were limited to the first child for practical reasons as well. Asking the same set of questions about each child would be cumbersome. Also, questions about all the children would probably yield less accurate answers than questions about a specific child.

I focus on four domains of childrearing: physical care, school activities, leisure activities, and talk or conversation. Childrearing obviously includes less tangible aspects, such as emotional support, affection, and socialization, but because we were primarily interested in the distribution of childrearing between husband and wife, we decided to limit the study to aspects of childrearing that involve a behavioral component. In addition, the questions pertain to childrearing in the past, and a retrospective design probably yields more accurate answers when the focus is on concrete activities than when the focus is on, for instance, psychological components of childrearing.

The four domains are subdivided into a number of concrete activities, and for each activity the

wife was asked to indicate on a 7-point scale whether the wife or the husband was more involved. The measures thus pertain to the relative, rather than to the absolute, contribution of fathers. For ease of interpretation, the 7-point scale was recoded to a scale ranging from 0 to 100 with equal intervals between categories. A value of 0 indicates that only the wife was involved, a value of 100 indicates that only the husband was involved, and a value of 50 indicates that husband and wife were equally involved. Means and standard deviations for all activities are presented in Table 1. The results of the analyses were weighted to make the age distribution equal to the population of interest.

Table 1 shows that, in all domains, fathers are less involved than mothers. Although this comes as no surprise, fathers' participation also varies depending on domain. Men are least involved in the physical care of the child when the child is young. Means vary from 9 for staying home when the child is sick to 29 for getting out of bed at night to comfort the child. Father's involvement in the child's schooling is also quite low. Fathers talk less often to school teachers (24) and participate less in school-related activities than mothers (18). When focusing on talk and conversation, we observe a higher level of involvement. Means vary between 40 for conversations with the child about manners and 21 for talking about cleaning the child's room. Fathers play a more important role when the balance between joy and burden shifts to joy. They

TABLE 1. DIVISION OF CHILDREARING TASKS BETWEEN FATHER AND MOTHER

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Physical care (child's first year)		
Changing diapers	21.1	18.6
Getting out of bed at night	29.2	27.8
Washing and bathing	15.4	18.5
Taking child to doctor	13.6	20.4
Staying home with sick child	8.7	19.1
School-related activities		
Talking to school teachers	23.8	21.2
Participating in school-related activities	17.6	23.6
Leisure activities		
Buying presents for child's birthday	35.6	19.0
Going on outings with child	43.9	13.3
Talking with child		
About cleaning room	21.4	22.5
About manners	40.1	18.0
About bedtimes	38.1	21.6
About problems with friends	32.8	19.4
About school	36.6	20.4

Note: Weighted results ($n = 563$). All variables are 7-point items, recoded on a scale from 0 (*mother does everything*) to 100 (*father does everything*).

clearly are more involved in the child's leisure activities (44) than they are in the child's education or physical care. In general, fathers in the Netherlands are more involved in activities that involve more social interaction with the child (leisure, conversation) than in other types of activities (changing diapers, talking to school teachers).

Variables and Scales

The variables used to examine the hypotheses are divided into five groups: (a) father's contribution to childrearing, (b) perceived marital stability, (c) marital satisfaction, (d) control variables, and (e) child characteristics. Means and standard deviations of all items and variables are presented in Table 2.

Father involvement. To measure father's contribution to childrearing, three scales were constructed. One scale provides an overall measure of father's involvement (all items in Table 1), one scale measures the social dimension of childrearing (items on leisure and talk), and one scale measures aspects of childrearing that are not necessarily social (physical care and school activities). To construct the scales, I standardized the items in Table 1 and, using factor scores as weights, took the average across items. The reliabilities of the scales, measured by Cronbach's alpha, are reasonably high (.77 for the overall scale, .66 for the social scale, and .71 for the nonsocial scale).

Perceived marital stability. Following earlier research, I make a distinction between marital satisfaction and marital stability (Booth et al., 1984; Sabatelli, 1988). Stability is a characteristic of the couple and refers to the likelihood of a future divorce. Marital satisfaction is an individual characteristic and refers to how individuals evaluate their marriage. In a self-administered questionnaire, husbands and wives were asked separately a number of questions about the current stability of their marriage. The questions closely resemble the ones developed by Booth and his colleagues (1983), but my approach differs in two respects. First, I asked both partners to answer the questions, rather than just one partner, which is an advantage because stability usually is considered a characteristic of couples, not individuals. Second, I added items on alternative partners because Booth, Johnson, White, and Edwards (1985) have shown that attitudes about alternative partners are needed with the index of marital stability to produce a sound prediction of actual divorce. To construct the scale, I

standardized all items and took the average, using factor scores as weights. The reliability of the scale is $\alpha = .83$. For a detailed description of this scale, see Janssen et al. (1998).

Marital satisfaction. Virtually all studies of marital satisfaction include elements of attitudes toward the marital relationship, and some also include information on marital conflict (Sabatelli, 1988). I used both. In the written questionnaires, partners answered questions about the following topics: having a happy marriage in general, being appreciated by the partner, being ashamed of the partner, whether the partner accepts the respondent for who she or he is, whether quarrels escalate, and whether the partner talks harshly to the respondent. To construct the scales, all items were standardized and averaged, using factor scores as weights. Because the husband and wife may differ in how happy they are with their marriage, separate scales were constructed for men and women. The reliabilities of the scales are reasonable ($\alpha = .67$ for men, $\alpha = .69$ for women).

Control variables. I include several variables that may suppress the relationship between father's involvement in childrearing and perceived marital stability. The first control variable refers to sex roles—how the husband and wife think about the way the roles of men and women should be divided. I asked both husbands and wives for their opinion on the following issues: whether women are better suited for childrearing, whether the man should be the prime breadwinner in the home, whether it is acceptable for women to be supervisors in the workplace, and whether the responsibilities of men and women should be based on custom and tradition. I constructed two separate scales, one for men ($\alpha = .68$) and one for women ($\alpha = .65$). Scales again were constructed by standardizing items and taking the weighted average (using factor scores).

I also include four other variables that may affect perceived stability: (a) whether the wife worked between the birth of the first child and the year the child was 6 years old, (b) the highest level of education completed by the wife, (d) the highest level of education completed by the husband, and (e) the year the partners married or began cohabiting.

Child variables. I also include two characteristics of the children as control variables: the number of children ever born and whether the first child was

TABLE 2. MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF VARIABLES AND SCALE ITEMS

	Fathers		Mothers	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Perceived marital stability ^a				
Thinking the marriage is in trouble	1.82	1.24	1.95	1.36
Talking with friends about divorce	1.16	.67	1.27	.86
Talking with partner about divorce	1.41	1.02	1.41	1.02
Thinking about life with someone else	2.01	1.26	1.84	1.22
Attracted to someone else	1.50	1.05	1.38	1.02
Would be happier with someone else	1.63	1.11	1.63	1.11
Thinking that divorce is inconceivable	4.32	1.00	4.25	1.14
Marital satisfaction ^a				
Marriage is happy	4.39	1.02	4.36	1.08
Unappreciated by partner	1.81	1.06	2.08	1.22
Accepted for who you are	4.16	.97	4.34	1.01
Ashamed of partner	1.25	.78	1.40	.92
Partner talks harshly to respondent	1.56	.96	1.56	1.02
Quarrels often escalate	1.36	.76	1.38	.82
Possible suppressor variables				
Year of marriage – 1900	77.7	7.56	77.7	7.56
Highest level of education	2.76	1.05	2.50	.92
Mother worked in labor force after first birth			.42	.49
Women better suited for childrearing ^a	3.06	1.44	2.44	1.40
Men should be prime breadwinner ^a	2.63	1.44	2.43	1.47
Women unacceptable as supervisors ^a	1.49	1.03	1.41	1.00
Responsibilities based on tradition ^a	2.23	1.26	1.99	1.32
Children's characteristics				
Number of children ever born ^b	2.26	1.01	2.26	1.01
First child is girl ^b	.48	.49	.48	.49

Note: Weighted results ($n = 563$).

^aAttitudes measured on 5-point scales, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). ^bCharacteristics of couples.

a boy or a girl. These variables are believed to affect marital stability and may be correlated with the other variables in our models.

REGRESSION ANALYSES

To test the hypotheses, I divide the analyses into two parts. In the first part, I estimate a multivariate regression model to assess which factors affect the degree to which fathers invest in childrearing (Table 3). In the second part, I estimate regression models predicting perceived marital stability, using father's involvement, control variables, indicators of marital satisfaction, and child characteristics as independent variables (Table 4).

Determinants of Father Involvement in Childrearing

Which factors affect the degree to which fathers contribute to childrearing? Table 3 presents three regression equations: one for the overall measure of father's involvement, one for the social aspects of childrearing (leisure and conversation), and one for the other aspects of childrearing (physical care, school). Father's relative share in childrearing

first depends on the attitudes that partners have about sex roles. Table 3 shows that fathers with a more traditional orientation toward sex roles are less involved in childrearing than fathers who are more liberal in this respect. This applies to both dimensions of childrearing. Wives' attitudes also affect the relative contribution of fathers, but the effects are weaker and not statistically significant for the social dimension of childrearing. In other words, how much fathers participate largely depends on their own values and not so much on the values of their wife. This is not entirely consistent with American studies, which generally find that both spouses' ideologies are important in determining how much men contribute to household labor (Greenstein, 1996; Presser, 1994).

Table 3 also shows that highly educated men participate more in childrearing than men with less education. This applies to both dimensions of childrearing. The effect of husband's education often has been interpreted in terms of values. More educated men tend to have a modern orientation toward sex roles. Although in this analyses I control for such values, it is possible that education captures unmeasured aspects of the husband's value orientation (Presser, 1994, p. 360). The wife's ed-

TABLE 3. MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION MODELS OF FATHERS' PARTICIPATION IN CHILDCARE: STANDARDIZED REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS

	Dimensions of Childrearing		
	All Items	Social Aspects	Other Aspects
Year of marriage	.092*	.072	.093*
Highest level of education of mother	-.038	-.112*	.035
Highest level of education of father	.150**	.178**	.083*
Traditional ideology of mother	-.102*	-.038	-.128**
Traditional ideology of father	-.147**	-.126**	-.123**
Mother worked after first birth	.196**	.077*	.235**
First child is girl	-.079*	-.044	-.083*
Number of children ever born	-.013	-.045	.019
R ²	.174	.082	.192

Note: Weighted results (*n* = 563) and one-tailed tests.
 p* < .05. *p* < .01.

education has no effect on the father's overall participation, no effect on the father's contribution to physical care of the child, and a negative effect on his contribution to the social aspects of childrearing. That the wife's education has no effect once the husband's education is controlled is consistent with American research (Greenstein, 1996). That her education has a small negative effect on the social dimension of childrearing is unexpected.

Although the characteristics of wives appear to play a modest role in how childrearing tasks are distributed, there is one important exception. Couples in which the wife worked after the birth of the first child have a more egalitarian division of childrearing. This finding is consistent with most earlier studies and points to the role of time constraints (Volling & Belsky, 1991). When the wife works, she cannot carry the entire burden of childrearing on her own, which creates a demand on fathers to do more. The effect of the wife's participation in the labor force applies more strongly to the nonsocial dimension of childrearing, a finding which is probably related to the fact that such tasks are more time consuming.

Table 3 shows that more recent cohorts have a more egalitarian division of childrearing than older cohorts. Over time, the division of labor in the household has become less unequal, even after compositional changes, such as rising levels of education and increasing numbers of married women who work for pay, are taken into account. A trend toward increasing participation of fathers in child care also has been found in analyses of time-budget data in the Netherlands (Van der Lippe & Niphuis-Nell, 1994). The negative effect is strongest for the nonsocial dimension of childrearing, which suggests that the more "female" tasks are most receptive to change.

Finally, the results show that there is a small negative effect of the sex of the first child. Fathers apparently participate less in childrearing when the child is a girl. American studies (Morgan et al., 1988) report similar findings.

Father Involvement in Childrearing and Perceived Marital Stability

To examine the effects of father's involvement in childrearing on perceived marital stability, I estimate a series of nested regression models (Table 4). Model A includes the effect of father's involvement and the effect of child characteristics. This model yields what I call the total effect of father's involvement on stability. In Model B, I add education, mother's participation in the labor force, sex-role attitudes, and year of marriage to see what the effect is of father's involvement when possible suppressor variables are controlled. This model yields what I call the net effect of father's involvement on perceived stability. In Model C, I add measures of marital satisfaction. This model yields the direct effect of father's involvement and allows me to assess what part of the net effect of father's involvement on stability is indirect, through satisfaction. Because both husbands' and wives' satisfaction may affect stability, I present three alternatives: a model in which only the wife's marital satisfaction is included (C1), a model in which only the husband's satisfaction is included (C2), and a model that includes both (C3).

Table 4 shows that there is a modest, statistically significant total effect of father's involvement in childrearing on perceived marital stability (Model A). After adding the control variables (presented in Table 3), the effect of father's involvement becomes stronger (Model B). In other words,

TABLE 4. MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION MODELS OF PERCEIVED MARITAL STABILITY ON FATHERS' PARTICIPATION IN CHILDREARING AND OTHER VARIABLES: STANDARDIZED REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS

	Model A	Model B	Model C1	Model C2	Model C3
Father's participation					
Overall participation	.082*	.120**	.000	.061*	-.001
Possible suppressor variables					
Year of marriage		.010	.046	.039	.055*
Level of education of mother		-.203**	-.193**	-.174**	-.175**
Level of education of father		.042	.070*	.104**	.107**
Traditional ideology of mother		-.018	.008	-.020	-.003
Traditional ideology of father		-.009	.030	.062	.070*
Mother worked after first birth		-.087*	-.017	-.061*	-.023
Marital satisfaction					
Marital satisfaction of mother			.571**		.366**
Marital satisfaction of father				.627**	.471**
Control variables					
Children ever born	.053	.041	.049	.049	.052*
First child is girl	-.003	.005	.000	.028	.019
R ²	.009	.053	.361	.433	.536

Note: Weighted results ($n = 563$) and one-tailed tests.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

when couples with similar values, equal levels of education, and a similar division of paid labor are compared, it appears that couples in which fathers participate more in childrearing are stabler than couples in which fathers are not so involved. The effect of father's involvement increases between Model A and Model B, which confirms the suppressor hypothesis. To examine which factors suppress the relationship between paternal involvement and marital stability, we first need to discuss the effects of the control variables on stability.

Model B in Table 4 shows that highly educated women and women who worked after the birth of the first child have unstabler marriages. This finding is consistent with earlier studies of marital stability and divorce (Cherlin, 1979; Janssen et al., 1998). The most common interpretation of this effect is that highly educated women who work have better economic options outside marriage and will be more likely to leave a bad marriage. Table 4 further shows that sex-role attitudes and the education of the husband have no effect on perceived marital stability.

From the findings in Tables 3 and 4, we conclude that education and participation in the labor force are the most important suppressor variables. Highly educated couples and couples in which the wife works for pay have a more egalitarian division of childrearing, on the one hand, and a lower degree of perceived stability, on the other. In other words, when fathers are involved in childrearing, their marriage is more stable, but this protective effect is reduced by the fact that their wives have better economic options outside marriage, which

lessens stability. The role of education is somewhat complex. The husband's education affects the division of childrearing, and the wife's education affects stability. The relationship between childrearing and stability is suppressed because women with more education have more unstable relationships and are married to highly educated men who participate more in childrearing.

Can the net effect of father's involvement be treated as evidence favoring the investment hypothesis? To answer this question, we first need to examine the satisfaction hypothesis. This hypothesis is tested by adding measures of husband's and wife's marital satisfaction to Model B. Model C3 shows that marital satisfaction has a strong effect on perceived marital stability. Both husband and wife play a role, but perceived marital stability is somewhat more sensitive to how happy the husband is with the marriage than to how happy the wife is. Once measures of marital satisfaction are included, the effect of father's involvement on perceived stability disappears. In other words, the effect of father's involvement on perceived stability appears to be indirect.

Whose satisfaction plays the most important mediating role? To address this issue, I estimated two additional models, one that included only the husband's marital satisfaction and one that included only the wife's satisfaction. These analyses show that the effect of father's involvement is still significant in the former case, but it is not significant in the latter case. Hence, the wife plays the most important mediating role. I, therefore, conclude that a father who is deeply in-

volved in childrearing tends to have a stabler marriage because his wife is more satisfied with the marriage if he contributes much to childrearing. This confirms the satisfaction hypothesis. According to the investment hypothesis, we would have expected to find a remaining direct effect on stability. That the effect runs entirely through the wife's marital satisfaction is not consistent with the investment hypothesis.

Including indicators of marital satisfaction also changes some of the other effects in the model. First, the effect of the number of children ever born becomes significant when satisfaction is controlled. Couples with more children have stabler marriages, but this is only true when comparing couples who are equally satisfied with their marriages. This confirms the often-noted opposing influences of children. Children increase marital stability because they lead to higher exit costs for both men and women, but this protective effect is reduced by the fact that children sometimes reduce marital happiness (Waite & Lillard, 1991). The effect of the mother's participation in the labor force also becomes nonsignificant when controlling for marital satisfaction, although her level of education still has a significant negative effect. Finally, the effect of husband's education becomes significant in Model C. The effect is positive, perhaps due to an underlying income effect. Generally, divorce is inversely related to male socioeconomic status and employment stability (Becker et al., 1977; Janssen et al.,

1998), and husband's education is heavily correlated with such resources. Why the effect did not appear in the first model remains unclear.

Do certain types of childrearing have a stronger effect on perceived marital stability than others? The investment hypothesis suggests that social interaction with the child has a stronger effect on marital stability than other activities. The underlying reason for this hypothesis is that the costs of divorce for men are primarily social. They experience a reduction in the number of times they see their children. If fathers are strongly involved in social interaction with their children, they will experience fewer contacts with their children as a greater loss. To test this hypothesis, I replace the overall measure of father's involvement with two separate scales—one for the social dimension of childrearing (leisure, talk) and one for the nonsocial dimension of childrearing (physical care, school activities). These effects are included in a model without marital satisfaction (Model D) and in a model with marital satisfaction (Model E).

The effects of the two scales, presented in Table 5, show that father's involvement in the social aspects of childrearing has a statistically significant positive effect on perceived stability, and his involvement in other aspects has no statistically significant effect. Because the two dimensions of childrearing are positively correlated ($r = .41$), the coefficients will be negatively related, making it important to assess if the difference between the coefficients is statistically significant. The difference between the effect of the social aspects of childrearing and the effect of nonsocial aspects has a t value of 2.31, which is statistically significant. Although this seems to confirm the investment hypothesis, in the last model, which includes measures of marital satisfaction, the effect of social investments disappears. Hence, the evidence in Table 5 again provides stronger support for the satisfaction hypothesis than for the investment hypothesis.

CONCLUSION

My central hypothesis was that fathers who are more involved in their children's upbringing have stabler marriages because they have more to lose from a divorce than fathers who are less involved. Analyses provide little support for this hypothesis. Highly involved fathers do have stabler marriages, but this effect appears to be due to the fact that their wives are more satisfied with their marriages when they don't need to carry the entire burden of

TABLE 5. REGRESSION OF PERCEIVED MARITAL STABILITY ON SOCIAL AND OTHER ASPECTS OF FATHERS' PARTICIPATION IN CHILDREARING AND OTHER VARIABLES: STANDARDIZED REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS

	Model D	Model E
Father's participation		
Social aspects	.162**	.018
Other aspects	-.018	-.015
Possible suppressor variables		
Year of marriage	.011	.055*
Level of education of mother	-.189**	-.173**
Level of education of father	.032	.105**
Traditional ideology of mother	-.027	-.005
Traditional ideology of father	-.008	.070*
Mother worked after first birth	-.071	-.021
Marital satisfaction		
Marital satisfaction of mother		.364**
Marital satisfaction of father		.469**
Control variables		
Children ever born	.047	.053*
First child is girl	.001	.019
R^2	.064	.536

Note: Weighted results ($n = 563$) and one-tailed tests. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

childrearing themselves. Although this favors the satisfaction hypothesis, alternative explanations should be considered. First, the association between marital satisfaction and the father's involvement in childrearing may also be due to the gatekeeping role that mothers play. If a mother is highly dissatisfied with her marriage, she may discourage her spouse from becoming involved in childrearing. Second, a father who is dissatisfied with his marriage may begin to invest less in his children in an attempt to reduce the exit costs of divorce. Such alternative hypotheses cannot be ruled out, but the measures of satisfaction and stability apply to the time when the survey was taken, and the measures of childrearing pertain to an earlier period. A correct time order is not conclusive evidence against the alternative hypotheses, but it is an important element in such evidence.

There is also evidence for the suppressor hypothesis. Couples with highly educated and working wives tend to have less stable marriages, presumably because wives are more economically independent. They also have a more egalitarian division of childrearing, however, which increases marital stability because wives are generally happier in such marriages. These findings provide an example of the mixed effects of modern sex roles on family life. Less economic interdependence weakens marriage, but a more egalitarian division of household labor strengthens marriage. The former effect points to the negative implications of declining sex-role differentiation for marital solidarity, and the latter effect reveals its more positive implications.

These analyses have provided a new test of the investment hypothesis. I measured investments directly and related measures to the degree of marital stability. This approach has resulted into a more direct test of the investment hypothesis, which is less sensitive to alternative explanations than indirect measures, such as the number and ages of children. The analysis also relies on proxy measures of stability, and although these are related to actual divorce probabilities, perceived stability is not the same as divorce. As a result, it is still possible that a longitudinal design with data on actual divorce would yield more support for the investment hypothesis. I look forward to a replication of this analysis that combines the advantages of earlier studies with the new elements introduced here.

NOTE

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