Predictors of Divorce and Relationship Dissolution

What predicts divorce and relationship dissolution?

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INTRODUCTION

The need for the current handbook attests to the instability of romantic unions in today's society. Approximately one-half of all first marriages end in separation or divorce (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Castro Martin & Bumpass, 1989; Rogers, 2004), with even higher rates of divorce for second marriages (Cherlin, 1992; Glick, 1984). Divorce is often preceded by separation, as 75% of separations eventually result in divorce (Bloom, Hodges, Caldwell, Systra, & Cedrone, 1977). Although divorce rates have been declining since the early 1980s and marriages have become more stable in recent years (Heaton, 2002), divorce continues to wreak emotional and physical havoc upon the families in which it occurs. Thus, identifying predictors of divorce and dissolution is an important task.

The current chapter reviews sociodemographic, individual difference, and relationship variables that predict divorce/relationship dissolution. Particular emphasis is devoted to exploring potential mechanisms that might explain the associations identified. Following identification and analysis of the various predictors, we consider implications for prevention programs and future research. We begin with a brief review of the theoretical frameworks that underlie relationship functioning and stability and that inform our analysis.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Three theoretical orientations have laid the foundation for much of the research on this topic (see Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001 for three alternative models). In addition, we review the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), as it is the first conceptual framework to integrate existing theory and research.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory, evolved from Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory, was first applied to the marital relationship by Levinger (1965). Interdependence theory emphasizes the dependence of each spouse upon the marital relationship, and the ability of that relationship to fulfill individual needs. Kurdek (1993) hypothesized that couples in which one or both partners exhibited low levels of relationship dependence would be at higher risk for divorce. Levinger (1979) initially expounded upon this idea, and posited that marital success or failure is dependent on the attractions of the relationship, barriers to

abandoning it, and the presence of potential alternatives. The attraction of a relationship is positively related to the rewards associated with that bond, examples of which are family income, companionship and sex. In addition there is an inverse relationship between attractiveness and the costs associated with the union, which include things such as time and energy. Levinger (1979) recognized individual perception was important by emphasizing the notion of subjective probability; the higher one's *anticipation* that a reward or cost will present itself, the greater impact it is thought to have on the attractiveness of the relationship. The outcome of marriage is also assumed to be influenced by the presence of barriers to leaving the relationship (e.g. financial or religious constraints) which encourage individuals to remain in a relationship. Social exchange theory also posits that marital stability is influenced by the presence of alternative attractions to the current relationship such as independence or alternate romantic partners, attractions that can result in withdrawal from the relationship. Ultimately, relationships characterized by low levels of attraction, a small number of barriers, and attractive alternatives are likely to end in dissolution according to proponents of social exchange theory.

An elaboration of the above view has been presented by Lewis and Spanier (1982), which considers marital satisfaction in addition to stability. Accordingly, marriages may be satisfied and stable, satisfied yet unstable, unsatisfied and unstable, or unsatisfied yet stable. Marital satisfaction is thought to be influenced by the attractiveness of the relationship, whereas the barriers to leaving and attractive alternatives impact marital stability. For example, a satisfied unstable relationship consists of a suitable level of attractions yet the barriers are low and there are attractive alternatives. This addition recognizes the importance of categorizing relationships in a more descriptive manner than merely as stable or unstable.

Behavioral Theory

Behavioral theories of marriage are also rooted in interdependence theory (Thibault & Kelley, 1959) yet, as Karney and Bradbury (1995) note, behavioral theory differs from the intrapersonal focus of social exchange theory which emphasizes individual perceptions of attractions and alternatives. In contrast, behavioral theory adopts an interpersonal stance which asserts that marital satisfaction is related to the exchange of overt behaviors between partners. The underlying premise is that the exchange of positive, rewarding behaviors enhances marital satisfaction whereas negative, punishing behavioral exchanges decrease

marital satisfaction (Wills, Weiss & Patterson, 1974; for reviews see Kelly, Fincham & Beach, 2003; Weiss & Heyman, 1997). This perspective has focused on behaviors occurring in the context of problem solving, in which distressed couples appear more likely to engage in negative behaviors than non-distressed partners.

Although the link between behavior and satisfaction has received considerable support, there is recognition that variables other than behavior are likely to be associated with marital satisfaction. Bradbury and Fincham (1990) have elaborated on the link between behaviors and satisfaction by considering the attributions partners make regarding overt behaviors. Although these cognitive processes are not thought of as directly associated with marital satisfaction, they are believed to influence interaction behaviors that in turn impact marital quality (Bradbury & Fincham, 1991). In the theoretical framework proposed by Bradbury and Fincham (1990), if the behavior of one's spouse appears to be low in negativity, unexpectedness, and self-relevance, the individual will produce subsequent behavior in the absence of additional processing. However, perceptions of high negativity, unexpectedness and self-relevance will lead to attributions regarding the specific behavior, examples of which include the intentionality of the behavior and the positive versus negative intent of the individual. These attributions in turn influence subsequent behavior. Both situations are believed to influence and be influenced by short and long-term satisfaction of partners.

Crisis Theory

Crisis theory originated from Hill's (1949) explanations of how families react to stressful events and has since been used in relation to marital outcomes. Hill proposed the ABCX model, which states that families have differing levels of resources (B) when dealing with stressful events (A) which are likely to be defined differently as a function of the familial context (C). According to Hill, the nature and outcome of the crisis (X) is determined by whether the available resources of the family (B) are adequate for the stressful event (A) as defined by the family (C). When related to the marital relationship, satisfaction and stability are a result of a couple's ability to recover from crises. Theoretically, the probability of negative outcomes increases as the stress surrounding the event increases; the way the event is defined in addition to available resources is thought to moderate this relationship.

An extension of this model has been provided by McCubbin and Patterson (1982), with the recognition that the focus of the original ABCX model is limited to variables present prior to the crisis. In their double ABCX model McCubbin and Patterson (1982) recognize that crisis responding is unlikely to be a static process and posit that variables subsequent to the crisis are important to consider in understanding marital satisfaction and stability. Therefore, they propose that variable A extends beyond the initial stressor to include every day occurrences unrelated to the stressor, in addition to stressors which develop as a result of dealing with the original stressor. Similarly, the level of available resources (B) consists of not only the resources present at the start of the conflict but also those developed through the course of dealing with the stressful event. And finally, the perception of the stressor or event is extended to include the perception of what this crisis situation means to each individual family member post-crisis. This perspective recognizes that the variables associated with marital satisfaction and stability in relation to crises or stressors are ever changing and admits to their importance in the revision of the ABCX model.

Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model

Discussion of social exchange theory, behavioral theory and crisis theory shows that each suggests different predictors of marital instability. Although beneficial, each perspective is alone insufficient as it is likely that marital satisfaction and stability may be predicted from a variety of factors. Karney and Bradbury (1995) have answered the call for an integrated framework with presentation of the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (see Figure 1). In this model marital quality is posited to be a function of three variables: enduring vulnerabilities, stressful events, and adaptive processes. Enduring vulnerabilities include the stable characteristics that each spouse brings to the union (e.g., personality characteristics and level of education). Stressful events, on the other hand, encompass all the events or circumstances that are experienced by the couple (e.g., death of a family member, loss of job). Adaptive processes refer to the experiences encountered in the marriage such as the behaviors engaged in during conflict or the appraisals surrounding these interactions. Karney and Bradbury (1995) posit that enduring vulnerabilities and stressful events influence marital quality indirectly through the adaptive processes with the relationship between stressful events and adaptive processes presented as reciprocal. The adaptive processes, in turn, are expected to influence (or be

influenced by) marital quality which ultimately predicts marital instability. Therefore, this model attempts to incorporate variables which have previously been recognized such as stressful events (crisis theory) and overt behaviors (behavioral theory) with additional factors such as stable characteristics and importantly, it presents an integrated framework for their influence on marital quality and stability.

A number of the pathways in the model have already received considerable support (e.g. stressful events to adaptive processes), allowing the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model to act as a comprehensive integration of previously cited research findings. In addition, empirical investigation of the complex relationship between the variables is well under way. For example, Cohan and Bradbury (1997) examined the way in which stressful events contribute to marital quality and stability through adaptive processes. Their results suggest that the link between stressful life events and relationship quality and stability may be moderated, not mediated, by adaptive processes. Therefore, it appears that the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model has received considerable empirical support as a useful organizational framework. As investigations continue, researchers will move closer to an integrating more fully the numerous predictors of divorce into a single framework.

Having laid the necessary theoretical groundwork, we now turn to the specific factors associated with divorce and relationship dissolution. Sociodemographic and life course factors are considered first, followed by a discussion of individual difference factors, and concluding with an exploration of relationship/process variables that predict dissolution.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND LIFE COURSE FACTORS

Gender

Within the traditional heterosexual institution of marriage, divorce is obviously equally likely among men and women. However, striking gender differences emerge when examining subjective and objective causes of relationship dissolution. Certain variables such as affirmation by one's spouse, predict marital stability when they are measured in terms of husbands, but not in terms of wives; husbands who reported that they felt affectively affirmed by their wives were at lower risk for divorce than those who did not feel affirmed (Orbuch, Veroff, Hassan, & Horrocks, 2002). When asked what caused their divorce, men and

women identify different variables, leading some researchers to suggest that there may be “his” and “hers” divorces (Gager & Sanchez, 2003). Wives are more likely than husbands to cite emotional or relationship issues, spousal personality variables, spousal drinking, and abusive behavior as causes of divorce (see Amato & Previti, 2003 for a review). Husbands are more likely to identify external causes, and to cite their own negative behaviors as being causally related to the divorce. Men are also more likely to report uncertainty as to what caused the divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; Kitson, 1992). In this sense, gender can be viewed as a moderator of divorce and relationship dissolution. Thus, rather than exploring it as an independent predictor, we will consider it throughout the chapter as a potential moderator of the association between other variables and relationship stability.

Race

African American couples are more likely than Caucasian couples to divorce during the first 14 years of marriage (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Bumpass, Castro Martin, & Sweet, 1991; Heaton, 2002; Orbuch et al., 2002). This association holds even after controlling for interactional processes such as conflict and affirmation through which one’s spouse is made to feel interesting, cared for and important (Orbuch et al., 2002). Rates differ by gender, as some studies have shown that African American women, but not men, are at increased risk for divorce (DeMaris & Rao, 1992). However, among separated women, African Americans and Hispanic Americans were less likely than Caucasians to legally divorce (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Cherlin, 1998; Kposwa, 1998). There is also emerging evidence to suggest that marital dissolution is more likely among interracial couples (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Heaton, 2002). Unfortunately, there is little research exploring mechanisms involved in this association between race and divorce. A notable exception is a study by Amato and Rogers (1997), which found that being African American was associated with a higher likelihood of marital problems due to infidelity, jealousy, spending money, and drinking/drug use.

According to sociologists, race can be seen as a structural factor, in that individuals from certain racial groups are systematically confronted with greater societal challenges/stressors (e.g. lower status, lower income, lower education), which may spillover into the marital relationship (Orbuch et al., 2002). Indeed, when it comes to relationship dissolution, race tends to serve as a proxy for other sociodemographic variables,

such as income, education, premarital birth, parental divorce, and cohabitation (Orbuch et al., 2002). However, different racial groups may also attribute unique meaning to marriage and marital processes. For example, whereas wives' supportive/cooperative behavior is viewed favorably within Caucasian marriages, this same behavior has negative connotations within the African American community (Orbuch, Veroff, & Hunter, 1999). Thus, race must be considered not only as having a potential main effect on divorce/dissolution, but also as a potential moderating variable.

Society/Culture

In addition to examining individual characteristics such as race and gender and their associations with divorce, researchers have broadened their focus to include the societies within which relationships are embedded. For example, researchers have consistently demonstrated regional differences in the prevalence of divorce within the United States. The available data reveal a higher rate of divorce in the West as compared to the East and a slightly smaller number of divorces in the North than the South (Glenn & Shelton, 1985). Of interest is the assortment of proposed explanations for this discrepancy which range from differences at the level of the individual to inconsistencies at the level of society. An example of an individual level explanation has been that individuals identified as Catholic or Jewish are less likely to divorce and tend to reside more heavily in the Northeast whereas high divorce rates are characteristic of African Americans, who are more likely to live in the South, therefore accounting for the regional inconsistencies in the prevalence of divorce (Glenn & Shelton, 1985). In contrast, a popular explanation at the societal level is concerned with the level of social integration. Social integration is characterized by adherence to social norms and it has been suggested that this norm compliance results in a decreased tendency to separate when dissatisfaction permeates the marital relationship, as divorce is often met with social disapproval. Glenn and Shelton's (1985) finding that residential movement which implies low levels of social integration, is positively correlated with marital dissolution after controlling for variables such as religion and socioeconomic status which may impact dissolution offers support for the social integration theory.

In addition to the regional differences described above researchers have found that the prevalence of divorce is likely a function of community size with urban areas exceeding rural areas in the divorce rate

(Wilkinson, Thompson, Reynolds, & Ostresh, 1982) and the social integration theory has again received support as an explanation for this discrepancy (Shelton, 1987).

Investigating the cultural variations in the divorce rate extends beyond the United States into the international realm. Although the elevated level of divorce in the United States has received considerable attention, the literature indicates that in comparison to other nations the rate of marital dissolution within the United States may be viewed as moderate (Lee, 1982) and there are a number of nations which exceed our levels of separation (Hutter, 1988). However, worldwide comparisons suggest that Western nations such as the United States exceed Eastern cultures such as Japan and China in their rates of marital dissolution (McKenry & Price, 1995)

In addition to examining divorce as a function of geographic location it is also common to highlight characteristics of the society such as level of individualism or collectivism. It is not surprising that nations such as Japan which deemphasize individual freedom while emphasizing family life have low levels of marital dissolution (McKenry & Price, 1995). On the other hand, a study by Hofstede (1980) examined individualism, which views the interest of the individual as taking precedence over those interests of the larger group to which the person belongs. The results indicate that even after controlling for gross domestic product per capita levels of individualism show a positive association with the rate of divorce.

These investigations highlight the importance of considering a wide array of variables such as geographic location, individualism or collectivism when attempting to understand the broad cultural variables which may be influential in understanding the level of marital dissolution. As noted by McKenry and Price (1995), as changes such as economic development and female labor force participation continue we are likely to see changes in the rate of marital dissolution throughout the world. However, as researchers continue to understand the mechanism through which these variables exert their influence we will be in a position to combat these potentially negative influences.

Income/Employment

Income is inversely related to risk of divorce (e.g., Kurdek, 1993). However, Orbuch et al. (2002) did not find that income predicted divorce after controlling for race and education. Although there is evidence to

suggest that the ratio of wife's income to husband's income may have more implications for divorce risk than the couple's overall income, findings in this area have been mixed. Whereas some research has shown that the risk of divorce is highest when spouses have equivalent incomes (e.g. Heckert, Nowak, & Snyder, 1998), other findings have shown that similar incomes bring the lowest risk of divorce (e.g. Ono, 1998). A recent study by Rogers (2004) found that wives' income was positively and linearly related to the risk of divorce. In addition, the risk of divorce was greatest when wives contributed about half of the total family income. Rogers concluded that economic dependence and obligation predict marital stability but when economic resources are equivalent spouses are then free to seek divorce.

In terms of employment, rates of divorce are elevated among couples in which the husband, or both husband and wife are unemployed during the first year of marriage (Bumpass et al., 1991; Tzeng, 1992). Nonstandard work schedules are also related to marital stability. Presser (2000) found that among families with children, working nights rather than days increased the risk of divorce. Interestingly, individuals from different socioeconomic groups tend to cite different causes for divorce (see Amato & Previti, 2003 for a review). Individuals of higher status are more likely to blame emotional or relationship issues, whereas those of lower status tend to cite more basic causes, such as financial problems or drinking.

Premarital cohabitation

Premarital cohabitation is associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction and a higher risk of divorce (Amato, 1996; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; Bumpass et al., 1991; deVaus, Qu, & Weston, 2003; Heaton, 2002; Teachman & Polonko, 1990). Premarital cohabitation is more common among African American couples, couples with lower education levels, and couples reporting parental divorce/separation (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; Orbuch et al., 2002). However, this differential risk between cohabitors and non-cohabitors has been shrinking in more recent cohorts (deVaus et al., 2003). After controlling for other divorce predictors, there was no significant difference between divorce rates for cohabitors and non-cohabitors who had married in the early 1990s. In addition, the link between premarital cohabitation and divorce may apply only for those individuals who have been in more than one cohabiting

relationship. Teachman (2003) found that premarital cohabitation was not associated with an increased risk of divorce when it was limited to the future spouse.

One potential mechanism that may account for this association between cohabitation and divorce is length of relationship. It has been posited that cohabitors have spent longer periods of time in the relationship, and thus report higher rates of dissolution (DeMaris & Rao, 1992). However, this argument has received only modest empirical support. Teachman and Polonko (1990) found that cohabitors displayed elevated rates of divorce relative to non-cohabitors when marital duration was considered from the wedding date. But when relationship length was measured from the date of cohabitation, only "serial cohabitors" (those who had cohabited more than once before marriage), had higher rates of divorce than non-cohabitors. However, other studies have found that premarital cohabitation predicts divorce even after controlling for relationship duration (Bennett, Blanc, & Bloom, 1988; DeMaris & Rao, 1992). An alternative account rests on selection bias. According to this account premarital cohabitation is nontraditional, and thus attracts individuals with unconventional views of marriage and a greater openness to divorce (Bennett et al., 1988; deVaus, Qu, & Weston, 2003). Other potential mechanisms include problem behaviors within marriage, as Amato and Rogers (1997) found that individuals who cohabitated experienced increased problems due to spousal moodiness.

Premarital/marital birth

Premarital childbearing is associated with an increased risk of divorce (Heaton, 2002; Martin & Bumpass, 1989; however, for an exception see DeMaris & Rao, 1992). Although African American couples are more likely to have children before marriage than are Caucasian couples (Orbuch et al., 2002), the association between premarital birth and divorce appears to be weaker among African Americans (Martin & Bumpass, 1989). Interestingly, there is not a strong association between premarital conception and divorce (Teachman, 2002). However, the birth of a child during marriage is a protective buffer against divorce; DeMaris and Rao (1992) found that the odds of divorce were significantly reduced upon the birth of the first child (DeMaris & Rao, 1992; White & Booth, 1985). Interestingly, this effect may be specific to the gender of the child, as Morgan, Lye, and Condran (1988) found that parents of girls were more likely to divorce than

parents of boys (but see Devine and Forehand (1996) for an exception). The presence of children appears to be related to accounts given for divorce. Amato and Previti (2003) found that couples with children were more likely to cite abuse or alcohol/drugs as causes of the divorce. This suggests that divorce is more likely in situations where children are witnessing or being the victim of negative and/or violent behaviors by one of the parents.

Age at marriage

Age at marriage is one of the strongest predictors of divorce within the early years of marriage, even after controlling for the presence of children (Bumpass et al., 1991; DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Heaton, 2002; Martin & Bumpass, 1989; Moore & Waite, 1981; Tzeng, 1992). Although the risk of divorce decreases as age at marriage increases, this buffering effect lessens as age at marriage increases (DeMaris & Rao, 1992). This is not surprising, as one year during the teens represents a greater increase in maturity, than does one year during a person's twenties or thirties. Age at marriage appears to be similar among African American and Caucasian couples (Orbuch et al., 2002), but is lower among offspring of divorced parents (Amato, 1996; Keith & Finlay, 1988). Age heterogamy is also associated with divorce, as couples in which the husband is three or more years older than his wife are at an increased risk for divorce (Tzeng, 1992). This effect was not found for older wife-younger husband marriages or age-homogenous couples.

As regards the mechanisms that link early marriage to divorce, it has been argued that individuals marrying at a young age may be less compatible with one another, less prepared for marriage, and lack economic resources (Booth & Edwards, 1985). Specific problem behaviors may also account for the link between age at marriage and divorce. Amato and Rogers (1997) found that marrying at a later age was associated with a decline in problems due to infidelity, jealousy, and drinking/drug use – behaviors that have been shown to predict divorce. Interestingly, subjective accounts of divorce also tend to vary according to age at marriage. Individuals who married at older ages were more likely to cite incompatibility and a lack of a sense of family as causes of divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; Kitson, 1992). Those who married young tended to blame marrying young, growing apart, and going out too much with friends. Drinking has been cited by

those who married young (Amato & Previti, 2003), as well as those who married at an older age (Kitson, 1992).

Education

Orbuch et al. (2002) found that level of education predicted divorce for African American and Caucasian wives, and Caucasian husbands; divorce risk decreased with greater education. No association between education and divorce was found among African American husbands. These findings held even after controlling for interaction variables such as affirmation (making one's spouse feel important) and conflict. Similarly, Bumpass et al. (1991) found that rates of divorce were lower among highly educated women, even after controlling for age at marriage. Kurdek (1993) also found that low levels of education for either spouse predicted divorce within the first four years of marriage. In contrast, Kposowa (1998) found that greater levels of education among wives predicted a higher likelihood of divorce. Rather than considering education in absolute terms, it is also important to examine educational heterogamy within couples. Rates of divorce are lower if the husband is in a higher educational category than his wife than they are among couples of the same educational status (Bumpass et al., 1991; Heaton, 2002) and are highest if the wife is in a higher educational category than her husband.

Few mechanisms have been proposed to account for the relationship between education and divorce. However, Amato and Rogers (1997) found that lower levels of education were associated with an increase in reported problems due to jealousy and drinking/drug use, behaviors which are also predictive of divorce. As regards subjective accounts, individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to cite incompatibility as the cause of divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003). It is also important to note that education tends to serve as a proxy for other sociodemographic variables, such as income, premarital birth, parental divorce, and cohabitation (Orbuch et al., 2002).

Length of marriage

The risk of divorce appears to decrease as length of marriage increases (Fergusson, Horwood, & Shannon, 1984; Thornton & Rodgers, 1987). Many studies have focused on the newlywed years, as the risk of divorce appears to be greatest during the first three years of marriage, and over one-third of divorces occur

within the first five years (National Center for Health Statistics, 1991). Becker (1991) has suggested that divorces early in marriage are predicted by changes in how one views one's partner, which are often the result of gaining negative information about the spouse after marriage. Divorces later in marriage, however, are the result of changes and life events that have affected the relationship. Indeed, individuals who divorce after long-term marriages tend to blame infidelity, growing apart, and problems with family cohesiveness (Amato & Previti, 2003; Kitson, 1992), whereas those in short-term marriages cite personality clashes and basic incompatibility.

Remarriage

The likelihood of divorce is significantly higher in second marriages than it is in first marriages (Amato, 1996). This trend is more extreme among African American women, women younger than 25 at the time of remarriage, and women from separated/divorced families (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). Martin and Bumpass (1989) found that the risk of divorce was 25% higher in second marriages than first marriages, and argued that individuals who remarry bring with them the same intrapersonal and interpersonal variables that led to divorce in their first marriage. However, White and Booth (1985) contend that second marriages are less successful because they generally present more complex family dynamics than first marriages.

Parental divorce

The risk of divorce is elevated among individuals whose parents divorced or separated (Amato, 1996; Bumpass et al., 1991; Keith & Finley, 1988; Pope & Mueller, 1976). Although African Americans are more likely than Caucasians to come from divorced/separated families of origin (Orbuch et al., 2002), Pope and Mueller (1976) found a weaker association between parental and offspring divorce among African Americans. There have been conflicting findings regarding gender-differences in the effect of parental divorce, as Amato (1996) and Teachman (2002) found significant associations between parental and offspring divorce among wives but not husbands. However, other studies have found that rates of divorce were especially high among couples in which the husband came from a separated/divorced family but the wife did not (Bumpass et al., 1991). Similarly, DeMaris and Rao (1992) found that coming from an intact family was a protective factor for males but not for females. Regardless, this effect of parental divorce upon offspring

appears to be additive, as Amato (1996, 1997) found that the risk of divorce was even greater when both spouses came from divorced families than when only one spouse did. In addition, the deleterious effects of parental divorce upon marital stability may be most potent for children who are young at the time of divorce. Amato (1996) found that parental divorce occurring when children are under the age of 12 was associated with a 60% increase in the probability of divorce, as opposed to a 23% increase for children aged 13-19 years. Offspring over the age of 20 when their parents divorced actually showed a 20% decrease in the risk of divorce.

Several mechanisms for this association have been posited, with age at marriage and premarital cohabitation accounting for much of the variance (Amato, 1996; Bumpass et al., 1991). However, Amato (1996) found that problematic interpersonal behavior was the strongest mediator of the association between parental and offspring divorce. These behaviors ranged from being easily angered and jealous, to being critical, or not being home enough. Amato and Rogers (1997) replicated these findings, showing that parental divorce was associated with an increase in problems among offspring due to jealousy, moodiness, infidelity, irritating habits, spending money foolishly, and drinking/drug use. Interestingly, after parental divorce, closeness to one's in-laws may serve as a protective buffer against offspring divorce. Timmer and Veroff (2000) found that when wives came from a divorced family, increased closeness with the husband's family was associated with a lower likelihood of divorce.

Religiosity

Low religious participation and religious heterogamy are also associated with a greater risk of marital dissolution (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Bumpass et al., 1991; Heaton, 2002; Thomas & Cornwall, 1990). As regards mechanisms for this association, problem behaviors within the context of marriage may account for the relationship between religiosity and divorce. Amato and Rogers (1997) found that lower church attendance was associated with an increased likelihood of reporting problems stemming from jealousy, moodiness, infidelity, irritating habits, spending money, and drinking/drug use. In terms of subjective accounts of divorce, more religious individuals were more likely to cite infidelity as a cause of divorce, and less likely to blame incompatibility (Amato & Previti, 2003). Amato and Previti (2003) stress that this does

not indicate that religious individuals are more likely to experience infidelity; rather, it may demonstrate that highly religious individuals divorce only under extreme conditions.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCE FACTORS

Personality

Approximately 30-42% of the heritability of divorce risk stems from genetic factors affecting personality (Jockin, McGue, & Lykken, 1996). Personality issues are also commonly cited by divorced individuals as being causally linked to separation/divorce. Amato and Previti (2003) found that personality problems were the fifth most commonly blamed causes of divorce, and were cited by approximately 10% of divorced individuals.

Among the personality variables that have been considered as predictors of divorce and relationship dissolution, *neuroticism* (a generalized tendency to experience negative affect, such as fear, sadness, embarrassment, anger, guilt) has gained the strongest empirical support (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Higher levels of neuroticism have been consistently linked to elevated rates of divorce. Kelly and Conley's (1987) impressive longitudinal study that followed 300 couples over nearly 50 years demonstrated that neuroticism at the start of the study was associated with subsequent divorce. Kurdek (1993) replicated these findings in a 5-year longitudinal study, as did Jockin, McGue, & Lykken (1996) in their genetic analysis of factors affecting divorce risk. These findings are strengthened by the fact that measurements of neuroticism taken during adolescence are predictive of women's divorce by age 32 (Kiernan, 1986). In addition, Kurdek (1992) found that these results generalized to cohabiting homosexual couples, as couples that separated reported higher levels of negative affect before the separation than did couples who stayed together.

However, other researchers have failed to find an association between neuroticism and divorce in longitudinal studies of marital stability (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978). Similarly, in a 4-year longitudinal study, Karney and Bradbury (1997) found that although neuroticism was associated with initial levels of marital satisfaction, it was not related to marital dissolution or trajectories of marital satisfaction. Other researchers have also found that neuroticism is associated with marital dissatisfaction (Kelly & Conley, 1987; Terman & Oden, 1947), suggesting that neuroticism may not be uniquely linked to divorce after controlling for marital

happiness. Alternatively, neurotic individuals may be difficult to live with and/or may easily give up on marriage (Kurdek, 1993).

Low levels of *agreeableness* (the tendency to be altruistic, trusting, soft-hearted, sympathetic, warm and generous) and high levels of *extraversion* (the tendency to be upbeat, energetic, assertive, active, talkative and friendly) have also been considered as predictors of divorce and relationship dissolution. Kelly and Conley (1987) found weak associations between these personality variables and marital dissolution, whereas Bentler and Newcomb (1978) found that high extraversion predicted divorce for husbands only. Jockin et al. (1996) found that a positive emotionality factor (corresponding with extraversion) was predictive of marital dissolution for both men and women. However, other studies have failed to find a significant relationship between agreeableness, extraversion, openness, and divorce (Kurdek, 1993). *Conscientiousness* (the tendency to be efficient, thorough, resourceful, organized, ambitious, industrious and enterprising) has also received some attention as a potential predictor of marital dissolution; Kurdek (1993) found that wives' lack of conscientiousness was associated with elevated levels of divorce.

Although these personality variables represent enduring characteristics, it has been argued that they exert different effects on a marriage at varying time points (Tucker, Kressin, Spiro, & Ruscio, 1998). Although not formally tested, Kelly and Conley's (1987) data suggest that divorces within 20 years after engagement were predicted by husbands' impulsiveness and both husbands' and wives' neuroticism. Divorces after more than 20 years from engagement were predicted by husbands' neuroticism and extraversion. In a prospective investigation, Tucker et al. (1998) found that certain aspects of neuroticism and disagreeableness were related to the timing of divorce. Specifically, individuals high in anxiety and anger were at higher risk for earlier divorce (within the first 20 years of marriage) than later divorce. Similarly, spouses rated lower on conscientiousness were at risk for earlier divorce, though this was only marginally significant after controlling for age at marriage and education. However, it is interesting to note that although the other aspects of neuroticism (inadequacy and sensitivity) were associated with a higher risk of divorce, they were unrelated to the timing of divorce. Tucker et al. (1998) conclude that characteristics associated with

disagreeableness and impulsivity/conscientiousness are risk factors for early divorce, while characteristics associated with neuroticism are risk factors for both early and late divorce.

Psychopathology

There is ample evidence of a cross-sectional association between psychiatric disorders and rates of divorce/relationship dissolution (Frank & Gertler, 1991; Thompson & Bland, 1995; Williams, Takeuchi, & Adair, 1992). However, two causal pathways are viable, as psychopathology may be the cause or the result of divorce. Thus, longitudinal research is necessary to explore this association. There is emerging evidence supporting a causal link between individual psychopathology and elevated risk of divorce. Kessler, Walters, and Forthofer (1998) found that individuals reporting the onset of one or more psychiatric disorders before or during the course of marriage were more likely to divorce than individuals without any psychopathology. All psychiatric disorders, with the exception of social phobia and simple phobia, were associated with increased odds of divorce during the first marriage. Mania was associated with the greatest risk of marital dissolution for both men and women. Anxiety disorders showed the highest chance of divorce among men, followed by mood disorders and substance use disorders. Among women, substance use disorders were associated with the greatest risk of dissolution, followed by mood disorders and anxiety disorders. Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) in particular, is associated with a higher risk of divorce in women's first and second marriages (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). For both sexes, the chance of divorce increased according to the number of disorders endorsed. Alcohol and drug use have also been cited as a cause of divorce in subjective accounts of divorced individuals. Amato and Previti (2003) found that drinking/drug use was the third most common cause reported by divorced individuals.

Thinking about divorce

Although thinking about divorce is more common than actually getting a divorce (Kitson, 1992), it is arguably a necessary (though not sufficient) precursor to relationship dissolution. Thoughts of divorce may be triggered by marital dissatisfaction, incompatibility, or sexual problems, among others (Orbuch et al., 1999). Not surprisingly, many of the sociodemographic and process factors that are predictive of divorce are also predictive of thinking about divorce, suggesting that these thoughts may mediate divorce related behaviors

(e.g., contacting an attorney). Broman (2002) found that African Americans, younger individuals, parents, and those with lower marital satisfaction were significantly more likely to think of divorcing their spouse. Thoughts of divorce were indeed linked to actually getting a divorce; individuals who thought of divorcing their spouse at Time 1 were 2.46 times more likely be divorced 3 years later (Time 2); however, 90% of those who originally thought of divorce remained married at Time 2. Ethnicity moderated the association between thoughts of divorce and actual divorce, as thinking of divorce increased the odds of actual divorce for Caucasians but not for African Americans.

Self-monitoring

There is emerging evidence to suggest that the degree to which one self-monitors is related to the likelihood of divorce. Self-monitoring, defined as the ability and motivation to modulate self-presentation (Snyder, 1974, 1987), is associated with divorce history; Leone and Hall (2003) found that the majority of married persons who reported at least one divorce were high self-monitors (70%; versus 30% low self-monitors), whereas the majority of those who had never divorced were low self-monitors (63%; versus 37% high self-monitors). Marital satisfaction and marital commitment are potential mediators of this association, as maritally satisfied spouses tend to be low self-monitors (Leone & Hall, 2003), and low self-monitors are more committed and less likely to seek out alternative relationship partners (Jones, 1993; Snyder & Simpson, 1984). However, additional research will be necessary to pinpoint the mechanism that links self-monitoring to relationship dissolution.

RELATIONSHIP/PROCESS VARIABLES

In addition to exploring the association between intrapersonal variables and divorce/dissolution, it is also important to discuss interpersonal or relationship-level factors, as these variables are considered to be more proximally linked to relationship outcomes (e.g. Amato & Rogers, 1997). Marital satisfaction, relational dependence, marital violence, and marital interaction are four areas most commonly related to divorce, and will be discussed in the following section. Although infidelity is one of the strongest predictors of divorce, we do not discuss it here, and instead refer readers to Chapter 8 where the link between infidelity and relationship dissolution is explored in detail.

Marital Satisfaction

At first glance the longitudinal impact of marital satisfaction on the possibility of dissolution appears straightforward as research has demonstrated a positive relationship between marital satisfaction and marital stability (Gager & Sanchez, 2003; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 1993; White & Booth, 1991). However, Broman (2002) found that marital satisfaction predicted divorce among Caucasians but not African Americans. Interestingly, when spouses disagree about marital happiness, only marriages in which the husband is unhappier than his wife are at an increased risk of divorce (Gager & Sancez, 2003). When wives are unhappier than their husbands, the risk of divorce is the same as when both spouses are happy. In Western cultures, happiness and satisfaction are integral to relationships and are thought to guide decisions regarding their future. Yet researchers have demonstrated that the association between satisfaction and stability is influenced by a variety of factors.

For example, the influence of satisfaction on the likelihood of dissolution has been found to be a function of the duration of the marriage, with happiness exerting a stronger impact on divorce in longer marriages (White & Booth, 1991). Therefore, much more marital unhappiness is necessary for a marriage of a longer duration to end in divorce than a marriage of shorter duration. This is thought to reflect the higher barriers and lower levels of alternatives characteristic of long lasting marriages which make abandoning the relationship more difficult. In contrast, in newer relationships the barriers to leaving are lower and there is likely to be a greater number of attractive alternatives, which allows for a lower level of marital dissatisfaction to lead to dissolution.

Additional attempts to reach a greater understanding of the satisfaction-dissolution association have focused on unhappy but stable marriages. For example, Davila and Bradbury (2001) examined individual differences in attachment style and found that individuals concerned with abandonment and love worthiness were more likely to remain in unhappy marriages. As the authors note, this demonstrates a situation in which something other than satisfaction, insecurity, is contributing to marital stability. An additional investigation of stable, unhappy marriages found that the frequency with which individuals remain in unhappy relationships is low (Heaton & Albrecht, 1991) most likely due to increasing adoption a hedonistic view of marriage in

Western culture. Yet of these individuals, a number of variables were found to influence the relationship between happiness and stability including duration of marriage, attitudes and beliefs surrounding marriage, and feelings of self-control. In sum, there is a strong link between satisfaction and dissolution yet this relationship may be attenuated by an assortment of factors.

Relationship Interdependence and Dependence

Consistent with interdependence and social exchange theory, Rusbult (1983) found that dating couples who separated reported lower levels of satisfaction, lower levels of investment, and a greater number of gratifying alternatives to the current relationship than did couples who remained together. Kurdek (1992) replicated these findings with cohabiting gay and lesbian couples. In a study of married couples, Kurdek (1993) inferred interdependence from marital satisfaction, faith in the marriage, value placed on autonomy and attachment, and motives for being in the relationship. Husbands who were externally motivated to be in the marriage, and wives who had few intrinsic motives were most at risk for divorce within the first four years of marriage. In addition, couples with discrepancies in terms of marital interdependence demonstrated elevated levels of divorce, and declines in marital interdependence were associated with divorce.

In an extension of interdependence theory, a dependence model of breakups posits that even when relationship satisfaction is low, individuals may remain in these relationships if their needs cannot be satisfied elsewhere (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992). In a longitudinal examination of dating relationships, Drigotas and Rusbult (1992) found that individuals who reported one or more alternative relationships in which to satisfy their needs were more likely to breakup than those who were dependent on the current relationship for need fulfillment.

Marital Aggression

The startling prevalence of marital violence is well documented and appears to be more commonplace than previously believed. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) reported that the lifetime prevalence for marital aggression is 30%, with 15% of married couples reporting aggression in the previous year. Both age and income have a negative correlation with marital aggression; younger people and those with lower socioeconomic status are most likely to report marital violence (Straus et al., 1980). However, as reported by

Rosenbaum and O'Leary (1981), marital discord proves to be the variable with which marital aggression shows the strongest correlation.

Given the prevalence of marital aggression and its strong association with marital discord, a number of studies have examined the longitudinal impact of violence. Great attention is given to newlywed samples as these couples are characterized by greater levels of aggression (Suitor, Pillemer, & Straus, 1990) and they enable researchers to examine spousal aggression in its earliest phases. O'Leary et al (1989) reported that individuals in relationships with stable levels of aggression show significant decreases in marital satisfaction across a 30-month period. Quigley and Leonard (1996) examined the impact of aggression across three years and found that husband-to-wife aggression predicted decreases in wives' marital satisfaction. Given the strong association between marital quality and divorce risk (White & Booth, 1991), findings such as these lend support to the conclusion that marital aggression is a significant predictor of future divorce. Indeed, DeMaris (2000) found that male violence predicted separation/divorce; however, this effect was mediated by relationship quality.

Studies that examine directly the relationship between aggression and divorce have found that physically aggressive couples were more likely to end their marriage in separation or divorce than non-aggressive couples (Lawrence & Bradbury, 2001) and premarital aggression was predictive of wives' future steps towards dissolution (Heyman, O'Leary, & Jouriles, 1995). Rogge and Bradury (1999) also confirmed the relation between aggression and marital dissolution with their finding that while dissatisfaction may be predicted by negative communication, the presence of marital violence foreshadows the occurrence of separation or divorce within the first four years of marriage. This finding suggests that the presence of aggression is associated with the rapid deterioration of the marital relationship. In short, the association between marital aggression and dissolution has received substantial support.

Importantly, many individuals involved in abusive relationships fail to perceive themselves as martially discordant and are likely to downplay the aggression (O'Leary et al., 1989). These findings have critical practical implications as they suggest that partners at high risk of divorce as a result of aggression are likely to downplay the violence or make excuses, which may make them less likely to seek treatment for the

problematic behavior. This highlights the importance of prevention programs that attempt to reach individuals and make them aware of the detrimental effects of violence with the primary goal of preventing aggression.

Marital Interaction

Although marital research originated in the 1930s with the use of self-report and interview methods, it was not until the 1970s that researchers began to focus on marital interaction (for an historical account see Fincham & Bradbury, 1990). Not surprisingly, spending time together is associated with lower levels of marital dissolution (Hill, 1988). But researchers have moved beyond merely studying the quantity of interaction to consider the quality of the interactions. This typically involves inviting participants into the laboratory where they are asked to discuss a given topic, which may range from a source of conflict in their marriage to the events of the day to a pleasant topic. From these interactions it has been repeatedly demonstrated that unhappy marriages exhibit greater levels of negativity and, to a lesser degree, lower levels of positivity (Matthews, Wickrama, Conger, 1996).

A number of longitudinal investigations have demonstrated an association between marital interaction and dissolution. For example, in a four-year longitudinal study of couples, Gottman and Levenson (1992) used the Rapid Couples Interaction Scoring System to classify couples as regulated or non-regulated based on a conversation surrounding a marital problem. The researchers used positive codes such as positive problem description and humor, in addition to negative codes such as complaining and criticizing to classify speakers. Regulated couples were characterized by a larger ratio of positive to negative behaviors for both partners whereas non-regulated couples had at least one spouse with a larger ratio of negative to positive behaviors. Non-regulated couples were more defensive, conflict engaging, stubborn, angry, whiny and more likely to withdraw, in addition to being less affectionate, interested, and joyful. Importantly, non-regulated couples were more likely to consider dissolution, experience separation, or divorce than couples characterized as regulated. Therefore, couples in which the ratio of positive to negative behaviors is greater than unity are likely to experience stability whereas dissolution appears to be predicted by equal or greater levels of negative as compared to positive behaviors. Similarly, among gay and lesbian couples, negative affect during conflict and lack of positive affect during an events-of-the-day discussion were associated with separation (Gottman,

Levenson, Gross, Frederickson, McCoy, Rosenthal et al., 2003). However, the association between affect and divorce may also vary depending on the length of the marriage. Gottman and Levenson (2000) found that negative affect during marital conflict predicted early divorcing (within the first 7 years of marriage), but not later divorcing (between the 7th and 14th year of marriage). However, a lack of positive affect during such conflict and during an events-of-the-day discussion was predictive of late but not early divorce.

Matthews, Wickrama and Conger (1996) also investigated interaction as a predictor of divorce in well established marriages (average length = 18 years). They classified couples in relation to their levels of hostility and warmth. Hostile behavior consisted of things such as rejecting behavior, insensitivity, and stubbornness whereas examples of warmth included cooperation and enjoyment. They found that greater hostility and less warmth were associated with marital instability both directly and also by influencing partner perceptions of hostility.

Recently, Gottman, Coan, Carrere, and Swanson (1998) elaborated on the finding that the balance of negative to positive behavior is associated with marital dissolution in a longitudinal investigation of 130 newlywed couples. They found that anger did not predict divorce but that the combination of other high-intensity negative affects did, including belligerence, defensiveness and contempt. Briefly, belligerence is an attempt to provoke a response by starting a fight or getting a rise out of one's partner whereas defensiveness is characterized by portraying oneself as an innocent victim and claiming to be blameless. And finally, contempt involves things such as insult, mockery, judgment, and disapproval towards one's partner. Therefore, it appears that a combination of these negative behaviors proves to be detrimental to marital stability. However, the results of this study should be interpreted with caution, as various methodological and conceptual concerns have been raised about it, including the nonrandom selection of subjects and the use of correlational data to draw causal conclusions (Stanley, Bradbury, & Markman, 2000).

In order to more fully understand the relationship of these variables Gottman (1994) tested alternative models and found that divorce is predicted by a model in which contempt of the wife leads to defensiveness of both spouses, which leads to divorce. Marital dissolution may also be predicted by the low-intensity negative affect of wives. This low-intensity affect is a sum of whining, anger, sadness, domineering, disgust,

fear and stonewalling (which refers to a listener who is not providing the appropriate cues to the speaker that they are listening; Gottman et al, 1989). These results suggest that even though negative affect (anger) may be associated with concurrent marital satisfaction (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989), this does not imply a longitudinal road to dissolution. Again, however, this finding has proved controversial and it is widely accepted that the relation between current negative interaction in marriage and its future course is far complex than the picture offered by Gottman (for a detailed discussion see Fincham & Beach, 1999).

Additional investigations have focused on sequences of interaction, particularly the demand-withdraw pattern. This pattern occurs when one partner (the demander) nags or makes demands of their partner (the withdrawer) who avoids the situation and becomes defensive (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002). This pattern is related to concurrent marital dissatisfaction (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002) and to future levels of marital satisfaction. Specifically, the wife demand/husband-withdraw pattern has been consistently linked with declines in marital satisfaction (Kurdek, 1995; Levenson & Gottman, 1985). Interestingly, it appears that the effects of this conflict resolution style may be moderated by the context of the withdrawal. For example, Smith, Vivian, and O'Leary (1991) found that premarital withdrawal in particular is associated with future decreases in marital satisfaction. Of interest is the finding that if the withdrawal occurred in the context of high levels of positivity, longitudinal marital satisfaction actually increased. Finally, Heavey, Christensen, and Malamuth (1995) showed that this pattern varies according to which partner's problem issue is discussed; when discussing an issue identified by the husband, there were no systematic differences in the roles taken by each spouse but when discussing the wife's issue, women were much more likely to be demanding and men more likely to be withdrawing than the reverse. These studies highlight the longitudinal impact of patterns of interaction such as demand-withdraw in addition to the importance of the context in which these behaviors occur.

Research is also moving beyond the study of conflict and negative behavior (Fincham, 2003). For example, among married individuals the spouse is being shown to be a significant and valuable source of social support (Beach, Martin, Blum, & Roman, 1993) and that social support is influential in maintaining relationships (Barbee, 1990). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that the way spouses lend social support to

one another is also indicative of future marital stability. Pasch and Bradbury (1998) examined newlyweds while interacting in both a marital conflict and social support task. They found that when wives displayed less positive behaviors and more negative behaviors while providing support to their partner, their relationship was more likely to be distressed in the future. In addition, wives use of increased negativity in soliciting support was also predictive of relationship distress. Both findings remained even when conflict behavior was statistically controlled. This study highlights the importance of examining behavior other than marital conflict, such as social support, in order to more accurately predict marital outcome and understand the processes underlying marital success or failure.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION

Identifying variables that impact marital stability presents psychologists with the opportunity to target for preventive interventions populations at increased risk for marital dissolution. The importance of identifying such risk samples should not be underestimated as recent investigations suggest that there is selection bias in prevention programs in that couples studied appear to be at no greater risk for dissolution than control couples within the community (Sullivan & Bradbury, 1996). Therefore, the variables identified earlier may prove useful in reaching the high-risk populations truly in need of prevention services.

In relation to prevention a much-needed emphasis has been placed on designing prevention programs in collaboration with investigations of the longitudinal course of marital dissolution. One well-known example of this is evident in the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP). Markman (1981) identified premarital communication as one of the strongest predictors of future marital distress. This finding, in addition to others that highlight destructive interaction patterns have laid the foundation for the goals and strategies of PREP. One of the most intensive focuses of the program lies in helping couples to first identify negative patterns of interaction followed by communication skills training designed to reduce these detrimental behaviors. A number of strategies have been implemented as a way of improving conflict management, including the speaker-listener technique and time-outs. Briefly, in the speaker-listener technique one person is designated as having the “floor” which clearly identifies the speaker and the listener. The speaker and listener are then expected to follow a set of rules that have been identified for their particular role.

A time-out involves using a predetermined method of ending early communication or interaction styles which are harmful to the relationship (Stanley, Blumberg, & Markman, 1999).

Interestingly, not only do the underlying goals of PREP recognize the impact of detrimental communication to marital stability, the specific strategies endorsed also allow the prevention to be tailored to specific patterns of negative interaction. For example, Gottman et al (1998) found that belligerence, contempt and defensiveness lead to marital instability. Therefore, a couple that exhibits these behaviors could use the rules of the speaker-listener technique to address and hopefully reduce this negativity. As noted earlier, the ratio of positive to negative behaviors is predictive of marital dissolution. In an effort to prevent negative behaviors from increasing in frequency as compared to positive behaviors a time out may be useful. Therefore, it appears that both the principles and practices of PREP have been successful at integrating empirical findings regarding marital dissolution with a practical prevention for couples.

PREP is just one example of a prevention program that has taken into consideration the variables that are likely to impact marital stability. This program and others like it represent a strong commitment to integrating research and practice. However, as noted by Kelly and Fincham (1999), areas such as personality characteristics and positive interaction have been identified as predictors of marital quality and stability (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998), yet have been greatly overlooked in the area of prevention. Therefore it appears that while prevention programs have been successful at incorporating specific predictors of marital dissolution into their underlying structure (e.g., the skills needed for conflict resolution), there are essential variables that have been neglected. In addition, although Stanley et al. (2000) support the use of basic science to inform couple interventions, they raise valid concerns about linking these two areas without ensuring the methodological and conceptual integrity of the basic research. The success of prevention programs is likely to increase as more factors are recognized as targets of prevention.

The previous discussion highlights the importance of allowing empirical findings to guide the future of marital prevention programs. However, it is also important to entertain the likely possibility that experiences with prevention may be useful in determining future research directions. For example, as previously alluded to there is a strong likelihood that couples presenting for prevention programs are not at an

increased risk for marital dissolution. It is possible to use various demographic variables such as age at marriage, race, and education to target populations at an elevated risk for dissolution. However, using demographic variables in this fashion is only successful to the extent that we understand the mechanisms underlying their relationship to increased marital dissolution. For example, recall that Amato (1996) examined the mechanisms underlying the association between parental divorce and future marital discord. He found that this relationship was mediated largely through interpersonal behavior of offspring such as communication difficulties, inability to trust and coping with jealous emotions. Therefore, practitioners are in a position to first target a population at increased risk for marital dissolution. But this is only a first step. The second step is to build on mediational research like that presented above. Such research allows the prevention program applied to this at risk population to target specific interpersonal behaviors that have been identified as the underlying mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of divorce. This is just one example of the way in which a better understanding of the precise mechanisms leading to divorce can be beneficial in devising prevention programs. As research in this area develops, it will prove fruitful in both targeting specific populations and the appropriate mediating variables.

It appears that while prevention programs have made significant advances in the integration of empirical findings there are a number of challenging obstacles that must be overcome before we can be certain that the appropriate populations and behaviors are the target of prevention. For example, the potential emotional – state dependence of skills training is a limitation of skills-based prevention programs. This limitation is aptly captured by Wile (1988) when he states “It is impossible to make I-statements when you are in the ‘hating my partner, wanting revenge, feeling stung and wanting to sting back’ state of mind” (p. 2). Fincham and Beach, (1999) therefore focus on the “emergent” goals that characterize couples locked in destructive interactions. They note that during destructive interactions couples commonly switch from the cooperative goals they profess and believe most of the time, to emergent goals that are adversarial in nature. For example, rather than focus on generating a solution to the problem at hand, couples locked in the destructive pattern of escalation may find themselves focused on defeating their partner – or at least not losing the argument to their partner. This sets the stage for couples to engage in negative behaviors even when they

"know better." In other words, even well learned relationship skills may fail when emergent goals change the focus of couple interaction from collaboration to competition.

Fincham and Beach's (1999) goal analytic approach suggests that skills based prevention alone is not a complete answer to marital breakdown and cannot provide couples with a sufficient basis for long-term marital satisfaction. Rather the area of prevention is in need of an intervention that can modify problematic "emergent" goals and an important task is to develop and evaluate a goal based prevention program.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this section, we offer several recommendations to guide future research.

Depth rather than breadth: Towards an integrative model of the prediction of divorce and relationship dissolution

Given that nearly 200 variables have been examined in longitudinal studies of marriage (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), it is not surprising that the literature on predictors of divorce and relationship dissolution is a vast and messy body of research. The result is that it has been nearly impossible to synthesize this research into a single model of divorce and relationship dissolution. In sacrificing depth for breadth, we have discovered many predictors of union disruption, but few mechanisms to account for these associations and hence the attention given to mechanism in our earlier analysis. A first step in integrating existing research and identifying potential mediators is to define the relationship between intrapersonal (sociodemographic and individual difference) variables and relationship/process variables.

Orbuch and colleagues (Orbuch, Veroff, & Eyster, 1997; Orbuch et al., 2002) have argued that there are three possible ways in which these factors may be interrelated in the prediction of divorce and relationship dissolution. First, demographic/individual difference factors and relationship/process factors may independently predict relationship dissolution. Alternatively, relationship/process variables may mediate the association between demographic factors and divorce. This viewpoint has been supported by numerous researchers (e.g. Kelly & Conley, 1987), who suggest that intrapersonal variables affect marital stability through interpersonal processes. Broman (2002) agreed, concluding that demographic variables answer the question of "who gets divorced?", and process variables address "why do people get divorced?" However, a

third possibility is that sociodemographic variables may serve as the context within which interactional processes occur, and may moderate the relationship between process variables and divorce. This idea has also gained empirical support, as the associations between marital conflict and divorce appear to vary by gender and race (Orbuch et al., 2002). It is improbable that any one of these three options accurately captures the relationship between intrapersonal and interpersonal variables in predicting divorce/dissolution. Rather, the nature of these associations likely varies depending upon the specific variables being considered. Thus, it is imperative that researchers begin to consider both demographic and process variables within single studies. Gottman and colleagues (1998) are perhaps in the best position to explore this relation, yet have failed to provide any data or analyses regarding the association between intrapersonal variables, interpersonal processes, and separation/divorce (see Stanley et al., 2000 for a discussion).

In order to expedite the integration of intrapersonal and interpersonal variables into a cohesive model of relationship dissolution, psychologists and sociologists must join forces and assimilate their knowledge. In reviewing the literature, it was striking to see how few citations there were of sociological research in the psychological literature. Given the history of marital research in the field of sociology, and the fact that marriage is a social institution, it is simply irresponsible for psychologists to continue to ignore the field of family sociology. Whereas sociologists have long focused on demographic predictors of divorce, psychologists have tended to view demographic variables as nuisance factors that need to be controlled (Kurdek, 1993). In addition, the most informative studies that examined intrapersonal and interpersonal predictors of divorce have come from sociology.

In one example of such a study, Amato and Rogers (1997) posited that problem behaviors within marriage, such as anger, jealousy, and infidelity, partially mediated the association between sociodemographic/individual difference factors and divorce. They found that infidelity, spending money foolishly, drinking/drug use, and jealousy at baseline were the leading spousal behaviors predictive of divorce during the following 12 years. More importantly, several demographic/ individual difference factors were associated with these problem behaviors, thus supporting the idea of mediation. Age at marriage, premarital cohabitation, race, religiosity, education, and parental divorce were all significantly associated with one or

more marital problems. Consistent with the criteria for mediation, adding marital problems to the model improved the prediction of divorce, above and beyond the effects of demographic/individual difference variables. However, Orbuch et al. (2002) found that marital interaction processes did not mediate the association between race and education and subsequent divorce. Nevertheless, it is important for the field to begin to build upon these studies that have focused on both intrapersonal and interpersonal variables, in order to improve the prediction of relationship dissolution.

Opposites may attract, but do they stay together?

According to the partner-discrepancy approach, differences between partners in terms of individual difference factors or levels of interdependence increase the risk of divorce (Kurdek, 1993). Indeed, Bentler and Newcomb (1978) found greater discrepancies in spousal personality traits at engagement among couples that later separated or divorced than among couples that stayed together. As discussed earlier, demographic heterogamy is also associated with elevated levels of divorce, as are relationship variables. Larsen and Olson (1989) assessed interspousal agreement on various relationship issues at the time of engagement, and found greater discrepancies among couples that went on to separate or divorce than couples that remained married. Gager and Sanchez (2003) found that the association between spousal discrepancies on relationship issues such as happiness and divorce varied by gender. However, aside from this handful of studies, relatively little attention has been devoted to exploring the association between partner similarities/differences and divorce. There is a pressing need for longitudinal research, which can capture growth over time, to compare divorce rates of spouses that become more similar over time with those that become increasing different. This parallels our earlier suggestion of increasing depth rather than breadth, as there are already a number of variables that are robustly linked to divorce. However, it is now important to explore each of these predictors more carefully, including considering differences between spouses in such variables, as spouses from divergent backgrounds may interpret relationship events very differently. However, some have argued that it is not incompatibility that predicts distress and/or divorce, but rather how a couple handles incompatibility (Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988). Thus, it is important to consider the full array of factors that may mediate the association between spousal heterogamy/homogamy and divorce remembering that when we

examine attitude and personality homogamy it is critical to control initial levels of the variables (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Pathways from distress to divorce: Why do some unhappy couples divorce while others don't?

Perhaps it is not marital satisfaction in an absolute sense that predicts divorce, but rather, the trajectory of marital satisfaction throughout the course of a relationship. Karney and Bradbury (1997) found that rates of change mediated the association between initial levels of marital satisfaction and divorce, such that dissatisfied individuals reported greater declines in satisfaction and higher rates of divorce than did maritally satisfied individuals. This finding is interesting when examined in light of unhappy stable marriages and may explain this latter phenomenon. It may be that although these relationships are characterized by dissatisfaction, the course that relationship satisfaction has taken is not a sufficient condition for marital dissolution. This possibility highlights, yet again, the need for depth rather than breadth. Although researchers have identified marital satisfaction as associated with marital dissolution it is time to expand upon this relationship with longitudinal studies that monitor changes in marital satisfaction. Multi-faceted investigations such as these are likely to have important implications for prevention. Although prevention attempts are justified in focusing their attention on marital satisfaction, expanding our knowledge of the specific trajectories of marital satisfaction which lead to dissolution is essential to success. Research may indicate the need to focus our attention on changing not merely the current levels of satisfaction but possibly the trajectory that satisfaction may follow. Therefore, as depth exceeds breadth and the potential mediators of the relation between satisfaction and stability is enhanced, practical as well as theoretical gains will accrue.

Subjective vs. objective causes of divorce

Research on predictors of divorce can be approached from one of two perspectives. The majority of this work has explored intrapersonal and interpersonal variables that are empirically and/or theoretically associated with marital dissolution. However, predictors of divorce can also be identified through subjective accounts of separated/divorced individuals (Albrecht, Bahr, & Goodman, 1983; Amato & Previti, 2003; Bloom, Niles, & Tatcher, 1985; Cleek & Pearson, 1985; Kitson & Sussman, 1982). This approach has been criticized for many reasons, including an inability to predict divorce (White, 1990), unreliability and

retrospective bias (Goode, 1956), and susceptibility to self-serving/self-presentation biases. In addition to these weaknesses the fallibility of attributions made by dissatisfied marital partners must be taken into consideration. For example, there is a tendency for spouses experiencing dissatisfaction to attribute positive behaviors to variables outside of the person whereas negative behaviors are attributed to internal characteristics of the spouse (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). Given the hostility and bitterness that often accompany divorce it seems unlikely that these attributions may increase in accuracy following separation. Therefore, it is cautioned that when using subjective accounts of the precursors to divorce it is imperative to understand the underlying attributions which may be driving these explanations. On a similar note, a fieldwork investigation by Hopper (2001) suggests that the spouse who initiated the divorce is likely to recreate the marriage as a negative and unhappy experience with an increased focus on problems and failures. Although it is likely that these relationships were characterized by high levels of negativity it is also a means of justification for ending a relationship which was at one time viewed as sacred and held in high esteem (Hopper, 2001). Therefore, it is important to take into consideration the justifications people might make for the non-ideal circumstances of their life.

Given these weaknesses why might subjective rather than objective accounts be desirable? Subjective accounts have revealed important information, including the fact that husbands' and wives' self-reported causes for divorce tend to be very different (Amato & Rogers, 1997), and that infidelity, incompatibility, and drinking/drug use are the most commonly cited causes of divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003). In addition, the utility of this subjective approach is dependent upon the purpose of the research. Subjective accounts are invaluable in their ability to inform marital interventions designed to prevent or avert divorce. In the therapeutic context, the couple's subjective reality looms large, and is most proximally related to the risk of divorce. Individuals assign a cause to their marital difficulties, and to their divorce, and this cause becomes the cognitive framework within which they view their circumstances. These accounts for marital difficulties/divorce can also be informative in prevention, as they may help to target at-risk couples. Couples affected by infidelity, incompatibility, drinking or drug use are easily identified, and these issues can be the focus of preventive interventions. Similarly, demographic variables that correlate highly with

commonly cited causes of divorce might be used to initially identify at-risk couples. This group can then be narrowed based on those experiencing the common problematic behaviors. Such an approach might also make preventions/interventions more relevant to participating couples, as objective predictors of divorce are rarely cited in subjective accounts (White, 1990). Thus, in order to fully understand the divorce process, we must begin to incorporate subjective accounts of marital dissolution (Amato & Previti, 2003).

Fairy dust and candy-colored clouds: The role of marital expectations and illusions in divorce

The association between relationship beliefs and divorce has most commonly been explored in the context of children of divorce, although there is little evidence that these individuals hold dysfunctional beliefs about love and marriage (Sinclair & Nelson, 1998). And while marital interventions consistently focus on challenging dysfunctional relationship beliefs in order to alleviate marital distress (e.g. Baucom & Epstein, 1990), there is little basic research on relationship beliefs/expectations in the literature on predictors of divorce. Studies that have examined relationship beliefs have found that initial levels of dysfunctional beliefs and increases in such beliefs over time predict divorce (Kurdek, 1993; Kurdek & Kennedy, 2001).

According to the disillusionment model, marital stability is jeopardized when spouses' views of one another change, love and affection decline, and ambivalence increases (Huston et al., 2001). Huston et al. (2001) found support for this model, as couples that divorced showed decreases in love and overt affection, decreases in perceived spousal responsiveness, and increases in ambivalence. Thus, as individuals' expectations of marriage and/or their spouses are unrealized, the risk of divorce may increase. Similarly, some individuals may enter marriage with unrealistic or idealistic expectations of marriage, and may opt to divorce after becoming disenchanted. Indeed, positive illusions about marriage are adaptive, as evidenced by their association with marital satisfaction (e.g. Fowers, Lyons, Montel, & Shaked, 2001). Thus, when individuals are not able to maintain these illusions through their own cognitive efforts, the risk of relationship dissolution may increase. The association between dysfunctional relationship/partner beliefs and divorce is one that has only begun to be explored, and is an important area for future research.

CONCLUSION

The present chapter began by presenting the four theoretical orientations (social exchange theory, behavioral theory, crisis theory, and vulnerability-stress-adaptation model) that have provided the foundation for most empirical research on the causes of marital discord and dissolution. Following this brief background, sociodemographic and individual differences factors as well as relationship/process variables were presented as they relate to marital satisfaction and stability. The data suggest that African American individuals as well as those people settled in the Southwest United States, Western countries or individualistic nations are more likely to experience divorce. It was also concluded that income, unemployment, premarital cohabitation or childbirth, age at marriage, education, length of marriage, remarriage, parental divorce and religiosity are all significant predictors of marital dissolution. The personality variables which were explored as precursors to marital dissolution include high levels of neuroticism or extraversion, low levels of agreeableness, psychopathology, actively thinking about divorce and self-monitoring. In recognizing that divorce may be attributed to more than the characteristics which individuals bring to the relationship a variety of relationship variables associated with marital dissolution were identified including satisfaction, dependence, aggression, and interaction. We ended with a discussion of the practical implications of these areas of empirical investigation for prevention efforts. We eluded to the importance of expanding our understanding of the moderating and/or mediating relationships which may exist between the assortment of dissolution predictors if we are to provide individuals with maximally successful prevention programs. We followed this analysis by making additional suggestions and identifying challenges that must be addressed as researchers endeavor to more fully understand the precursors to marital success and failure. This discussion included the importance of longitudinal research on the way in which spouses change over time as well as examination the trajectory of marital satisfaction as it may increase our understanding of which dissatisfied couples are ultimately faced with divorce. In addition to the above suggestions we mentioned the importance

of obtaining subjective accounts of the possible precursors to divorce from the divorced individuals and the need for research on the expectations one enters a marriage as they may be detrimental to future marital stability. Hopefully we have provided an initial cartography of the terrain we need to cover in future marital research as we continue the journey towards uncovering the complex nuances that surround marital dissolution.

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Figure 1.Karney and Bradbury's (1995) Stress-Vulnerability-Adaptation model