

Interactive Effects of Gender Ideology and Age at First Marriage on Women's Marital Disruption

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A sample of ever-married women from the NLSY79 is analyzed to examine the effects of age at first marriage and gender ideology on the likelihood of experiencing marital disruption. The authors hypothesize that age at first marriage will have no effect on the likelihood of experiencing marital disruption for non-traditional women, but that there will be a strong negative effect for traditional women. The authors use the log-rate model for piecewise-constant rates to estimate the log odds of respondents' hazard for experiencing a marital disruption separately for each of the three gender ideology groups. Findings suggest that age at first marriage affects women's likelihood of marital disruption contingent upon gender ideology. It is suggested that gender ideology is a lens through which women view the world and make decisions and that within each ideology category the factors that affect likelihood of divorce may differ as a result.

Keywords: *marital disruption; gender ideology; divorce*

Although in principle marriage is an endeavor entered into by two individuals, the institution of marriage itself is a social construction resulting from the intersection of structural and interactional constraints. The disruption of a marriage is constructed socially as a negative event in the lives of the individuals involved. As a result, there seems to be a great debate on whether the seemingly rising acceptance of divorce is a sign of the decline of the family (Skolnick, 1991), even though historian Glenda Riley (1991) called divorce "an American tradition." Divorce is not an event that occurs

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in a family randomly; factors must have been present in the marriage that resulted in divorce as an acceptable alternative. Is marital disruption caused more by individual factors, structural factors, or an intersection of the two?

In this article, we specifically examine the relationship between a woman's age at first marriage and her likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption to determine if it is mediated not simply via structural factors but through gender ideology as well. In particular, we test for differential effects of a woman's age at first marriage on the likelihood of her marriage being disrupted, contingent on an interaction effect with gender ideology.

A primary goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of how and why a woman's beliefs about gender affect the stability of her marriage. Furthermore, we examine whether gender ideology can moderate the relationship between the age at which the woman married and her marital stability, and if so, the nature of this relationship. It is our suggestion that, in fact, gender ideology is a lens through which women view their world and their lives and on which they make decisions. Previous research that has found no effect of gender ideology on marital stability assumed gender ideology could be considered a simple control variable in analysis. We suggest that this research was faulty in that the location of gender ideology in the causal process was not appropriately identified.

Prior to testing this hypothesis, we will first review what is already known about predictors of marital stability, more specifically what previous research has shown to be the effects of age at first marriage and gender ideology on the likelihood of marital disruption.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marital stability has been shown in the previous research to be a function of both individual characteristics and structural factors. Little research has included the influence of gender ideology on the decision to end a marriage. Following is a brief review of the effects of age at first marriage and gender ideology. Age at first marriage has been consistently found to be the best single predictor of marital instability (Bumpass & Sweet, 1972; Burns, 1984; Hampton, 1979). However, the nature of this relationship has not been found to be consistent. Whereas most scholars report a negative relationship between age at first marriage and likelihood of marital disruption (Albrecht, Bahr, & Goodman, 1983; Bitter, 1986; Bumpass & Sweet, 1972; Burns, 1984; Chan & Heaton, 1989; Hampton, 1979; Heaton, 1991; Moore & Waite, 1981; Norton & Glick, 1979; South

& Spitze 1986; Wu & Penning, 1997), several other scholars suggest a curvilinear relationship between age at first marriage and likelihood of marital disruption (Booth & Edwards, 1985; Heaton, 1991; South, 1995; Teachman, 1983), particularly for minorities (Heaton, 1991; Teachman, 1983). Age at marriage has also been found to have a large negative effect on likelihood of marital disruption in White marriages but is not a predictor of Black divorces (Heaton & Jacobson, 1994). Booth, Johnson, White, and Edwards (1986) also found that there is a curvilinear relationship between age at first marriage and marital stability when divorce probability is measured over marital duration.

Recent research on determinants of divorce focuses on the relationship of gender ideology with other factors that are known to influence marital instability. Early research suggested that marital instability would be greatest when gender ideologies were inconsistent, but most particularly when the wife was nontraditional (Ross & Sawhill, 1975). Heaton and Blake's (1999) research supports this hypothesis. Other research that has included measures of gender ideology found mixed results. Booth and Edwards (1985) found that a person's perception of the role performance of his or her spouse was extremely important in his or her decision on whether to divorce, although later research found that measures of gender ideology were not significant predictors of marital disruption (Booth et al., 1986; Greenstein, 1995). Divorced women in Finlay, Starnes, and Alvarez's (1985) sample held more egalitarian beliefs than married women, but the authors were unsure of the nature of that causal relationship. Were the more egalitarian women more likely to divorce, or was their divorce experience the cause of their egalitarian beliefs? Kaufman (2000) found that, indeed, egalitarian women were more likely to divorce than traditional women.

However, one explanation for inconsistent findings concerning the effects of gender ideology is provided by other research that finds that ideology does influence behavior but in different ways or degrees for different types of family- and marriage-related behaviors (Greenstein, 1996a, 1996b, 1998; Sayer & Bianchi, 2000). Gender ideology does not affect the division of household labor, the perceptions of fairness of the division of household labor, nor the likelihood of divorce in the same way. Sanchez and Gager (2000) determined that in the context of perceived entitlement within a marriage, the more traditional a woman's gender ideology, the less likely she is to experience marital instability. In addition, research on cohabitators suggests that there is greater instability among couples in

which the female partner is more progressive about domestic gender equity than the male partner (Sanchez, Manning, & Smock, 1998).

Research that has included gender ideology in models predicting marital disruption has generally placed gender ideology in the causal model as a predictor variable occurring contemporaneously with other predictors such as income and employment hours. This placement in the causal process suggests that the effects of gender ideology on other predictor variables can be controlled through regression analyses (as is done with the effects of race) or can be included as a multiplicative interaction effect. However, if gender ideology can be conceptualized as a belief system through which women create their identities (Kroska, 2000), then failure to place gender ideology earlier in the causal process is a misspecification of the models predicting marital disruption.

HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis tested here is that age at first marriage will have differential effects on the likelihood of marital disruption contingent on the wife's gender ideology. Specifically, we hypothesize that age at first marriage will have a stronger negative effect on the likelihood of disruption for traditional women when compared with nontraditional women.

What is it about age at first marriage and its effects on marital instability that suggest that the relationship would differ by a woman's gender ideology? Age at first marriage is a proxy for a woman's preparedness for marriage. Women who marry early may be less prepared for married life than women who wait to marry, as predicted by marital search theory (South, 1995; Wu & Penning, 1997). As the women age, mature, and have additional life experiences, they may realize that their marriage was not what they had expected it to be. This leads to the negative relationship between age at first marriage and the likelihood of marital disruption. Furthermore, the women in our sample were all raised in what Hackstaff (1999) termed the "divorce culture," a time in which continued marriage is seen as contingent on the relationship itself. Hackstaff argued that women raised and married in the divorce culture see the contingency of marriage as a lever with which they can more easily set the terms of marriage. Thus, if the relationship does not fit their ideals, they can simply leave it.

A woman's beliefs on gender roles and issues of equality between women and men in marriage alter the way she will view her marital situa-

tion. We suggest that a woman who believes that women and men are equal in all spheres of life will be more likely to act to create change if she sees her husband as treating her unfairly. This change would include both separation and divorce, and would occur regardless of the amount of preparation the woman had for marriage (age at first marriage) and the influence of the divorce culture in which she prepared. Therefore, for egalitarian women, we expect age at first marriage will have relatively little effect on the likelihood of marital disruption.

It would also be plausible to argue that women whose beliefs on gender suggest that women should be subordinate to men in a marriage, that the husband should be the primary breadwinner, or if both have to work because of economic necessity, that the husband's job is more important, believe strongly in marriage as an institution. These women could choose to stay married out of obligation to their ideal of the institution regardless of when they married. This would also suggest that the age at marriage of traditional women would have relatively little effect on the likelihood of marital disruption.

However, we suggest these traditional women will experience a different relationship between the age at which they married and their likelihood of marital disruption. For these women, age at first marriage will have a strong negative effect on their likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption. Young, traditional women are likely to have had a short marital search, as their beliefs about their roles as women entailed their being the traditional wife/mother as soon as possible. However, as these young women come of age during the divorce culture, divorce will provide the mechanism through which they can continue searching for the relationship they desire, if their short marital search did not provide it for them. An older woman at marriage will be less likely to divorce, as she would have lived on her own, possibly worked, and is now ready to settle down, raise a family, and be the traditional wife/mother, because she believes that is her role.

METHOD

DATA AND SAMPLE

The data used for this analysis were collected in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). This survey, sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the U.S. Department of Labor, was designed to gather information over time on the labor market experience of men and women.

The NLSY respondents began to be interviewed in 1979 and were interviewed annually until 1994, when the survey changed to a biennial schedule. Since 1994 the panel has been reinterviewed on a biannual basis.

The NLSY is a national probability sample. The original sample was drawn from civilian young women and men aged 14 to 21 (as of December 31, 1978). The data were collected from the respondents via a questionnaire. In this analysis, we examine the predictors of marital instability or separation for women in the NLSY. The analytic sample examines only first marriages occurring to these women after the initial interview in 1979, as remarriages are likely to be qualitatively different from first marriages in terms of the factors that influence decisions made within the marriage. The original female sample size for the NLSY was 6,283. Of those women, 4,728 were known to have married prior to or after the 1979 interview and 3,546 were known to have married and had codable marriage date information after the 1979 interview. Because of nonresponse on several included variables, the sample size for this research is 3,420. To conduct the event history analysis, the construction of the person-period data set used in the analyses proceeded as follows. First, NLSY civilian women who entered into a first marriage after the first interview in 1979 were identified. Values of variables that were fixed at the woman's first marriage were determined. These variables included age at first marriage, race, living arrangements at age 14, premarital fertility status, and religious affiliation. Next, a series of records were created, one for each completed interview following the date of entry into the risk period and ending with the record immediately preceding the marital disruption. In the case of the women who had not experienced marital disruption by the time the study period had ended (i.e., women whose data were right-censored), the final record was the last completed interview. Married women who became widowed during the study were right-censored as of the data of widowhood (i.e., their marital data up until the death of their husbands is included in the analyses).

Each of the records contained data on the fixed covariates as well as additional data on time-varying covariates at the time of the interview (educational attainment, region of residence, and gender ideology) or for the preceding 12-month period (earnings in the past year, number of weeks employed in the past year, average number of hours employed per week, and husband's earnings). Thus, each woman in the sample had one record for each year of marital duration. This person-period technique resulted in a data set containing 22,291 records; each woman contributed, on average, 6.52 observations to the event-history analysis.

MEASUREMENT

Outcome variable. The rate and timing of marital disruption (either separation or divorce) was the dependent variable in the analysis. Whether the respondent became divorced or separated during the data-collection period was determined as exactly as possible. All respondents were known to have not married prior to the initial interview in 1979. In each subsequent interview, respondents were asked if they had experienced a change in marital status since the last interview. If they responded in the affirmative, they were prompted for the status change. If they had been previously coded as single and were now married, this signified the beginning of the person-period record for that particular woman. If they had been previously coded as married and were now becoming divorced or separated, this status change signified the end of the risk period for that particular woman. If a woman did not experience a marital disruption during the data-collection period, her data were right-censored as of the last completed interview.

Predictor variables for marital stability. The primary predictor variables to be tested for influence on marital stability were the effects of age at first marriage and gender ideology. Age at first marriage was also determined as exactly as possible. Each woman's date of birth was also gathered in the initial interview. Women who responded that they were single at the first interview and subsequently changed their marital status to married were asked their marriage date; their age at first marriage was calculated from this date. For this analysis, age at first marriage is not conceptualized as a continuous variable but instead is categorized by a series of dummy variables. Conceptualizing age at first marriage as a continuous variable assumes that the effect is linear and monotonic and that each year at which a woman could marry would have the same effect on her marital stability. Using categories of ages allows for differing and nonmonotonic effects by age at marriage group. Consistent with previous research in this area, the categories used in this analysis are (a) marrying at less than 18 years of age, (b) marrying at the ages of 18 or 19, (c) marrying at the ages of 20 or 21, (d) marrying between the ages of 22 and 24, and (e) marrying older than 24. The reference category is marrying at the ages of 22 to 24.

Gender ideology was measured through a battery of eight statements called Family Attitudes Questions in the NLSY (asked in 1979, 1982, and 1987), with responses ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* (responses of strongly agree were scored 1; responses of strongly disagree were scored 4) for each statement. The statements were as follows:

1. A woman's place is in the home, not in the office or shop.
2. A wife who carries out her full family responsibilities doesn't have time for outside employment.
3. A working wife feels more useful than one who doesn't hold a job.
4. The employment of wives leads to more juvenile delinquency.
5. Employment of both parents is necessary to keep up with the high cost of living.
6. It is much better for everyone concerned if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.
7. Men should share the work around the house with women, such as doing dishes, cleaning, and so forth.
8. Women are much happier if they stay at home and take care of their children.

Statements 3, 5, and 7 were recoded with the responses in the reverse order to create a scale moving from most traditional to least traditional attitudes. The Cronbach's alpha for the eight measures ranged from .68 to .76 for the 3 years in which the questions were asked. Because of low interitem correlations, the final six-item scale excluded questions 3 and 5. Once these questions were removed, the resulting Cronbach's alpha calculations ranged from .75 to .81.

Within the analysis, the scores for the six included Family Attitudes Questions were added together to determine a woman's gender ideology. The range of scores is from 6 to 24. For any given year of marital duration, a woman's gender ideology was fixed as her score from the most recently administered scale items. Gender ideology was then categorized into three roughly equally sized groups: traditional (scores less than 18), transitional (scores between 18 and 20, inclusive), and nontraditional (scores greater than 20).

Control variables for marital stability. All other variables included in the model are considered control variables. Race of respondent has three response categories, White, Black, and Hispanic, and is included in the analysis as two dummy variables with White as the reference category. There were not enough women whose racial group was something other than White, Black, or Hispanic in this sample to be included either as separate racial groups or as a catch-all group called other. Education is measured by the highest grade the respondent had completed and received credit for at the time of the interview. Dummy variables were created with receiving a high school diploma as the reference category (the other categories were less than high school, some college, and receiving a college degree).

Religious influence is measured using the religion in which the respondent was raised, as this was the only question asked in the NLSY about religious affiliation. This was treated as a dummy variable with two possible categories: Catholic and non-Catholic (Protestant, Jewish, other religion, or no religion). Non-Catholic was the reference category, as Catholics are known to have a relative low probability of divorce (Teachman, 1983). Stability of parental marriage is estimated through asking the respondent with whom she lived at age 14. If she was not living with both biological parents at age 14, she would be considered coming from a disrupted family background. Also included is whether the woman had experienced a premarital birth (0 = no, 1 = yes).

Physical location is measured in two ways. First, region of current residence is measured using four categories: Northeast, North Central, South, and West, with the West as the reference category. Next, whether the respondent is currently living in an urban or a rural area (0 = rural, 1 = urban) was also included, where urban consists of a town or city and rural consists of living outside of a town or city regardless if the residence is on a farm or ranch.

Employment-related variables include the number of weeks and hours the respondent worked the previous year and her income from all sources during the past year. Average number of hours per week was calculated by dividing the number of hours worked the previous year by the number of weeks worked the previous year. Family income for the previous year is in dollars and was converted into 1984 to 1986 dollars using the Consumer Price Index coefficients. It was calculated by adding together the respondent's income for the previous year and her husband's income during the previous year. Also included is a created variable of relative income. This created variable captures the proportion of the total household income that the woman contributes. The respondent's total income was divided by the total family income. A number close to 1 suggests that she provides most of the household income; a number around 0.5 suggests that both spouses contribute approximately equally; and a number close to zero suggests that the husband provides most of the household income.

Along with marital duration, the other marital-specific information included is a measurement for the number of persons living in the household at the time of the interview. This measure is included to capture any effects that increased household size, attributed to the presence of children, would have on marital stability. If this number is greater than 2, this suggests that additional individuals were living in the household other than the respondent and her spouse. Although those individuals could be unrelated to the respondent, we are using this variable as a proxy for the effect

of children on marital stability as no direct measure of the presence of children was available.

ANALYTIC TECHNIQUE

We use the log-rate model for piecewise-constant rates to model the log odds of the respondents' hazard for experiencing a marital disruption. This type of model assumes that the hazard rates are piecewise constant, that is, fixed within specified time intervals (although the rates are free to vary across time intervals). In this study, the time intervals are years of marital duration. We assume that the hazard rates of marital disruption (i.e., the likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption in the i th year of marriage, given that the woman has not experienced a marital disruption prior to the i th year of marriage) are constant within years of marital duration, although they may vary across years of marital disruption.

We first examine whether all married respondents' probability for experiencing a marital disruption changes over time. We do this by including a series of dummy variables indicating the year of marital duration that a given record in the person-period data set represents. This allows us to characterize the time dependence of the process of marital dissolution. As there were few women who experienced a marital disruption during the first year of marriage or after 12 years of marriage, we combined several of the years to prevent analytical problems. Therefore, years 1 and 2 are combined, and all marital durations longer than 12 years are combined into one dummy variable. Year 6 was the baseline category.

The coefficients are to be interpreted as the effect of a given variable on the log of the hazard (transition) rate. For covariates that are represented by dummy variables, negative coefficients suggest that respondents in that particular category have a hazard rate of marital disruption that is lower than the baseline (omitted) category, and that their marital durations tend to be longer. Positive coefficients imply that respondents in that category have a hazard rate higher than the baseline category (and that their marital durations tend to be shorter). For continuous covariates, the sign of the coefficient indicates the direction of the relationship between the covariate and the hazard rate; positive coefficients mean that the hazard rate increases (and that marital duration tends to decrease) as the value of the covariate increases. Negative coefficients suggest that the hazard rate increases (marital durations tend to decrease) as the value of the covariate decreases, and that the hazard rate decreases (that is, marital durations tend to increase) as the value of the covariate increases. The exponent of the coefficient represents the effect on the hazard rate itself. For example,

an effect of .21 on the log of the hazard rate of marital disruption is interpreted as increasing the baseline hazard rate of marital disruption by a factor of 1.23— $e^{.21}$ —or alternatively, an increase in the risk of marital disruption of 23%.

Using this technique, we created a model predicting the likelihood of marital disruption. This model includes the dummy variables indicating the effects of duration of marriage, the fixed predictors, and the time-varying covariates. This model also tests for interactive effects of gender ideology and age at first marriage. The interaction effect tested is not what might be considered a traditional interaction effect. The categories of gender ideology are not multiplied by the categories of age at first marriage to determine if there is a differing effect for each group. Instead, a separate analysis determining rate and timing of marital disruption is presented for each gender ideology group. This type of analysis assumes that not only does gender ideology affect how marital age influences the likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption, but allows for the possibility that gender ideology may moderate the effect of all personal characteristics that influence the likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption. These separate analyses give credence to the idea of gender ideology as causally affecting individual decisions women make in their lives. This type of model allows us to test whether the actual processes in traditional women's lives are different from the processes in nontraditional women's lives, including how their marital age affects the likelihood of marital disruption. These analyses model the interaction of gender ideology with all included variables, not simply the primary one in the hypothesis. Therefore, this model is the same one that would exist had we created a multiplicative interaction term for each included variable with gender ideology.

RESULTS

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

In this sample, 30% of the women experienced a marital disruption. The majority of the women first married while in their 20s. As shown in Table 1, only 19% of the women married younger than age 20. A little more than one fourth (29%) of the women married at age 25 or older. Almost three fourths (71%) of the women came from an intact family, as measured by whether they lived with both parents at age 14. About one fifth of the women experienced a premarital birth. The women do not completely mirror the racial distribution in America, as the percentages of

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD^a</i>
Fixed at Year 1 for time-invariant predictors (<i>N</i> = 3,420)		
Age at first marriage		
Less than 18	0.04	
Age 18-19	0.15	
Age 20-21	0.22	
Age 22-24	0.30	
Age 25 or older	0.29	
Live with both parents at age 14 (1 = lived with both)	0.71	
Premarital birth (1 = birth)	0.19	
Race		
Black	0.20	
Hispanic	0.16	
White	0.64	
Catholic (1 = Catholic)	0.37	
For all person periods for time-varying predictors (<i>N</i> = 22,291)		
Region		
Northeast	0.18	
North Central	0.24	
South	0.38	
West	0.20	
Urban (1 = urban)	0.78	
Education		
Less than high School	0.10	
High school degree	0.45	
Some college	0.24	
College degree	0.21	
Family income (in thousands)	28.60	39.43
Wife's relative income	0.34	0.27
Hours worked per week	29.85	17.38
Family size	3.42	1.32
Gender ideology		
Traditional	0.30	
Transitional	0.40	
Nontraditional	0.30	

a. Included only for continuous variables.

African American and Hispanic women are very similar. This is a result of deliberate oversampling of non-Whites. Finally, a little more than a third of the women (37%) identified themselves as being raised in the Catholic faith.

The women were almost equally distributed across the country, although a higher percentage of women lived in the South (38%). Practi-

cally four fifths resided in an urban area. The educational attainment of the women in this sample seems to be very representative of the country as a whole, as only 10% did not receive their high school diploma, whereas 45% were high school graduates with no postsecondary education. About one fourth have some college experience, whereas 21% obtained at least one college degree.

The average family income of the women in this sample was \$28,600 in 1984 to 1986 dollars. The women earn, on average, about 34% of their household's income. They worked a little less than 30 hours per week on average and had a family size of almost 3.5 people including themselves. Forty percent of the women held a transitional gender ideology with the other 60% split evenly between traditional and nontraditional.

Within each gender ideology, a slightly different proportion of women experienced a marital disruption. About one third (33%) of the traditional women experienced a marital disruption. Thirty percent of transitional women and 29% of nontraditional women experienced divorce or separation during this study.

EFFECTS ON RATE AND TIMING OF MARITAL DISRUPTION

Figure 1 presents the survival rate of the NLSY women's marriages over time. Note that the proportion of intact marriages begins to decline rapidly after about 3 years of marriage and begins a leveling out trend after about 12 years of marriage. The information presented in this figure suggests that in this sample, after 18 years of marriage, less than 50% of the unions will still be intact.

Our hypothesis is that there is an interaction between age at first marriage and gender ideology in the effect on marital stability. To test this hypothesis, we performed separate analyses modeling the log odds of the hazard of experiencing a marital disruption by gender ideology group. Therefore, there are separate models for traditional women, transitional women, and nontraditional women. This type of interaction effect allows for all the control variables to vary by gender ideology. If gender ideology is a causal factor in decisions women make, some of the effects on rate and timing of marital disruption should be substantially different by ideology, including the effects of age at first marriage.

INDIVIDUAL MODELS BY GENDER IDEOLOGY

In determining the differential effects on the rate and timing of marital disruption by gender ideology, we first examined whether the survival es-

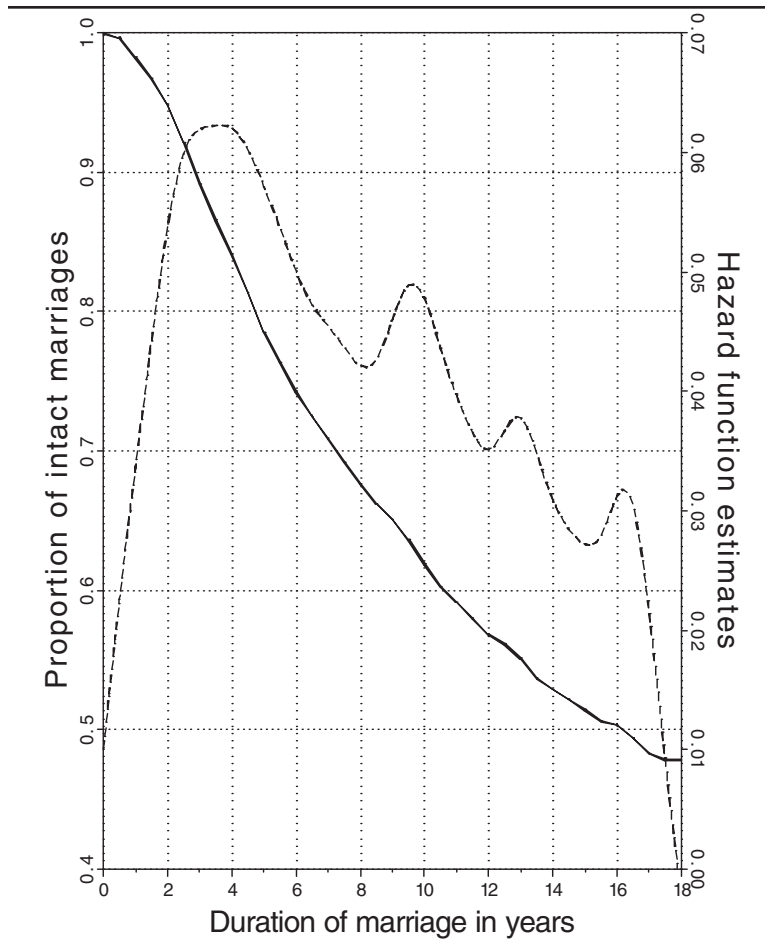


Figure 1: Survival and Hazard Function Plots for NLSY Women 1979 to 1998

timate for these women's marriages over the marital duration differed by gender ideology. Figure 2 shows that traditional, transitional, and nontraditional women's survival plots did not have drastically different shapes over the marital duration. The survival estimate for traditional women is consistently slightly lower than the estimates for either transitional or nontraditional women; however, the shape of the curve depicting the estimates is not different from that of transitional or nontraditional women. In fact, the estimates for transitional and nontraditional women are very similar over the marital duration. In addition, the test of equality over strata is

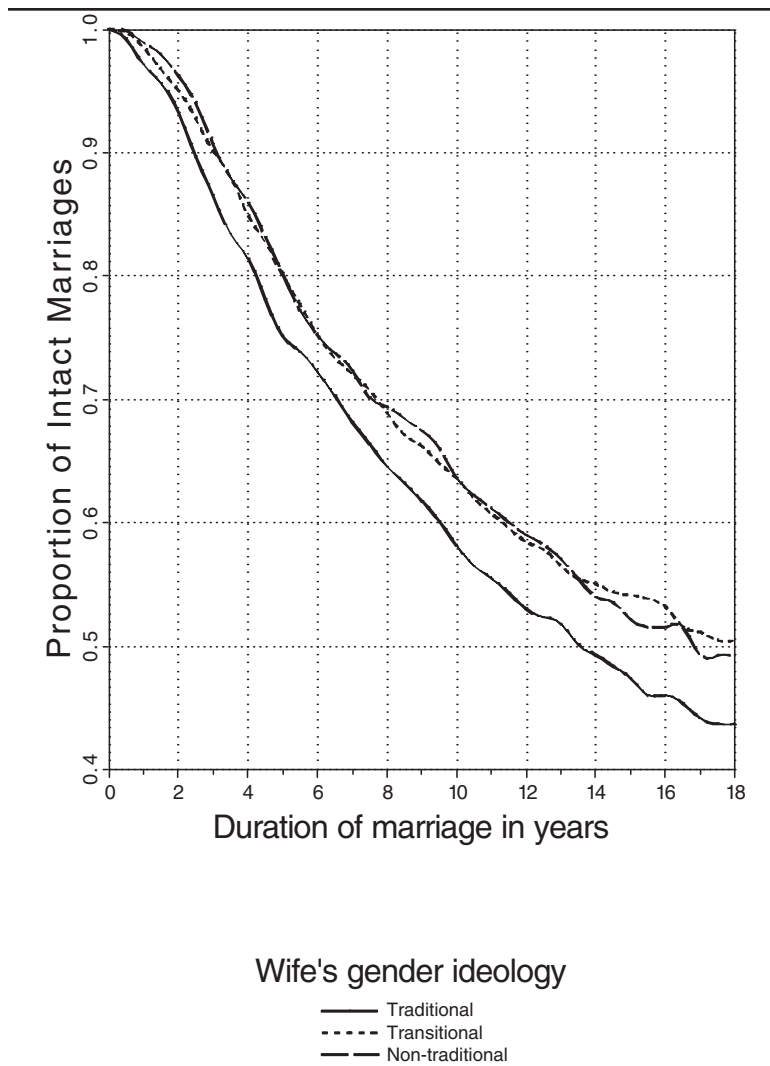


Figure 2: Plot of Survival Estimates by Gender Ideology for NLSY Women 1979 to 1998

significant, suggesting that at least one of the three groups is significantly different from the others.

Next, we present the findings of the separate analyses. Our hypothesis suggested that age at first marriage would have relatively little effect for nontraditional women but a strong negative effect for traditional women

on the likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption, with no specific hypothesis for the effect for transitional women. The logit coefficients presented in Table 2 support this hypothesis. In comparing each of the dummy categories of age at first marriage to the reference group for an effect on the likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption, there are no statistically significant effects among nontraditional women. For nontraditional women, age at first marriage has no statistically significant effects on whether a woman will experience a marital disruption.

Age at first marriage does significantly affect the rate and timing of marital disruption for transitional women. Very young transitional women who marry are 57% more likely to experience marital disruption than transitional women who marry at the ages of 22 to 24. Transitional women who marry at age more than 24 are one third less likely to experience marital disruption than those in the reference group. These figures are similar to those of the full sample.

However, for traditional women, there is a strong negative effect of age at first marriage on marital stability. Compared to traditional women who married at the ages of 22 to 24, traditional women who married younger than age 18 were 2 times more likely to experience a marital disruption. Traditional women who married at 18 or 19 are 48% more likely than those aged 22 to 24 at marriage of experiencing a marital disruption, although there is no effect if the woman married at ages 20, 21, or more than 24.

In examining the differences in these models, it appears that age at first marriage does affect a woman's likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption differently based on her gender ideology. In addition, in calculations not shown here, the effects of the age at first marriage categories were found to be significantly different statistically from one another across models. Therefore, our hypothesis is supported through these analyses.

DISCUSSION

Using the sample of women in the 1979 to 1998 NLSY, this research addresses whether the effect of the age at which a woman married on her propensity to experience a divorce/separation differs by gender ideology. In attempting to answer this question, we chose to treat gender ideology not simply as a variable to be included in an interaction term in our model. Instead, we analyzed the effects of fixed and time-varying predictors on the rate and timing of marital disruption separately by gender ideology,

TABLE 2
Piecewise-Constant Exponential Models of Divorce by Gender Ideology

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Gender Ideology</i>					
	<i>Traditional</i>		<i>Transitional</i>		<i>Nontraditional</i>	
	<i>Effects on Log Odds</i>	<i>Effects on Odds</i>	<i>Effects on Log Odds</i>	<i>Effects on Odds</i>	<i>Effects on Log Odds</i>	<i>Effects on Odds</i>
Duration of marriage						
2 years or less	-0.99*	0.37	-1.18*	0.31	-1.44*	0.24
3 years	0.11	1.12	0.19	1.22	-0.02	0.98
4 years	-0.07	0.93	0.05	1.05	-0.16	0.85
5 years	-0.18	0.83	0.02	1.02	-0.09	0.91
7 years	-0.44	0.64	-0.08	0.92	-0.24	0.79
8 years	-0.32	0.73	-0.29	0.75	-0.34	0.71
9 years	-0.26	0.77	-0.48	0.62	0.00	1.00
10 years	-0.80*	0.45	-0.05	0.95	-0.23	0.80
11 years	-0.35	0.71	-0.32	0.72	-0.02	0.98
More than 11 years	-0.45	0.64	-0.39	0.68	-0.70*	0.49
Age at first marriage						
Less than 18	0.67*	1.96	0.45*	1.57	0.47	1.59
Age 18-19	0.40*	1.48	0.22	1.24	0.27	1.31
Age 20-21	0.17	1.18	-0.04	0.96	0.15	1.16
Age 25 or older	-0.09	0.91	-0.40*	0.67	-0.19	0.83
Lived with both parents at age 14 (1 = lived with both)	-0.11	0.90	-0.19	0.83	-0.34*	0.71
Prenatal birth (1 = birth)	0.82*	2.28	0.61*	1.83	0.53*	1.69

Race									
Black	0.30	1.35	0.24	1.27	0.23	1.26			
Hispanic	-0.24	0.79	0.08	1.08	0.34	1.41			
Catholic (1 = Catholic)	0.05	1.05	-0.31*	0.73	-0.22	0.81			
Region									
Northeast	0.00	1.00	-0.31	0.73	-0.06	0.94			
North Central	0.03	1.03	-0.08	0.93	-0.35	0.70			
South	0.11	1.11	-0.11	0.90	-0.26	0.77			
Urban (1 = urban)	0.13	1.14	0.22	1.25	0.31	1.36			
Education									
Less than high school	0.55*	1.74	0.19	1.21	0.18	1.20			
Some college	0.02	1.02	-0.09	0.92	-0.17	0.84			
College degree	-0.66*	0.52	-0.73*	0.48	-0.61*	0.54			
Family income (in thousands)	0.00	1.00	-0.01*	0.99	-0.02*	0.98			
Wife's relative income	0.29	1.34	-0.07	0.93	0.08	1.08			
Hours worked per week	0.00	1.00	0.01	1.01	0.01*	1.01			
Family size	-0.15*	0.86	-0.22*	0.80	-0.28*	0.76			
Intercept	-2.75*		-0.22*	-1.87*		-1.16*			
Model χ^2	155.37*		184.62*			164.37*			

* $p < .05$.

with one model for traditional women, one for transitional women, and one for nontraditional women. This allowed us to determine whether the effects of age at first marriage differ by ideology and to hypothesize about the placement of gender ideology in these causal models.

The data support our hypothesis that the effect of age at first marriage on the likelihood of a woman experiencing a marital disruption does differ by gender ideology (an interaction effect). This interaction effect was not measured using a standard multiplicative term but instead measured by analyzing separate predictor models for each gender ideology group. This type of analysis allowed for all of the covariates to vary within the model by ideology. If gender ideology did not moderate the effects of age at first marriage on the rate and timing of marital disruption, all of the coefficients across the models would have been the same or similar. In fact, they were not. This suggests that the processes through which traditional, transitional, and nontraditional women experience their lives and make decisions are substantively different.

An explicit test of our hypothesis shows that indeed, age at first marriage does have differential effects on the rate and timing of marital disruption by gender ideology. As Table 2 clearly shows, compared to women marrying at the ages of 22 to 24, the effect of marrying within each age group is different by ideology. Consistent with our hypothesis, there are no statistically significant effects of age at first marriage for nontraditional women. Preparation for marriage, measured by proxy by age at first marriage, does not significantly affect the likelihood of a nontraditional woman to terminate her marriage. This is consistent with the beliefs associated with being nontraditional. These women would be more likely to expect equality in their relationships and would be more likely to notice inequality if it existed. Not only would they notice if inequalities existed, they would also be more likely to call them inequities and want the situation to change. Regardless of when the woman married, if she felt the situation to be unfair to her, she would be likely to leave. Thus leaving (likelihood of divorce) does not depend on age at first marriage for nontraditional women.

Also consistent with our hypothesis, there is a strong negative effect of age at first marriage on the likelihood of a traditional woman experiencing a marital disruption. This finding suggests that traditional women who marry early are possibly less prepared for marriage. This finding is also consistent with the marital search theory (South, 1995; Wu & Penning, 1997). Traditional women believe that their role is to be a good wife, mother, and homemaker by focusing their attention on the home and not on paid employment. Therefore, they may be more likely to shorten their

marital search to begin fulfilling that role as soon as possible. However, this abbreviated marital search may result in their being partnered with someone with whom they are not completely compatible. As a result of their being raised in the divorce culture, they see their relationship, although important to their sense of self as a woman, as contingent—based on being the “right” relationship. Young traditional women who came of age in the divorce culture want a traditional relationship and are willing to divorce to find that relationship.

We did not explicitly hypothesize about the relationship between age at first marriage and marital stability for transitional women. The findings in this research are consistent with transitional women being less polarized ideologically than either traditional or nontraditional women. Transitional women have education levels, incomes, and time spent on paid employment that are in between those of traditional and nontraditional women. As Hochschild (1989) suggested, transitional women are more likely to want to work and to identify with their work than traditional women, but are not as likely as nontraditional women to want their husbands to contribute equally at home. They are still likely to marry early to fulfill the role of a “good wife and mother,” and are subject to the same types of processes as described above for traditional women. However, they are more likely to have a higher education than traditional women, which would lead to a higher income and less conflict in the home over financial matters. Transitional women are more likely to want to work and would not blame their husband for not fulfilling his role as provider. Hence, we see the polarized two-directional negative effect of age at first marriage on the likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption for transitional women. The younger at marriage, the more likely they were to divorce, whereas the older they were at marriage, their likelihood of marital disruption decreased. These were comparisons with the reference category of marrying between the ages of 22 and 24.

The differing relationships of age at first marriage groupings with the likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption based on gender ideology suggest that a woman’s gender ideology is a primary lens through which she views the world. Her ideology will guide decisions she makes in her life and may influence the meaning she attributes to her personal experiences. Therefore, analyzing women’s hazard of experiencing a marital disruption with gender ideology as a control variable does not imply the importance of gender ideology as a causal mechanism through which women experience life, and in particular, their marriages. The type of analysis we use in this research does honor that causal process.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

The design of this research included a measure of gender ideology based on six family attitude questions asked three times during the study. These measures were combined to create a woman's gender ideology score. There are two possible negative implications of that design. First, the questions address general attitudes about men and women in relation to work in family. We make the assumption that the women responded to these questions with their own lives in mind. However, they could have been responding based on their attitudes about gender for the generalized other men and women. Therefore, their responses may be valid measures of how they feel other couples should behave but is not necessarily how they feel about their own marriage. This difference in abstract versus concrete applications of marital equality has been documented in qualitative research (Rosenbluth, Steil, & Whitcomb, 1998) and may certainly exist within our sample.

Furthermore, the ideology score used to place women in the categories of traditional, transitional, or nontraditional was each woman's score from the last time the questions were asked. For women whose marriages lasted past 1987, their 1987 score was used as their gender ideology. As up to 11 years passed between this measurement and the censoring of women in the sample, there is the possibility that this score is no longer a valid measure of how the woman feels about the roles that women and men should play in families.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings in this article have several research implications. First, we as researchers need to rethink the ways in which we include gender ideology in our explanatory models. We have been making the assumption that by controlling for gender ideology or using multiplicative interaction effects, we are including the possibility of differing effects of ideology on our outcome variables. This article shows that this was not the case with the effect of gender ideology through age at first marriage on the likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption and suggests that other effects could differ through a similar process.

Second, we should take particular notice of the connection between ideology as a belief structure and behaviors. Ideology is a vehicle through which individuals construct meanings for their personal experiences. These ideological beliefs are socially constructed and reinforced; in no

other social location is this more apparent than in the family with the construction of gender and its ideal types. As researchers, including those of us who study the family, we can use these findings of social processes that differ by ideology to learn more about the association between ideology and behavior, in particular how this relationship can perpetuate inequalities. We now have a new lens through which we can view inequality.

Finally, this research is limited in that we were only able to examine the effects of the wife's gender ideology-based processes on her likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption. If processes can be shown as different by ideology for the wife, why not test to see if those processes also differ for the husband and the interaction of the two as a couple? Sanchez et al. (1998) found that transitions from cohabitation into marriage or out of a relationship were mediated via the interaction of both partners' gender ideologies. Greenstein (1996b) and Hochschild (1989) both noted that processes within a marriage are affected by the interaction of the wife's and the husband's gender ideologies; why would we assume that the decision to divorce or separate is any different?

This research has shown that there are moderating effects of gender ideology on marital stability. These findings join others that suggest there are differing processes in the lives of women due to their gender ideology. Whether the process is marrying (Hyde & Greenstein, 1997), the possibility of being the victim of abuse (Lewellyn Jones, 1999), perceptions of fairness within the marriage (Greenstein, 1996a), or marital stability (Sayer & Bianchi, 2000), these researchers have suggested that there are experiences within the family that differ as a result of a woman's gender ideology. Although the current research examines only the moderating effect of gender ideology on the relationship between a woman's age at first marriage and her likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption, we suggest that our findings support the growing belief that family processes may vary by gender ideology.

What does it mean that family processes may vary by gender ideology? Gender ideology is a primary lens through which individuals view the world. In the case of this research and the research cited above, gender ideology is a primary lens through which women view the world. Decisions women make in their lives, specifically in their families, are guided by the way in which they believe the relationships between women and men should be. A woman will view her place in the marital relationship and her role as a mother very differently based on whether she holds traditional, transitional, or nontraditional beliefs. Thus, spousal and parental relationships will vary according to the lens through which the woman looks. In addition, experiences within the family may differ dramatically due to the

woman's gender ideology (e.g., whether she stays at home or works while the children are preschoolers). A woman's reaction to those actual life experiences will be based on the roles she believes women and men should have in marriage as well. Therefore, processes that occur in many families will both transpire and then be viewed very differently by women with traditional, transitional, and nontraditional gender ideologies.

The factors that predict divorce are not as clearly related nor are the relationships as simple in nature as previous research has posited. The simplistic view of age at first marriage as negatively related to likelihood of experiencing a marital disruption was challenged in this research and found to be different based on specific conditions, namely, differing gender ideologies. Although as researchers we report findings based on patterns in group behavior, we need to keep in mind that the individuals who make up these groups live their lives in a complex social world. Simple regression analyses are not always able to tell the full story. We need to be willing to move past the abridged version and look for the complex and interactive processes present in the lives of those we study. Examining differential effects on marital stability by gender ideology is a step in that direction.

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