Who wants the Breakup?
Gender and Breakup in Heterosexual Couples

With corrected interpretation of Table 2.

Note to Reader: This paper is often cited in the popular press about predominance of women wanting divorces (I found that about 2/3 of all divorces were wanted by the wife, which is consistent with prior research from other sources). Somewhere along the way, an erroneous claim started getting repeated in popular commentary: that 90% of divorces among college educated people were wanted by the wife. This 90% college women's divorce preference is definitely Not in the data, not in the paper, and is in my view too high to be feasible. So, if you see that erroneous claim, know that it is wrong and alert me: some folks have been good enough to fix and correct this error when they were alerted to it.

Abstract:

Marriage is the most important, and the most stable social network tie in American life. Marriage is also a gendered, and therefore a potentially asymmetric network tie. Most divorces in the US are wanted by the wife. Women's predominance in wanting divorce (among couples who divorce) seems to have been consistent over time. The author uses a new longitudinal study of relationships in the US, the How Couples Meet and Stay Together surveys, to examine the gender of who wanted the breakup for both marital and nonmarital heterosexual relationships for the first time. The results show that only in marriages are the majority of breakups wanted by the female partner. Men and women in nonmarital heterosexual relationships in the US are equally likely to want to break up. Furthermore, wives report lower relationship quality than husbands, while men and women in nonmarital relationships report more similar relationship quality.

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Introduction

It is a well-established fact that most divorces in the US are wanted primarily by the wife. In Goode's (1956) sample of recently divorced women from the 1940s in Detroit, about two thirds of the recently divorced women described themselves as the initiators of their divorces.[1] More recent US data show a similar pattern, with roughly two thirds of divorces wanted by the wife (England and Kilbourne 1990; Sayer et al. 2011; Sweeney 2002; Pettit and Bloom 1984; Brinig and Allen 2000). Most divorces are wanted by the wife not only in the US, but in Europe (Kalmijn and Poortman 2006; Charvoz et al. 2009) and Australia (Hewitt 2009; Hewitt, Western and Baxter 2006) as well.

The fact that wives have been more likely to want divorce implies that wives were less satisfied with their marriages than their husbands, at least among couples who divorced. Gender inequality in who wants to break up is one way to measure gender differences in satisfaction within romantic relationships. Do nonmarital relationships experience breakup in a gendered way similar to marriages? The prior literature on the gender of breakup has explored breakup in heterosexual marriage exclusively. In this paper, I use a new longitudinal study of relationships and breakups in the US. I compare the data on who wanted the breakup for married couples, nonmarital cohabiting couples, and couples who are not married and who have not cohabited. I examine the gender of breakup for both marital and nonmarital relationships with quantitative data for the first time.

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[1] Goode (1956 p.144) reported 105 divorces initiated by the husband, 264 initiated by the wife, and 56 mutually initiated divorces. Counting the mutual divorces as 50% female initiated yields 69% female initiation (see also Table 1 below).

Some of the prior explanations for women's predominance in wanting divorce (for instance, that women are more sensitive to relationship difficulties) apply equally well to marital and to nonmarital relationships. Other explanations for women's predominance in wanting divorce rely on the uniquely gendered history (and therefore uniquely gendered current reality) of heterosexual marriage. The central question addressed below is whether the gender of who wants breakups in nonmarital unions is consistent with, or inconsistent with hypotheses that have previously been offered to explain women's agency in initiating divorce.

Explanations for Why Women are more likely to Want Divorce

1) Sensitivity to Relationship Issues

One plausible explanation offered for why women are more likely to want divorce is that women are more sensitive to relationship difficulties (Sweeney 2002; Heaton and Blake 1999). If women are more attuned to a relationship difficulty, they may be more likely to see the difficulty as requiring action, and eventually make the decision to exit from the relationship. The hypothesis that women are more sensitive to relationship problems leads to a corollary that women would be more likely to want breakups than men across all types of relationships and contexts. The corollary that women would have a leading role in breakup across all relationship contexts is consistent with research on the longevity of same-sex couples, which has usually shown that lesbian couples in committed relationships have a higher breakup rate than gay male couples in committed relationships (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Rosenfeld 2014).

2) Marriage as a gendered institution

Heterosexual marriage is an institution built on centuries of gendered law and common

law (Weitzman 1981). Despite the institution of marriage changing and adapting (Cherlin 2004) and becoming more diverse in terms of who marries whom (Rosenfeld 2007), feminist scholars view heterosexual marriage as a gendered institution (Berk 1985), which is a potential reason why wives might selectively want divorce. By gendered institution, scholars mean that heterosexual marriage reproduces and reifies traditional gender roles for men and women (Berk 1985; Shelton and John 1993). In their description of the post-1960 gender revolution as a stalled revolution, Hochschild and Machung (1989) describe how wives' careers were constrained by their husbands' expectations that the afternoon and evening shift of housework and childcare was fundamentally women's work. Even husbands and wives who thought of themselves as holding gender egalitarian ideals were found by Hochschild and Machung to be living (and justifying to themselves) traditional gender expectations of childcare and housework as women's work.

More recent research on the transition from cohabitation to marriage continues to show that traditional gender expectations are re-enforced at the threshold of marriage for heterosexual couples. Brown (2000) found that heterosexual couples were especially likely to marry if the man had high earnings. Weisshaar (2014) found that among heterosexual couples, earnings between partners became more unequal as the couples transitioned from cohabitation to marriage. Sassler and Miller (2011) found that among young heterosexual couples, men had the privilege of asking their partner to marry, meaning men controlled the marriage decision. Bass (2015) found that among young heterosexual couples planning to marry, men pressured their fiancées to adopt the man's family surname. Most women in the US continue to take their husbands' surnames when they marry (Johnson and Scheuble 1995), even though the laws that required wives to take their husband's surname were phased out in the 1970s (Scheuble and Johnson 1993). Wives' adoption of their husbands' surnames is an example of heterosexual

marriage as a gendered institution with current gender practice rooted in a gender inegalitarian past.

Feminist literature on marriage argues that heterosexual marriage is not only gendered, but fundamentally asymmetric and inegalitarian as well. Jessie Bernard ([1972] 1982 p.14) famously wrote: "There are two marriages, then, in every marital union, his and hers. And his… is better than hers." The feminist critique of heterosexual marriage is consistent with wives being more likely than husbands to want to divorce. The feminist critique of heterosexual marriage, however, has less direct application to nonmarital heterosexual relationships. Nonmarital heterosexual relationships generally involve lower levels of commitment, fewer children, and nonmarital unions are less influenced by the legal and cultural history of marriage as a gendered institution (Cherlin 2009; Rosenfeld 2014; Poortman and Mills 2012).

Time use studies (Bianchi, Robinson and Milkie 2006) suggest that between 1965 and 2000, married fathers had increased their share of unpaid family caregiving, but that married mothers still did about two thirds of the housework. Frisco and Williams (2003) showed that not only were men doing less housework than their wives in the US in the 1980s, but that marriages in which the wife felt they were doing more than their share of the housework were especially likely to end in divorce. The slow pace of gender role change within heterosexual marriage is one key reason why the feminist revolution is seen as an unfinished, or stalled revolution (Gerson 2010; Hochschild and Machung 1989; Ridgeway 2011; England 2010).

Research on housework has consistently found that the gender housework gap was larger in marriage than in nonmarital cohabiting relationships (Davis, Greenstein and Marks 2007; Gupta 1999; South and Spitze 1994; Shelton and John 1993). Married men resist housework to

an extent that cannot be explained by practical considerations and constraints (such as the presence of children or men's higher earnings, see Brines 1994; Shelton and John 1993).

3) Power Differentials within Relationships

A third potential explanation for who wants divorce or breakup relates to the relative power of the partners or spouses within the relationship. The power differential theory of divorce assumes that the spouse with better prospects beyond the current relationship is more likely to want to break up (Sayer et al. 2011). By external measures, husbands' power has generally exceeded wives' power. Husbands tend to be older than wives (England and McClintock 2009), though the power advantage of being older might dissipate or even reverse as individuals age into their later years. Husbands have always had higher earnings on average than wives (though the gender earnings gap has narrowed over time, see Vanneman 2006). Research in online dating markets shows that single women's attractiveness to men declines more sharply over the adult life course than single men's attractiveness to women (Rudder 2014). Wallerstein and Blakeslee's (1989) reported that older women were more likely to be "losers" in divorce.

If women are most in romantic demand when they are young, and older men are more in demand as heterosexual partners as they age (Rudder 2014), the power theory of relationships implies that divorce should become more male-initiated as couples age. The realities of gendered divorce fit uneasily with power theory, however: despite men's various power advantages (being older than their wives, earning more, and ageing into greater demand as heterosexual partners), women have been the initiators of about two thirds of all divorces from the 1940s to the present. Furthermore, as I show below, female initiation of divorce does not vary significantly by age.

An alternate version of the power theory of relationships suggests that women's *lack* of power within heterosexual marriages is the reason that women choose to exit marriages (England and Kilbourne 1990). Lacking power within the relationship to give sufficient voice to their dissatisfactions, women may choose to exit (Hirschman 1970). As Sayer et al. (2011) noted, the vast literature on determinants of divorce (with some notable exceptions cited above) has usually failed to distinguish between divorces wanted by the wife versus divorces wanted by the husband.

Hypotheses

Consistent with prior literature:

Hypothesis 1: Women want the clear majority of heterosexual divorces.

Corollary 1a: Women's tendency to want divorce is robust to multivariate controls from the individual or couple level.

If the reason that most divorces are wanted by the wife is that marriage is a uniquely gendered institution, then nonmarital unions should have a more egalitarian breakup pattern.

Hypothesis 2: In nonmarital heterosexual couples, neither gender dominates in who wants breakups.

If women are more sensitive to relationship shortcomings, then:

Hypothesis 3: Self-reported relationship quality has a stronger effect on women wanting to break up than on men wanting to break up.

If Hypothesis 3 is supported by the data, we also expect that the divergent gender sensitivity to relationship quality would mediate the association between gender and who wants to break up.

Corollary 3a: Different gender responses to relationship quality explain (at least partly)

the prevalence of women wanting breakups.

The simplest version of the power theory of relationships gives the initiative to the

partner with more power or status. Therefore:

Hypothesis 4: Individuals with more power, more status, or more income are more likely

to want to break up.

Data and Methods

The How Couples Meet and Stay Together surveys (HCMST; Rosenfeld, Thomas and

Falcon 2015) started with a nationally representative survey of 2,538 adults who had partners of

a different gender in 2009, and included follow-up with the same individuals covering wave 2 in

2010, wave 3 in 2011, wave 4 in 2013, and wave 5 which ended in early 2015. I supplement the

individual-level and couple-level analysis of HCMST data with data on marital satisfaction from

the General Social Survey (GSS; Smith, Hout and Marsden 2013), and data on the prevalence of

marriage from the US Census and American Community Surveys (Ruggles et al. 2015).

The HCMST subjects were initially recruited into the study through a nationally

representative random digit dialing (RDD) telephone survey, so the HCMST sample is nationally

representative (Chang and Krosnick 2009; Rosenfeld and Thomas 2012). Subjects who did not

have Internet access at home were given Internet access by survey firm Knowledge

Networks/GfK (hereafter KN/GfK).[2]

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[2] The response rate to HCMST wave 1 was 71%. Including the initial RDD phone contact and agreement to join the KN/GfK panel (recruitment rate 32.6%) which took place months or years before HCMST wave 1, and the respondents' completion of the initial KN/GfK demographic survey (profile rate 56.8%) which also predated HCMST wave 1 by months or years, the composite overall response rate for the wave 1 HCMST survey is .71*.326*.568= 13% (Callegaro and DiSogra 2008). Despite the low overall response rate of multistage KN/GfK surveys compared to single stage RDD surveys, the quality of data derived from the KN/GfK panel has been shown

In the 6 years of exposure to the risk of breakup from early 2009 to early 2015, HCMST recorded 385 breakups of heterosexual couples. Of the 385 subjects who reported breakup of a heterosexual union, all but 12 answered the question about which partner had wanted the breakup more.[3] The number of subjects in heterosexual unions that broke up between waves 1 and 5 of HCMST was reduced by 2 when subjects were removed from analysis for inconsistent report of own gender, yielding the final count of 371 breakups reported in Table 1, below.

In waves 2-5 of HCMST, respondents who reported that their relationship with their spouse or partner from wave 1 was no longer intact were asked: "Between you and (partner name), who wanted the (divorce/separation/breakup) more?" Respondents were offered 3 alternatives: "I wanted the (divorce/separation/breakup) more;"(Partner name) wanted the (divorce/separation/breakup) more;" and "We both equally wanted the (divorce/separation/breakup)." Literature on women's initiation of divorce shows that the average of female predominance in divorce initiation is similar whether one examines the records of who files for divorce, or who wanted the divorce more, or who initiated the divorce (Brinig and Allen 2000; Sayer et al. 2011; Sweeney 2002; Pettit and Bloom 1984), though in

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to equal or exceed the quality of data derived from industry standard RDD surveys (Fricker et al. 2005; Chang and Krosnick 2009), in part because KN/GfK gathers information from subjects at each survey stage. Among subjects eligible for follow-up, the response rate was 85% at wave 2, 73% at wave 3, 60% at wave 4, and 46% at wave 5. The key determinant of response to the HCMST follow-up surveys was not any factor that predicts couple longevity (such as relationship duration or marriage), but whether the respondent was still in the KN/GfK panel at the time of the follow-up survey, which is why loss-to-follow-up does not bias estimates of breakup in HCMST. In separate analyses (available from the author) I replicate a key model from Table 2 with weights that are adjusted for attrition (McGuigan et al. 1997), and I show that the attrition-adjusted weights and the standard weights yield the same results.

[3] Among the 12 subjects for whom the gender of who wanted the breakup was not reported, 6 subjects had their breakup status identified post-hoc from text answers in wave 5, so they did not see the 'who wanted the breakup' question.

individual couples the person who initiates the breakup need not be the same person as the

person who most wanted the breakup.[4]

The measure of relationship quality in HCMST is a 1-5 scale, treated as a continuous

variable, measured at wave 1, with higher values meaning higher relationship quality (5 is

"excellent," 4 is "good", 3 is "fair, 2 is "poor", and 1 is "very poor"). Relationship duration is the

time varying duration, in years, since the couple first became romantically involved. Control of

relationship duration is necessary to preclude the potential bias of left censored observations

(Yamaguchi 1991). The income difference between partners was determined at wave 1 by the

question "Between you and (partner name), who earned more income in 2008?" with the options

"I earned more," "we earned about the same amount," and "(partner name) earned more." Both

female partner's college degree status and the educational gap between female and male partners

are based on educational attainment at wave 1. The number of minor children in respondent's

household and household income for the prior 12 months are both time varying variables drawn

from the 5 KN/GfK background surveys. I deflated household income to 2009 dollars by the

Consumer Price Index, and then took its natural logarithm.

Methodologically, I rely on discrete time multinomial logistic regression to distinguish

between competing gendered breakup outcomes (Kalmijn and Poortman 2006; Box-

Steffensmeier and Jones 2004). My multinomial logistic regressions are weighted using the

weight variable "weight2." An alternate set (available from the author) of event history

multinomial logistic models which uses robust standard errors and clustering to account for the

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[4] HCMST data include only one subject from each couple. Sayer et al (2011) used data from the National Survey of Families and Households, which included both spouses' report on who wanted the divorce. Sayer et al found consistency between husbands' and wives' reports (about who wanted the divorce more), net of the ego bias effect I discuss below.

non-independence of repeated observations of the same couple yields the same substantive

conclusions. I present the unclustered event history analysis in Table 2 below to preserve model

fitting by likelihood maximization, and to preserve BIC goodness of fit tests based on likelihood

maximization.

The univariate analysis in Table 1 compares three couple types: married couples, non-

marital couples who have cohabited, and nonmarital couples who have never cohabited. For

Table 2, the multinomial logistic regressions, I compare married couples to nonmarital

cohabiting couples, and exclude the couples who have never cohabited because some aspects of

the power dynamics of couples apply less well to couples who have not cohabited.

The couple- month dataset used for the event history models in Table 2 begins with the

month of wave 1 of HCMST, and ends with the month of breakup or the month of last contact. I

randomly allocated the month of breakup for couples who broke up in the approximately 12

months between wave 1 and wave 2, as month of breakup was not asked in wave 2.[5] The 3

models in Table 2 each include 1,904 heterosexual couples (reduced via listwise deletion from a

maximum of 2,262 couples) and 95,006 couple-months of exposure to the risk of breakup.

[Table 1 and Figure 1 here]

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[5] For married couples who broke up between wave 1 and wave 2, whose annual rate of breakup was less than 2%, breakups were randomly distributed to months between wave 1 and wave 2. For unmarried couples, breakup rate was much higher in the early stages of the relationship; the breakup rate was more than 60% per year for unmarried couples who had been together for less than a year (Rosenfeld 2014), meaning the breakups would have been distributed more in the beginning of the year than in the end of the year between wave 1 and wave 2. To accommodate the front-loading of breakups of nonmarital unions in the period between wave 1 and wave 2, I used

the following function: $M_b = (M_e)r^{(\frac{2+rd}{1+rd})}$ Where M_b is the allocated month of breakup after wave 1, M_e is the

number of months elapsed between wave 1 and wave 2, r is a random uniform number between zero and 1, and rd is relationship duration in years. For short relationship duration, the random factor is nearly squared, reducing the allocated months before breakup.

Results

Table 1 and Figure 1 show the percentage of heterosexual couple breakups in HCMST waves 2-5 whose breakup was wanted more by the woman. If the woman wanted the breakup more, that is scored as "1"; if the man wanted the breakup more, that is scored as "0"; and if both partners wanted the breakup equally, that is scored as "0.5." Table 1 shows that women accounted for 69% of the breakups of heterosexual marriages, consistent with the approximately two thirds of divorces wanted by wives reported in other studies (England and Kilbourne 1990; Sayer et al. 2011; Sweeney 2002; Heaton and Blake 1999). Even though only 92 breakups of heterosexual marriages were recorded in the data, the 69% of marital breakups wanted by women is significantly different from 50%, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 61% to 78%.[6]

For heterosexual cohabiters, Table 1 shows 76 breakups were recorded, and of these breakups 56% were wanted by the woman. The 95% confidence interval for the gender of who wanted breakup among nonmarital heterosexual unions was 47% to 65%, which includes 50%, meaning that the gender of breakup for nonmarital heterosexual couples was not significantly different from 50%. Cohabitation proved to have no effect on the gender of breakup for nonmarital couples. Among the noncohabiting nonmarital unions, 53.4% of the breakups were wanted by the woman, which was not significantly different from the 50% gender parity level and also not significantly different from the 56% rate of female wanted breakups recorded among the cohabiting couples.

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[6] Standard errors are defined by $SE = sd/\sqrt{n}$, where sd is the standard deviation, and n is the sample size in each category

Table 1 and Figure 1 support Hypothesis 1 (that most divorces would be wanted by the wife) and Hypothesis 2 (that breakup among nonmarital heterosexual couples would be gender neutral). Table 1 and Figure 1's support for Hypotheses 1 and 2 is strengthened by the observation that coresidence (and the relationship commitment that coresidence implies) appears to have had no effect on the gender of relationship breakup, whereas heterosexual marriage was firmly associated with women wanting to break up. Table 1 shows that mutual breakup was substantially more common in nonmarital breakups (32% for cohabiters and 35% for non-cohabiters) than in marital breakups (19%).

For the gender of nonmarital breakup, there are no published results to compare HCMST to. Is it possible that the person who wanted the breakup is recalled less accurately in nonmarital relationships? One reason that it might be easier to recall who wanted a marital breakup is that divorces require a court petition (which one spouse alone can file), while nonmarital breakups are generally accomplished without paperwork or formalities.

Despite the informality of nonmarital breakups, the nonmarital breakups in HCMST do not show signs of being subject to greater recall bias than the marital breakups. Most breakups in HCMST were reported within a year of occurrence. If the true recollection of who wanted the nonmarital breakup was subject to more recall bias, we would expect to see more ego bias (i.e. the subject, in their recollection of the breakup, giving themselves more agency over the breakup) in the nonmarital breakups.[7] Yet, as Table 1 shows, the ego bias appears to be strongest

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[7] Table 1 demonstrates a pattern of ego bias in the reporting of who wanted the breakup, a bias which is evident in similar fashion in every prior study that has surveyed divorced individuals and asked them (after the divorce) who wanted or who initiated the divorce (Charvoz et al. 2009; Hewitt, Western and Baxter 2006; Kalmijn and Poortman 2006; Sayer et al. 2011). By ego bias, I mean that individuals magnify (after the fact) their own agency in the breakup, so that the rate at which women are reported to want the breakup is lower for male survey respondents compared to female survey respondents. Table 1 understates the difference in the percentage of breakups wanted by the woman between married couples (69%) and nonmarital cohabiting couples (56%) because of ego bias. The marital breakups in Table 1 were reported by a sample that was majority male, while the nonmarital breakups were reported by a sample that had a slight majority of female respondents. In model 1 of Table 2 below, controlling for

for the married couples, at 78-63=15%. Second, subjects' open-ended reports of why they broke up suggest clarity on the respondents' parts about who wanted the breakup. Explanations for breakup include: "I wasn't in love with him anymore, he was selfish, immature. I was ready to move on and find better love;" or "I'm not really sure. She just wanted it to end;" or: "We had a mutual break up …, we knew that we would never end up getting married as we belong to different religion. However, we had a nice relationship till the time we were together and she is still my very good friend."

[Table 2 here]

Multivariable tests

Table 2 shows coefficients from a series of three competing risk discrete time event history models, for couples who were married or who cohabited. Each model compares competing risk outcomes: male partner wanted the breakup, mutual breakup, or female partner wanted the breakup (compared to non-breakups). Model 1, the simplest model, includes only marriage and subject gender as predictors. Column D of each model tests the difference between predictors of breakups that women wanted compared to the breakups that were wanted either by men or by both partners.[8] The gender difference coefficients (column D of each model) identify which factors explain gendered differences in who wanted to break up. I compare the women-wanted breakups to all other breakups because it is women's unique role in wanting breakups that is of particular interest here. When a coefficient in column D of Table 2 is positive and

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only marital status and the gender of the subject, the marital gender gap in who wanted the breakup was highly significant.

[8] The coefficient for the gender contrast is D=C-((A+B)/2), where A is the coefficient for men wanting breakup, B, is the coefficient for both wanting breakup, and C is the coefficient for women wanting the breakup.

significant, that indicates that the attribute in that row is associated with women especially

wanting the breakup (net of other predictors of breakup).

Model 1 shows that marriage was negatively associated with breakup, regardless of who

wanted the breakup. Being married reduced the coefficient of breakups that men wanted by 2.56

compared to unmarried people, and reduced the coefficient of mutual breakups by 2.88

compared to unmarried people. Being married also reduced the coefficient of women wanting to

breakup, but by a smaller amount, by 1.79 compared to unmarried people. In Model 1, women

had a higher coefficient of wanting marital breakups by 0.92 (column D of Model 1) compared

to male initiated and equal initiated breakups, so the relative risk of women wanting breakup

were $e^{0.92}$=2.51 times higher than other kinds of breakups for married couples.[9] The gender gap

in wanting marital breakups was significant at the 0.01 level in Model 1, supporting Hypothesis

1.

Model 2 adds a control for relationship quality (at wave 1) interacted with respondent

gender. Note that control for relationship quality in Model 2 does not substantially diminish the

gender difference coefficient for marriage (0.89 in Model 2, column D compared to 0.92 in

Model 1, column D). In Model 2, being married increased the relative risk that women wanted

the breakup by $e^{0.89}$=2.44 compared to male initiated and mutual breakups. Relationship quality

coefficients that are more negative indicate that better relationship quality (at wave 1) depressed

the relative risk of breakup. The more negative the relationship quality coefficient, the more

sensitive respondents were to relationship quality (in terms of better relationship quality

protecting couples more against breaking up). Models 2 and 3 show no significant gendered

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[9] There is some diversity in the literature on whether the correct terminology for exponentiated coefficients from multinomial logistic regression models should be referred to as odds ratios, or as relative risk ratios. In the odds ratio camp, see Powers and Xie (2000 p.230), and Long and Freese (2001 p.204). Stata documentation (STATA 2013) refers to exponentiated coefficients from mlogit models as relative risk ratios.

effects of perceived relationship quality on which partner wanted to break up, because the coefficients in column D of Models 2 and 3 show no significant gender differences in the effect of his or her relationship quality. Table 2 provides no support for Hypothesis 3 (that relationship quality has a stronger effect on women wanting to break up) and no evidence for Corollary 3a (that different gender responses to relationship quality would explain women's role in wanting divorce).

Model 3 adds controls for female partner's age, income gap, female partner's education, education gap, household income, number of minor children, subject's race, evangelical Christian identity for both partners (the Christian identity controls were all non-significant, and are not shown), and relationship duration, operationalized as $\frac{1}{r.d.}$ where r.d. is relationship duration (in years). The $\frac{1}{r.d.}$ term fit the data better than the untransformed relationship duration term because of the sharp decline in breakup rate during the first two years of relationships (Rosenfeld 2014). A positive significant coefficient for $\frac{1}{r.d.}$ would indicate that longer relationship duration was associated with lower relative risk of breakup. Model 3 includes several potential predictors of breakup that allow for tests of Hypothesis 4, specifically whether individuals with more power or more status within the relationship were more likely to want to break up. None of the power differential hypotheses are supported by Model 3. Model 3 shows that females having higher income had no significant effect on which gender partner wanted to break up. Model 3 shows that female partner's age did not have a gendered effect on who wanted to break up. The lack of significance of all of the power differential coefficients in column 3d, and the similarity of the key gender difference coefficient for marriage across models (0.92 in Model 1 column D, 0.89 in Model 2 column D, 1.04 in Model 3 column D) means that power

differentials in education, or income between partners do not appear to explain the women's role in wanting divorce. Model 3 with its several additional terms to test power differential hypothesis fits the data dramatically worse by the BIC standard compared to Model 2.[10]

[Table 3 here]

Relationship Quality

Table 3 summarizes relationship quality in heterosexual couples in HCMST. The data on relationship quality show that in nonmarital cohabiting heterosexual couples, men reported relationship quality of 4.22 (with 5 meaning best, or "excellent" relationship quality) and women reported relationship quality of 4.29, not statistically different from the men. In married heterosexual relationships, the men reported relationship quality of 4.61, significantly more than the female reported relationship quality of 4.46. Even excluding all respondents who later broke up from their spouse or partner, the results remain the same: married men in HCMST reported higher relationship quality than married women (Corra et al. 2009), whereas men and women in nonmarital unions report more similar levels of relationship quality.

For respondents in heterosexual marriages at wave 1, 69.2% of the husbands and 60.1% of the wives reported that relationship quality was "excellent," or 5 points out of 5 on the relationship quality scale, while 6.0% of husbands and 11.1% of wives reported that their relationship quality was "fair," "poor," or "very poor." Note also that Table 2 above showed that neither differences in relationship quality between husbands and wives nor gender differences in

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[10] Lower BIC scores correspond to better fit. The BIC for Table 2 Model 2 is -201.4, 256.4 points lower than the BIC for Model 3. A difference of 256.4 favoring Model 2 in the BIC is a substantial difference by the standards of the parsimony-favoring BIC, it corresponds to a probability of less than 10^{-54} that Model 3 is the better fitting model (Raftery 1995). The N of couples, 1904, was used as the relevant sample size in calculating BIC. Model 3 fits somewhat better than Model 2 by the Likelihood Ratio Test standard: the chisquare difference of 375.4-291.99= 83.4 on 57-12=45 degrees of freedom yields an upper tail P value of 0.0004.

the association between relationship quality and breakup explain why women seek most divorces. Table 3 provides an explanation: women's relationship quality is slightly lower than men's relationship quality in marriage regardless of whether the marriage later broke up.[11]

[Table 4 here]

Table 4 reports a series of OLS regressions predicting relationship quality for men and women in heterosexual marriages at HCMST wave 1, to determine if there were any relational or sociodemographic factors that might explain why married women report lower relationship quality than married men. Table 4 shows that while age had a U-shaped association with marital quality, and wives' high earnings were negatively associated with marital quality, and evangelical respondents married to evangelicals had higher marital quality than non-evangelicals, none of these factors mediated women's report of lower marital quality (compared to men; note the consistency of the female coefficient across models 1-3). There are demographic and life course predictors of marital happiness, but the marital happiness gap between husbands and wives does not appear to be a function of age, life course, individual socioeconomic status, or demography. Table 4 therefore provides no evidence to support Hypothesis 4 (that power inequalities, some of which are age related, might explain women's lower marital satisfaction).

[Figure 2 here]

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[11] The relationship quality question in HCMST was re-asked in wave 4. Relationship quality did not change significantly between wave 1 and wave 4 for male respondents or female respondents who married their different gender partner between wave 1 and wave 4.

Figure 2 shows a smoothed graph of husbands' and wives' marital quality by age, smoothed by lowess regressions (Cleveland 1979). The gender marital satisfaction gap is constant in Figure 2 across the adult age distribution; both husbands and wives in their early 40s report substantially lower marital satisfaction than their younger and their older peers. The lack of an age interaction with the gender marital satisfaction gap is further evidence against Hypothesis 4.

[Figure 3 here]

Figure 3 shows a smoothed time trend of marital satisfaction for men and for women from the GSS, 1973-2014. In figure 3, marital satisfaction in the US declined in the 1970s and 1980s, a period when the divorce rate was rising. Despite changes in average marital satisfaction over time, the gender marital satisfaction gap in the GSS has remained fairly stable over historical time. Although the gender marital satisfaction gap in the GSS data amounts to only a difference of 3.6% across all years (with 65.2% of husbands and 61.6% of wives saying their marriage is "very happy"), and Figure 3 reflects a good deal of noise in the measured gender gap within years (where the sample size is much smaller) the gender gap in marital satisfaction is highly significant, with no significant change in the marital satisfaction gender gap over historical time (significance determined by logistic regressions not shown).

Conclusion:

Most divorces in the US are wanted by the wife. In this paper I suggest (for the first time) that the gender gap in relationship satisfaction and the gender gap in who wants the breakup are unique to heterosexual marriage. Nonmarital heterosexual unions have a gender neutral breakup

pattern and a gender neutral pattern of relationship satisfaction. Neither women's supposedly

greater sensitivity to relationship problems, nor income gaps, nor education gaps, nor

conservative religious identity, nor woman's age, nor the presence of children explain why

women are so much more likely than men to desire exit from heterosexual marriage, but no more

likely than men to desire exit from nonmarital heterosexual unions. The uniquely gendered

character of the heterosexual marriage tie is consistent with the view that heterosexual marriage

is a gendered institution (Berk 1985; Shelton and John 1993).

The HCMST, GSS, and US Census data I use in this paper do not allow for in-depth

insight into marriages that would be required to shed light on how gender is enacted within

marriages, and to explain what precisely leads to women's lower average rate of marital

satisfaction. The specific reasons for women's greater agency in divorce remain opaque. It is also

true that selection into marriage is an agentic and nonrandom activity, with the male partner

usually having more agency (Sassler and Miller 2011) as marriage ties are formed. Given that

men are more agentic in the formation of marital ties, relationships that reflect men's preferences

about relationship gender roles may be more likely to transition to marriage. Thus, the gendered

nature of marriage might reflect (men's) selection bias rather than transformation of couples'

experiences after getting married.

Could women's primary role in wanting divorce be instrumental? Court-ordered spousal

support and child support which follow divorce mainly benefit women. There were only 14

marriages in HCMST that ended in separation but not divorce, an insufficient number to judge

whether the instrumental aspects of divorce were responsible for some of the gendering of

marital breakups. The gender gap in marital satisfaction which is consistent across the life course

and across historical time suggests that women's role in marital breakup is not simply introduced

at the end of relationships for instrumental reasons; rather, the gender of breakup appears to be rooted in marriage itself.

While the analyses above show that women's predominant role in wanting divorce seems to be robust to power differentials between spouses and robust to perceived relationship quality, sample size limitations of HCMST should be kept in mind. Only 92 breakups of heterosexual marriages were recorded in HCMST. Furthermore, my analyses here do not provide a model for predicting which subset of women will be particularly likely to want divorce. A substantial proportion of married people who later divorced reported at wave 1 that their relationship quality was excellent, and described the relationship as idyllic or nearly perfect, which is consistent with Vaughan's (1990) description of divorce as often taking one spouse by surprise.

Most married women are happily married, and the marital network tie remains the most stable (and some scholars would argue, the most important) network tie in the modern social world. Across 6 years of HCMST data, the weighted marital breakup rate was 1.2% per year for heterosexual married couples,[12] compared to 9.4% per year breakup rate for unmarried heterosexual couples who ever cohabited, and a 30.3% per year breakup rate for unmarried heterosexual couples who never lived together. Even though most married women are happily married, a modest difference in husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction can result in most divorces being wanted by the wife.

Wives have predominated in wanting divorce since the earliest available data on who wanted divorce from the 1940s. Wives have consistently reported lower marital satisfaction than husbands since the earliest available data from the 1970s. The lack of apparent progress over

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[12] The unweighted annual breakup rate of heterosexual married couples through wave 5 of HCMST was 1.44%, compare to the 1.5% reported unweighted annual breakup rate of heterosexual married couples reported in Rosenfeld (2014) using the first 4 waves of HCMST.

time in two key marital gender gaps (breakup and satisfaction) is consistent with the stalled

gender revolution theory (Hochschild and Machung 1989).

[Figure 4 here]

Discussion:

Because the marital union is the most stable primary network tie in American social life,

the society-wide retreat from marriage has broad implications. Nonmarital unions of men and

women are a nontraditional family form that is increasing over time (Rosenfeld 2007; Smock

2000) as marriage prevalence declines among adults, see Figure 4.[13] Age at first marriage has

grown more for women than for men in the past few decades (Rosenfeld 2007).

[Figure 5 here]

One paradox of gender, marriage, and the life course, is that young single women appear

to desire marriage and commitment more than men do, yet married women appear to be less

satisfied by their marital experiences than married men are. Figure 5 shows smoothed data from

the 1996 and 1998 GSS. Consistent with the Ad Health results reported by Falcon (2014), the

GSS data show that single women were more likely than single men to say they wanted to marry

between age 20 and age 35, when most first marriages take place. After age 50, however, Figure

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[13] The gender gap in Figure 4 is driven by the sex ratio of older adults: because women live longer, women
outnumber men among adults. Because the US Census Bureau has previously only counted heterosexual marriages
as marriages, the count of married couples had to include a nearly equal number of men and women (excluding the
small number of minors married to adults and US persons married to persons living outside the US), so the number
of unmarried women had to be higher than the number of unmarried men as a function of the adult sex ratio.

5 shows that single women were substantially less likely than single men to say they wanted to

marry "if the right person came along."[14] Women's lower marital satisfaction might explain part

of single women's especially steep life course decline in wanting to marry.

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[14] The GSS question for the variable willwed2 was fielded only in 1996 and 1998, and only to GSS respondents who were not married. The sample size of 773 respondents to willwed2 yields tests of insufficient power to show conclusively whether women's experience of prior marriage significantly discourages them from wanting to marry again (supplementary analyses available from the author). The remarriage rate for men has long been higher than the remarriage rate for women, yet this difference in remarriage rates could be explained by the surplus of unmarried women in adulthood, see Figure 4.

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Table 1: Women's role in the breakup of married and nonmarital heterosexual relationships

	N of breakups	Pct reporting that both partners equally wanted to break up	weighted mean of women wanting the breakup, pct	SE of mean	95% Confidence Interval
Married	92	19	69	4.3	(61,78)
reported by women	43		78	5.8	(66, 89)
reported by men	49		63	6.4	(50, 75)
Nonmarital, have cohabited as a couple	76	32	56	5.3	(47, 65)
reported by women	40		59	6.6	(46,72)
reported by men	36		52	6.8	(39, 66)
Nonmarital, never cohabited	203	35	53.4	2.8	(47.9,58.9)
reported by women	104		60	4.1	(52, 68)
reported by men	99		47	3.9	(39, 55)

Source: How Couples Meet and Stay Together, breakups from waves 2-5, covering 2009-2015. Data weighted by weight variable "weight2." Women's role is scored as follows: 0 if the male partner wanted the breakup more, 0.5 if both partners equally wanted the breakup, and 1 if the female partner wanted the breakup more. Unweighted breakup outcomes are as follows: for married couples, 92 breakups: 18 wanted by the husband, 18 mutual breakups, 56 wanted by the wife. For 76 nonmarital cohabiter breakups: 24 wanted by the man, 24 mutual breakups, 28 wanted by the woman. For 203 breakups of non-cohabiting never married couples: 58 wanted by the man, 61 mutual breakups, 84 wanted by the woman.

Table 2: Coefficients (and standard errors) from Competing Risks Discrete Time Weighted Multinomial Logistic Models for Break-Up (compared to non-breakups) for Heterosexual Couples who were Married or who have Coresided

Predictors:	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	1a) Male wanted Breakup	1b) Both wanted breakup	1c) Female wanted breakup	1d) female-other difference	2a) Male Breakup	2b) both wanted break up	2c) Female breakup	2d) female-other difference	3a) Male Breakup	3b) both wanted break up	3c) Female wanted breakup	3d) Female-other difference
Married	-2.56*** (0.32)	-2.88*** (0.34)	-1.79*** (0.23)	0.92** (0.33)	-2.40*** (0.32)	-2.71*** (0.33)	-1.66*** (0.23)	0.89** (0.33)	-2.06*** (0.39)	-2.43*** (0.40)	-1.21*** (0.28)	1.04** (0.39)
Subject Female	-0.32 (0.32)	-0.43 (0.32)	0.25 (0.23)	0.62+ (0.32)	0.38 (0.48)	-0.19 (0.48)	0.19 (0.34)	0.09 (0.48)	0.48 (0.49)	-0.27 (0.49)	0.19 (0.35)	0.09 (0.50)
Her Relationship Quality					-0.46+ (0.27)	-0.68** (0.25)	-0.89*** (0.13)	-0.33 (0.23)	-0.35 (0.27)	-0.90*** (0.26)	-0.88*** (0.14)	-0.24 (0.24)
His Relationship Quality					-1.16*** (0.21)	-0.94*** (0.22)	-0.94*** (0.17)	0.12 (0.23)	-1.22*** (0.23)	-1.00*** (0.24)	-0.94*** (0.18)	0.16 (0.25)
female's age									-0.0043	-0.056***	-0.027**	0.003
female has BA									-0.15	-0.26	-0.34	-0.13
female more ed									0.46	-0.23	0.35	0.23
1/(Rel Duration)									0.11	-1.23	0.04	0.60
Same income (ref his more)									0.27	1.70***	0.79*	-0.20
Female more income									-0.29	-0.65	-0.003	0.47
ln of HH income (2009 $)									-0.40*	-0.07	-0.18	0.05
Num of minor children in HH									-0.007	-0.006	0.10	0.11
Subject is black									-0.28	1.32**	-0.17	-0.70
df	6				12				57			
LRT	186.3				291.99				375.4			
BIC	-141.0				-201.4				55.1			

Source: HCMST, waves 1-5, for years 2009-2015. For each model, N of couples= 1904 (used as the basis for BIC), and N of couple-months= 95,006. Regressions analytically weighted by weight variable "weight2,". Models exclude 9 subjects whose self-reported gender changed across survey waves. Relationship quality (5 point scale, rescaled so that 0 is best and -5 is worst), female partner's educational attainment, race, evangelical Christianity (3 terms, all insignificant, included in Model 3 but not shown), and relative income of partners both measured at wave 1. Time varying variables are marital status, living with children, age, relationship duration, and household income (in 2009 dollars). Coefficients for four ethnic/racial groups other than black not shown above. The direct effect of gender (for women with relationship quality of zero, model 2 and 3), is not reported in the table. Female-Other Difference is (with letters indicating columns in the table above): D=C-((B+A)/2). * P<0.05; ** P<0.01; *** P<0.001, two tailed tests.

Table 3: Relationship Quality at wave 1 for Married and Nonmarital Respondents in Heterosexual Unions, by Gender

	all wave 1 subjects					excluding subjects who later broke up	
	Married	Nonmarital, Cohabiting	Nonmarital, Non cohabiters		Married	Nonmarital Cohabiters	Nonmarital, Non cohabiters
Men	4.61	4.22	4.25	Men	4.65	4.35	4.42
Women	4.46	4.29	4.34	Women	4.50	4.37	4.49
N	1,826	251	446	N	1,733	189	219
Male-Female Difference	0.15***	-0.07	-0.09	Male-Female Difference	0.15***	-0.02	-0.07

Source: HCMST wave 1 data, relationship quality scores weighted by variable "weight2." Relationship quality was scored on a 1-5 scale, 5 being the best relationship quality. Relationship quality, Marriage and Coresidence were measured at wave 1, excluding individuals with inconsistent gender reports in later waves of the background survey

Table 4: Predicting Relationship Quality for individuals in Heterosexual Marriages from HCMST Wave 1, OLS Regression Coefficients and Robust Standard Errors

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Female	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.13**
	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.042)
Wife's Age		-0.22**	-0.027***
		(0.0071)	(0.0077)
Wife's Age Squared		0.00026***	0.00030***
		(0.000067)	0.000069
Relationship Duration (years)		-0.0032	-0.00096
		(0.0020)	(0.0024)
Earnings Gap (ref: Husband Earned More)			
Equal Earnings		-0.019	-0.017
		(0.066)	(0.064)
Wife Earned More		-0.16**	-0.15**
		(0.058)	(0.057)
Evangelicals (ref: both Evangelical)			
Wife Evangelical		-0.28**	-0.28**
		(0.10)	(0.097)
Husband Evangelical		-0.17	-0.16
		(0.11)	(0.11)
Neither Evangelical		-0.093*	-0.13**
		(0.045)	(0.044)
Wife has BA			0.098*
			(0.048)
Ln household income			0.073
			(0.038)
Respondent Black			-0.24*
			(0.10)
Times married			0.074
			(0.039
Num Children < 2 years old			-0.10
			(0.077)
df	1	9	17
N	1,752	1,752	1,752
R-square	0.011	0.0415	0.0612
BIC	-11.9	-7.0	16.3

Source: HCMST wave 1 data, relationship quality scores weighted by variable "weight2." Relationship quality was scored on a 1-5 scale, 5 being the best relationship quality. Interactions between gender of respondent and who earned more, wife's age, and evangelical Christianity were all not significant, so not included above. Four additional race/ethnicity categories not shown.

Percentage of breakups of heterosexual couples wanted by the female partner
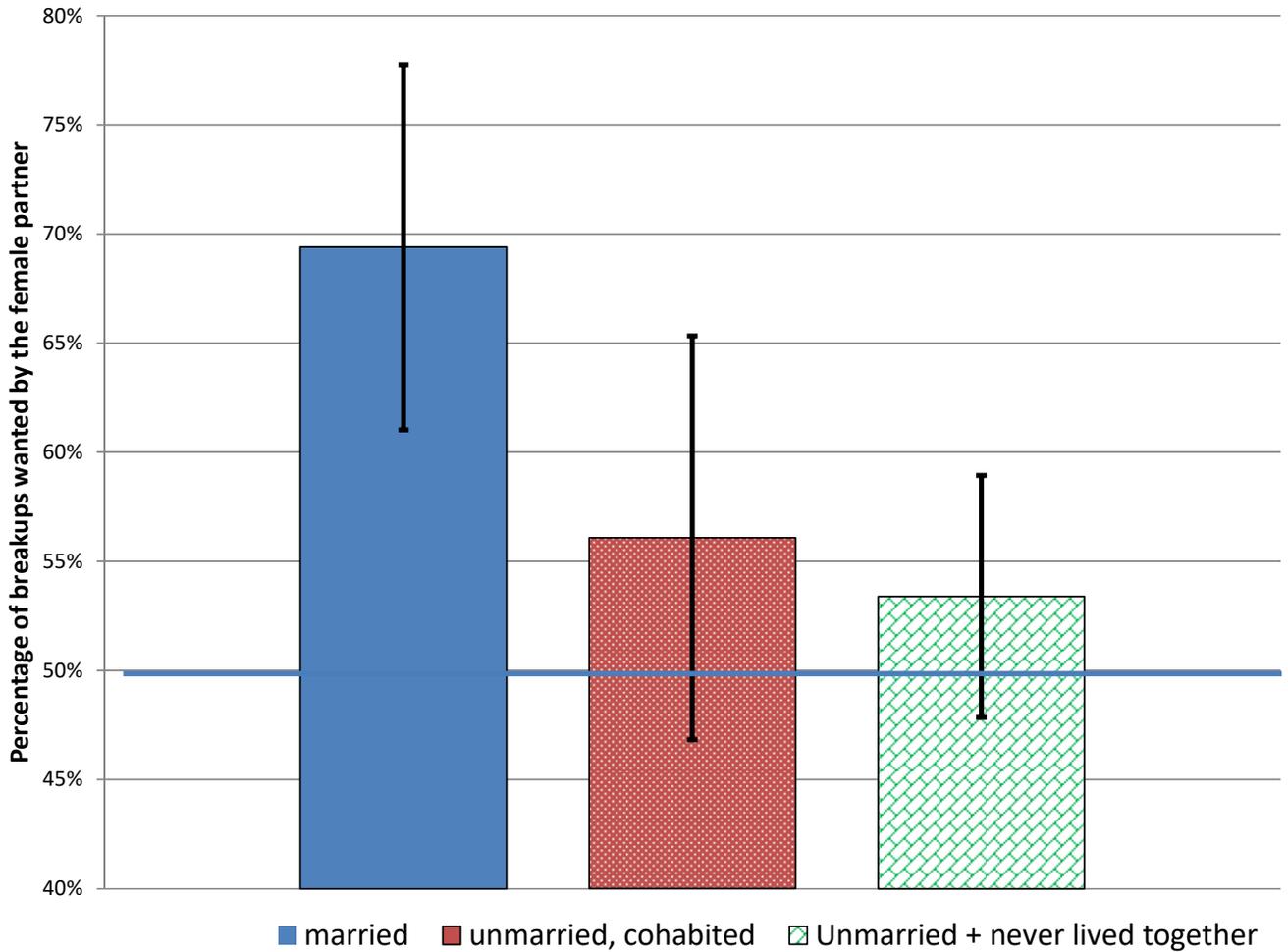
Source: How Couples Meet and Stay Together, breakups from waves 2-5, covering 2009-2015. Data weighted by weight variable "weight2." See Table 1 for more details. Bars represent the average, with 95% confidence intervals. For married, n=92, for unmarried cohabiters, n=76, for unmarried and never lived together, n=203.
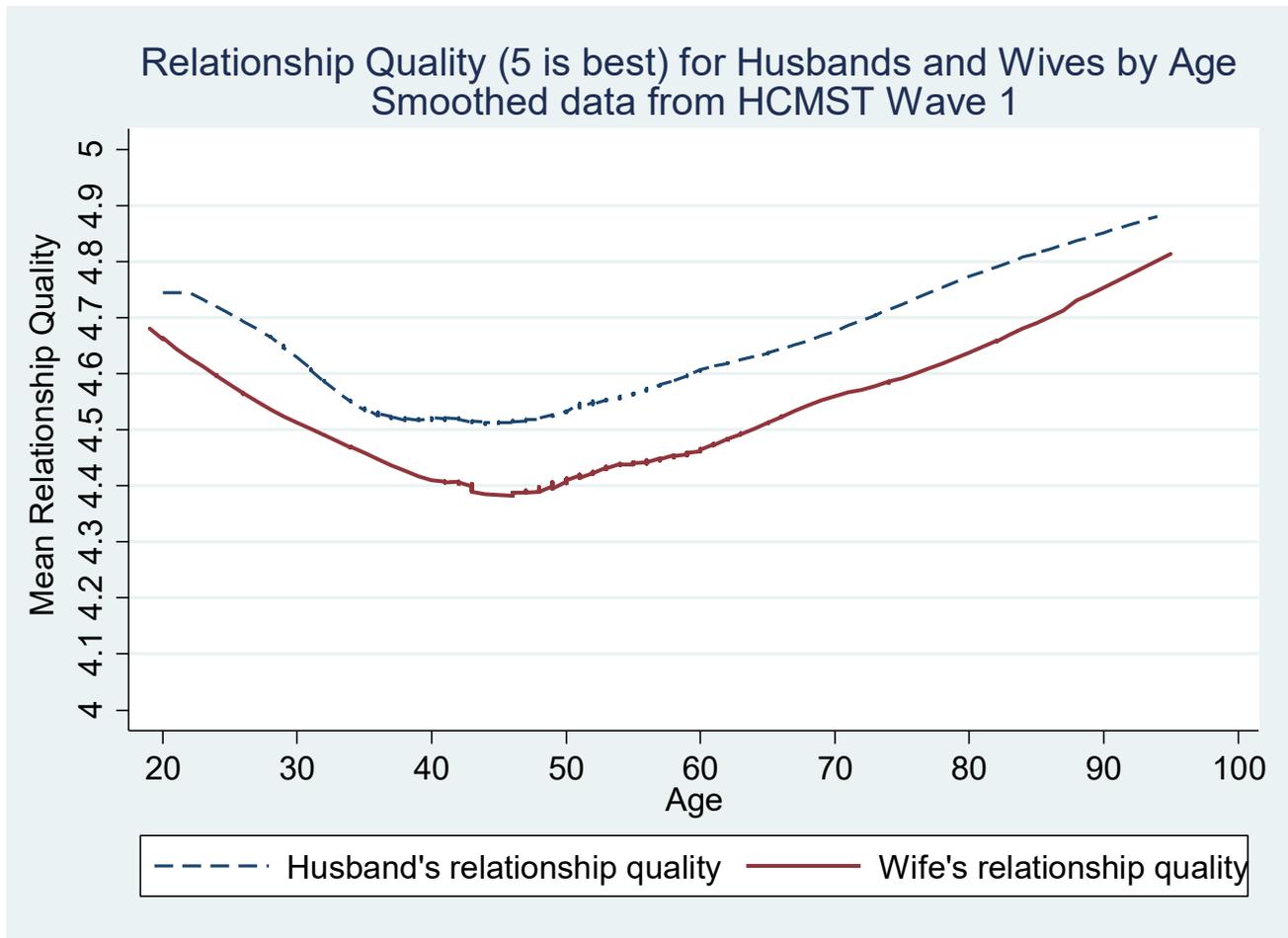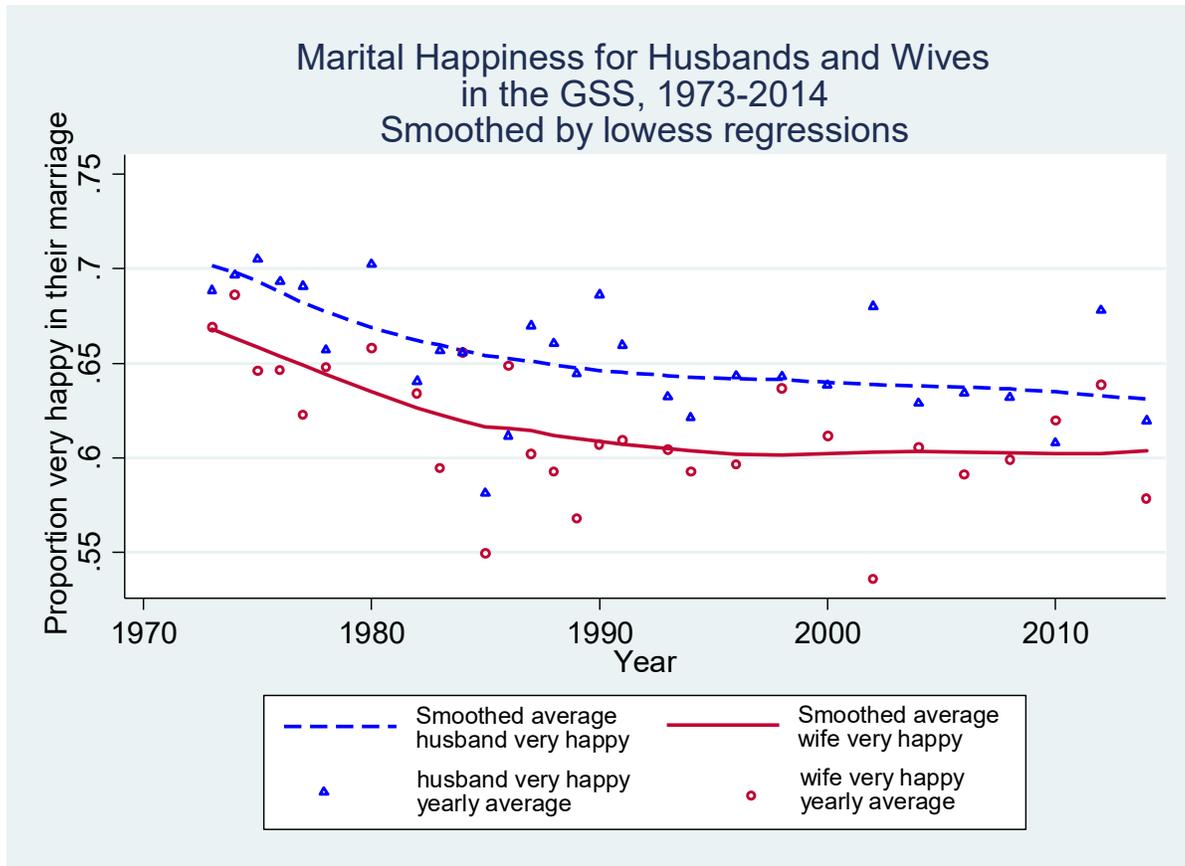
Figure 2: Source: HCMST, wave 1 (2009), heterosexual married couples only. Relationship quality is a 5 point scale with 5 being excellent, 4 being good. Unweighted data smoothed by lowess local regressions with bandwidth= 0.8.

Figure 3:

Marital Happiness for Husbands and Wives in the GSS, 1973-2014. Smoothed by lowess regressions.

Source: unweighted data from GSS, variable hapmar, n=28,362. Question text: "Taking all things together, how would you describe your marriage?", with answers 1 " Very Happy," 2 "Pretty Happy," and 3 "Not Too Happy." In this figure, marital happiness equals answer 1, "Very Happy." Lowess regressions used bandwidth 0.8.

The Post-1960 Decline of Marriage Prevalence for adults 20 y.o. or older in the US
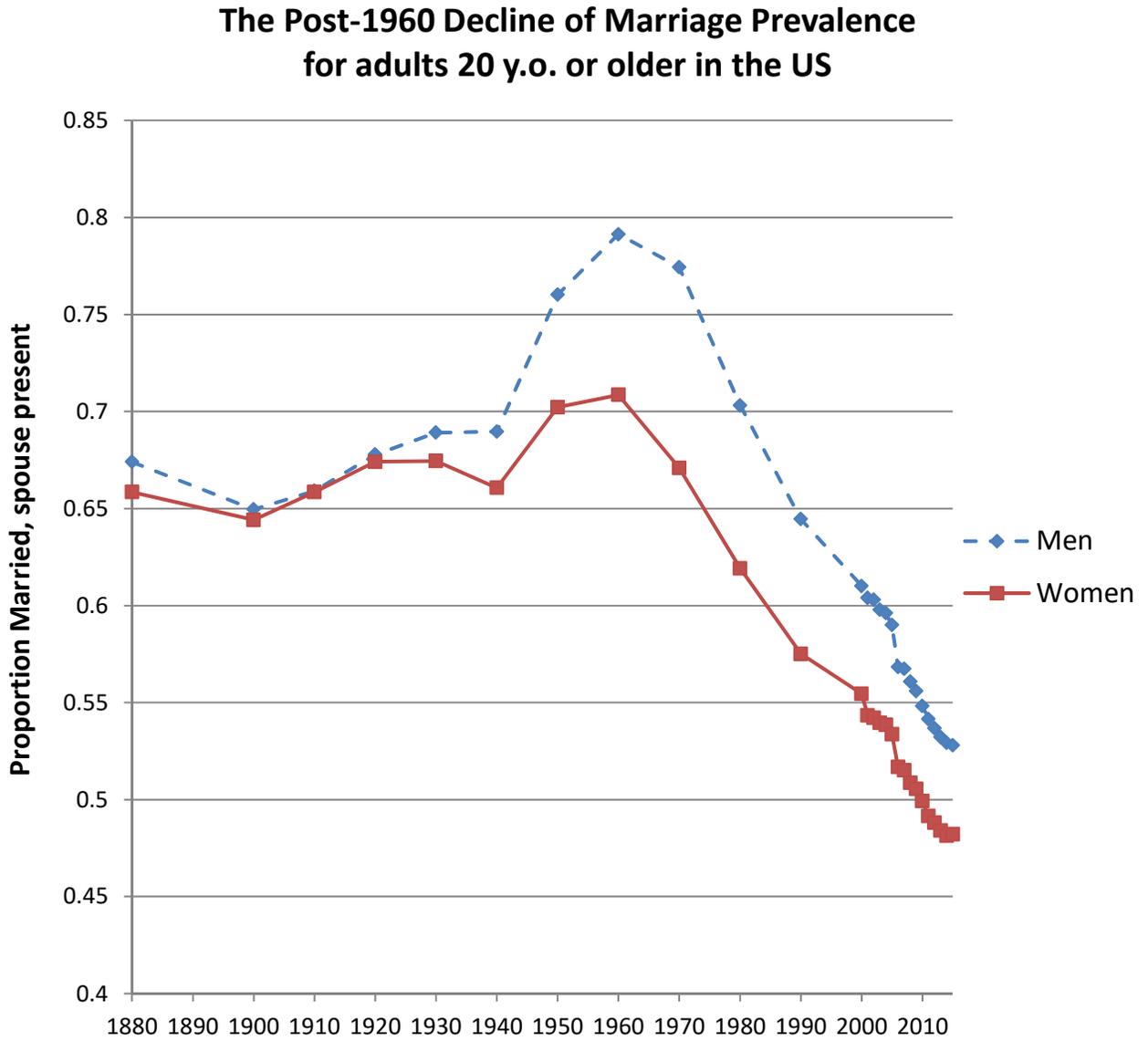
Source: Weighted US census microdata from ipums, 1880-2015, persons not living in group quarters.

Figure 5: The proportion of unmarried people who want to marry, by age and gender, from GSS 1996 and 1998
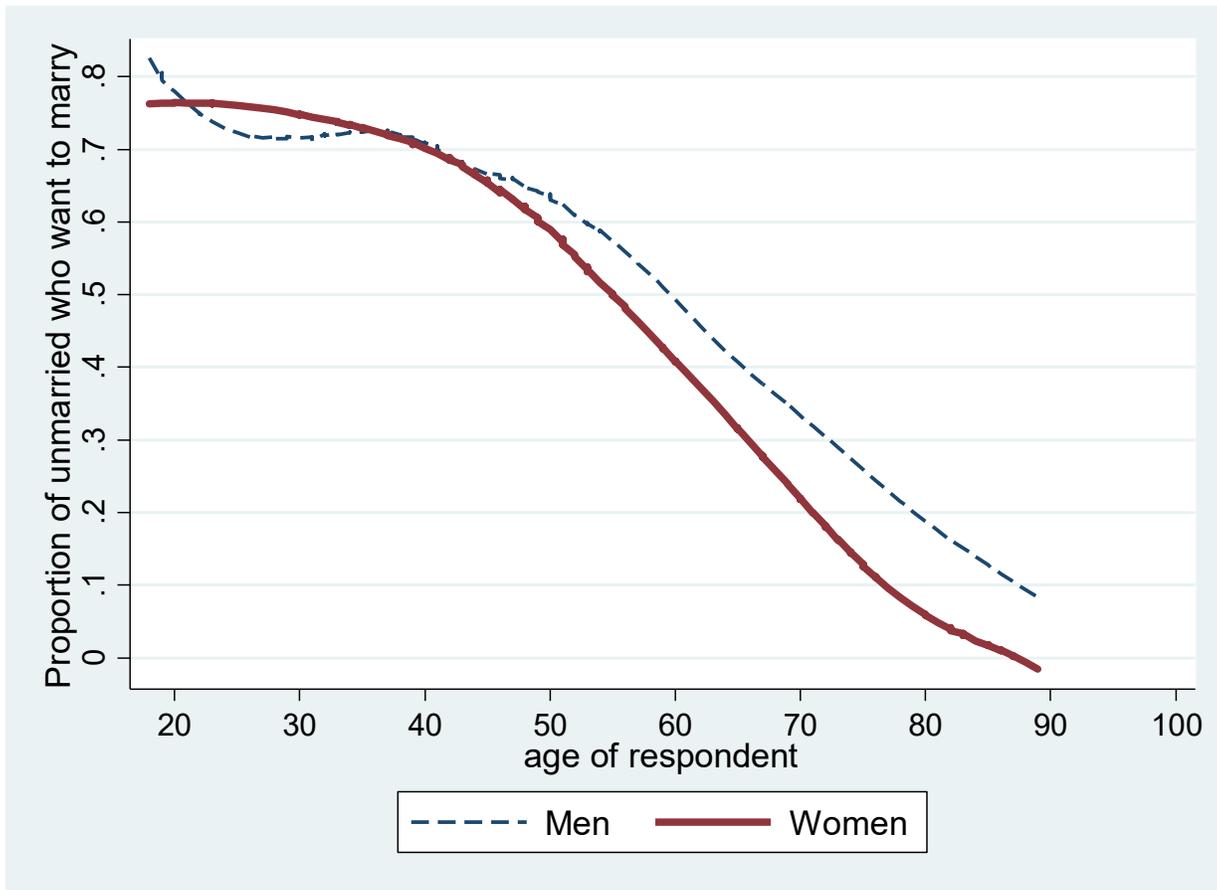
Source: General Social Survey, Willwed2 Question text: "If the right person came along, would you like to be married?" Smoothed via Lowess.