

The Utility of Family Life Cycle as a Theoretical and Empirical Tool

Commitment and Family Life-Cycle Stage

CAROLYN A. KAPINUS

Ball State University

MICHAEL P. JOHNSON

Pennsylvania State University

Using data from a 1980 national sample of married men and women, the authors' empirical analysis examines the utility of the family life cycle concept, employing as dependent variables constructs from Johnson's conceptualization of commitment. They argue, in disagreement with two classic critiques of the family life cycle concept, that the predictive power of family life cycle is, for many dependent variables, quite independent of age or length of marriage. Their analyses demonstrate that, when using dependent variables one would expect to be related to the presence and ages of children, family life cycle remains a useful predictive tool.

Keywords: family life cycle; marriage; commitment

The family life cycle concept is "the categorical system of operationally slicing the family career into segments that modally represent families whose incumbents display particular configurations of characters" (Mattessich & Hill, 1987, p. 437). The stages are typically defined in terms of the presence and ages of children in the household. How useful is the concept of family life cycle? Might we be better off simply using age or years married to discover changes in marriage through the life course? In 1979, two much-cited articles called into question the empirical utility of family life-cycle stages beyond the effects of other variables, such as age or length of marriage (Nock, 1979; Spanier, Sauer, & Larzelere, 1979). Spanier et al. (1979) concluded that "stratification schemes [other than family life-cycle stage] may be more relevant depending on the research variables of interest" (p. 38). Nock (1979) argued more strongly that "this research suggests that the concept cannot be operationalized into

Authors' Note: This is a revision of a paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council on Family Relations, Kansas City, Missouri, 1996.

JOURNAL OF FAMILY ISSUES, Vol. 24 No. 2, March 2003 155-184

DOI: 10.1177/0192513X02250135

© 2003 Sage Publications

a variable that empirical researchers will find useful" (p. 24). If one consults the *Social Science Citation Index*, one can see that the Nock and Spanier et al. articles have each been cited more than 50 times since their publication in 1979, and they have both been cited as recently as 2001. These articles are referred to repeatedly as justification for using age cohort, marriage cohort, or simply the presence of children instead of family life cycle (see Aldous, 1990; Cunningham, 1990; Grote, Frieze, & Stone, 1996; Lee, 1988; Rexroat & Shehan, 1987). In Mattessich and Hill's (2001) chapter on life cycle and family development, the authors refer to the Nock and the Spanier et al. articles in their enumeration of the criticisms of the family development perspective. The authors note the following:

At the empirical level, despite some controversy regarding severe technical shortcomings (see Klein & Aldous, 1979), the results of these analyses provide evidence of the need for better operationalization of the process of family development . . . The results also reveal the need for studies that focus on a set of family variables that are clearly relevant to an examination of family change. (1987, p. 463)

Because the Nock and Spanier et al. articles are classics and their criticisms have not been adequately addressed, we would like to reintroduce the question of the usefulness of the family life cycle. We will demonstrate that family life cycle is not only significantly related to a number of theory-relevant variables but that it remains so after controlling for age or length of marriage.

Lest we misrepresent the extent of the difference between our position and those of Spanier et al. (1979) and Nock (1979), we would like to note that in the conclusions cited above, although Nock is willing to make sweeping generalizations regarding the nonusefulness of the family life cycle in empirical analysis, Spanier and colleagues are more circumspect. Both articles suggest that one's conclusions might vary depending on "the research variables of interest," and this is exactly the position we wish to take. Our concern with the two 1979 articles is that both Nock and Spanier et al. deal with sets of dependent variables that are dominated by measures one would be hard-put to call *family* variables at all.

The heart of the Nock (1979) and the Spanier et al. (1979) criticisms of the family life cycle concept is their demonstration that the relationship between the family life cycle and their dependent variables disappears or is greatly reduced by controls for age or length of marriage. However, all of the dependent variables employed by Spanier and colleagues are demographic variables. Nock claims to investigate whether family life cycle is

related to various facets of individual and family life. These facets are characterized by Nock as instrumental factors, expressive dimension, and personal attitudes.¹ Furthermore, the pattern of relationships in both articles suggests to us that the effects of the family life cycle variable are weakest when one is dealing with variables one would reasonably expect to be related more to *individual* matters than to family life-cycle stage (e.g., income or level of education). For example, Spanier et al. indicates that family life-cycle stage is a better predictor of the wife's socioeconomic level than is age or marriage cohort. Given that bearing and rearing young children is likely to influence wives' participation in the paid labor force, it makes sense that family life cycle is a better predictor of wives' socioeconomic level than age or years married. In contrast, Spanier et al. found that age cohort is the best predictor of socioeconomic level of husband. Again, this finding is logical because accruing income is a function of education level and experience, variables that are closely linked with age rather than the presence and ages of children in the home.

Both of the 1979 articles seem to have dealt with sets of dependent variables that were chosen more because they were available rather than of particular interest to family theorists. Ironically, Nock's test of the family life cycle seems to contradict his statement "The events that mark points in the family life cycle must be demonstrated or presumed to have real consequences for the issues being studied by the researcher" (p. 16). Yet Nock makes no argument about why instrumental resources, expressive feelings, and personal attitudes should be linked with family life cycle. Indeed, these variables would seem to be linked more with the individual life course rather than the family life course. We believe that the family life cycle concept is much more than an "empirical tool" or even a "conceptual tool," the two choices offered to us by Nock in 1979. The family life cycle is a theoretical tool whose utility can be assessed only in the context of meaningful propositions about the nature of family life. In this article, we will demonstrate that the family life course is linked in meaningful ways to various aspects of marital commitment. Furthermore, the commitment variables employed in this article are real family variables with a coherent theoretical origin.

FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

It has long been recognized that not all families go through the same family life cycle, and a number of recent shifts both in the nature of family

life in the United States and in our understanding of the meaning of the term *family* call for clear acknowledgment that any particular definition of "the" family life cycle can address only one of many possible versions of a family's life history. The family life cycle as it is usually conceptualized is tied to the presence and ages of children in the family² and thus represents stages that cannot capture the life course experiences of families that do not involve children at any point in their development, including many gay and lesbian families (Allen & Demo, 1995). Furthermore, at a time in U.S. history when more than half of marriages end in divorce and most divorced persons remarry, it is likely that many families do not experience the impact of children as an ordered progression of "stages." One's family may consist of husband, wife, and a teenager about to leave home one year, and husband, wife, and two preschoolers the next year. However, most adults marry, a majority of married couples have children, and it is still the case that about half of U.S. marriages do not end in divorce (Martin & Bumpass, 1989). Thus, a family life cycle variable defined by the presence and ages of children is still a useful tool for the analysis of many couples' experiences.

As children join a family and develop, their effects on the emotional and material structure of the family develop with them. For example, MacDermid, Huston, and McHale (1990) found that compared to childless couples, parents of young children share less leisure time together, are involved in more instrumental and child-oriented activities, and are more traditional in their division of labor. Rexroat and Shehan (1987) found that even when employed, mothers who have children aged 3 years or younger spend more time doing housework than mothers of older children. Similarly, Higgins, Duxbury, and Lee (1994) noted that both mothers and fathers spend the most amount of time on child care when children are younger than age 6 and substantially less time on child care when children are older than age 13. Leisure time for both mothers and fathers is inversely associated with time spent performing child care. Staines and O'Connor (1980) reported that parents of children younger than 6 years of age had the highest levels of conflict between family and work and that this conflict lessens as children age. Munch, McPherson, and Smith-Lovin (1997) found that child rearing affects both men's and women's network size and composition, and the effects of offspring depend on their developmental stage. Both men's and women's networks are composed mostly of kin when children are very young; however, young children reduce the frequency of social contact for women but not for men.

Clearly, children have an impact on various dimensions of family life, and the effect varies as a function of the ages of children. Although some

families may not proceed through the stages of the family life cycle in an orderly fashion, knowing the ages of children in the family—and particularly the age of the youngest child because rearing younger children is more labor intensive—is indicative of the role relationships among members of a particular family. We believe that the family life cycle variable is a constructive predictor of important aspects of family life, even after controlling for age or length of marriage, and we will employ variables from Johnson's (1991) commitment framework to demonstrate that the utility of the family life cycle variable is quite clear.

THE COMMITMENT FRAMEWORK

We argue that the Nock (1979) and Spanier et al. (1979) articles do not adequately test the empirical value of the family life cycle construct because the authors' dependent variables are measures one would expect to be related more to individual matters than to family life-cycle stage. A true test of the empirical value of family life cycle is to examine it within the context of theory regarding close relationships. We have chosen to examine the utility of the family life cycle concept using Johnson's (1973, 1982, 1991) commitment framework, the heart of which is a set of distinctions among personal commitment, moral commitment, structural commitment, and their respective components.

There is both theoretical and empirical support for the notion that certain aspects of relationship commitment are meaningfully linked to family life-cycle stage. Raising children necessitates considerable time, financial, and emotional resources. The demands associated with child care have very real consequences for marital roles and stability, and these demands are likely to change as children age. Several studies indicate that couples who have children are less likely to divorce compared to childless couples (Becker, Landes, & Michael, 1977; Morgan & Rindfuss, 1985; Waite, Haggstrom, & Kanouse, 1985). The presence of young children in particular seems to have a stabilizing influence on marriage (Rankin & Manker, 1985). Researchers theorize that this is because the time demands of raising children are greatest when children are young, increasing dependency between spouses. As children age, the risk of divorce increases as dependency and satisfaction with marriage decreases and then lessens after children leave the home (Heaton, 1990). Implicit in the explanation of these findings is the idea that family life cycle (as defined by the presence and ages of children) is linked in a meaningful way to marital commitment.

Although the commonsense understanding of the nature of commitment to a marriage is often confined to the simple image of dedication to the continuation of the relationship even in the face of adversity (i.e., “for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health”), it is also generally recognized that the forces that hold a relationship together over time can extend far beyond the personal dedication of the people involved (Fehr, 1988). At some level, we all know the difference between “I want this relationship so badly that I’ll do whatever I have to do to make it work,” and “I’m stuck in this relationship for now whether I like it or not.” Johnson’s (1973, 1982, 1991) elaboration of the concept of commitment is rooted in Becker’s (1960) symbolic interactionist analysis of the concept (Johnson & Ulmer, 1991). Becker’s basic insight was that once one begins a line of action, various social processes are engaged that may make it costly to terminate that line of action in the future, whether or not one wants to continue the line of action. Johnson’s framework (1991) expands this perspective into distinctions among three types of commitment (personal, moral, and structural) and develops elaborations of the primary determinants of each. Table 1 presents the full commitment framework. Because the major focus of this article is the utility of the family life cycle concept, our discussion of the components of the commitment framework will be brief.

PERSONAL COMMITMENT

Personal commitment is defined as the sense of wanting to continue a relationship, and it flows from three components: (a) attraction to the relationship, (b) attraction to the partner, and (c) relationship identity. Although attraction to the relationship and attraction to the partner are likely to be highly correlated, Johnson (1973, 1982, 1991) argued that the distinction is important; we know that people can be highly attracted to partners with whom their relationship is less than satisfactory. The third component of personal commitment, relationship identity, or the extent to which the relationship has become a central part of one’s self-concept, has received little attention in the relationship literature (cf. Aron, Aron, & Smollen, 1992) but has long been a part of the symbolic interactionist analysis of self-concept (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954).

We use secondary analysis for this study, and the data set employed here was not created with Johnson’s (1973, 1982, 1991) commitment framework in mind. Nevertheless, we were able to find measures of the first two components of personal commitment (attraction to the relationship, attraction to the partner) in the data set used for this analysis. Attrac-

TABLE 1
The Commitment Framework

I. Personal commitment
A. Attraction to the relationship (marital satisfaction)
B. Attraction to the partner (love)
C. Relationship identity
II. Moral commitment
A. General consistency values
B. Relationship-type values (divorce attitudes)
C. Person-specific obligation (perceived difficulty of divorce for spouse)
III. Structural commitment
A. Irretrievable investments (joint property)
B. Termination procedures (joint property)
C. Social reaction (shared friends)
D. Alternatives (perceived difficulty of divorce for self)

NOTE: Operationalizations are noted in parentheses; there were no measures of relationship identity or general consistency values in the data set used.

tion to the relationship is measured by marital satisfaction, and attraction to partner is measured by respondents' feelings of love for their partner.

MORAL COMMITMENT

Moral commitment is the feeling that one ought to continue a relationship, that one has a moral obligation to the relationship. Moral commitment often involves a sense of constraint, as in "I'm not really doing what I wish to do, but what I should." There are three major sources of moral commitment. The first is a general belief in the value of consistency, that one has a duty to finish what one starts. The second component of moral commitment is tied to one's relationship-type values. For example, a person who views marriage as an indissoluble commitment for life is less likely to divorce than someone who believes a marriage should continue only as long as both partners are emotionally fulfilled. The third source of moral commitment is tied to one's sense of person-specific obligation to particular others in one's life. This involves concern regarding the effects of one's behavior on others. Such altruism is the heart of Kelley's (1979) conception of personal relationships (through his concept of "transformations"). If one feels that the cessation of a relationship will harm people about whom one cares, one may feel morally obligated to continue in the relationship even if personally, one would like very much to get out of it.

We are able to measure two components of moral commitment: relationship-type values and person-specific obligation. We have operationalized

relationship-type values using an attitude toward divorce scale and person-specific obligation by using a person-specific obligation scale, which ascertains how much difficulty the respondent feels that his or her spouse will face in the event of a divorce.

STRUCTURAL COMMITMENT

Structural commitment, the feeling that one has to continue a relationship, derives from factors that are experienced as external to the individual and constraining. These include irretrievable investments, termination procedures, social reaction, and lack of attractive alternatives (Johnson, 1991). First, the time, energy, and other resources that are consumed in the maintenance of a relationship are sometimes experienced as irretrievable investments that keep individuals from leaving relationships to which they are no longer personally or morally committed. If the resources were "invested" in anticipation of the long-term payoffs of the relationship and are not retrievable, then leaving the relationship may be perceived to entail an unacceptable loss. Second, ending a relationship generally calls for a series of specific actions (termination procedures) that may be more or less onerous. An early divorce in which there are no children and very little joint property may involve a relatively simple termination process, although couples who have been together for a while and who have teenage children are likely to have to settle some very complex property and child custody issues to end their marriage. A third source of structural commitment is social reaction. Partners who have close, overlapping social networks may feel that other people are invested in the continuation of their relationship, and individuals who have few friends who know them apart from their partner may not feel they have the social support to cope with a divorce, as their friends would have to choose sides. The social pressure exerted by such others may be a factor in the maintenance of some relationships. Finally, the lack of acceptable alternatives may be a major constraint. When one considers the ending of a relationship, one evaluates a broad range of possible consequences, including not only the possibility of a "replacement" for one's partner but also the likely effects of a relationship dissolution on one's social life, one's economic situation, and other matters (Udry, 1981). Consider, for example, the difference between the alternatives readily available to a childless 20-year-old college student considering the ending of a marriage and those available to a 45-year-old mother of three who has given up participation in the labor force to raise children for the last 20 years.

As stated earlier, this study employs secondary analysis of data that were not collected to test Johnson's (1973, 1982, 1991) commitment framework. For measures created specifically to test Johnson's commitment framework, see Johnson, Caughlin, and Huston (1999). We have three measures of structural commitment: (a) attractiveness of alternatives; (b) the value of joint property, which indirectly taps some aspects of irretrievable investments and difficulty of termination procedures; and (c) the proportion of the respondent's friends who are also friends of his or her spouse, which measures social reaction.³

FAMILY LIFE CYCLE AND MARITAL COMMITMENT

In this article, we will demonstrate that the relationship of family life cycle to the components of personal, moral, and structural commitment exhibits three predictable patterns, patterns that are quite distinct for different components.

First, among the components of commitment for which we have measures, there is one component that we expect will not be related to family life cycle at all. Previous research indicates that attitudes toward divorce tend to be a function of personal experiences unrelated to the family life cycle. For example, Amato and Booth (1991) found that experiencing either parental divorce or one's own divorce is associated with favorable attitudes toward divorce. It has also been shown that parents' attitudes toward divorce influence their children's attitudes toward divorce (Axinn & Thornton, 1996; Kapinus, in press). Therefore, because attitudes toward divorce are formed by early experiences or influences other than those related to the age or presence of children, we do not expect family life-cycle stage to be related to this component of commitment.

Hypothesis 1: Attitude toward divorce is unrelated to family life-cycle stage.

This does not mean that moral commitment in general is not related to the family life cycle but rather that this one component is tied more to personal experiences. We expect that the other component, for which we have a measure—person-specific obligations—is related to family life cycle and we will discuss this in more detail later.

Second, for some of the components of commitment, we predict that there is a relationship with family life-cycle stage, but it is spurious, a function of age or number of years married, which are in turn correlated

with family life-cycle stage. These are aspects of commitment that develop with the length of a relationship, whether or not a couple has children. For example, over the course of a relationship, a married couple accrues joint property that may complicate the termination procedures involved in a divorce, and some of that may be perceived as irretrievable investments in the relationship. The value of jointly owned property will generally increase steadily throughout the history of the relationship as the couple continues to make joint purchases. During this process, many couples will also move through the various stages of the family life cycle, thus producing a spurious relationship between family life-cycle stage and the value of joint property.

Hypothesis 2a: There is a zero-order relationship between value of joint property and family life-cycle stage, a relationship that will disappear with the introduction of controls for age or years married.

In a similar process, the proportion of an individual's social network that is shared with his or her spouse is likely to increase with length of time spent together (Milardo, 1982). As with joint property, the correlation of age or years married with family life-cycle stage will produce a spurious relationship between the jointness of one's social network and the family life cycle variable.

Hypothesis 2b: There is a zero-order relationship between jointness of social network and family life-cycle stage, a relationship that will disappear with the introduction of controls for age or years married.

Third, there are components of commitment for which we predict a relationship with family life-cycle stage that is not spurious. Specifically, we predict that attraction to the relationship (marital satisfaction), attraction to one's partner (love), person-specific obligation (difficulty of divorce for one's spouse), and attractiveness of alternatives (difficulty of divorce for oneself) will all be related to family life-cycle stage and that the relationship will remain intact with the introduction of controls for age or number of years married.

With respect to marital satisfaction, there has been a running debate in the literature regarding an alleged U-shaped relationship between satisfaction and family life-cycle stage. Although the relationship is not large, it has been demonstrated in a variety of contexts (Duvall, 1971; McHale & Huston, 1985; Schram, 1979; Spanier & Lewis, 1980; Spanier, Lewis, & Cole, 1975; White, Booth, & Edwards, 1986). However, there is some evi-

dence that at least the early dip in marital satisfaction is in part a function of relationship duration, rather than family life-cycle stage. MacDermid et al. (1990), using longitudinal data comparing young couples who had children with those who did not, found that parents did not differ from nonparents in their reports of marital satisfaction; both groups experienced declines in marital satisfaction over the first 2 years of marriage. Therefore, we expect that the variance explained by family life-cycle stage will diminish somewhat when controls for age or length of marriage are introduced, and that the shape of the relationship will shift from a shallow U to a fairly flat curve with a slight increase in the later stages as children leave home.

Hypothesis 3a: There is a curvilinear relationship between family life-cycle stage and marital satisfaction, a relationship that will be reduced slightly but remain significant with the introduction of controls for age or number of years married.

On the matter of love, there is similarly some evidence in the literature for a slight decline in love during the early stages of a marriage (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986), a decline that couples experience regardless of parental status or whether they cohabited before marriage. On the other hand, Grote et al. (1996) found that couples with children reported lower levels of "erotic" and "friendship-based" love. The authors indicated that children per se are not associated with reduced levels of love, but rather being responsible for more family work was related to low reports of love for both men and women. One might reasonably expect that as children age and become able to care for themselves and help around the house, parents' reports of love for each other would increase. Again, as in the case of marital satisfaction, we predict that some explained variance due to family life cycle will diminish on inclusion of age and years married in our models.

Hypothesis 3b: There is a curvilinear relationship between family life-cycle stage and love, which will be somewhat attenuated with the introduction of controls for age or number of years married.

There are two commitment variables that we expect to be heavily tied to family life-cycle stage because both of them have to do with the anticipated consequences of a divorce: in one case, the consequences for one's spouse (person-specific obligations) and in the other case, consequences for oneself (alternatives). There are a number of ways in which the pres-

ence of young children in the family creates difficulties in the case of a divorce. For example, either one or both (in the case of coparenting) of the parents will find themselves struggling with the complexities of single parenthood, the cost of children may weigh heavily on the custodial parent, there may be concerns about changes in one's relationship with one's children, and the custodial parent may not be particularly optimistic about the prospects for remarriage. To the extent that one cares about one's spouse, these anticipated difficulties will increase one's moral commitment to the marriage when there are young children in the family. Thus, we predict an inverted-U relationship between life-cycle stage and person-specific obligation, a relationship that will hold up under controls for age or number of years married.

Hypothesis 3c: There is a strong, inverted-U relationship between family life-cycle stage and person-specific obligations, which is independent of the effects of age or number of years married.

The predictions for attractiveness of alternatives are similar, as respondents anticipate that a divorce would produce a difficult living situation for themselves as well as for their spouse. Again, we predict that these difficulties will be expected to be most severe when there are young children in the family.

Hypothesis 3d: There is a strong, inverted-U relationship between family life-cycle stage and alternatives, which is independent of the effects of age or number of years married.

METHOD

SAMPLE

The data used in these analyses are from a nationwide survey conducted in 1980 (Booth, Amato, Johnson, & Edwards, 1993). Although the data are part of a multiwave study, the first wave is used for these analyses because measures that we use for the commitment components changed over subsequent waves. Telephone interviews were conducted with 2,033 married individuals. Sample households were chosen through a clustered random-digit-dialing procedure; a second random process was used to select the respondent. Only married respondents aged 55 and younger were

included in the sample. The youngest respondent was 16 years old. The mean age was 35.3 ($SD = 9.2$). The number of years married ranged from less than 1 year to 38 years; the average was 12.5 and the standard deviation 9.1. The completion rate was 65%. The 1980 wave was comparable with U.S. census data with respect to age, household size, presence of children, home ownership, and region. The sample is biased in a manner common with survey research: It has a greater proportion of females, metropolitan areas are underrepresented, and the respondents are better educated than the general population.

We selected respondents who were in their first marriage and whose spouses were also in their first marriage. This reduced the sample size to 1,528 respondents. The mean age of the remaining respondents was 34.6 ($SD = 9.1$) and the range was 16 to 55. The mean number of years married was 13.2 ($SD = 8.9$), the range was less than 1 year to 35 years.

FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

Each respondent was placed into one of six family life-cycle categories: (a) childless couples, wife younger than 40 ($n = 253$); (b) youngest child age 2 or younger ($n = 350$); (c) youngest child aged 3 to 6 ($n = 246$); (d) youngest child 7 to 13 ($n = 385$); (e) youngest child 14 to 18 ($n = 182$); and (f) couples whose children are grown and out of the home ($n = 112$). We operationalized family life cycle according to the age of the youngest child because caring for younger children places more time demands on families. Family life cycle is operationalized in the literature in a variety of ways. Our conceptualization of family life cycle fits with Rodgers' (1973) assertion, "Although the set [of family life-cycle stages] developed by one analyst may be used directly by another, it may be preferable to develop a new set which adequately meets the needs of the specific problem" (p. 81). We also ran all the analyses operationalizing family life cycle according to the age of the oldest rather than youngest child. The results do not differ from the analyses using age of the youngest child. Analyses are available from the authors on request. We excluded the permanently childless and defined this category as women who were older than 40 and childless ($n = 9$) and men who were childless and married to a woman older than 40 ($n = 5$). In addition, respondents whose youngest child was older than 18 and still residing at home were not included because this category was relatively small ($n = 72$) and when included with other categories in the analysis, appeared anomalous.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

The dependent variables include some components of each of the three types of commitment: personal, moral, and structural. Because this is a secondary analysis of data collected for other purposes, some of the components outlined by Johnson (1973, 1982, 1991) are not available at all, and for others, we must use less than ideal proxies. Nevertheless, the data have proven useful in addressing much of the commitment framework. On measures where it is appropriate to report alpha reliability, we checked for individual correlations within the measure to determine whether reliability could be improved by dropping items and in each case it could not.

Reasonable measures of two of the three components of *personal commitment* were available: attitude toward one's relationship (operationalized as marital satisfaction) and attitude toward one's partner (operationalized as feelings of love). Marital satisfaction was measured by respondents' mean score on a 6-item scale that includes: satisfaction with spouse's understanding, satisfaction with love received, satisfaction with agreement, satisfaction with sex, and satisfaction with spouse as companion. Responses were coded in the following manner: 1 = *not too happy*, 2 = *don't know*, 3 = *pretty happy*, and 4 = *very happy*. The mean score was 3.43 ($SD = 0.61$). The scale has a coefficient alpha reliability of .84.

Respondents' feelings of love were ascertained by responses on a 2-item scale. The first item is the question "When your spouse is away, would you say you miss (him/her) a great deal, somewhat, or hardly at all?" The second item asks, in the event of a separation or divorce, "emotionally, do you think you could handle living apart from your (husband/wife)?" Both items were coded so that higher scores indicate stronger feelings of love for one's spouse. Because the response options for these items differed, the items were standardized and then averaged. The mean score was .00 ($SD = .71$), scores ranged from -3.17 to $.75$. The scale has a coefficient alpha reliability of .43.

We were able to determine two of the three components of *moral commitment* in the data: relationship-type values (operationalized as attitude toward divorce) and person-specific obligation (operationalized as a scale tapping how well the respondent thought his or her spouse could cope with a divorce). Divorce attitudes were assessed by the mean score on a 5-item, Likert-type scale in which respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with the following statements reflecting views of divorce: (a) Couples are able to get divorced too easily; (b) it's okay for couples to marry thinking that if it does not work out, they can always get a divorce; (c) the personal happiness of an individual

is more important than putting up with a bad marriage; (d) if one spouse becomes mentally or physically disabled, the other person should stay in the marriage regardless of their own happiness; and (e) marriage is for life, even if the couple is unhappy. All items were coded so that higher scores indicate greater disapproval of divorce. The scores ranged from 1 to 5. The average score was 3.28 ($SD = .64$). The scale has a coefficient alpha reliability of .57.

The data set with which we are working does not offer a direct measure of the extent to which respondents express concern regarding the likely consequences of a divorce for their spouse. However, there is a series of items that do ask the respondents to indicate how well they think their spouse would be able to handle living apart. The items include (a) whether the spouse could earn enough money to support him- or herself and any people he or she would be responsible for, (b) whether the spouse could handle children on his or her own, (c) whether the spouse could handle living apart from the children, (d) whether the spouse could emotionally handle living apart from the respondent, and (e) whether the spouse could rely on relatives for help. All items were coded so that higher scores indicate a perception of greater difficulty in coping with divorce; the scale score is the mean of nonmissing items. Thus, childless respondents received the mean score on items that did not ask about coping with children (items 1, 4, and 5.) Scores could range from 1 to 4, and the average score was 2.22 ($SD = .59$). Alpha is not reported because this scale falls into the class of "effects models" for which measures of internal consistency are inappropriate (Bollen & Lennox, 1991). Although these items do not measure person-specific obligations directly, they do indicate the problems that the respondent thinks his or her spouse will face in the event of a divorce. If we can assume that these respondents do in fact care about their spouses, then this variable ought to tap differences in this component of moral commitment.

Proxies for all four components of *structural commitment* were available, although some of the proxies are clearly less than ideal. The value of joint property is used as a very indirect indication of some aspects of both difficulty of termination procedures and irretrievable investments. The value of joint property was determined by summing the dollar value of home and dollar value of shared assets (i.e., a business, stocks or bonds, real estate, or other major investments). The average dollar value of joint property was 72,530 (median = 56,000; $SD = 90,763$).

Similarly, although there was no direct measure of social pressure to stay together, we could determine the extent to which respondents' friendship networks were shared with their spouse. We simply divided the num-

ber of friends shared with one's spouse by the total number of friends reported by the respondent, producing a variable with a potential range of 0 to 1. The average proportion of friends shared was .76 ($SD = .33$).

Attractiveness of alternatives was indexed by the mean score on a scale of 5 items in which the respondent was asked whether, in the event of a divorce, he or she could (a) earn enough money to support herself and any other people she is responsible for, (b) handle the children on his own, (c) handle living apart from the children, (d) rely on relatives, and (e) find another spouse. The answer format ranged from 1 to 4 (*strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*); the average score was 2.21 and the standard deviation was .57. Scale score was the mean of nonmissing items; childless respondents thus received the mean score on items that did not ask about coping with children (items 1, 4, and 5). Again, alpha is not reported because this scale falls into the class of models for which measures of internal consistency are inappropriate (Bollen & Lennox 1991).

A correlation matrix including all the commitment components is shown in Appendix A. Although some of the components are moderately correlated, even the highest correlation (marital satisfaction and love) indicates only 34% of shared variance.

CONTROLS

Age and number of years married were coded in actual years. We also squared age and length of marriage to create variables that could be entered into regressions to tap the quadratic component of age and number of years married (Agresti & Finlay, 1997).

RESULTS

We conducted hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression and created dummy variables for family life cycle (stage 6 was the reference category). We ran three models for each dependent variable. (All of these analyses were also run with gender and its interactions with other variables, but because its inclusion did not alter any of our findings regarding family life-cycle stage, we report these simpler analyses.) In the first model, we included only family life-cycle stage (as a block of dummy variables), allowing us to assess the variance attributable to family life-cycle stage. In the second model, the first block entered included age and age-squared, followed by the block of family life-cycle stage dummy variables. This analysis yields the variance explained by family life-cycle stage, con-

trolling for the linear and quadratic components of age. In the third model, we first entered years married and years married-squared, followed by the family life-cycle stage variables. Thus, we ran three different regression models for each of the components of commitment, yielding 21 different regression models (shown in Appendix D). Correlations between each family life-cycle stage, years married, and age are shown in Appendix C. Note that the strongest correlation is between age and family life-cycle stage 1 at $-.49$, which does not pose a multicollinearity problem. The results of the analyses are presented in Table 2. Coefficients for these regressions are found in Appendix B.

COMPONENTS PREDICTED TO BE UNRELATED TO FAMILY LIFE-CYCLE STAGE

In examining Table 2, we see that, as predicted in H1, family life cycle is not related to divorce attitudes, either with or without controls for age or length of marriage.

COMPONENTS WHOSE RELATIONSHIP TO FAMILY LIFE CYCLE IS SPURIOUS

As predicted in H2a, *joint property* (a proxy measure for irretrievable investments and difficulty of termination procedures) is significantly related to family life-cycle stage and captures 8% of the variance. For each successive stage of the life cycle, the dollar value of joint property increases, from a mean of \$37,795 for those with no children to \$107,063 for those with teens, then to \$110,235 for those whose children have left the home (see Figure 1). Years married is also positively related to joint property ($r = .29, p < .001$), as is age ($r = .34, p < .001$). Most important, as predicted in H2a, the addition of age or length of marriage to the model essentially eliminates the effect of family life-cycle stage (see Table 2 and Figure 1). Because, given the large sample size, trivial effects can be statistically significant, we have set an explained variance of .02 as the cutoff point for discussion of effects.

We see a similar pattern for the extent to which spouses have a shared friendship network (a proxy variable for social pressure). Referring to Table 2, the reader will note that the regression results reveal that family life-cycle stage captures 2% of the variance of shared friends, before controlling for age or years married. The proportion of friends who are shared increases through each successive stage of the life cycle, from 0.70 for childless respondents to 0.84 to respondents whose children have left the home

TABLE 2
Variance Attributable to Family Life Cycle

	<i>No Controls</i>	<i>Controlling for Age^a</i>	<i>Controlling for Years Married^a</i>
Divorce attitudes			
Family life cycle R^2	.00	.00	.00
F ratio change	1.60	1.96	2.27
Joint property			
Family life cycle R^2	.08	.00	.00
F ratio change	25.51***	0.10	0.91
Shared friends			
Family life cycle R^2	.02	.00	.00
F ratio change	5.26***	0.45	0.23
Marital satisfaction			
Family life cycle R^2	.02	.02	.02
F ratio change	5.97***	5.00***	3.42***
Love			
Family life cycle R^2	.02	.02	.02
F ratio change	7.72***	8.02**	9.96***
Person-specific obligations			
Family life cycle R^2	.14	.13	.12
F ratio change	48.96***	47.42***	41.18***
Alternatives			
Family life cycle R^2	.11	.09	.06
F ratio change	38.96***	31.11***	21.83***

a. Includes both curvilinear and linear variables.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

(see Figure 2). As predicted in H2b, however, both age and years married are related to proportion of friends shared (zero-order correlations = .15, $p < .001$, and .16, $p < .001$, respectively), and when we add the linear and quadratic components of either of these variables to the model, the effect of life-cycle stage disappears (see Table 2 and Figure 2).

COMPONENTS WHOSE RELATIONSHIP TO FAMILY LIFE CYCLE IS NONSPURIOUS

As predicted in H3a, family life-cycle stage is significantly related to marital satisfaction, and the relationship is curvilinear such that young childless respondents and older respondents whose children have left the home report the highest levels of marital satisfaction (weighted quadratic term $F = 30.23$, $p < .001$). For this sample, the relationship between family life-cycle stage and marital satisfaction barely meets our cutoff criterion

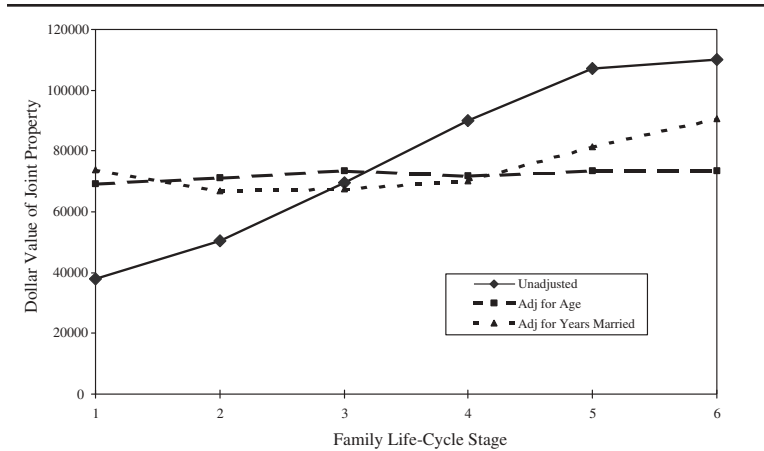


Figure 1: Joint Property by Family Life Cycle

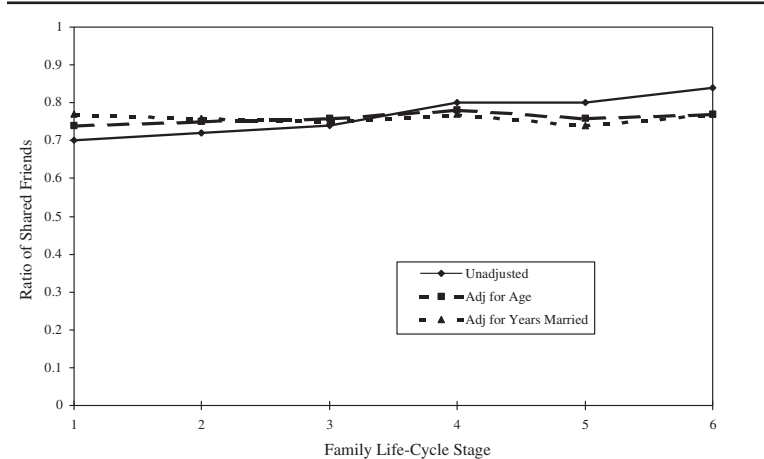


Figure 2: Ratio of Shared Friends by Family Life Cycle

of 2% explained variance, and although this very weak relationship holds up under controls for age, it drops to 1% when length of marriage is controlled. Neither years married nor age is significantly related to marital satisfaction (zero-order correlations of $-.02, p = .46$, and $-.01, p = .75$ respectively). The adjusted and unadjusted means are essentially identical (see Figure 3).

The relationship between family life-cycle stage and love explains 2% of the variance. Although age is significantly related to love, years married

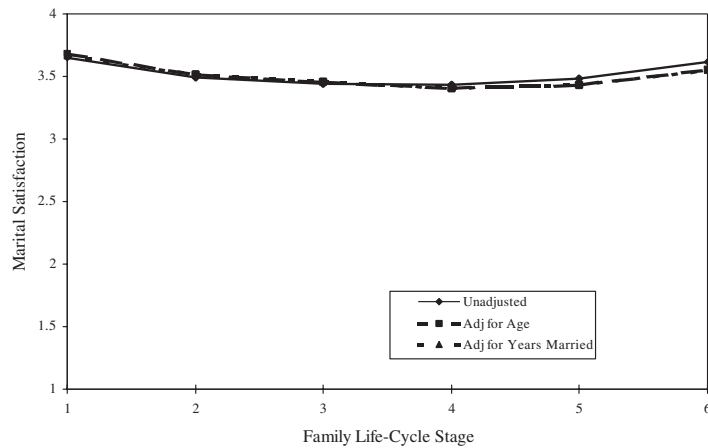


Figure 3: Marital Satisfaction by Family Life Cycle

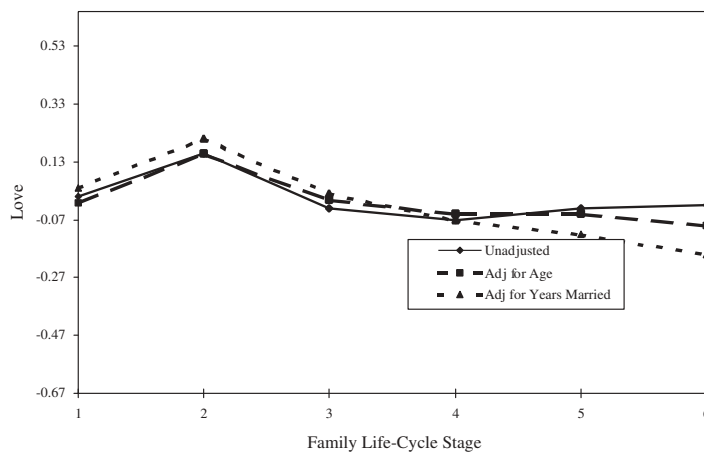


Figure 4: Love by Family Life Cycle

is not (zero-order correlations of $-.06$, $p = .01$, and $-.02$, $p = .37$ respectively), and adjustments for these variables have little effect (see Table 2 and Figure 4).

In the case of both marital satisfaction and love, neither is related (beyond the 2% or larger explained variance criterion) to family life cycle or to age or length of marriage. For our purposes, perhaps they should be moved to the class of variables that are simply unrelated to family life-cycle stage, with or without controls.

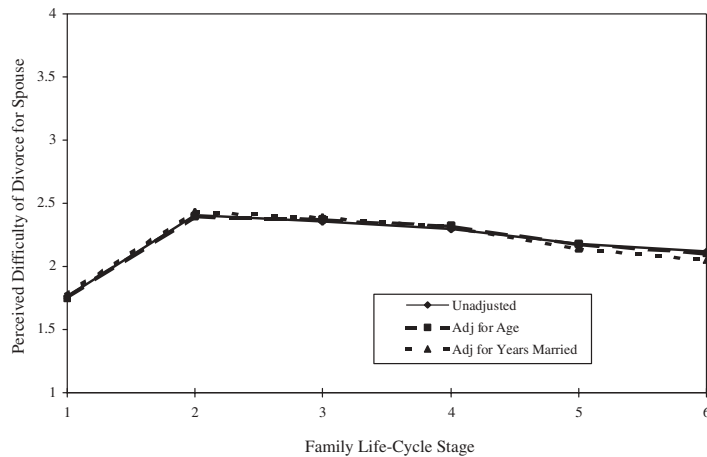


Figure 5: Perceived Difficulty of Divorce for Spouse by Family Life Cycle

As predicted in H3c, family life-cycle stage is significantly related to person-specific obligation, capturing 14% of its variance, and the effect is curvilinear (quadratic component $F = 142.14$, $p < .001$). Respondents who are childless or whose children have left the home perceive that their spouses will have less difficulty in the event of a divorce (see Figure 5). Although age is not significantly related to person-specific obligation ($r = .04$, $p = .12$), years married is ($r = .08$, $p = .002$). Controls for the linear and quadratic components of age reduce the variance explained by life-cycle stage from 14% to 13%; similar controls for years married reduce the explained variance to 12%. Thus, although a small portion of the effect of life-cycle stage is attributable to confounding with age or years married, the bulk of the effect is independent.

As predicted in H3d, family life-cycle stage is also a strong predictor of alternatives (respondents' perceptions of the difficulties they themselves would face in handling a breakup), accounting for 11% of its variance. The largest increase in respondents' perceptions of their own difficulty in handling a divorce occurs between childless respondents and those whose youngest child is 2 or younger (from 1.78 to 2.27). Perceptions of difficulty then increase slightly for parents whose child is between the ages of 3 and 6 and decline thereafter through each stage to 2.22, when children have left the home. The relationship is curvilinear, the quadratic term F ratio = 89.59 ($p < .001$). Both age and years married are significantly related to respondents' anticipated difficulty in facing a divorce (zero-order correlations of .12, $p < .001$, and .17, $p < .001$ respectively). However, as pre-

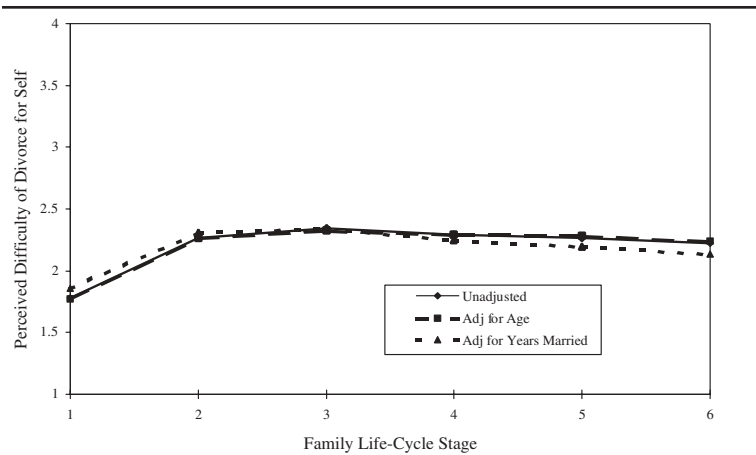


Figure 6: Perceived Difficulty of Divorce for Self by Family Life Cycle

dicted in H3d, the inclusion of the linear and quadratic components of either of these variables reduces the variance attributable to family life-cycle stage only slightly (see Table 2), and the adjusted means are virtually identical to the unadjusted means (see Figure 6).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Thus, as predicted, controlling for age and length of marriage changes the observed effects of family life cycle in different ways depending on the type of commitment variable involved. First, and of least interest, are commitment variables that represent stable attitudes and values that do not vary either with family life-cycle stage, age, or length of marriage. We predicted such a pattern for attitudes to divorce, and as expected, it was unrelated to family life cycle.

There are, however, two other commitment variables that exhibited this pattern of essentially no relationship in our data. Based on previous literature, we predicted that marital satisfaction and love would decline early in marriage, then increase again as the children aged, although we did not expect particularly strong zero-order relationships. For this sample, the relationship between family life-cycle stage and marital satisfaction barely met our cutoff criterion of 2% explained variance, and although this very weak relationship held up under controls for age, it dropped to 1% when length of marriage was controlled. The relationship between family life-cycle stage and love was even weaker, explaining only 1% of the variance.

Noting that marital satisfaction and love are not even related to our control variables (in all cases, explained variances are 2% or less) we would argue that they should be moved to the class of variables that are simply unrelated to family life-cycle stage, with or without controls. The low level of explained variance is similar to that reported by other studies. For example, Spanier et al. (1975) reported an explained variance below 2%, and White et al. (1986) indicated that the presence of children accounted for 1% of the variance in marital satisfaction.

Second, there are some commitment variables that we would expect to be a function primarily of age or length of marriage and thus related to family life-cycle stage only because of its association with those variables. We predicted that controlling for age or years married would seriously erode the predictive power of family life-cycle stage for joint property and shared friends, and our hypotheses were supported. As our analysis indicates, these variables are probably a function of time spent together and not related independently to the presence and ages of children.

Finally, there are commitment variables that we hypothesize to be tied closely to the presence and ages of children, independently of age of respondent or length of marriage. Perceived difficulty of divorce for one's spouse and one's self, person-specific obligation and attractiveness of alternatives, are strongly tied to the presence and ages of children. More importantly, controlling for age or length of marriage did not significantly reduce the variance attributable to family life-cycle stage.

In summary, controlling for age or years married erodes the effect of family life-cycle stage only when the dependent variables considered are tapping dimensions of family life that one would expect to have little to do with family structure, such as joint property and proportion of shared friends. When considering variables of family life associated with aspects of the marital relationship, such as person-specific obligation and the attractiveness of alternatives to the marriage, the effect of family life-cycle stage is robust.

Critics may continue to wonder about the usefulness of the family life cycle concept given the diversity of American households. Whether the stage model could be applied to complex, blended families depends on how family life cycle is operationalized. Although many families may not progress through the family life-cycle stages in an orderly fashion, knowing that a family has children at home and knowing the age of the youngest child can give researchers consequential information about the role demands facing the parent(s) in the household given the particular time demands associated with rearing very young children. Thus, many researchers may find operationalizing family life cycle according to the age of the

youngest child useful, especially when dealing with single and blended families. In addition, researchers may also consider using the "stage-transitional" model (Mattessich & Hill, 1987, p. 464), which looks at role-transition as the variable of interest. Thus, in this conceptualization, families would not need to progress through the traditional order of stages as specified by other family life cycle models.

As Klein and Aldous (1979) pointed out, "The spirit of the family development framework is to point to places in a family's development where changes in status and role occur" (p. 689), and we would add that one would only expect it to be a significant factor when the dependent variables in question involve aspects of family life that are tied to those changes in status and role. Choosing variables out of convenience, rather than for their meaningful relationship to changes in family roles or status, seems to us to be what C. Wright Mills (1959) referred to as "abstracted empiricism," rather than a true test of the utility of family life cycle. When assessing the utility of the family life cycle concept in the context of reasonable hypotheses, we find that the family life-cycle stage is indeed a useful theoretical as well an empirical tool.

APPENDIX A
Correlation Matrix for Commitment Components

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Marital satisfaction	—	.38***	.18***	-.05*	.23***	-.00	-.05*
2. Love		—	.26***	.36***	.18***	-.11***	.27***
3. Divorce attitudes			—	.15***	.13***	-.05*	.14***
4. Person-specific obligations				—	.10***	-.07**	.52***
5. Shared friends					—	-.03	.08**
6. Joint property						—	-.04
7. Alternatives							—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

APPENDIX B
Correlation Matrix for Commitment Components by Gender^a

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Marital satisfaction	—	.43***	.19***	-.07*	.27***	.02	-.05
2. Love	.30***	—	.29***	.36***	.20***	-.12***	.24***
3. Divorce attitudes	.17***	.25**	—	.15***	.12***	-.04	.17***

(continued)

APPENDIX B (continued)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Person-specific obligations	-.03	.39***	.12**	—	.10**	-.11**	.54***
5. Shared friends	.14**	.16***	.13**	.11**	—	.04	.12**
6. Joint property	-.05	-.09	-.08*	-.05	.01	—	.00
7. Alternatives	-.01	.31***	.16***	.54***	.12**	-.10*	—

a. Correlations for wives are above the diagonal and correlations for husbands below.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

APPENDIX C
Zero-Order Correlations for Family Life-Cycle Stage—
Years Married and Age

Family Life-Cycle Stage	Years Married	Age
Stage 1	-.42***	-.49***
Stage 2	-.41***	-.40
Stage 3	-.14***	-.13***
Stage 4	.23***	.23***
Stage 5	.37***	.38***
Stage 6	.41***	.39***

*** $p < .001$

APPENDIX D
Standardized OLS Coefficients for Regression of Commitment
Components on Family Life-Cycle Stage, Age, and Years Married

	Marital Satisfaction			Love		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Life Cycle 1	.042	.104*	.108	-.009	.003	.080
Life Cycle 2	-.069	-.001	.004	.169***	.199***	.291***
Life Cycle 3	-.081*	-.029	-.022	.029	.081	.145**
Life Cycle 4	-.116**	-.074	-.067	.037	.103*	.152**
Life Cycle 5	-.063*	-.051	-.047	.038	.066*	.082**
Age ^a		-.090			-.898**	
Age ^a		.158			.897**	
Years married ^a			-.023			-.278*
Years married ^a			.092			.377**
R ²	.02	.02	.02	.01	.02	.02
N	1,527	1,527	1,526	1,528	1,527	1,526

(continued)

APPENDIX D (continued)

	<i>Divorce Attitudes</i>			<i>Divorce for Spouse</i>		
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
Life Cycle 1	-.057	.137*	.169**	-.226***	-.225***	-.172**
Life Cycle 2	-.035	.184**	.216***	.201***	.210***	.270***
Life Cycle 3	-.027	.155**	.178**	.149***	.168***	.210***
Life Cycle 4	-.018	.137**	.155**	.133**	.158**	.192***
Life Cycle 5	.035	.089*	.098*	.032	.042	.053
Age ^a		-.625**			-.341	
Age ^a		.817***			.334	
Years married ^a			-.090**			-.107
Years married ^a			.312**			.159
R ²	.00	.02	.02	.14	.14	.14
N	1,527	1,526	1,525	1,527	1,526	1,525
				<i>Shared Friends</i>		
	<i>Joint Property</i>			<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
Life Cycle 1	-.297***	-.018	-.069	-.155***	-.039	.002
Life Cycle 2	-.278***	-.000	-.109	-.148**	-.028	-.014
Life Cycle 3	-.164***	.000	-.093	-.105*	-.018	-.023
Life Cycle 4	-.096*	-.009	-.097	-.047	.017	-.004
Life Cycle 5	-.011	.000	-.033	-.033	-.014	-.027
Age ^a		1.032***			.050	
Age ^a		-.704***			.072	
Years married ^a			.765***			.315
Years married ^a			-.531***			-.159
R ²	.08	.12	.11	.02	.02	.03
N	1,525	1,524	1,523	1,354	1,353	1,353
	<i>Divorce for Self</i>					
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>			
Life Cycle 1	-.294***	-.309***	-.189**			
Life Cycle 2	.033	.016	.127*			
Life Cycle 3	.075*	.059	.130*			
Life Cycle 4	.049	.033	.082			
Life Cycle 5	.024	.018	.030			
Age ^a		.102				
Age ^a		-.115				
Years married ^a			1.63			
Years married ^a			-.787			

(continued)

APPENDIX D (continued)

	<i>Divorce for Self</i>		
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
R^2	.11	.11	.12
N	1,527	1,526	1,525

NOTE: OLS = ordinary least squares.

a. In Models 2 and 3, controls for age and years married were entered stepwise into the equation first, followed by family life-cycle stages. Stage 6 is the somitted category.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

NOTES

1. Using U.S. Census data, Spanier, Sauer, and Larzelere (1979) investigated the relationship between family life cycle and presence of parents or in-laws in household, number of children, number of children present, age of youngest child, age of oldest child, socioeconomic level of husband, socioeconomic level of wife, family income, educational level of husband, educational level of wife, husband's age, wife's age, number of children who left home, and number of years married. Using the Quality of American Life survey, Nock (1979) examined the relationship between *instrumental factors*, which include family life cycle and occupation, family income, education, hours spent on job, size of dwelling, employment of spouse, and health of individual; *expressive dimension*, which includes degree of satisfaction from one's marriage, contemplation of divorce, frequency person wished he or she had married someone else, companionship with spouse, degree person feels he or she understands spouse, how well spouse understands him or her, frequency of disagreement over finances, degree children are a problem, degree individual enjoys being a parent, satisfaction derived from family, satisfaction from friends, satisfaction from standard of living, satisfaction from dwelling; *attitudes*, which include desire to change residence, feeling of personal freedom, religious strength, importance of acquiring money, importance of family, number of memberships in voluntary groups, belief that U.S. life is getting better or worse, satisfaction with life in general, and satisfaction with main job.

2. Another way to conceptualize family life cycle is to look at the transition between family life-cycle stages as the variable of interest (Mattessich & Hill, 1987, p. 464). In this "stage-transitional" model, disequilibrium occurs between stages but resumes as families settle into their new roles. Using this conceptualization of family life cycle would require looking at time-since-last-role transition as a potential predictor of variables of interest. This stage-transitional model may also be more useful for examining diverse family forms that may not follow the ordered progression of stages as specified by the traditional model of family life cycle.

3. We tested the predictive validity of the commitment measures by examining which individuals in the sample divorced in later waves. Using logistic regression, we found both measures of personal commitment, one measure of moral commitment (divorce attitudes), and one measure of structural commitment (shared friends) were significantly and negatively related to divorce. However, the sample lost 457 respondents in later waves, and all of the measures of structural and moral commitment were significantly and negatively related to attrition. Analyses are available from the authors on request.

REFERENCES

- Agresti, A., & Finlay, B. (1997). *Statistical methods for the social sciences*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Aldous, J. (1990). Family development and the life course: Two perspectives on family change. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 5, 571-583.
- Allen, K. R., & Demo, D. H. (1995). The families of lesbians and gay men: A new frontier in family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 111-127.
- Amato, P., & Booth, A. (1991). The consequences of divorce for attitudes toward divorce and gender roles. *Journal of Family Issues*, 12, 6-19.
- Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Smollen, D. (1992). Inclusion of other in the self scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 9, 21-50.
- Axinn, W. G., & Thornton, A. (1996). The influence of parents' marital dissolutions on children's attitudes toward family formation. *Demography*, 33, 66-81.
- Becker, C. S., Landes, E. M., & Michael, R. T. (1977). An economic analysis of marital instability. *Journal of Political Economy*, 85, 1141-1187.
- Becker, H. S. (1960). Notes on the concept of commitment. *American Journal of Sociology*, 66, 32-40.
- Bollen, K., & Lennox, R. (1991). Conventional wisdom on measurement: A structural equation perspective. *Psychological Bulletin*, 110, 305-314.
- Booth, A., Amato, P., Johnson, D. R., & Edwards, J. N. (1993). *Marital instability over the life course methodology report for fourth wave*. Unpublished report, Department of Sociology, Pennsylvania State University, University Park.
- Cunningham, P. J. (1990). Medical care use and expenditures for children across stages of the family life cycle. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 52, 1197-1207.
- Duvall, E. M. (1971). *Family development* (4th ed.). Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott.
- Fehr, B. (1988). Prototype analysis of the concepts of love and commitment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, 557-578.
- Grote, N., Frieze, I. H., & Stone, C. A. (1996). Children, traditionalism in the division of family work and marital satisfaction: "What's love got to do with it?" *Personal Relationships*, 3, 211-228.
- Heaton, T. B. (1990). Marital stability throughout the child-rearing years. *Demography*, 27, 55-63.
- Higgins, C., Duxbury, L., & Lee, C. (1994). Impact of life-cycle stage and gender on the ability to balance work and family responsibilities. *Family Relations*, 43, 144-150.
- Huston, T. L., McHale, S. M., & Crouter, A. C. (1986). When the honeymoon's over: Changes in the marriage relationship over the first year. In R. Gilmour & S. Duck (Eds.), *The emerging field of close relationships*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Johnson, M. P. (1973). Commitment: A conceptual structure and empirical application. *Sociological Quarterly*, 14, 395-406.
- Johnson, M. P. (1982). Social and cognitive features of the dissolution of commitment to relationships. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Personal relationships 4: Dissolving personal relationships* (pp. 51-73). New York: Academic Press.
- Johnson, M. P. (1991). Commitment to personal relationships. In W. Jones & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Advances in personal relationships: Volume 3*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Johnson, M. P., Caughlin, J., & Huston, T. L. (1999). The tripartite nature of marital commitment: Personal, moral, and structural reasons to stay married. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61, 160-177.

- Johnson, M. P., & Ulmer, J. (1991, August). *A symbolic interactionist analysis of commitment to lines of action*. Paper presented at Society for the Study of Symbolic Interactionist annual meeting, San Francisco, CA.
- Kapinus, C. (in press). The effect of parents' attitudes toward divorce on offspring's attitudes: Gender and parental divorce as mediating factors. *Journal of Family Issues*.
- Kelley, H. (1979). *Personal relationships: Their structures and processes*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Klein, D. M., & Aldous, J. (1979). The blind mice: Misleading criticism of the "family life cycle" concept. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 41, 689-691.
- Kuhn, M. H., & McPartland, T. S. (1954). An empirical investigation of self attitudes. *American Sociological Review*, 19, 68-76.
- Lee, G. (1988). Marital satisfaction in later life: The effects of nonmarital roles. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 50, 775-792.
- MacDermid, S. M., Huston, T. L., & McHale, S. M. (1990). Changes in marriage associated with the transition to parenthood: Individual differences as a function of sex-role attitudes and changes in the division of household labor. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 52, 475-486.
- Martin, T. C., & Bumpass, L. L. (1989). Recent trends in marital disruption. *Demography*, 26, 37-51.
- Mattessich, P., & Hill, R. (1987). Life cycle and family development. In M. B. Sussman & S. K. Steinmetz (Eds.), *Handbook of marriage and the family* (pp. 437-470). New York: Plenum.
- McHale, S. M., & Huston, T. L. (1985). The effect of the transition to parenthood on the marriage relationship: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Family Issues*, 6, 409-433.
- Milardo, R. M. (1982). Social networks in developing relationships: Converging and diverging social environments. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 45, 162-172.
- Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Morgan, S. P., & Rindfuss, R. R. (1985). Marital disruption: Structural and temporal dimensions. *American Journal of Sociology*, 90, 1055-1077.
- Munch, A., McPherson, J. M., & Smith-Lovin, L. (1997). Gender, children, and social contact: The effects of child rearing for men and women. *American Sociological Review*, 62, 509-520.
- Nock, S. L. (1979). The family life cycle: Empirical or conceptual tool? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 41, 15-26.
- Rankin, R. P., & Manker, J. S. (1985). The duration of marriage in a divorcing population: The impact of children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 47, 43-52.
- Rexroat, C., & Shehan, C. (1987). Family life cycle and spouses' time in housework. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 49, 737-750.
- Rodgers, R. H. (1973). *Family interaction and transaction: The developmental approach*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Schram, R. W. (1979). Marital satisfaction over the family life cycle: A critique and proposal. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 41, 7-14.
- Spanier, G. B., & Lewis, R. A. (1980). Marital quality: A review of the seventies. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 42, 96-110.
- Spanier, G. B., Lewis, R. A., & Cole, C. L. (1975). Marital adjustment over the family life cycle: The issue of curvilinearity. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 37, 263-276.
- Spanier, G. B., Sauer, W., & Larzelere, R. (1979). An empirical evaluation of the family life cycle. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 41, 27-38.

- Staines, G., & O'Connor, P. (1980). Conflicts among work, leisure, and family roles. *Monthly Labor Review*, *103*, 35-39.
- Udry, R. J. (1981). Marital alternatives and marital disruption. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *43*, 889-897.
- Waite, L. J., Haggstrom, G. W., & Kanouse, D. E. (1985). Parenthood and marital stability. *American Sociological Review*, *50*, 850-857.
- White, L. K., Booth, A., & Edwards, J. E. (1986). Children and marital happiness: Why the negative correlation? *Journal of Family Issues*, *2*, 131-147.