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**INTERACTIONS BETWEEN CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS  
OF DIVORCE IN THE NETHERLANDS**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between gendered family roles and divorce in the Netherlands. Cultural and economic aspects of this relationship are distinguished. Economic hypotheses argue that the likelihood of divorce is increased if women work for pay and have attractive labor market resources. Cultural hypotheses argue that divorce chances are increased if women adhere to emancipatory norms, independent of their labor market position. An event-history analyses of a life-history survey among 1,289 Dutch women reveals evidence for both hypotheses. Interaction effects are found as well: The protective effect of a traditional division of paid labor is only present among couples in which wives have traditional gender attitudes. Hence, the validity of economic explanations of divorce is conditional on cultural values.

Keywords: Divorce, gender roles, marital specialization, Netherlands, women's employment.

**INTERACTIONS BETWEEN CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS  
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As in most other modern industrialized societies, there has been a strong increase in divorce in the Netherlands over the past decades. The increase started in the mid-1960s and ended in the mid-1980s. The annual number of divorces rose from a low of 2 per 1,000 married men to a high of nearly 10 per 1,000 married men in those two decades. The last ten years for which data are available reveal fluctuations in the rate, but divorce remains high and there are no signs of a trend reversal. From a cohort perspective, the trend in divorce is even more pronounced (Table 1). Divorce increased from 2 percent after five years of marriage for couples married in 1960 to about 13 percent for couples married in the early 1990s. Life table extrapolations show that in the Netherlands, one out of every four contemporary marriages will eventually end in divorce, which is high by any standard (De Jong, 1999).

\*\*\* Table 1 here \*\*\*

Several explanations have been offered for the increase in divorce. In this study, we focus on one explanation: the changing roles of men and women in society. The explanation of divorce in terms of women's and men's roles has both economic and cultural dimensions. From an economic perspective, gendered roles have changed in several important respects. Women have closed the gap in market resources: They now attain similar levels of education as men and participate increasingly in the labor market—although in the Netherlands, primarily in part-time jobs (De Graaf & Vermeulen, 1997). Changes are particularly marked for married women. In the Netherlands during the 1950s, 10 percent of married women

worked for pay and this increased to about 50 percent in the 1990s (Van der Lippe & Van Doorne-Huiskes, 1995).

The redistribution of paid labor among men and women has been accompanied by a cultural shift in norms and values. Hand-in-hand with long-term processes of secularization and individualization, the Netherlands has experienced a considerable shift toward emancipatory attitudes, in particular among women. Normative acceptance of the traditional subordinate role of women has disappeared and the virtues of gender equality and women's independence have received increasing support. Data on gender attitudes in the Netherlands show a steady movement toward more egalitarian attitudes since 1970, the earliest point of measurement (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 1994). These trends closely follow the pattern observed in the United States (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001).

In short, the gender revolution is both economic and cultural in nature. This revolution occurred in exactly the same period as the rise in divorce, and has often been considered an important cause of rising divorce. In this contribution, we present hypotheses concerning the link between gender differentiation and divorce and we develop hypotheses about how divorce probabilities depend on the interaction between economic and cultural dimensions of gendered family roles. We test these hypotheses using individual-level data on divorce in the Netherlands from the 1950s to the 1990s.

By presenting Dutch data, we hope to say something about the Western European case in a general sense. Divorce in the Netherlands in the 1980s was as common as it was in France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, and Austria (Goode, 1993). Compared to other European countries and the United States, the divorce rates of these Western European countries are at an intermediate level. Southern European countries have substantially lower divorce rates, and Northern European countries and in particular the United States have higher

levels of divorce. In terms of trends, the Dutch case is similar to other Western European societies as well. In most Western European countries, divorce began to increase in the 1960s. In the United States, trends started earlier (in the 1950s), and in Southern European countries they have yet to begin.

## **BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES**

### *Hypotheses*

Sociologists have long theorized that changing economic roles of men and women, and in particular a change in the direction of less gender segregation, would undermine the stability of marriage (Cherlin, 1992; Parsons, 1949). Economists later presented similar arguments and have suggested that female labor force participation is the driving force behind the decline in fertility, the decline in marriage, and the rise in divorce (Becker, 1981, pp. 245 - 256). This notion has become dominant among both economists and demographers in the last decades, and has thus far received mixed support in micro- and macro-level analyses of demographic behavior (for a review, see Oppenheimer, 1997).

The basic premise of the explanation is that the benefits of marriage largely derive from task specialization, and that such benefits decline when married women begin participating in the labor market. Obviously, these are not the sole benefits of marriage, but as long as decreases in the benefits arising from specialization are not compensated by increasing marital benefits in other domains, the hypothesis remains a good candidate for explaining the increase in divorce. The specialization hypothesis is augmented by another economic hypothesis. If women have their own income, or have sufficient labor market experience to be able to enter the labor market if they wish, they are in a better position to leave an unhappy marriage, and are probably less motivated to work out marital problems (Cherlin, 1979).

Economically independent women can afford to evaluate their relationship, and to take action if that evaluation turns out negative. Similarly, a husband probably feels less uncomfortable leaving a marriage if his wife is better able to support herself. Hence, a weakening of market specialization through women's labor force participation reduces both the gains from marriage and the costs of leaving a marriage. Note that a wife's paid work may also have a negative effect on divorce because it increases the couple's income and a high income is generally believed to foster marital stability. This is the so-called income effect of wife's employment (Hannan, Tuma, & Groeneveld, 1977; Ross & Sawhill, 1975). The specialization hypothesis can also be applied to marriages in which the man cannot fulfill his role as breadwinner. Especially when men are not able to find stable unemployment, marital stability may be weakened (Cherlin, 1979; South & Spitze, 1986).

From this general economic framework, we derive and test the following economic hypotheses: *Couples in which wives have more labor market resources have a higher risk of divorce than couples in which wives have fewer labor market resources.* The opposite hypothesis can be formulated for husband's resources: *Couples in which husbands have fewer labor market resources have a higher risk of divorce than couples in which husbands have more labor market resources.*

Although the economic framework is elegant and persuasive, it is unlikely that economic considerations are the sole trigger for separation. Cultural norms and values play a role in this decision as well, and especially attitudes about family roles are important in this respect. Women with egalitarian views put greater emphasis on autonomy so that they are probably more likely than traditional women to believe in their ability to establish an independent household. Emancipatory women are also more tolerant toward alternative forms of family living and less likely than traditional women to believe it is morally wrong to leave

their husband when a marriage is unhappy (Lueptow, Guss, & Hyden, 1989; Lye & Biblarz, 1993). Over and above these lower thresholds to divorce, women's emancipatory attitudes may lead to tension between spouses because women with these attitudes are less likely to take traditional roles for granted and more often will discuss family tasks with their husbands (Amato & Booth, 1995; Greenstein, 1995; Lye & Biblarz, 1993).

Because it is likely that women with attractive labor market resources will be oriented more than other women to emancipatory values, the economic and cultural dimensions of gendered family roles are in competition and it is important to estimate their impact on divorce simultaneously. We therefore consider hypotheses about specialization in market work in combination with hypotheses about the *cultural dimension* of gendered roles. More specifically, we test the following cultural hypothesis: *Couples in which wives are more strongly oriented toward emancipatory values have a higher risk of divorce than couples in which wives have a more traditional orientation toward women's emancipation.*

The economic hypotheses outlined above are based on a traditional view of marriage and family. Although the traditional functions or benefits of marriage have eroded, most people eventually marry, and it is likely that people now enter marriage with different needs and expectations (Oppenheimer, 1997). People with traditional views on gendered family roles may still consider specialization to be important in marriage, but people with egalitarian views will evaluate such benefits in a different manner. In egalitarian couples, it is more accepted that the wife works for pay, and such couples may also consider having two incomes as an important requisite for developing a comfortable life style. In addition, women with emancipatory attitudes do not work for financial reasons only, but also for the intrinsic pleasure a career can give them. It is important to recognize that even though the cultural and the economic dimension of gendered family roles are correlated, as discussed above, they do

not always coincide. Some women with traditional value orientations participate in the labor market because the household needs the extra income. Similarly, some women with modern value orientations are housewives because it is difficult to find child care or because the demands of work and care weigh too heavily. Because the economic and cultural dimensions are not perfectly correlated, it is possible to formulate an interaction effect.

We expect that among women with traditional values, labor force participation will have the often predicted disruptive effect on marriage. More modern wives, in contrast, will be more satisfied with the marriage when they participate in the labor market. In couples with egalitarian value orientations, the possible economic benefits of a traditional division of work will thus be counteracted by women's dissatisfaction with their role as housewife. We therefore expect that a traditional division of labor in these couples does not lead to a decrease in the risk of divorce and may even lead to an increase in this risk. The interaction hypothesis is formulated more formally as follows: *The disruptive effect of wives' labor market resources on marriage is reduced when wives have a stronger orientation toward emancipatory values.* In other words, we expect a positive main effect of wife's labor market resources and a negative interaction effect of emancipatory values and labor market resources on divorce.

#### *Earlier evidence*

The specialization hypothesis has often been studied, particularly in the United States. The results of American divorce studies are modestly supportive. Most studies find indications of a destabilizing influence of women's paid work and economic resources on marriage (*e.g.*, Becker, Landes, & Michael, 1977; Brines & Joyner, 1999; Cherlin, 1979; D'Amico, 1983; ; Hiedemann, Suhomlinova, & O'Rand, 1998; Tzeng & Mare, 1995). There are studies that do not find positive effects of wife's labor market resources (*e.g.*, Greenstein, 1990; Hoffman &

Duncan, 1995; Sayer & Bianchi, 2000) but the number of negative studies is smaller and most rely on income resources. When focusing on employment measures, even the less supportive studies find positive evidence (Greenstein, 1990). Effects of the wife's education—the usual proxy for human capital—on divorce are generally not positive (*e.g.*, Ono, 1998; South, 2001; South & Spitze, 1986).

Although less research has been done in Europe than in the United States, the number of European studies has increased significantly in the 1990s, with studies in Great Britain, Sweden, Italy, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The evidence in this context is mixed however. Some studies yield supportive evidence (*e.g.*, Babka von Gostomski, Hartmann, & Kopp, 1998; De Rose, 1992; De Graaf & Kalmijn, 1999; Fokkema & Liefbroer, 1998; Wagner, 1993) whereas others present negative or inconsistent evidence (*e.g.*, Berrington & Diamond, 1999; Corijn, 1999; Manting, 1993; Pit & Rouwendal, 1994). Women's educational effects are also not always supportive of the economic hypothesis (*e.g.*, Diekmann & Klein, 1991; Hoem 1997; Manting, 1993), but that is true in the United States as well.

That European evidence is mixed has often been linked to the role of the more generous welfare state, and this applies in particular when making comparisons between the United States and the Netherlands (Esping-Andersen, 1999). Most divorced women in the Netherlands are able to be economically independent because they can rely on welfare payments. Individuals in the Netherlands with no personal income and who do not live with a partner who has an income can obtain welfare payments. Welfare payments may be low but are high enough to maintain a normal standard of living. People on welfare generally must be active in finding paid work, but single mothers have been exempted from this requirement. The presence of good welfare provisions in the Netherlands has moved many Dutch

researchers to be skeptical about the relevance of the “American” economic independence hypothesis.

Studies on the cultural aspects of gendered roles are scarcer and have so far been done primarily in the United States. Studies focusing on actual divorce show that, in contrast to our hypothesis, women with progressive gender attitudes are not more likely to divorce than traditional women (Greenstein, 1995; Kaufman, 2000; Sayer & Bianchi, 2000). Other studies use more subjective indicators, such as marital quality and satisfaction. These studies mostly apply a cross sectional design and find positive evidence for the hypothesis that nontraditional attitudes among women are associated with greater perceived instability (Lueptow, Guss, & Hyden, 1989; Lye & Biblarz, 1993; Amato & Booth, 1995). The picture is complicated, however, because there are also indications that effects are different for men. For men it is sometimes found that egalitarian gender attitudes are associated with more stable or more satisfactory marriages ( Amato & Booth, 1995; Kaufman, 2000; Sayer & Bianchi, 2000).

The interaction hypothesis has been studied as well, but the results thus far are not convincing. In a cross-sectional analysis of marital quality, Vannoy and Philliber (1992) relate wife’s employment and occupational status to gendered role expectations of husbands and wives. They show how effects of such expectations differ between employed and nonemployed women, but do not show how wife’s employment effects vary between traditional and nontraditional couples, which is what our hypothesis is about. In an analysis of divorce, Sayer and Bianchi (2000) test whether the effect of the wife’s relative income varies with her gender ideology, but they do not find a significant interaction effect. Greenstein (1995) also studies actual divorce and relates wife’s working hours to wife’s gender attitudes. He finds that wife’s working hours has a stronger positive effect on divorce when women are

nontraditional, which contradicts our hypothesis. The interaction effect of wife's relative earnings and gender attitudes, however, reveals the opposite pattern (Greenstein, 1995, p. 39).

More indirect evidence comes from a study by South (2001) who presents the hypothesis that the effect of wife's employment may have declined over time. In motivating this expectation, South relies on the same interaction between cultural and economic mechanisms discussed above. In the words of South, "with the recent redefinition of gender roles and, in particular, the increased acceptance of married women's employment, wives' labor force participation is perhaps less likely to create the sorts of marital strains that can lead to divorce" (South, 2001, p. 228). Empirically, South tests the hypothesis by examining interaction effects of wife's employment and historical time. In contrast to the interaction hypothesis, he finds an increase in the effect over time, instead of a decrease. Studies outside the United States, however, have found that the destabilizing effect of the wife's employment has decreased over time (Beck & Hartmann, 1999; Bracher, Santow, Morgan, & Trussel, 1993; Poortman & Kalmijn, 2002; Wagner, 1993), thereby lending indirect support for our hypothesis.

Other indirect evidence comes from a comparative study of divorce in Italy, Germany, and Sweden. Blossfeld, De Rose, Hoem, and Rohwer (1995) compare the effects of women's education on divorce in these three countries and hypothesize that in countries where the divorce rate is low, the liberating effect of education will be strong because "in such societies, marital disruption represents a more severe violation of an established social norm" (p. 202; see also Hoem 1997). Increases in the divorce rate signify a weakening of such norms and women's educational resources will no longer have an effect on divorce. In line with the hypothesis, Blossfeld et al. find that the disruptive effect of women's education is strongest in Italy, lower in Germany, and lowest in Sweden. Although their interpretation is more specific

than ours, the interaction effect they find is consistent with our view that women's economic independence more strongly affects divorce in culturally more traditional settings.

A last piece of evidence on interaction effects comes from a study by Brines and Joyner (1999) who examine effects of wife's employment in combination with marital status. More specifically, Brines and Joyner compare married and cohabiting couples and find that disruptive effects of female employment are present (though modest) in marriages and absent in cohabiting unions. Although Brines and Joyner use notions of fairness and justice to develop hypotheses—cohabitators would have different fairness and justice norms than married couples—their interpretation of the interaction between wife's work and cohabitation bears resemblance to the cultural interaction hypotheses we propose.

In this study we test the interaction hypothesis in a new way. We link employment variables to a series of individual cultural indicators and we examine how these sets of variables—by themselves and in interaction—affect divorce. We use retrospective data so that we are able to cover a wide range of marriage cohorts: marriages that were formed in the past five decades. At the outset, we make clear that we rely on behavioral proxies to measure women's gender ideology in the past. Because the retrospective design we are using makes direct measures of past attitudes unreliable, we developed a set of alternative behavioral measures, which are plausible indicators of values.

The research literature has pointed to a range of social and structural variables that affect divorce probabilities. Research has shown that religion has a strong negative effect on divorce (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). The presence of children reduces the chances to divorce (Waite & Lillard, 1991). Persons who cohabited with their partner before marriage are generally more likely to experience a divorce (Brines & Joyner, 1999). Persons who married at a young age have often been found to have a higher divorce risk (Tzeng & Mare, 1995).

The risk of divorce is increased if the parents of the respondent divorced when the respondent was young (Wolfinger, 1999). Finally, American research points to ethnic and racial differences in the divorce risks (Raschke, 1987). We include these variables in our analyses as control variables. There are two reasons for doing so. First, several of these variables may be related to the wife's employment and to her attitudes about gender. Hence, omitting these variables may lead to biased effects of the main variables of interest. Second, most of the research discussed above is American and little is known about the effects of social and structural variables on divorce in the Netherlands.

## METHODS

Longitudinal data are needed to test our hypotheses. Prospective data are one option, but panel data in the Netherlands do not cover a long time span so that not enough divorces can be observed. Retrospective life history surveys are available as well, but the number of divorcees is often too small. Moreover, information on former partners is typically lacking. To develop better insights into the causes and consequences of divorce in the Netherlands, we designed a new survey based on a retrospective method and a stratified design. We first made a selection of 19 municipalities that are representative of the Dutch population with respect to region and urbanization. From the population registers of these municipalities, three random samples were drawn: (a) persons in their first marriage, (b) divorced persons who were not remarried, and (c) divorced persons who were remarried. Stratifying was possible because municipalities in the Netherlands have information on current and past marital status of their inhabitants. Because we stratified the sample, we could oversample divorced persons, and this made it possible to study the determinants of divorce with a normal size survey. Note that the

oversample increases the proportion of divorced persons in the sample. Oversampling of the divorced will not affect the results when comparing the proportion of divorced persons between categories, however. In other words, the intercept will change due to oversampling, but the effects will not change.

Our data do not allow us to analyze the risk of separation for persons who are cohabiting. The population registers do not contain information about cohabitation, but only about marital status. In the interview, we did ask questions about whether couples cohabited before they got married and we also asked about cohabitation after divorce. We limited the original sample of persons, who are either married or separated from a marriage, to first marriages (*i.e.*, either in a first marriage or divorced from a first marriage). We include premarital cohabitation as a control variable. As is the case in most retrospective surveys, data on (former) spouses were obtained from respondent reports. This reduces the amount of information we were able to obtain on the (former) spouse. Although we have full work histories for respondents, we have only partial histories for (former) spouses. Because women's labor force participation is central to the current analysis, we therefore limited our sample to female respondents. The total sample size consists of 1,289 women, of whom 1,011 experienced a divorce.

We use discrete-time event-history analysis to assess the causes of divorce (Yamaguchi, 1991). This method allows the use of covariates that change over time, it is flexible in the type of duration dependency one models, it requires a data matrix that is easy to construct (a person-period file), and it leads to a simple logistic regression model for the conditional probability of divorce. Discrete time models are good approximations of continuous time models as long as the time intervals are not too large (Yamaguchi, 1991). The same models have been used by South (2001) and Brines and Joyner (1999), for example. We use years as

our interval. The dependent variable refers to the timing of separation, that is, when the couple stopped living together. Duration dependency is assessed by using the number of years the marriage has existed, as well as the number of years squared. Including both terms fits the data best.

We constructed a person-period file starting with the year of marriage and ending with the survey year (if still married) or the separation year (if divorced). After excluding person-periods with missing values on central characteristics (year of separation, year of marriage, and timing of employment), we were left with data on 1,351 women, of whom 1,067 were ever divorced. The women in our sample got married at some point between 1943 and 1997. The earliest divorce occurred in 1949, the last divorce occurred in the interview year, 1998. Descriptive statistics of all independent variables are in Table 2.

\*\*\* Table 2 here \*\*\*

#### *Measures of economic variables*

Measures of work and schooling are obtained from full work and schooling histories for the respondent and partial histories for the spouse. The measures we use are as follows:

*Wife's paid work hours*: two time varying covariates, one for part-time work (1 - 31 hours per week), and one for full-time work (more than 31 hours per week) in the year before the risk year, derived from a full work history and represented by two dummy variables.

*Wife's labor force experience*: the number of years the wife has been in the labor force during the marriage.

*Wife's schooling*: the most recent level of completed schooling, obtained from a partial educational history (degree obtained upon completion of first full-time school program plus

information on the level and timing of subsequent schooling) and measured on an ordinal scale, from 1 for *elementary*, to 7 for *university*.

*Husband's paid work hours*: variable indicating how many hours the husband worked, obtained from a partial work history (his employment at the onset of marriage or cohabitation and his employment five years after the beginning of marriage or cohabitation). The number of hours is calculated as the mean of these two variables.

*Husband's schooling*: the highest level of completed schooling, obtained from a single question, measured (just as wife's schooling) on an ordinal scale, from 1 for *elementary* to 7 for *university*.

#### *Measures of cultural variables*

Most earlier studies of cultural effects use standard attitude items to measure an individual's gender ideology. These studies either have prospective data where attitudes are measured in the early waves of the panel (*e.g.*, Greenstein, 1995) or rely on cross-sectional data and relate current attitudes to current perceptions of the quality of marriage (*e.g.*, Lye & Biblarz, 1993). In this study, we are unable to use standard attitude measures because we rely on retrospective data. In a retrospective design, valid measures of values are difficult to obtain because life course experiences may change how people perceive their earlier attitudes. For that reason, we look at concrete behaviors in the past that reflect emancipatory attitudes. We believe that reports about behaviors in the past will be less biased than reports about prior attitudes. We asked women to indicate whether they did the following things in the first years of the marriage:

*Read books about women's liberation*: *often* (10 percent), *sometimes* (17 percent), or *almost never* (74 percent).

*Attended meetings about women's liberation: often* (3 percent), *sometimes* (5 percent), or *almost never* (92 percent).

*Read books about self-actualization or new age: often* (12 percent), *sometimes* (14 percent), or *almost never* (74 percent).

*Attended meetings about self-actualization or new age: often* (4 percent), *sometimes* (5 percent), or *almost never* (91 percent).

*Voted for far-left political parties: usually voted for these parties* (12 percent).

*Which surname was used: surname of the husband* (59 percent), *only own surname* (14 percent), *both surnames* (27 percent).

We constructed an index by counting the number of positive scores on all the items. For the first four items, *often* and *sometimes* count as a positive score. For the last item, using both surnames and using only one's own surname count as a positive score. The resulting index has a sufficient degree of reliability ( $\alpha = .66$ ). The index can be regarded as an indirect measure of the degree to which the wife was oriented toward emancipatory values. Because the index is skewed, with few women scoring on all six items, the index was converted to percentile scores. We also experimented with a simple dichotomy, but this yielded no different results.

A possible criticism of our items is that they are historically specific. The women's movement in the Netherlands became popular in the 1960s so that few women before that time could have responded affirmative to these items. We do not think that this is a problem, however, because the rise of the women's movement is to a large extent the result of a change in values in the population. A similar argument can be made for books about women's liberation: Their availability reflects the demand for such books, and that demand is part of the concept we are considering here.

*Measures of control variables*

*Period*: the current year in which the couple is at risk. We tested whether the effect is nonlinear but this turned out not to be the case.

*The presence of children*: a set of time varying covariates, indicating whether the couple had children between 0 - 5, 6 - 12, 13 - 18 or over 18 years old; couples without children are the reference group.

*Parental divorce*: whether the parents of the wife were divorced when the respondent was growing up.

*Marrying young*: whether the wife married before age 21.

*Premarital cohabitation*: variable indicating whether the wife cohabited with her (former) spouse before marrying (coded 1).

*Religiosity*: whether the woman was a member of a church when she was 14 years of age.

*Caribbean ethnicity*: whether the wife or wife's father or mother was born in Suriname or the Netherlands Antilles.

**RESULTS**

Tables 3 and 4 display the results of six logistic regression models applied to the person-period file. Model A includes the control variables only. Model B includes economic variables, Model C includes the cultural variable, and Model D contains both. By comparing Model B to D, we examine whether effects of the partner's labor market resources on divorce are spurious, caused by effects of emancipatory attitudes on both the economic variables and on the probability of divorce. By comparing Model C to D, we examine whether the possible

effect of an emancipatory orientation is indirect, operating through the accumulation of the wife's labor market resources. The last models (Model E and F) offer a test of the interaction hypothesis. We start with the effects of the control variables (Table 4).

The period effect shows the well documented increase in the divorce rate since the 1960s. Couples with children have a lower divorce rate than couples without children. The protective effect is lower for older children than for younger children and for couples with children older than 13 years, the divorce risk is the same as for couples without children. This age pattern has been found in American studies as well, and points to the reduced social costs of divorce for men and economic costs for women when the children are somewhat older and to the possibility that parents in troublesome marriages with very young children postpone divorce (Waite & Lillard, 1991). Having divorced parents increases the conditional odds of divorce by 27 percent, which is a substantial effect (exponent of .240). Intergenerational transmission of divorce has been found in many studies (*e.g.*, Wolfinger, 1999), and our data show that this phenomenon occurs in the Netherlands as well. We also find that marrying at a young age increases the odds of divorce, although the effect is modest (20 percent). In line with earlier research (Brines & Joyner, 1999), we find that couples who cohabited prior to marriage have a higher risk of divorce than other couples. The effect is substantial (29 percent). Women who attended church when living at home are 20 percent less likely to divorce than other women, which is also consistent with other studies (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). Finally, we see that women with Caribbean origins (coming from Suriname or the Netherlands Antilles) are more likely to divorce than other women.

\*\*\* Table 3 here \*\*\*

Effects of labor market resources are presented in Model B. Model B supports the specialization hypothesis. Full-time working women have a 29 percent higher odds of divorce ( $e^{.252}-1$ ) than nonworking women. The effect of part-time work is weak and not statistically significant. The effect of wife's labor force experience is positive but not significant. Men's work effects are reversed: The more hours the husband works, the less likely a divorce. In combination, these two effects support the notion that a traditional division of paid work, with husbands gainfully employed and wives staying at home, stabilizes marriage.

Specialization also depends on the educational resources of husbands and wives. Model B shows that educational attainment has significant effects on divorce. More highly educated women are more likely to divorce, although this effect only shows up when husband's education is included in the model. We also examined whether the effect of education is linear. We constructed seven groups and replaced the linear term with the effect of six dummy variables. The effects are as follows: elementary school only (.00, reference), lower vocational (.20), lower level general (.02), middle level general (.22), middle vocational (.20), higher vocational (.35), and university (.36). The educational categories are listed here in the order of their earning power. We note some deviations from linearity but the increase in fit is not statistically significant when comparing this model to Model B (the Chi-square change is 5.31 with a loss of  $df = 5$ ). Husband's education has a negative effect on divorce, which is in line with the well known income effect on divorce.

In Model C, we look at the cultural dimension of gender differentiation. The results show a significant and negative effect of our measure of emancipatory values on marital stability. Women with modern attitudes about gender—as reflected in participation in women's liberation groups, using one's maiden name, voting for far-left political parties, and so on—have a higher risk of divorce than more traditional women. The effect is substantial in

size: Between the most progressive and most traditional women, the risk of divorce is 52 percent higher.

Model D in Table 3 combines economic and cultural aspects of gender specialization. When comparing Model D to Model B, we see that the effects of the economic variables are not reduced much by controlling for cultural variables. One exception is the effect of wife's education, which is reduced by 22 percent. Apparently, part of the reason why higher education in the Netherlands is associated with higher risks of divorce lies in the more progressive cultural values of better educated women. The more purely economic effects, however, are not changed when the cultural variable is included, showing that the effect of a modern division of labor on divorce is not based on the fact that employed women are more progressive. When comparing Models D and C, we also see that the effect of the cultural variable is only slightly reduced by incorporating economic variables. Between models, the coefficient becomes somewhat smaller, but it remains large and significant. The effect of the cultural variable is apparently not indirect, through labor market specialization.

Some effects of the control variables change as a result of the inclusion of economic and cultural variables. Particularly interesting is the effect of premarital cohabitation. This effect is reduced when adding economic variables to the model. In Model B, the cohabitation effect is no longer significant. Hence, an important reason why premarital cohabitation increases the risk of divorce is that women in these couples have more attractive labor market resources: They more often work for pay and are more highly educated. Adding cultural variables has a weaker effect on the change in the cohabitation effect. Prior research has often argued that the positive premarital cohabitation effect is due to cohabitators having different values (Axinn & Thornton, 1992), but our analysis shows that in the Netherlands, this selectivity explanation is

less important than the economic explanation, at least when selection is measured by gender attitudes.

\*\*\* Table 4 here \*\*\*

To test our hypothesis that wife's labor market resources have weaker (less disruptive) effects for couples in which the wife holds more emancipatory attitudes, we estimated interaction models (Table 4). Note that we only interact the cultural index with economic characteristics of the wife, not with characteristics of the husband. Because we measured the cultural characteristics of the wife only, this is a more logical interaction model. Model E offers partial support for the interaction hypothesis. Wife's full-time work has a positive and significant main effect on divorce ( $b = .644$ ). This means that for traditional women (women with the lowest possible percentile score on the cultural index, a score of zero), divorce probabilities are higher for working women than for women who are not participating in the labor market. For this group, women's labor force participation increases the odds of divorce, in line with the economic hypothesis. The interaction effect, however, is negative and for full-time work statistically significant. The effect is also significant in Model F where only the interactions with work are included and the other nonsignificant interactions are removed. When adding the interaction effect and the main effect, we obtain the effect for modern women, that is, women with the highest percentile score, a score of 1. The combined effect for full-time work then is negative:  $b = .644 - .758 = -.114$  (Model E). This shows that for modern women, divorce probabilities are slightly lower for working women than for nonemployed women. This small negative effect is not statistically significant, however ( $p = .267$ ). Although these findings support the interaction hypothesis, the findings for wife's

education and wife's labor force experience are not as expected. Both these interaction effects are not significant.

We also present the interaction effects of work from Model F in Figure 1. Model F was chosen for the figure because this model does not interact the cultural index with the other economic variables. We present results for three groups: the most liberal, the most traditional, and the average group of women. We plot the odds of divorce for nonworking women, part-time working women, and full-time working women. The absolute level of the odds is not important as the survey contains an oversample of ever divorced persons. As the figure shows, the differences in the effects are substantial. Women's employment increases the odds of divorce substantially, but only for more traditional women, not for more liberal women. Part-time work seems to have a slight tendency to be more disruptive for more modern women, but these deviations are small. Interesting in Figure 1 is that the main effect of emancipatory values is incorporated as well. We see that more liberal women only have a higher odds of divorce when they are not employed full time. Among full-time working women, traditional and modern women have a more or less similar risk to divorce.

\*\*\* Figure 1 here \*\*\*

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the wife's labor market resources significantly increase the odds of divorce in the Netherlands. The likelihood of divorce is higher when women are gainfully employed, when women have accumulated more paid-work experience, and when wives are better educated. The effects of specialization in market resources do not disappear when we

take into account that couples with a traditional division of labor are also couples with traditional values concerning gender. These results are in line with the dominant economic hypothesis that traditional family roles are beneficial to marital stability. The effects are also in line with findings in the American divorce literature. One interesting difference concerns the effect of women's education. Whereas we find a positive effect of women's education on divorce, American studies generally find that divorce is more common among lower socioeconomic groups (Raschke, 1987), and this is also true when women's education is used as an indicator of socioeconomic status (*e.g.*, Ono, 1998; South, 2001). A negative effect of education on divorce casts doubt on the economic perspective and has instead been linked to greater (inter)personal skills among the better educated (Ono, 1998). It is difficult to explain why the Dutch results are different from the American results on this point. One clue is our measure of emancipatory orientation. When we include this variable, the effect of wife's education is weaker and no longer significant. Hence, part of the reason why better educated Dutch women experience more unstable marriages is that their values are more liberal.

Our analyses also show that the cultural aspects of women's and men's roles should not be overlooked. Women with traditional value orientations toward family roles are less likely to divorce than are women with modern values, even after taking into account differences in the degree of specialization in market resources. The most important finding, however, is that the disruptive effects of women's labor market resources depend on cultural values. Although wife's labor force participation increases the probability of divorce for women with a traditional value orientation, there is no destabilizing effect of wife's work for women with more egalitarian attitudes. Whereas there is a significant reduction in the work effect when values become more egalitarian, we also find that the effect does not become negative.

The interaction effect we find is partly consistent with what has been found in the few previous studies on this issue. Although American studies that directly tested for interaction effects (*e.g.*, Greenstein, 1995; Sayer & Bianchi, 2000) lend only weak or even negative support for a less disruptive influence of wife's labor market resources among egalitarian women, the interaction effect we find is consistent with a recent American analysis in which egalitarian labor force patterns between men and women appear detrimental only in marriage and not in cohabiting relationships (Brines & Joyner, 1999). The interaction effect is also consistent with the finding that the disruptive effect of women's education on divorce is stronger in more traditional European countries than in more modern European countries (Blossfeld, De Rose, Hoem, & Rohwer, 1995). Our findings are less consistent with a recent analysis by South (2001), which shows that the effects of women's working hours in the United States are stronger in recent periods than in earlier periods. From our findings, we would expect that a modern division of labor in marriage will be less detrimental in the recent, more liberal era. In this respect, our findings are more in line with studies outside the United States, which have found a decline in the disruptive influence of wife's work over time (*e.g.*, Bracher, Santow, Morgan, & Trussel, 1993; Wagner, 1997). Our findings suggest that economic theories of marriage are only conditionally true, which in turn implies that declining specialization is not necessarily detrimental to the future of marriage.

The important role of cultural factors in divorce has been demonstrated in a somewhat unusual way in our study. Because we rely on retrospective data, we used alternative behavioral and contextual measures to measure values, such as participation in women's liberation groups, using one's maiden name, and voting for left-wing parties, all referring to the early period of marriage. We argued that these variables are a reflection of women's past emancipatory values. Although some authors would argue that using behavior to measure

attitudes is problematic, we believe our approach is in line with the revealed preference approach often advocated in economics. We note that a similar approach has been used, although often implicitly, in analyses of the relationship between religiosity and demographic behavior. Many demographers use church membership, for example, to measure religious values (*e.g.*, Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993).

Even if one accepts the behavioral approach to measuring values, one can have concerns about the validity of the cultural index because our design is retrospective. Perhaps some women who experienced a divorce have become more strongly opposed to traditional family values. Such changes can also lead to a biased view of the past. People generally have a preference for being consistent in their views and this may create incentives to bring reports of past attitudes into line with current attitudes. In the present case, this would mean that divorced women will have a more liberal view of themselves in the past than married women and this will bias the effects of our cultural index. There are three reasons why we do not believe that this is an important threat to our conclusions. First, the argument is true only when the assumption is valid that divorce has an independent effect on women's family values. Second, we asked about behaviors in the past and we believe it is more difficult to give a distorted view of past behavior than of past attitudes. Third, if there is bias, it probably has a greater influence on the main effect of the cultural index than on the interaction effect we found.

Our findings are compatible with one of the most common explanations for the rising divorce rate in the Western world, including the Netherlands. Given the destabilizing effect of women's work and schooling, the increase in women's labor force participation and educational level offer a plausible explanation for the increase in the divorce rate (Cherlin, 1992). Yet our findings also suggest that this explanation is losing some of its power. The

gender attitudes of the Dutch population have become increasingly progressive and egalitarian, and this study shows that, for women with progressive attitudes, women's labor force participation does not increase the risk of divorce. An important implication of this finding is that even though female employment rates may continue to increase, the increase in the divorce rate may decline or even end.

From an international perspective, differences in women's labor market and educational resources probably do not offer a sufficient explanation for the differences in divorce rates among countries. The labor force participation rate of Dutch women used to be relatively low, whereas the proportion of Dutch women in part-time jobs was and remains the highest compared to other European countries and the United States. We would therefore not expect the Dutch divorce rate to be so high. The findings with respect to the destabilizing influence of progressive values suggest that the tolerant value climate in the Netherlands is partly responsible for the intermediate divorce level. Cross-national studies are needed to draw more definite conclusions about the relative role of women's labor force participation and cultural values in explaining the differences in divorce rates among western countries.

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Table 1  
*Percentage of Marriages Ending in Divorce After Five, Ten, and  
 Twenty Years Since Entering Marriage: Marriage Cohorts 1945-  
 1990*

Year of marriage	After 5 years	After 10 years	After 20 years
1945	2.7	4.6	6.7
1950	1.9	3.6	5.9
1955	1.8	3.4	7.0
1960	2.1	4.3	10.2
1965	2.5	6.2	14.2
1970	4.1	9.2	18.3
1975	5.9	13.2	21.4
1980	9.6	16.2	
1985	9.2	16.7	
1990	12.5		

*Note.* Vital statistics tabulated in Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (1996, p. 69). The official tabulations do not provide separate entries for first and second marriages.

Table 2  
*Means of Variables Used in the Analyses for Women At Selected Points in Their First Marriage*

	Time constant	Year 1	Year 5	Year 10
Control variables				
Child 0 - 5		.09	.62	.59
Child 6 - 12		.00	.01	.58
Child 13 - 18		.00	.00	.00
Child $\geq$ 18		.00	.00	.00
Parents divorced	.10			
Married before age 21	.33			
Cohabited with partner before marrying	.35			
Church member at age 14	.70			
Caribbean descent	.05			
Economic variables				
Wife works part-time (1 - 31 hours)		.11	.14	.21
Wife works full-time ( $\geq$ 32 hours)		.67	.37	.20
Wife's work experience in marriage		1.53	3.82	5.74
Husband's hours worked (year 0-5)	34.56			
Wife's educational level		3.74	3.76	3.06
Husband's educational level	3.85			
Cultural variables				
Read books about women's liberation	.27			
Attended meetings about women's liberation	.08			
Read books about self-actualization	.26			
Attended meetings about self-actualization	.09			
Voted for far-left political parties	.12			
Used own surname in marriage	.41			
Index (0 - 6; $\alpha = .66$ )	.94			
<i>N</i>		1289	1131	858

Table 3

*Discrete-time Event-history Analyses of the Risk of Divorce/Separation: Logistic Regression Parameters*

	Model A		Model B		Model C		Model D	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>						
Control variables								
Year of marriage	.047**	.004	.046**	.004	.046**	.004	.046**	.004
Duration of marriage	.178**	.017	.178**	.018	.177**	.017	.177**	.018
Duration squared	-.005**	.001	-.005**	.001	-.005**	.001	-.005**	.001
Child 0 – 5	-.304**	.080	-.226**	.083	-.287**	.080	-.223**	.083
Child 6 – 12	-.394**	.085	-.322**	.087	-.382**	.085	-.315**	.087
Child 13 – 18	-.155	.097	-.108	.099	-.145	.097	-.102	.099
Child ≥ 18	-.077	.144	-.039	.146	-.055	.144	-.025	.146
Parents divorced	.240*	.108	.261*	.108	.248*	.108	.262*	.108
Married young	.182**	.070	.163*	.073	.202**	.070	.164*	.073
Cohabited with partner	.256**	.080	.106	.085	.204*	.082	.079	.085
Church member age 14	-.232**	.073	-.244**	.073	-.241**	.073	-.252**	.073
Caribbean descent	.572**	.144	.541**	.145	.565**	.144	.538**	.145
Economic variables								
Wife works part-time			.041	.100			.049	.100
Wife works full-time			.252*	.101			.254*	.101
Wife's experience			.009	.008			.008	.008
Wife's education			.055*	.024			.043	.024
Husband's hours			-.018**	.003			-.017**	.003
Husband's education			-.060**	.021			-.068**	.021
Cultural variables								
Emancipation					.421**	.131	.372**	.139
Model characteristics								
Constant	-7.629**	.342	-7.033**	.371	-7.804**	.348	-7.158**	.375

Model $\chi^2$	512	566	522	574
<i>Df</i>	12	18	13	19
<i>N</i> of women	1289	1289	1289	1289
<i>N</i> of events	1011	1011	1011	1011

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\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . (two-tailed).

Table 4  
*Discrete-time Event-history Analyses of Interaction Effects of Cultural and Economic Variables on the Risk of Divorce/Separation: Logistic Regression Parameters*

	Model E		Model F	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Control variables				
Year of marriage	.046*	.004	.046*	.004
Duration of marriage	.178*	.018	.179*	.018
Duration squared	-.005*	.001	-.005	.001
Child 0 – 5	-.229*	.083	-.228*	.083
Child 6 – 12	-.320*	.087	-.319*	.087
Child 13 – 18	-.107	.099	-.107	.099
Child ≥ 18	-.024	.146	-.028	.146
Parents divorced	.268*	.109	.264*	.109
Married young	.169*	.073	.164*	.073
Cohabited with partner	.078	.086	.085	.085
Church member age 14	-.261*	.073	-.256*	.073
Caribbean descent	.558*	.146	.536*	.145
Economic variables				
Wife works part-time	.059	.209	-.022	.197
Wife works full-time	.644**	.190	.576**	.181
Wife's experience	-.001	.014	.008	.332
Wife's education	-.013	.047	.042	.024
Husband's hours	-.017**	.003	-.017**	.003
Husband's education	-.067**	.021	-.067**	.021
Cultural variables				
Emancipation	.151	.368	.561**	.204
Emancipation x				
wife part-time	-.031	.357	.135	.327
wife full-time	-.758*	.314	-.613*	.289
wife's education	.019	.023		
wife's experience	.088	.077		
Model characteristics				
Constant	-7.093**	.402	-7.265**	.384
Model $\chi^2$	582		580	
<i>Df</i>	23		20	
<i>N</i> of women	1289		1289	
<i>N</i> of events	1011		1011	

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . (two-tailed).