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MARITAL SATISFACTION ACROSS THE TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD

by

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A THESIS

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# MARITAL SATISFACTION ACROSS THE TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD

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University of Nebraska, 2010

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Many studies have documented the decline in marital satisfaction following the birth of a child. This decline has been attributed to individual factors such as stress, role strain and tension, and an increased division of labor. The current study focuses on couple-level characteristics such as the duration of their relationship, religious frequency, and economic stability indicators. This study utilized the first two waves (1980 and 1983) of the Marital Instability over the Life Course study. Wave I (1980) was analyzed using OLS regression to predict scores of marital satisfaction at baseline. Several interactions were also run using data from Wave I to assess several factors that may moderate the transition to parenthood, such as age, race, and gender of the parents.. Multinomial logistic regression was used to analyze Wave II (1983) to predict change in marital satisfaction between waves using a three-category outcome variable. Findings from the OLS regression analysis indicate that marital satisfaction is lower for those couples who have at least one child. Significant interactions from Wave I indicate that becoming a parent affects couples differently based on age, race, and income. Results from the Multinomial Logistic regression analysis suggest that women are more likely to maintain the same level of marital satisfaction between waves than are men. Limitations and implications of the findings and future research directions are discussed.

## Introduction

Certain events in life are fairly predictable and occur at about the same time and in the same order for most people (White and Klein 2008). These events include marriage, childbirth, exiting of adult children, and retirement among others. For a large portion of married adults one of the sharpest expected changes is the transition to parenthood (Miller and Sollie 1980; Clausen 1986). This transition involves parents' commitment to bear and raise a child, high levels of physical and psychological investment associated with pregnancy and delivery, and the real and symbolic changes that accompany the addition of a small and extremely demanding new member to the family (Belsky, Ward, and Rovine 1986).

Recent studies have also found a decline in marital satisfaction following the birth of the first child (Meijer and Van den Wittenboer 2007; Lawrence, Rothman, Cobb, and Rothman 2008). The current study uses the first two waves of the Marital Instability over the Life Course data set to address three distinct issues. First, I will use parental status at baseline, along with a host of additional variables, to predict the marital satisfaction of individuals at baseline. Second, I will test a series of statistical interactions to assess if certain characteristics of the parents moderate the relationship between marital satisfaction and parental status. Finally, I will test whether changes in parental status between Waves I and II predicts a subsequent change in marital satisfaction across waves. The current study will also take a more sociological approach to understanding marital satisfaction. This will fill gaps in the literature, as previous studies have focused on individual personality predictors of marital satisfaction.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Life Course Development Theory will provide the theoretical framework for this research. This theory highlights social roles within the family and how those roles change and evolve as a consequence of shifting from one life stage to another (White and Klein 2008). The main proposal of the Life Course perspective is that social norms within the family change and shift based on age- and stage-graded transitions. A stage is an interval of time in which the structure and interactions in the family are distinctly and qualitatively different from other periods of time (Aldous 1996). As individuals transition through life's stages, their roles and related expectations shift. Each life transition is understood as a "marker" (White and Klein 2008:128) which denotes an event on the life course calendar of the individual.

As individuals and families transition from one stage to another, they are guided by societal norms of "on time" and "off time" transitions (White and Klein 2008) as well as internal family norms. These transitions are regarded as being "on time" if they occur at the socially approved stage in the life course. Within the family, members create internal norms derived from institutional norms. These norms guide functioning within the family as well as within society.

## **Literature Review**

### **Marital Satisfaction**

Nearly 90% of all individuals marry at least once in their lifetime (Cherlin 2004). This can be taken as an indication of the value placed on the marital union. However, the rate at which marriages dissolve was 3.7 per 1,000 in April of 2009 (CDC 2009). I argue that the rate of marital dissolution is affected by levels of marital satisfaction and

happiness within the marriage. Although we seem to value being married, that value is only retained if the marriage is happy and functional.

Marital satisfaction appears to be essential in preserving a marriage (Amato and Rogers 1999; Previti and Amato 2003; Trent and South 2003). I define marital satisfaction here as the perceived level of happiness and support experienced by each spouse. Being able to predict marital satisfaction is an important element in being able to maintain functional marriages. If we can predict marital satisfaction then we may be able to help couples attain and sustain high levels of satisfaction.

Many studies have reported a significant decrease in marital satisfaction during the first few years of marriage. VanLangingham, Johnson, and Amato (2001) attribute this decline to what they refer to as 'relationship disenchantment.' Their argument is that the first few years of a marriage require negotiation of the responsibilities of married life and to learn how to deal with the conflict that inevitably accompanies long-term relationships. Individuals with high or unrealistic views on their partners and the new marriage may become disappointed as they encounter the realities of married life. The association between marital satisfaction and instability and divorce has not been found to differ by age or marital duration or for men and women (Booth, Johnson White, and Edwards 1986).

Previous cross-sectional studies have found a U-shaped curve in regards to marital satisfaction (Kudek 1998; Kurdek 1999). This curve in satisfaction tends to decrease during the first few years of marriage and then tends to increase after all dependent children have left the home. VanLangingham et al. (2001) reported that this U-shaped curve was not supported longitudinally. They attributed the misreporting of

this curve to older cohorts of married couples experiencing higher levels of marital satisfaction than younger cohorts. In other words, it is not life transitions that affect trends in marital satisfaction but simply that older married couples are happier overall.

### The Transition to Parenthood in Terms of the Life Course

The transition to parenthood signifies the formation of a family stage. This is the idea that there are intervals in time during which the structure and interactions of role relationships in the family are noticeably and distinctively divergent from other periods of time. Stages are usually separated from one another by discrete events that change the memberships of the family or the way in which members are spatially and interactionally organized (White and Klein 2008). Each stage in the family life cycle is marked with unique qualities that determine if the couple is adaptively passing through these challenging transitions or not (Gottman and Notariu, 2002). Becoming a parent is irrevocable (Cowan & Cowan, 1992). The addition of a child to a couple is viewed as instigating a shift in the marriage whereby most couples are expected to experience a qualitative change in their relationship that is relatively abrupt, adverse in nature, relatively large in magnitude, and likely to persist (Prancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, and Gallant 2000). The birth of a baby is considered normative in the development of a marriage (Raphael-Leff 1993). It can be both a source of stress and an event to test the family's coping strategies (Miller and Sollie 1980). At the same time, the baby can provide a sense of fulfillment, new meaning in life, and can strengthen the bond between husband and wife, thus contributing to a sense of family cohesiveness (Miller and Sollie 1980). Even when a couple is looking forward to their first baby, they will inevitably

experience concerns about having to share their intimate duo and emotional resources with a third person (Raphael-Leff 1993).

With the transition to parenthood, dramatic changes occur in parents' daily behaviors and routine as they incorporate the new baby into their individual lives, their dyad, and their important social networks (Alexander and Higgins 1993). New parents must renegotiate their roles and their relationship; they take on the role of parent based on social prescriptions of what a parent is (Cast 2004). Parren et al. (2005) argued that the relationship adjustments required by having a baby are influenced by one's family-of-origin experiences. New parents' own experiences within their families of origin may provide role models or mental representations of family function on a conscious or unconscious level that they could emulate in their own families. Perren and colleagues found a positive relationship between husbands' and wives' recollections of family-of-origin marriages and changes in their own self-reported marital quality.

The transition to parenthood is crucial. Becoming a parent has the largest effect on marital satisfaction compared to couples without children (Twenge, Campbell, and Foster 2003). A commonsense observation suggests that the presence of children reduces husband-wife interaction, rigidifies the division of labor, causes role strain and tension, and that these changes in marital structure and process reduce the perceived quality of the marriage (White & Booth, 1985). Most new parents report a lessening of shared leisure activities, joint decision making, and general companionship (Feeney, Hohaus, Noller, and Alexander 2001). LeMasters (1957) noted a 'crisis' once a couple transitioned to parenthood. He concluded that the addition of a child forces couple to quickly reorganize their established relationship. This led to stress and strain in the

relationship and decreased marital satisfaction. In general, marital quality tends to gradually decline during the first years of marriage for most couples (Karney and Bradbury 1997; Kurdek 1998). However, this decline appears to be more drastic in married couples with children (Belsky and Hsieh, 1998; Kurdek 1999; Lawrence et al. 2008; Twenge et al. 2003; Wallace and Gotlib 1990). Couples who became parents were more likely to report increased conflict and disagreement in their marriage and were less likely to view themselves as 'lovers' in their relationships (Cowan, Cowan, Heming, Garrett, Coysh, Curtis-Boles, and Boles 1985). Identities such as 'father' and 'mother' become dominant and 'spouse/husband/wife' identities recede (Cowan, Cowan, Heming, and Miller 1991). For the overwhelming majority of couples, the transition to parenthood can be extremely stressful (Rholes, Simpson, Campbell, and Grich 2001). This stress can amplify differences between the spouses which can lead to a decrease in marital satisfaction (Cowan, et al. 1991). For approximately 10 to 70% of couples there is a drop in marital quality. In general, marital conflict increases by a factor of 9; people are at risk for depression; there is a precipitous drop in marital quality within one year after the birth of the first child; people revert to stereotypic gender roles; they are overwhelmed by the amount of housework and childcare; fathers withdraw into work; and marital conversation and sex sharply decrease (Gottman and Notarius 2002).

A classic study by Dyer (1963) noted that the addition of the first child would constitute a crisis event for couples. He noted four criteria that represents the degree of the crisis: (1) the state of the marriage and family organization; (2) the couple's preparation for marriage and parenthood; (3) the couple's marital adjustment after the

birth of the child; and (4) certain social background and situational variables such as the number of years married, 'planned parenthood,' and the age of the child (as it develops).

Speaking to the decline in marital satisfaction immediately following the wedding, a handful of studies have found no differences in declining marital satisfaction between childless couples and parent couples. McHale and Huston (1985) found that both parents and nonparents evaluate their marriages less favorable during the first few years, but they also reduce the extent to which they say and do things that bring pleasure to one another. They also noted that in both groups, instrumental activities became most prevalent. Since these activities are less enjoyable than leisure time, spouses may begin to associate one another with neutral, or even negative, actions which might eventually erode their attraction toward each other. McHale and Huston also mention that even though they found no differences in dissatisfaction between parents and nonparents, such differences may emerge once the pattern of activity has been in place for a longer period of time. MacDermid, Huston, and McHale (1990) compared two cohorts of couples who became parents (divided by time of transition) and one cohort of couples who remained childless who had been married for similar lengths in time. This was to distinguish changes attributable to parenthood from normative changes in the course of early marriage. They found that all three groups exhibited declines in the prominence of companionate activities over time, but the declines were sharper for couples who became parents, regardless of the timing of parenthood. However, parents did not differ from nonparents in their general feelings of love or marital satisfaction, even more than a year after the transition to parenthood had occurred.

Based on this literature, I expect that couples with children will report lower marital satisfaction than couples without children especially those whose marriages are also young.

### Gender Differences in the Transition to Parenthood

Many studies have found a difference between men and women in reported marital satisfaction over the transition to parenthood. Women usually report being more dissatisfied in their marriages than men (Cowan et al. 1991; Meijer and Van den Wittenboer 2007; Shapiro et al. 2000). This is largely attributed to the woman being the primary caregiver of the child and remaining responsible for the quality of this care (Feldman and Nash 1984). Even if both partners work outside of the home following the birth of their baby, the mother still takes on most of the responsibility for childcare and housework (Cowan 1997). The man's role usually changes as well. It often involves the sole responsibility of providing financial and physical security for his expanded family (Belaky and Kelly 1994; Cowan 1997; Cowan et al. 1991; Feldman and Nash 1984). His transition may also include indifference to the child as love is slower to take hold in fathers, or he may feel guilt for not equally sharing the household work (Belsky and Kelly 1994).

Nonetheless, the greatest burden is placed on the mother to adjust her life to the birth of the baby (Belsky et al. 1983; Belsky and Kelly 1994; Prancer et al. 2000). She typically relinquishes her role as a paid worker and her former balance between work and leisure time is now upset by the full time 'on-call' role of mother, with little compensatory time off (Cowan 1997). Her social contacts are reduced and she generally takes on the traditional gendered tasks of cooking and laundry (Belsky et al. 1983; Belsky

et al. 1986; Cowan 1997; Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Cowan et al. 1991; Feeney et al. 2001; Feldman and Nash 1984). She may also experience chronic fatigue and exhaustion, suffer from depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Belsky and Kelly 1994). Mothers of infants are significantly more dissatisfied than any other group (e.g. men with infants, men with older children, and women with older children) (Twenge et al. 2003).

The division of household labor is not only divided by gender, but also by expectations and perceptions which can also affect marital satisfaction. Some couples expect an egalitarian division of labor after the baby is born. If a gendered division of labor becomes the reality, couples can feel shocked and disturbed. These feelings may lead to tension and conflict, thereby lowering marital satisfaction (Cowan 1997).

Couples may not be prepared for the strain of creating and maintaining egalitarian relationships, and this strain may lead them to feel more negatively about their partners and the state of their marriage (Cowan and Cowan 1992). Regarding perceptions of the division of labor, husbands and wives can have similar descriptions about their division, but they shade them differently (Cowan and Cowan 1992). Each spouse claims to be doing more than the other gives him/ her credit for. This can foster feelings of not being appreciated which can lead to increases in tension and possibly decreases in marital satisfaction.

After reviewing this literature, I hypothesize that women will report being less satisfied in their marriages than men. This can be attributed to the increased pressures of childcare and household labor placed on women after they assume 'motherhood.'

### Age at Transition to Parenthood

There is a small pool of research that assesses the transition to parenthood and marital satisfaction in regards to the age of the parents at the time of transition. Generally, the implications of a given transition depend on the timing of the event relative to normative patterns and cultural expectations. Russell (1974) suggested that age at time of parenthood in the marital career is related to the level of gratification received from the parental role. Individuals may need time to adjust to their marriage or to mature as a person before becoming parents. Becoming a parent at age 22 is a qualitatively different experience than becoming a parent for the first time at age 34. Age not only serves as a marker for development and maturity, but also signals differences in life experiences in the realms of education, financial security, marital stability, career establishment, and in the sense of readiness for the parental role (Booth and Edwards 1985; Umberson, Williams, Powers, Chen, and Campbell 2005). Husbands and wives who delay parenthood are better educated, have higher incomes and occupational prestige, and are more likely to have planned the birth of their child than other couples (Coltrane 1990).

Based upon the current literature, I hypothesize that couples who transition at older ages will report a less severe decline in their marital satisfaction than couples who transition at younger ages.

### Length of Marriage at Transition to Parenthood

Very little research has been done as to the effect of the length of a couple's marriage at the time of their transition to parenthood. Only one study has looked at this association. Alexander and Higgins (1993) found that new parents in shorter marriages

are more likely than new parents in longer marriages to switch their emphasis from their role of spouse to the role of parent. They argue that this is due to the relatively short time spent in the spouse-only role and that allows ease to shift into the parent role. This finding requires the assumption that the length of marriage prior to parenthood is related to greater interdependencies of the spouses which are hard to disentangle. This is an intriguing finding, however, Alexander and Higgins do not establish how couples who become parents before they solidify their roles as spouses balance their new roles as parents with their unestablished spousal roles. If a couple is not strong and secure as spouses within their marriage, how can they easily handle the additional weight of the parental role?

Based on this study and Life Course theory, a logical hypothesis is that couples who have been married for a longer period of time will adjust to the status of 'parent' more easily than those couples who have not been married for a long period of time.

#### Religion and overall Marital Satisfaction

Durkheim (1965) was the first to suggest that church and family are integrative forces that could well serve each other. Recently, polls have indicated that religion is a guiding force in the lives of average Americans: most Americans believe in God, belong to a church, synagogue, or house of worship and believe in the power of prayer (Lichter, and Carmalt 2009). In regards to family, religion may create a bond between husband and wife that enhances their marital satisfaction (White and Booth 1991). Call and Heaton (1997) found that church attendance had the greatest impact on marital stability. They stated the couples in marriages where one spouse attends church regularly while the other never attends are most likely to divorce than couples who attend church together.

They also noted that mixed- faith marriages significantly increase the rate of marital dissolution. Couples with no religious affiliation had high rates of marital dissolution as well (Call and Heaton 1997). Religion appears to be a force that can bring couples together or divide them tenaciously.

However, the correlation between religion and marital quality may reflect a process of selection. Through the joining of any organization, individuals increase their marriage pool and their access to healthier, more compatible relationships (Lichter and Carmalt 2009). Religion also offers the potential for individuals to meet others similar to themselves. Sharing religious practices and beliefs may serve as a proxy for other equally or more important shared activities, beliefs, and values that contribute to a successful relationship (Lichter and Carmalt 2009). Many religions also stress the value of keeping families intact and individuals whose marriages are troubled may look to their religion as a way to strengthen their relationship (Booth, Johnson, Branaman, and Sica 1995). Religiosity may also buffer the negative effects of economic stressors or other negative events (Dehejia, DeLeire, and Luttmer 2007). Any negative effects of stress are reduced when individuals have strong social support networks, such as a spouse or family that they can turn to for comfort or counsel during a stressful time. Religion may play the same stress- buffering role (Lichter and Carmalt 2009).

Lichter and Carmalt (2009) reported that most low- income couples in their study had unexpectedly high scores on various dimensions of marital quality. Interestingly, these couples also faced serious financial stressors that negatively affected the quality of their relationship. Carmalt and Daniel concluded that couples who placed God at the center of their relationships or who were actively engaged together in their faith

communities reported higher marital quality. They established that religiosity is correlated with marital satisfaction.

In contrast to Lichter and Carmalt (2009), Booth, Johnson, Branaman, Sica (1995) found that high religiosity did slightly increase the probability of thinking about divorce but did not increase marital satisfaction nor decrease conflict and problems. They did however find a slight increase in marital satisfaction with regards to church service attendance and religion's influence on daily life.

In this study, I expect that couples who share strong religious beliefs and attend religious services together on a regular basis will report higher levels of marital satisfaction than those couples who differ on religious views and attendance.

#### Work, Economics, and overall Marital Satisfaction

Work is an inevitable part of life for the majority of couples. The intersection between work and family life is a complicated dynamic to understand. However, it is logical to imagine that experiences in one microsystem influence conditions in the other through permeable boundaries in the work-family configuration (Hill 2005). The connection between the two systems is bidirectional (Hill 2005; Rogers and May 2003). Experiences in one role that create frustration or depression may lead to negative effects in the other role. Similarly, experiences in one role that create feelings of enjoyment and competence may result in positive effects in the other role. "Participation in the work [family] role is made more difficult by virtue of the participation in the family [work] role," (Hill 2005:797).

One study has found that increases in marital discord significantly related to declines in job satisfaction over time (Rogers and May 2003). However, the majority of

studies have found the opposite outcome: that the work role significantly impacts the family role. Higher levels of work-related stress has been found to increase hostility and decrease warmth and supportiveness in marital interactions (Matthews, Conger, and Wickrama 1996). Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, and Wethington (1989) found that arguments in the workplace increased the likelihood of arguments at home. These findings were true for both husbands and wives.

Hill (2005) argued for a traditional sex-role theory to understand the work-family dynamic. He stated that fathers are more invested at work and mothers are more invested in the family due to their traditional roles. This would logically lead to the father's job having the potential to impact the family more than the mother's job. His findings supported this line of thinking. He found that working fathers are more likely to invest time in paid work and less time in child care and household chores. This shows that fathers are more entrenched in work and spillover from work to family is likely.

White and Rogers (2000) presented a gender-neutral hypothesis that stated that lower income, job insecurity, and unemployment of either partner raise the risk of divorce by causing the other to reevaluate their marriage market bargain and by raising strain and tension. Work and income can clearly cause significant family issues. The number of hours worked by a spouse has been linked to increased work-family conflict, decreased mental and physical health, and decreased family functioning (Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw 2003; Major, Klein, and Erhart 2002; Yeung and Hofferth 1998). Job pressure has been found to be negatively associated with marital satisfaction (Mauno and Kinnunen 1999). As an indication of financial security, home ownership has been found

to defer divorce (Heiderman, Suhomlinova, and O’Rand 1998; Ono 1998; Weiss and Willis 1997).

Several studies have found that subjective assessments of financial worry have been shown to correlate negatively with marital satisfaction (Fox and Chancey 1998; Conger, Elder, Lorenz, Conger, Simons, Whitbeck, Huck, and Melby 1990). The decrease in marital satisfaction was not found to be related to the financial reality but to the individual’s subjective assessment of that financial reality. This is in line with several studies that have found that subjective indicators of income or employment are more strongly correlated with marital outcomes than are objective measures (Fox and Chancey 1998; Clark- Nicolas, and Gray- Little 1991).

Upon reviewing this literature, I hypothesize that couples who are more secure financially will report a lesser decline in marital satisfaction than those couples who are less economically stable.

### **Research Questions**

This research is guided by the necessity to fully understand how the transition to parenthood affects marital satisfaction. This specific paper addresses gaps in the literature concerning the age of the couple at the time of transition, the duration of their marriage at that time, and also the entire duration of their relationship (including pre-marital duration). It also takes into account work and economics as well as religion to assess their full impact on marital satisfaction. The research questions guiding this research project are:

- (1) Do married individuals without children experience higher levels of marital satisfaction at baseline than do married individuals with children?

- (2) Does context matter? That is to say, does parenthood have the same affect on marital satisfaction for all people, or are there significant statistical interactions between parental status and other predictors of marital satisfaction?
- (3) Does a change in parental status lead to a change in marital satisfaction over time?

Adding these key pieces of information to the knowledge about marital satisfaction is necessary. It is important to delineate the relationship between parenthood and marital satisfaction. There are many different facets to what makes couples satisfied in their marriages. It is essential to understand them as thoroughly as possible. Clearly understanding this relationship could have profound implications for couples who wish to make an informed decision about marriage and especially about having children. Potential parents would be able to make better choices and could prepare and hopefully counteract the potentially negative effect of children on their marriage.

## **Methods**

### Data

The current study uses the first two waves of the Marital Instability over Life Course survey. The first wave was collected in 1980 on 2,033 married individuals between the ages of 18 to 55 who were living in households with telephones. Wave II was collected in 1983 on 1,578 of the previously surveyed individuals. Both waves of data were national probability samples generated through a random digit dialing cluster technique. This survey's initial purpose was to determine the impact of wives' participation in the labor force on marriage and marital instability. Information was collected regarding earnings, commitment to work, hours worked, and occupational

status. Subsequent waves offered the potential for assessing changes in these economic factors and their influence on marital stability. Measures indicating marital satisfaction, health, relationships quality, as well as the presence of children were also added.

This survey has many positive aspects such as its various waves of data collection at different time-points and its distinctive subject matter. However, it does have its limitations. Individuals who did not live in households with telephones were not able to be selected for the survey. The sample size is also relatively small for a national survey. For the purposes of the current study the sample was reduced to husbands and wives who were in their first marriage (N=1,866). This allowed for the isolation of these couples for analysis so as to only test the population of interest.

## Measures

### *Dependent Variable*

There are two dependent variables used in this study. The first dependent variable used is **marital satisfaction at baseline**. In Wave I (1980), marital satisfaction is measured as the sum of seven indicators all measuring various aspects of marital satisfaction (see Appendix A). An example of one indicator asks, “How happy are you with the amount of understanding you receive from your (husband/wife)?” The response categories were recoded “1- Not to happy”, “2- Pretty happy”, or “3- Very happy.” All indicators have the same response categories with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction. Scores ranged from 0 to 14.

The second dependent variable used is the **change in marital satisfaction** between Waves I and II. In Wave II (1983), marital satisfaction is also measured as the sum of seven indicators all measuring various aspects of marital satisfaction (see

Appendix B). Indicators are constructed as they were in Wave I. Response categories are the same, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction. Using these two scales of marital satisfaction, a variable indicating the change in marital satisfaction between the two time points was created by subtracting marital satisfaction at Time 1 from marital satisfaction at Time 2. This new variable had scores ranging from -14 to 14. It was recoded to have three outcome categories: (1) increased marital satisfaction; (2) decreased marital satisfaction; and (3) consistent marital satisfaction. Respondents were placed in the “no change” category if they had a score of 0. Scores from -14 to -1 placed respondents in the “decreased” category and scores from 1 to 14 placed respondents in the “increased” category. The majority of respondents (59.79%) reported no change in marital satisfaction, 28.20% reported decreased marital satisfaction and 12.01% reported an increase in marital satisfaction.

### *Independent Variables<sup>1</sup>*

The primary independent variable in this analysis is **parental status**. When predicting the baseline level of marital satisfaction, parental status is a dummy variable measuring the presence or absence of a child (1=parent of 1 or more children, 0=not a parent). When predicting a change in marital satisfaction over time, a set of three dummy variables representing parental status was used. An individual was coded as either a first time parent (no children at baseline and had a child between baseline and Wave II), recurring parent (child(ren) at baseline and had a child between baseline and Wave II), continuous parent (child(ren) at baseline and did not have a child between baseline and Wave II), and continuous non-parent (no child at baseline and did not have a child

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<sup>1</sup> Measures indicating change between Time 1 and Time 2 were created. They were not used due to the lack of enough respondents actually having changed between waves.

between baseline and Wave II). The continuous non-parent category is the reference group in the analysis.

Several variables from Wave I (1980) are included as demographic measures in the analysis. **Female** is coded '1' for females and '0' for males. Females comprise 59.81% of the sample. **Race** is coded '1' for white and '0' for any other race. Whites make up 91.44% of the sample. **Age** is measured continuously in years. In Wave I the mean age is 35.78 years for respondents ( $\sigma = 9.23$ ) and 36.13 for spouses ( $\sigma = 9.35$ ). **Educational achievement** is measured as a continuous variable indicating the number of years of completed education. In Wave I, respondents completed a mean of 13.74 years ( $\sigma = 2.56$ ) and spouses completed a mean of 13.81 years ( $\sigma = 2.81$ ).

Two variables from Wave I are included to measure relationship duration. **Pre-marriage relationship duration** was measured by the question, "How many months did you go with your (husband/wife) before you got married?" Responses were continuous with a mean 24.860 of months ( $\sigma = 18.785$ ). The number of **years married** is measured continuously with a mean of 14.334 ( $\sigma = 9.188$ ).

A set of six variables from Wave I were used to measure religiosity. **Religious affiliation** were expressed by three dummy variables, one representing Protestants, one Catholics, and one of other religions, with no religious affiliation being the omitted category in the analysis. The study sample is 57.96% Protestant, 28.13% Catholic, and 8.33% other religions. **Frequency of churchgoing** by the couple was measured by the question, "How often do you and your (husband/wife) attend church together?" Responses included "1- Less than once a year"; "2- Several times per year"; "3- Once monthly"; and "4- Weekly or more." Of the individuals in the sample, 22.52% attend

church together less than once a year, 21.79% attend church together several times a year, 17.35% attend church together once monthly, and 38.34% attend church together weekly or more. **Religious influence** was measured by the question, “In general, how much would you say your religious beliefs influence your daily life?” Response categories were “1- None”; “2- A little”; “3- Some”; “4- Quite a bit”; and “5- Very much.” Of the individuals in the sample, 5.34% have no religious influence in their daily lives, 10.12% have a little religious influence, 22.67% have some, 25.59% have quite a bit, and 36.28% have very much religious influence in their daily lives. Finally, **religious similarity** was measured by the question, “When you started going together, was your religious preference the same as your (husband’s/wife’s)?” “No” was coded ‘1’ and “Yes” was coded ‘0’. 56.02% of couples shared the same religion when they began dating.

Finally, a set of five variables were included in the analysis to account for work and economics. To establish financial stability by looking at **home ownership**, a variable was created to equal ‘1’ if the couple owned or was buying their home and ‘0’ if they were renting or had another arrangement. Owners and buyers represented 82.41% of the sample. Two measures were used indicating two different aspects of the husband’s job. One measures the **husband’s job satisfaction**: “On the whole, how satisfied (is your husband/ are you) with this job?” Response categories included “0- Very dissatisfied”; “1- Little dissatisfied”; “2- Moderately”; and “3- Very satisfied.” Of this sample, 4.30% of respondents reported being very dissatisfied with their or their husband’s job, 9.35% reported being a little dissatisfied, 37.15% reported being moderately satisfied, and 49.20% reported being very satisfied with their or their husband’s job. The other variable measures the **influence of husband’s job on family**

life: “How much does (your husband’s/ your) job interferes with family life?” Response categories were “0- Not at all”; “1- Not too much”; “2-Somewhat”; and “3- A lot.” Of these individuals, 36.62% reported no intrusion on family life by their or their husband’s job, 33.25% reported not too much interference, 20.45% reported that their or their husband’s job interferes somewhat with family life, and 9.68% reported no interference of the husband’s job with family life. A measure was created to indicate whether or not the **wife was employed** which was coded at ‘1’ if she had employment and ‘0’ if she did not. 60.05% of wives reported being employed. Lastly, **Household income** is coded ‘1’ for more than \$20,000 in 1979 and ‘0’ for less than \$20,000 in 1979 and 73.71% of the sample had a household income of over \$20,000 in 1979.

### Analysis

The methods used for data analysis is Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression and Multinomial Logistic Regression. OLS regression is a statistical technique that one employs when the outcome variable is continuous and normally distributed. In OLS, estimators are used to construct a straight line using the predicted values of  $Y_i$  given  $X_i$  based on the OLS regression line (Stock & Watson, 2007). Different OLS estimators are calculated until those found minimize the total squared mistakes, resulting in the best estimator. Multinomial Logistic regression analysis requires a nominal outcome variable with categories that are assumed to be unordered (Long and Freese 2006). In this analysis, a separate binary logit is estimated for each pair of all possible comparisons among the outcome categories (Long 1997). This allows for consistent estimates of the parameters. The statistical analysis program Stata 11 was used to run the regressions. The sampling techniques were complex and several populations were oversampled.

Therefore, sample weights had to be employed to reduce the coefficients and to make the sample more nationally representative.

## Results

The data were analyzed using two different methods. First, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was applied to Wave 1 (1980) to predict baseline levels of marital satisfaction. Then, Multinomial Logistic regression was applied to assess if marital satisfaction changed between Wave 1 and Wave 2. The dependent variable for this analysis (marital satisfaction) was placed in three categories of change: increased, decreased, or stayed the same.

### Baseline Levels of Marital Satisfaction – Main Effects

Table 1 shows the results of OLS regression analysis for five different models using data at Wave 1 (1980). The purpose of Model 1 is to assess the relationship between marital satisfaction and parent status. The analysis indicates a significant, negative relationship between parental status and marital satisfaction ( $\beta=-0.1030$ ;  $p<.001$ ). This means that married individuals who are parents have significantly lower marital satisfaction than do married individuals who are not parents.

Model 2 adds a set of demographic variables (age of respondent and spouse, education of respondent and spouse, race and gender) to predict marital satisfaction at baseline. Five of the seven variables included in this model had a statistically significant relationship with marital satisfaction. Parental status maintains the significant, negative relationship with marital satisfaction that was found in the previous model ( $\beta=-0.1072$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Additionally, it is found that for each subsequent year of education the respondent received, marital satisfaction declined ( $\beta=-0.0092$ ,  $p<.05$ ). This indicates

highly educated individuals tend to report lower levels of marital satisfaction. The respondent's spouse's educational attainment was also a significant predictor of marital satisfaction. For each subsequent year of education a respondent's spouse achieved, respondents reported a significant increase in marital satisfaction ( $\beta=0.0129$ ;  $p<.001$ ). White respondents reported significantly higher marital satisfaction than did non-white respondents ( $\beta=0.0799$ ;  $p<.01$ ). Finally, females reported significantly lower marital satisfaction than males ( $\beta=-0.0872$ ;  $p<.001$ ).

Model 3 was used to assess the impact of parental status and demographics as well as how long the couple has been together on their reported marital satisfaction. As indicated in the table, five of the nine variables significantly predicted marital satisfaction. Neither of the two new variables included in this model, number of years married nor number of months with spouse prior to marriage, attained statistical significance. Again it is found that parental status has a significant, negative effect on marital satisfaction ( $\beta=-0.1154$ ,  $p<.001$ ). These results continue to indicate that parents report lower levels of marital satisfaction than do non-parents. Additionally, each of the four demographic indicators that were significant in the previous model remain significant at the same level and in the same direction in this model.

The purpose of Model 4 is to assess the impact of several religious variables on marital satisfaction in conjunction with the parental status and the demographic and relationship length variables. As denoted in the table, six of the 15 variables included in this model significantly predict marital satisfaction. Parental status is still a significant predictor of marital satisfaction ( $\beta=-0.1218$ ,  $p<.001$ ), as parents report significantly lower

Table 1 – Ordinary Linear Regression Results Predicting Baseline Marital Satisfaction for Wave 1 (1980) of the Marital Instability over the Life Course Study

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<b><u>Demographics</u></b>					
Parental Status <sup>a</sup>	-.1030*** .0168	-.1072*** .0193	-.1154*** .0195	-.1218*** .0196	-.1139*** .0206
Age of Respondent		.0023 .0026	.0011 .0030	.0016 .0030	.0009 .0029
Age of Spouse		-.0016 .0025	-.0027 .0024	-.0024 .0024	-.0028 .0023
Education of Respondent		-.0092* .0043	-.0089* .0043	-.0095* .0042	-.0088* .0043
Education of Spouse		.0129*** .0040	.0134*** .0041	.0131*** .0040	.0121** .0040
Race <sup>b</sup>		.0799** .0308	.0769** .0309	.0808** .0314	.0772** .0316
Female		-.0872*** .0193	-.1154*** .0195	-.0898*** .0192	-.0974*** .0193
<b><u>Relationship Length</u></b>					
Number of Years Married			.0028 .0021	.0011 .0022	.0009 .0022
Number of Months with Spouse prior to Marriage			-.0004 .0005	-.0005 .0022	-.0004 .0005
<b><u>Religion</u></b>					
Respondent and Spouse Same Religion (1=yes)				.0096 .0226	.0121 .0222
Protestant (1=protestant)				-.0120 .0339	-.0067 .0329
Catholic (1=catholic)				-.0452 .0361	-.0490 .0350

Other Religion (1=other religion)				-.0494 .0469	-.0483 .0464
Frequency of Churchgoing Together (high #=high frequency)				.0481*** .0088	.0433*** .0087
Degree Religion Influences Life (high #=high frequency)				.0083 .0084	.0110 .0083
<b><u>Economic</u></b>					
Own Home (1=own)					-.0317 .0221
Impact of Husband's Job on Family (high #=greater impact)					-.0420*** .0092
Husband's Job Satisfaction (high #=high satisfaction)					.0300** .0105
Wife Works (1=wife works)					-.0282 .0168
1979 Income					.0575** .0208
Constant	2.4161	2.325	2.380	2.251	2.696
R-squared	.0120	.0381	.0398	.0729	.0976

Significance Levels \* .05 \*\* .01 \*\*\*.001

N = 1832

a: Omitted reference category is non-parent.

b: Omitted reference category is non-white.

marital satisfaction than do non-parents. Of the variables included to measure religiosity, only the frequency of churchgoing together has a significant relationship with marital satisfaction. It is found that the higher the frequency of churchgoing together, the higher the marital satisfaction ( $\beta=0.0481$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Additionally, each of the four demographic indicators that were significant in the previous model remain significant at the same level and in the same direct in this model.

Model 5 incorporates all previously mentioned variables as well as several measures of work and economics to assess their over affect on marital satisfaction. As shown in the table, nine of the 20 variables significantly predicted marital satisfaction. Parental status maintains the significant, negative relationship with marital satisfaction that was found in all previous models ( $\beta=-0.1139$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Additionally, three of the five new variables incorporated into this model were statistically significant predictors of marital satisfaction. Couples in which the husband's job impacts family life report lower levels of marital satisfaction ( $\beta=-0.0420$ ,  $p<.001$ ). This implies that if a couple contains a husband whose job requires much of his time and energy marital satisfaction will suffer. However, for each unit increase in a husband's job satisfaction marital satisfaction increases ( $\beta=0.0300$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Husband's who are more satisfied in their jobs boost the couple's marital satisfaction. Finally, there was a significant positive relationship between household income and marital status ( $\beta=0.0575$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This suggests that having more financial resources positively affects a couple's marital satisfaction. Each of the four demographic indicators that were significant in the previous models remain significant at the same level and in the same direct in this model as does the measure of frequency of churchgoing together.

### Baseline Levels of Marital Satisfaction – Statistically Significant Interactions<sup>2</sup>

Due to the fact that parenthood has a negative effect on marital satisfaction, several statistical interactions were run to assess if this negative impact held for all types of respondents. The results of the interactions showed that having children does not impact all individuals in the same way.

Table 2 shows the results for the interactions. The first significant statistical interaction is between sex (female=1, male=0) and parental status (1=parent, 0=non-parent). The significant coefficient ( $\beta=0.0634$ ,  $p<.05$ ) indicates that the status of “parent” is significantly more damaging to the marital satisfaction of women than men. The next significant interaction is between parental status and respondent’s age. The coefficient ( $\beta=0.0048$ ,  $p<.05$ ) indicated that being a parent is significantly less damaging to marital satisfaction as the respondent increases in age. Finally, the interaction between parental status and household income (income greater than \$20,000=1, income less than \$20,000=0) is also statistically significant. The coefficient ( $\beta=0.0889$ ,  $p<.01$ ) indicates that parental status is significantly more damaging to the marital satisfaction of those with a household income less than \$20,000. The results of all of these interactions taken together show that having children does not have the same level of impact for every relationship at those two time points.

### Change in Marital Satisfaction Over Time

Table 3 shows Multinomial Logistic regression results for five models using data from Time 1 (1980) and Time 2 (1982) to analyze change in marital satisfaction between those two time points. The purpose of Model 1 was to predict change in marital

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<sup>2</sup> Many more interactions were created and incorporated into the models. Only those reactions that showed significance are reported here.

Table 2. Significant Interactions in OLS Regression†

Interaction	$\beta$
sex * parental status	-.0634*
	.0328
age of respondent *	.0048*
parental status	.0022
income in 1979 *	.0889**
parental status	.0345

† Interactions added to full model (Model 5)

satisfaction using several variables that identify a change in parental status, controlling for level of marital satisfaction at Wave I. As can be seen, none of the change in parental status variable has a significant relationship with change in marital satisfaction. This is to say that individuals who have a child for the first time, individuals who have an additional child, and those who had a child previously but did not have another between time points are not significantly more likely to see an increase or a decrease in the marital satisfaction compared to those who remain childless across the two waves.

Model 2 incorporates demographic variables in addition to the change in parenthood variables to assess their impact on the change marital satisfaction. As shown in the model, three of the ten variables predicted significant change in marital satisfaction. The results show that females' marital satisfaction is more likely to stay the same than decrease from Time 1 to Time 2 ( $\text{rrr}=0.4126$ ,  $p<.01$ ). For each year of the respondent's age, marital satisfaction was more likely to stay the same than decrease

Table 3. Multinomial Logistic Regression Results to Predict Change in Marital Satisfaction using Wave 2 (1983) of the Marital Instability over the Life Course Study

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Increase VS. No Change	Decrease VS No Change	Increase VS No Change	Decrease VS No Change	Increase VS No Change	Decrease VS No Change	Increase VS No Change	Decrease VS No Change	Increase VS No Change	Decrease VS No Change
Marital Satisfaction at										
Time 1 (higher score = greater satisfaction)	.986	1.066	.983	1.071	.982	1.070	.973	1.069	.969	1.071
<b>Change in Parental Status</b>										
First Time Parent <sup>a</sup> (1=Parent)	.911	.646	.846	.603	.842	.588	.883	.615	.942	.629
Another Child <sup>a</sup> (1= Additional Child)	1.385	.8065	1.442	.869	1.461	.917	1.458	.946	1.676	1.116
Parent, No New Kids <sup>a</sup> (1=Stay Parent)	1.323	.802	1.240	.958	1.240	1.019	1.222	.997	1.357	1.129
<b>Demographics</b>										
Female			.855	.413**	.853	.417**	.849	.408***	.913	.439***
Race <sup>□</sup> (1=White)			.993	.679	1.000	.700	.990	.717	1.021	.756
Age of Respondent			.973	.912**	.968	.922**	.969	.922**	.970	.925**
Age of Spouse			1.031	1.082*	1.036	1.087**	1.038	1.085**	1.035	1.088*

Education of Respondent	1.061	1.003	1.061	1.000	1.062	1.007	1.045	.998
Education of Spouse	1.025	1.034	1.022	1.026	1.025	1.025	1.021	1.024
<b><u>Length of Relationship</u></b>								
Numbers of Months Dating Spouse Prior to Marriage	1.008	1.010	1.007	1.010	1.007	1.010	1.007	1.009
Number of Years Married	1.011	.984	1.005	.978	1.005	.978	1.005	0.979
<b><u>Religiosity</u></b>								
Protestant <sup>b</sup> (1=Protestant)	.895	1.269	.964	1.360				
Catholic <sup>b</sup> (1=Catholic)	.839	1.158	.876	1.194				
Other Religion <sup>b</sup> (1=Other Religion)	.594	1.194	.649	1.241				
Frequency of Churchgoing Together (higher score = greater frequency)	1.034	.918	1.031	.927				
Degree Religion Influences Life (higher score = greater influence)	1.068	1.103	1.076	1.104				

Spouse and Respondent Same Religion (1=yes)	1.182	1.429	1.243	1.501
<b>Economic</b>				
1979 Income		1.507		1.39
Husband's Job Satisfaction (higher score = greater satisfaction)		.964		.893
Impact Husband's Job has on Family (higher score = greater impact)		.995		1.068
Wife Works (1=wife works)		1.425		1.286
Own Home (1=own)		.829		.584
<b>R squared</b>	.008	.035	.030	.041
Significance Levels	* .05	** .01	***.001	
N	1148			

α: Omitted reference category is non-parent at both time points.

β: Omitted reference category is no religious preference.

( $rrr=.0.9124$ ,  $p<.01$ ). However, for each year of the respondent's spouse's age, marital satisfaction was more likely to decrease ( $rrr=1.0821$ ,  $p<.05$ ) than it was to remain the same.

The purpose of Model 3 is to add in the length of relationship variables. As shown in the table, three of the 12 variables significantly predicted change in marital satisfaction. Neither of the new variable attained statistical significance. Again it is found that females are more likely to retain the same level of marital satisfaction that they had at Time 1 than have a decrease in satisfaction ( $rrr=0.4174$ ,  $p<.01$ ). It is also found that for each year of the respondent's age, marital satisfaction was more likely to stay the same than decrease ( $rrr=.0.9222$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and for each year of the respondent's spouse's age, marital satisfaction was more likely to decrease ( $rrr=1.0873$ ,  $p<.01$ ) than it was to remain the same.

In addition to all of the aforementioned variables, Model 4 incorporates variables regarding religious affiliation, attendance, and religious influence. As presented in the table, three of the 18 variables significantly predicted change in marital satisfaction. Increasing in significance, females are still more likely to have the same level of marital satisfaction at Time 2 than to decrease ( $rrr=0.4076$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The age of the respondent predicts that for each year of additional age, marital satisfaction is more likely to stay the same than decrease ( $rrr=0.9235$ ,  $p<.01$ ). For each year that the respondent's spouse ages, marital satisfaction is more likely to decrease than stay the same ( $rrr=1.0850$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The respondent's age and their spouse's age continue to affect marital satisfaction in opposite directions.

Model 5, the final model, regressed all previously mentioned variables as well as indicators of income, home ownership, and variables related to the husband's job to assess their impact on a change in marital satisfaction. As shown in the table, three of the 23 variables significantly predicted marital satisfaction. As in all previous models, females continue to be more likely to have the same marital satisfaction at Time 2 than to decrease in satisfaction ( $rrr=0.4392$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The age of the respondents still predicts that for each additional year, the respondent is more likely to have the same marital satisfaction at Time 2 ( $rrr=0.9251$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The age of the respondent's spouse also continued to predict that for each additional year, the respondent is more likely to experience a decrease in marital satisfaction ( $rrr=1.0876$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

This study had three essential goals at the outset: (1) to predict baseline marital satisfaction, (2) to test if the impact of parental status on marital satisfaction is felt across all groups, and, (3) to predict a change in marital satisfaction after three years. The data was taken from the Marital Instability over the Life Course study which began in 1980 and has since followed participants over six waves of data collection. To meet the two goals of this paper, Wave I (1980) was used to predict baseline marital satisfaction using OLS regression. Wave II (1983) was used in conjunction with Wave I to predict a change in marital satisfaction using Multinomial Logistic regression. Based on my analysis, several interesting findings have surfaced.

When predicting baseline satisfaction, the most important factor was whether or not the respondent had a child. The presence of a child is significantly associated with lower marital satisfaction in every model and even gained statistical power as the models included more variables. This effect did not hold for respondents who already had at least one child and were adding another. Only respondents having their first child experienced a significant decline in marital satisfaction. The presence of a child is not a mediating factor and holds its significance no matter what else is being controlled. This finding supports previous literature (McHale and Huston 1985; MacDermid, Huston, and McHale 1990; Belsky and Kuang-Hua 1998; Kurdek 1998; Kurdek 1999; Gottman and Notarius 2002; Pacey 2004; Lawrence et al. 2007; Lawrence et al. 2008). Children require a renegotiation of the marriage arrangement and can test each parent's coping strategies and magnify difficulties (Pacey 2004) which can result in a decline in marital satisfaction (White and Booth 1985). Belsky, Lang, and Rovine (1985) attributed declines in marital satisfaction to an intensified focus on instrumental functions rather than on emotional expression. This can be due to the fact that children impose additional household chores on couples (Helms-Erickson 2001).

Another consistent finding was that women reported significantly lower marital satisfaction than did men. This effect held for all models. Parenthood as being more burdensome to women than to men is nothing new in marriage literature. Many studies have found gender differences across the transition to parenthood. Women have long been ascribed the position of primary caregiver of a child and remain responsible for the quality of this care (Feldman and Nash 1984). Meijer and Van den Wittenboer (2007) found a decrease in marital satisfaction that was more pronounced in women than men

following the birth of their first child. They attributed this finding to the insomnia created by a crying baby and the gender norms that dictate that childcare is a woman's job. Having to revert to traditional gender roles after becoming a mother may be the cause of the significant decrease in females' marital satisfaction.

Interestingly, in all the models, the respondent's education and the respondent's spouses education were working in opposite directions. The respondent's education predicted a significant decrease in marital satisfaction while his or her spouse's education predicted a significant increase in marital satisfaction. Future research should address this interesting finding.

Of all the religious variables presented in the model, only the couples' frequency of churchgoing predicted baseline marital satisfaction. As couples attended church together more frequently, their marital satisfaction significantly increased. This finding indicates that it is not religious affiliation that seems to be important but any religious activity that the couple can participate in together. This could also be a proxy measure indicating that the spouses share the same worldview and values because they attend religious services together.

According to Life Course theory, how long a couple has known each other should impact their marital satisfaction. It would seem logical to hypothesize that the longer a couple has known each other, the higher their marital satisfaction should be. In my models, I incorporated two variables of relationship length: (1) number of months the couple dated prior to marriage, and (2) the number of years they have been married. Neither variable significantly predicted marital satisfaction. It does not appear that how long one has known his or her spouse significantly affects one's marital satisfaction.

As described in the analysis, several interactions were run to assess if being a parent affected marital satisfaction in the same way for all couples. The results indicated that a handful of factors do impact how couples experience their marital satisfaction after they become parents. The first significant interaction was between sex and parental status. Women who had children reported being less satisfied in their marriages than men. The second significant interaction was between race and parental status. It suggests that white parents were significantly more satisfied than non-white parents. This finding suggests that children do not affect white couples' marital satisfaction as much as they impact non-white couples' marital satisfaction. The next significant interaction was between the respondent's age and parental status. The status of "parent" becomes significantly less damaging to one's marital satisfaction as one's age increases. This finding indicates that older parents more easily negotiate the demands of children and their marriage than do younger parents. The final significant interaction was between income and parental status. The status of "parent" appeared to be more harmful to the marital satisfaction of couples whose household income is less than \$20,000. Taken together, all of these findings indicate that being a parent does not affect all couples in the same way.

As discussed above, several characteristics of couples predict baseline marital satisfaction. Interestingly, very few significantly predicted a change in marital satisfaction. The most note-worthy finding was that baseline marital satisfaction did not predict a change in marital satisfaction. This is an unusual finding that initial marital satisfaction is not predicting a change marital satisfaction. Also, the variables indicating parental status at Time 2 did not significantly predict a change in marital satisfaction. In

other words, it did not matter if the couple became a parent, had an additional child, or were already parents but did not have another child: none predicted a change in marital satisfaction. Both of these non-findings could be attributed to the fact that only three years had passed between Wave I and Wave II and this may have not been enough time for satisfaction to change significantly. It is also unclear how old the children were at the time of the survey. They may have not been old enough to impact marital satisfaction. It is also possible that not enough couples transitioned to parenthood during the time between Wave I and Wave II and statistical power was affected. Potentially having a larger sample that transitioned would show marital satisfaction being significantly affected.

The findings from the Wave II (1983) analysis were not what was expected. However, some interesting results were discovered. Women were found to be significantly more likely to hold the same level of marital satisfaction at Time 2 than they had at Time 1. It didn't matter if their satisfaction at Time 1 was high or low; either way it was not likely to change. This is an interesting finding given the literature on the gendered division of household labor mentioned previously that generally occurs after a couple has a baby.

Another unique finding is that the age of the respondent and the age of the respondent's spouse are working in opposite directions just as education did at Time 1. For each year older the respondent is, he or she is more likely to maintain his or her previous level of marital satisfaction. As for his or her spouse, for each additional year older he or she is, the respondent is more likely to decrease in marital satisfaction. This

finding is very useful. Future research should be directed at finding the cause for this opposite relationship.

### Limitations

As with all empirical studies, this one is not without its limitations. For each measure in Wave II (1983) it is possible that not enough time had passed since Wave I (1980) for much change to occur and statistical power was affected. This would mean that the significance levels that were found were not telling the whole story about how the couples were changing. Also, the data used for this analysis was collected in 1980 and 1983 making it slightly older data. However, this data provided me with strong indicators of marital satisfaction as well as any potential changes in satisfaction more so than other datasets. There was also the possibility of attrition between waves I and II which could have affected the final results.

### Implications for Future Research

Understanding marital satisfaction has important implications for understanding married life. This study has provided support to the literature contending that whether or not a couple has children is a significant predictor of their marital happiness. In addition to giving this support, this study has also raised several questions: Why doesn't it appear to matter how long a married couple has known each other?; Why is educational attainment working in opposite directions for the respondent and his or her spouse?; What is it about the frequency of religious attendance that makes it more important for predicting marital satisfaction than religious affiliation?; and, Why doesn't initial marital satisfaction predict a change in satisfaction?

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## **Appendix A: Indicators Used to Construct Marital Satisfaction in Wave I (1980)**

For each indicator, the respondent was asked to answer:\*

- 3 – Very happy
- 2 – Pretty happy
- 1 – Not too happy

- 1) How happy are you with the amount of understanding you receive from your (husband/wife)?
- 2) With the amount of love and affection you receive?
- 3) How happy are you with the extent to which you and your spouse agree about things?
- 4) With your sexual relationship?
- 5) With your spouse as someone who takes care of things around the house?
- 6) With your spouse as someone to do things with?
- 7) With your spouse's faithfulness to you?

\*For my analysis, I reverse-coded these indicators so higher numbers would indicate higher marital satisfaction.

**Appendix B: Indicators Used to Construct Marital Satisfaction in Wave II (1983)**

For each indicator, the respondent was asked to answer:\*

- 3 – Very happy
- 2 – Pretty happy
- 1 – Not too happy

- 1) How happy are you with the amount of understanding you receive from your (husband/wife)?
- 2) With the amount of love and affection you receive?
- 3) How happy are you with the extent to which you and your spouse agree?
- 4) With your sexual relationship?
- 5) With your spouse as someone who takes care of things around the house?
- 6) With your spouse as someone to do things with?
- 7) With your spouse's faithfulness to you?

\*For my analysis, I reverse-coded these indicators so higher numbers would indicate higher marital satisfaction.

## Appendix C: Frequencies of Variables in Wave I and Wave II

Frequencies of Categorical Variables from the Marital Instability over the Life Course Study

Wave I (1980) Indicators	Observations	Percent	Cum. Percent
<b>Presence of Children</b>			
No Children	315	16.93	16.93
At Least One Child	1546	83.07	100.00
	1866	100.00	
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	755	40.46	40.46
Female	1111	59.54	100.00
	1866	100.00	
<b>Race</b>			
Other	220	11.79	11.79
White	1646	88.21	100.00
	1866	100.00	
<b>Protestant</b>			
No	789	42.28	42.28
Yes	1077	57.72	100.00
	1866	100.00	
<b>Catholic</b>			
Yes	513	27.49	27.49
No	1355	72.51	100.00
	1866	100.00	
<b>Other Religion</b>			
Yes	148	7.93	7.93
No	1718	93.07	100.00
	1866	100.00	
<b>Frequency of Churchgoing</b>			
Less than once a year	508	27.22	27.22
Several time per year	399	21.38	48.61
Once monthly	329	17.63	66.24
Weekly or more	630	33.76	100.00
	1866	100.00	

Degree Religion  
Influences Life

None	122	6.54	6.54
A little	201	10.77	17.31
Some	455	24.38	41.69
Quite a bit	479	25.67	67.36
Very much	609	32.64	100.00
	1866	100.00	

Spouse's Religion the  
Same as Respondent

Yes	391	21.03	21.03
No	1468	78.97	100.00
	1859	100.00	

1979 Income

\$20,000 or less	507	27.17	27.17
\$20,000 or more	1359	72.83	100.00
	1866	100.00	

Husband's Job  
Satisfaction

Very dissatisfied	90	4.82	4.82
Little Dissatisfied	198	10.61	15.43
Moderately satisfied	697	37.35	52.79
Very satisfied	881	47.21	100.00
	1866	100.00	

Impact of Husband's Job  
on Family

Not at all	702	37.62	37.62
Not too much	595	31.89	69.51
Somewhat	373	19.99	89.50
A lot	196	10.50	100.00
	1866	100.00	

Wife Works

No	752	40.30	40.30
Yes	1114	59.70	100.00
	1866	100.00	

Own Home

Renting/Other	417	22.35	22.35
Own/Buying	1449	77.65	100.00
	1866	100.00	

Wave II (1983) Indicators

<u>Change in Marital Satisfaction</u>				
	No Change	138	12.01	12.01
	Decrease	687	59.79	71.80
	Increase	324	28.20	100.00
		1149	100.00	
<u>Became a New Parent</u>				
	No	1741	93.30	93.30
	Yes	125	6.70	100.00
		1866	100.00	
<u>Became a Parent Again</u>				
	No	1662	89.07	89.07
	Yes	204	10.93	100.00
		1866	100.00	
<u>Remained a Parent with no New Kids</u>				
	No	816	43.73	43.73
	Yes	1050	56.27	100.00
		1866	100.00	

## Frequencies of Continuous Variables from the Marital Instability over the Life Course Study

<u>Wave I (1980) Indicators</u>	<u>Observations</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>
Marital Satisfaction at Baseline	1841	10.79	2.93	0	14
Respondent's Age	1866	35.44	9.19	16	55
Respondent's Spouse's Age	1866	35.92	9.21	15	55
Respondent's Education	1866	13.49	2.61	0	24
Respondent's Spouse's Education	1866	13.55	2.82	1	27
Number of Months Dating Spouse	1866	22.60	17.94	0	96
Number of Years Married	1866	12.60	9.14	0	38