

# Chapter 9

## Divorce and Repartnering

Title page Image 9.1

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/concerned-black-couple-sitting-on-bed-in-misunderstanding-5700176/>



### Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Understand the historical background of divorce and how it compares to current data and trends.
2. Describe the divorce fluidity and variation model used to understand the ecology of divorce as well as see it as a process and not just an event.
3. Identify the correlates and predictive variables understood to explain divorce and

identify the ways in which divorce rates are calculated as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each method.

4. Describe the research on the outcomes of divorce, particularly its effect on children as seen across the life course.

5. Identify the various pathways that people take after divorce.

<*vignette*>

Ms. Baker couldn't help noticing that Haley had been looking out the window for most of the class. She knew that Haley's parents were going through a divorce and, based on Haley's declining school performance, she thought things were probably not going well. Jordan, on the other hand, seemed to be much happier now that his parents had sorted through their divorce issues. He was glad he wasn't going to have to move and that his mom was going to live close to their old house so she and Jordan could still spend a lot of time together. Emma also seemed to be doing well with her new family. After a tough year, she was much more focused on her studies and seemed to be getting along better with the other kids in the class. When Emma's mother got remarried to her childhood girlfriend, it was quite a transition for everyone, but they seemed to be adjusting well with the support of extended family. With all of these children making progress, Ms. Baker examined her own feelings about her mother getting divorced again. Given her mother's age, Ms. Baker was worried about things like home care, grocery shopping, and doctors' visits. It looked as if her mother's needs would once again become her own.

<*end of vignette*>

In 2010, a Canadian news article began with the following statement: "The traditional definition of family is changing in Canada, with four in 10 first marriages ending in divorce, according to a new study" ([www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2010/10/04/vanier-study004.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2010/10/04/vanier-study004.html)). In 1997, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead wrote *The Divorce Culture*. Fifteen years later, it is now possible to examine the influence of marital breakdown on a generation of people who grew up with divorce as a normative family life-course event. In this work, Whitehead argues that divorce is now part of everyday North American life. It is embedded in our legal system, part of our pop culture, and so common that it is now considered normative. One need only ask the average adolescent or adult what he or she knows about divorce and the response typically will be that half of all marriages will experience it. Is this true? Do we live in a divorce culture? Are current times drastically different from other periods in history? If so, what implications does divorce have for adults, children, and society as a whole?

This chapter looks at the divorce process in three parts. We begin by providing the historical context of divorce. Then we look at the diversity of divorce, considering the many different experiences people have while going through it. Finally, we look at the implications of divorce for adults and children across the life course as a means of giving us a better

appreciation for the topic. The final section of the chapter discusses the new experiences and challenges that face families confronted with divorce: single-parent families, re-entry to the dating scene, and more complex family types with the introduction of remarriage and stepfamilies.

## **DIVORCE IN CONTEXT**

### **Historical Overview of Divorce**

For the purposes of understanding divorce across the life course, the history of divorce has two primary stages: an ancient historical phase and a modern historical phase. Divorce is not a new social entity. It was developed as a stage in the life course shortly after marriage was created! The ancients discussed divorce in historical records and sacred texts. Divorce and its place in society are discussed at length in the Jewish Pentateuch, which is dated to well over 3000 years ago. According to Dionysius, Roman law regulated divorce from the time of Romulus onward. Roman law allowed divorce under certain conditions and could be initiated only by males (Woolsey, 1882).

In this ancient historical period, divorce was characterized as an event that took place infrequently. When it did occur, it was highly regulated and permitted only to men of influence. Not much changed through history in Western nations. The strong influence of the church through much of the previous two millennia subdued any attempts for divorce to grow. The Roman Catholic Church currently does not recognize divorce, consistent with their doctrinal history. Apart from the church granting an annulment (deciding that a marriage is not officially recognized because of some undisclosed pre-existing condition or fraudulent representation at the time of marriage), a couple must remain married until one of the partners dies. This strong church position changed for some Christians because of the influence of reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, who taught that divorce was permitted for specific reasons such as adultery. King Henry VIII is often thought to have established the Church of England because of the issue of divorce, but that was not the case. He wanted to marry Anne Boleyn after his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, was unable to produce a male heir, and sought an annulment from the Pope in Rome. When it wasn't granted, King Henry VIII formed the Church of England and was issued an annulment by the archbishop. Divorce continued to be rare in England and was made available to the average citizen only in 1857. In 1901, there were 512 divorces in England and Wales, compared to 141 135 in 2001 (Wilson and Smallwood, 2008).

Divorce continued to remain unattainable for several hundred years after the Protestant Reformation in areas of Europe where Catholicism dominated. The ecclesiastical influence of the church on divorce continued to be felt in Western nations until the end of the twentieth century, with Ireland not making divorce legal until 1995. The situation in North America was different. Apart from Quebec, North America was originally settled mostly by Protestants and divorce, although difficult to obtain, was not uncommon.

The history of divorce in North America is described in detail by Cherlin (2009) in his book *The Marriage-Go-Round* (see also Phillips, 1991). He emphasizes the U.S. government's desire to have Christian marriage viewed as a fundamental aspect of American society. Legislation and judicial decisions were used to ensure that aberrant unions such as polygamy and Aboriginal marriage customs were unable to continue.

Divorce laws and practices varied from state to state and divorce rates began to rise in the mid 1800s. Cherlin states that, by the 1890s, divorce had become a national issue. He cites President Theodore Roosevelt's comments to Congress in response to a 1905 study on the topic: "There is widespread conviction that the divorce laws are dangerously lax and indifferently administered in some states, resulting in the diminished regard for the sanctity of the marriage relation" (O'Neill, 1965). The rate of divorce in the United States doubled between 1865 and 1890 (Cherlin, 2009).

As a result of the imposition of institutionalized marriage by the Indian Act of 1876, divorce was also dissuaded in Indigenous communities, in part due to the Indian Act assertion that annuity and revenue monies would be withheld from any woman, "with no children, who deserts her husband and lives immorally with another man" (McGrath & Stevenson, 1996, p. 46). These laws also made it more burdensome for women to be granted a divorce than men, which was in stark contrast to traditional Indigenous divorce and partner dissolution practices allowing women to leave their partners on the grounds of poor hunting skills or irreconcilable differences (McGrath & Stevenson, 1996).

In Canada, the divorce rate was held down by the Catholic influence in Quebec and by the fact that divorce in Canada required a parliamentary act. According to Statistics Canada, only five divorce acts were passed prior to Confederation in 1867. From 1867 until the first major legislative change regarding divorce, a person had to petition the government for an Act of Divorce, placing the request publicly in the *Canada Gazette* as well as in two local newspapers. This petition remained in the paper for a six-month period. The rare nature of divorce in Canada continued into the twentieth century, with only 11 divorces registered in 1900. Until 1968, the only common grounds for divorce were adultery or seven years of desertion.

The increased participation of women in the paid workforce allowed them to reduce their economic dependency on a breadwinning partner. Women were no longer required to remain in unfulfilling marriages for financial security. This employment trend also provided women with a greater diversity of roles and identities beyond those of wife, mother, and homemaker. Changes in legislation regarding divorce and the increasing numbers of women in the labour market contributed to a change in divorce patterns.

The **Divorce Act** of 1968 was the first significant piece of Canadian legislation to affect divorce rates. It granted divorce for couples who had experienced marital breakdown and been separated for three years. Grounds-based divorce continued to exist as well. The number of divorces almost doubled between 1968 and 1970. Less than 20 years later, an amendment to the Divorce Act in 1985 reduced the waiting period from three years to one. Once again, the divorce rate spiked, with the number of divorces reaching 90,900 in the following year (Oderkirk, 1994).

During the twentieth century, the divorce rate continued to rise in the United States. The one exception to this trend occurred during the 1950s, when the divorce rate remained stable (Cherlin, 2009). Cherlin estimates that approximately one in three marriages ended in divorce at that time, compared to one in two today. The divorce culture discussed by Whitehead (1997) coincides with Cherlin's summary of the last 40 years. For this period, he refers to marriage as individualized and uses Whitehead's term *expressive divorce*. Concern over fraudulent attempts by couples to feign adultery as a means of expediting divorce hastened the social and legislative changes that made divorce easier. Cherlin connects California's no-fault automobile insurance legislation to this new and easier type of divorce. The idea that divorce is not either partner's fault was not intended by legislators, but the name stuck and other states began to



adopt **no-fault divorce**. This change led to an increase in divorce rates after the brief levelling out period of the 1950s. The rate of divorce climbed during the 1960s and 1970s and remains high today. In fact, it is much higher in the United States than anywhere else in the world, a distinction that the country has had throughout the entire twentieth century (Goode, 1970). This is partly because the United States has a continued high rate of marriage compared to other developed countries, which have seen a more rapid trend toward cohabitation replacing marriage. These cohabiting unions are not counted as marriages, so they are also not counted as divorces if they dissolve.

**Image 9.1**

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-person-holding-a-divorce-decree-7876000/>



## **Determinants of Divorce**

The rapid rise and sustained high levels of divorce in North America lead to a question about cause. What is causing this important and enduring social trend? A review of divorce research in the 1980s reveals three clusters of study: macro-structural influences, the life course and demographics, and family process (White, 1990).

Concerning macro-structural influences, the focus was on several institution-level factors. Legislative changes had large impacts in Canada and Australia, where no-fault divorce laws caused a spike in the number of divorces (Balakrishnan, Rao, Lapierre-Adamczyk, & Krotki, 1987). The institutional importance of the family was found to be waning with the advent of other

competing institutions. The conclusion made by several researchers was that family is not as important as it has been in the past (Becker, 1981; Popenoe, 1988). White (1990) quoted Schoen, Urton, Woodrow, and Baj (1985, p. 113): "Recent economic changes have undermined the social and economic forces that maintained the institution of marriage." The increased labour force participation of women was correlated to an increase in divorce, as was a lack of social integration. These macro-level factors have all been consistent, with the general rise of individualism identified by family scholars as contributing to a rise in divorce (Popenoe, 1988).

The second cluster identified by White (1990) includes life course and demographic factors. More complex family forms and secondary marriages were found to be at a greater risk of dissolving (Martin & Bumpass, 1989; White & Booth, 1985). The intergenerational impact of divorce was identified as an important factor in divorce (McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). Cohabitation along with premarital pregnancy and childbirth led to higher levels of divorce (Teachman, 1983; White, 1987) as well as to marriages at earlier ages. Martin and Bumpass (1989) found age at marriage to be the strongest predictor of divorce in the first five years of marriage, while additional researchers found this age effect carried well into the marriage (Heaton, Albrecht, & Martin, 1985). Fertility was also a factor in divorce. The birth of a child reduced the likelihood of divorce in the year immediately following the birth, and additional births had an additive effect in preventing divorce. Couples who were childless were more likely to divorce and the process, when it happened, occurred more rapidly (Booth, Johnson, White, & Edwards, 1986; Wineberg, 1988). White (1990) highlights what she feels was the most important finding of the decade. Morgan, Lye, and Condran's (1988) study found that heterosexual parents of sons are less likely to divorce than parents of daughters. The interpretation of these findings is that fathers spend more time and have greater involvement with sons than daughters, and that this greater father involvement has been shown to reduce divorce (Seccombe & Lee, 1987). South and Spitze (1986) concluded from the use of longitudinal data that, irrespective of the stage of the life course, the detriments of divorce remain consistent.

The final cluster of White's (1990) decade in review focused on the process of divorce. Reflecting on a review of the research from a decade earlier, White concluded that although much is known about the relationship of demographic variables and divorce, we still know little about the mechanisms at work in the couples or individuals who choose to divorce. Most of the findings supported a rational choice or exchange theory approach. Couples with high cost for divorce because of the presence of children or with relatively low alternatives to divorce because of age or employment status (particularly women) were much less likely to entertain the divorce option. General predictors of divorce such as socio-economic status and women's labour force participation also received attention. More family income = less divorce and more female employment = more divorce were the general findings. Conflicting reports of women's labour status and family stability gave some hope that things were changing for the better, but White (1990) pointed out that the bulk of the research from the 1980s still pointed to the conflict that home care and paid employment for women creates in terms of family stability. Individual anecdotal data collected from a handful of studies focused on issues of alcoholism, drug abuse, physical and emotional abuse, gender role disagreements, infidelity, sexual incompatibility, and financial disagreements as some of the key factors precipitating divorce. White summarized her final cluster by saying that due to small samples and selectivity issues (all participants were divorced), these studies were difficult to generalize from but did provide fertile areas for future research.

## Data Box 9.1

### Reducing the Risk of Divorce

If your annual income is more than \$50,000, the risk of you getting divorced reduces by 30%

Your risk of divorce goes down by 14% if you have strong religious beliefs

If you marry after you reach 25 years of age, your divorce risk reduces by 24%

If you're college educated, divorce risk reduces by 13%

If your parents are happy in their marriages, your divorce risk reduces by 14%

Source: Whitehead and Popenoe (2006).

## Current Trends

More recently, Teachman (2002) came to a conclusion similar to that of South and Spitze (1986). He found that the research-identified covariates of divorce have remained relatively stable across more recent cohorts. Using data from the National Survey of Family Growth, Teachman was able to study marriages that spanned a 35-year period (1950 to 1984). Apart from race, the other major variables of age at marriage, education, premarital births and conception, religion, and parental divorce continued to be predictors of divorce (see Data Box 9.1). Teachman concluded by stating that in a period of widely varying divorce rates, there is a consistency in risk factors across cohorts.

The twenty-first century has also seen its fair share of divorce and divorce research. Paul Amato (2010), like White (1990) 20 years earlier, reviewed a decade of research in the area. The major risks of divorce are listed as marrying before age 20, low socio-economic status, periods of unemployment, cohabitation with the partner one marries or with another partner, premarital birth, stepchildren, interracial marriage, growing up in a home without two continuously married parents, and second and **higher-order marriages** (that is, marriages after a first marriage) (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Bratter & King, 2008; Sweeney & Phillips, 2004; Teachman, 2002). Amato (2010) cautions that although these variables are correlated to divorce, we cannot assume that they are the causes of divorce. Each of these variables needs further and more detailed study to understand how it may affect the life course in different ways.

Amato (2010) uses cohabitation as an illustration of the changing divorce landscape and the need to look more closely at the correlate's role in the process. Even with the majority of premarital cohabitation findings concluding a negative effect, some research has found the opposite. This illustrates the complicated and complex nature of studying the interconnectedness of social phenomena across the lives of diverse populations in different periods. A further example provided by Amato (2010) is that of female paid employment. Earlier researchers hypothesized that increased roles in a woman's life would have a detrimental impact on her other roles. For example, if a woman fills the roles of wife and mother, it would be expected that those roles would suffer if she added the role of worker. More recent research

does not support this conclusion (Schoen, Rogers, & Amato, 2006). Although increased roles may create the potential for increased tension between spouses, other factors such as inequitable distribution of tasks and responsibilities were more often cited as reasons for marital stress. Married mothers with children report a greater sense of satisfaction with their other roles when they are employed outside the home (Korabik, Lero, & Whitehead, 2008).

## THE DIVORCE PROCESS

Using a life course perspective to study the family reveals the diverse nature that virtually every life stage takes as it unfolds across a population, with divorce being no different. Divorce tends to be thought of in a monolithic way, as if everyone who gets a divorce goes through the same process. Although the act of a divorce may produce the same result of dissolving the marriage contract, the pathway into and out of divorce is anything but similar. The divorce of a couple without children is quite different from that of a couple with children. **Blended families** going through a divorce have more complex challenges than a family facing a first divorce. The following sections look at the diverse ways in which divorce plays out in the lives of those affected, the diverse ways in which divorce is explained and theorized, and the diverse ways in which divorce rates are calculated.

### The Diverse Nature of Divorce

Examining divorce as an event in time is like looking at marriage or the birth of a child as a single momentary event. The marriage planning process is quite elaborate for some, as are the preparations for childbirth. Understanding the process helps us to understand the event in context. Divorce is a process, not something people decide to do on a whim and never think about afterwards. The experiences of people who have gone through divorce are varied and, as a result, the outcomes on those involved (child well-being, financial or social costs) will also vary. David Demo and Mark Fine (2009, p. 49) describe divorce as “a complex and multidimensional process that unfolds over many years.” In their divorce variation and fluidity model, or **DVFM**, they describe an ecology of divorce in which socio-historical context, gender, race, cultural values, legal context, and economic conditions are part of the ecosystem with which couples and families must contend as they go through the process of divorce. The impact on both child and adult well-being is considered both leading up to the divorce event and following it. Risk factors and protective factors are recognized as influencing the adjustment of both the children and the adults affected. Risk factors include pre- and post-divorce family conflict, financial consequences, and the reality of reduced parent–child interaction. Protective factors include human and social capital qualities such as coping skills and support communities. Demo and Fine also suggest that new partnering for the adult members may be a positive support for the family.

The DVFM model highlights the diversity of potential pathways into and out of divorce. Some of the factors affecting that diversity are the family form or composition as the divorce process unfolds. A young couple without any children may move through the divorce process with less discomfort than a larger family. The family structure may change in the middle of the process with the birth of a child or the acknowledgment of a third person involved. Children may leave home or extended family may move in. The economic circumstances surrounding the loss



of a job or the acquisition of a new job by one of the spouses may also affect the divorce pathway. If only one spouse is involved in the wage economy, the other spouse may be at a financial disadvantage in seeking legal counsel or securing other housing arrangements. Divorce is a dyadic event that affects individuals differently. There is also a gendered aspect to divorce. Kalmijn and Poortman (2006), in their sample of the Dutch population, found that women tend to initiate divorce more often than men. They also found that women's decisions to divorce were tied more to economic implications than were men's and that men's decisions were more strongly constrained by the presence of children than were women's. Kim & Stein (2018) found a similar trend for divorce in LGBTQ marriages - couples consisting of two women are more likely to file for divorce than couples consisting of two men. They also found that due to the higher degree of independence for partners, especially in marriages consisting of two Black women, individuals' decisions to file for divorce were less likely to have economic implications (Kim & Stein, 2018). Additionally, couples consisting of two men were less likely to file for divorce on the grounds of adultery, as cases of consensual non-monogamy were higher in these marriages (Kim & Stein, 2018).

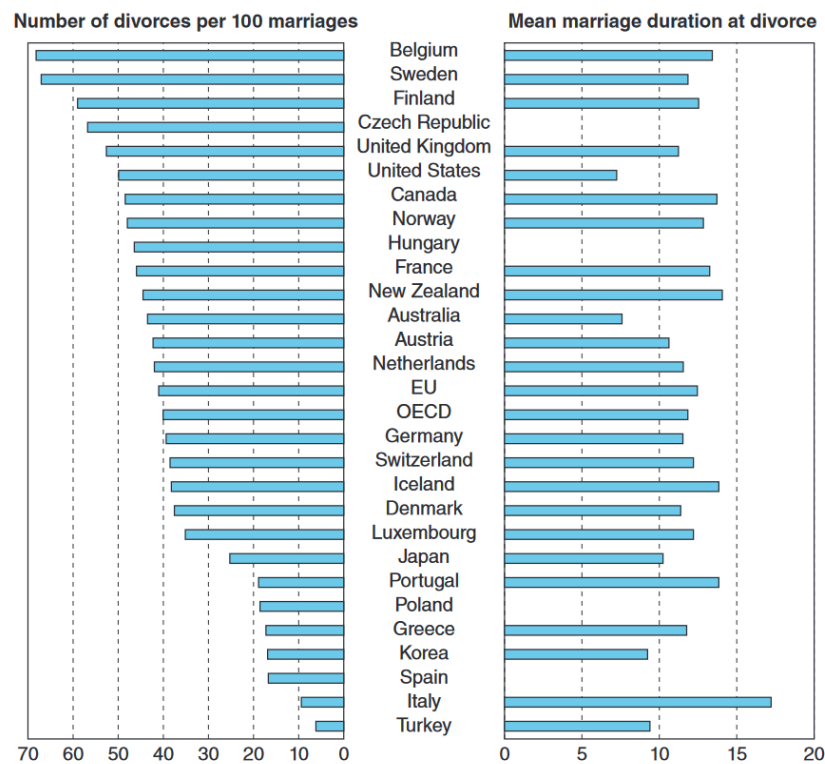
The age of the spouses and the duration of the union at the onset of the divorce process is another differentiating factor. With age at marriage rising and women delaying childbirth, the standard life course timetable is adhered to less. Divorce at an early age may provide greater opportunity for remarriage, while divorce at an older age may take place when children are no longer at home, resulting in different experiences. Shorter marriages may involve less personal investment and be easier to end. Cultural norms also affect the divorce experience, as illustrated by changing social sanctions regarding divorce. During the first half of the twentieth century, divorce was frowned upon and few chose it as a result. The rise of expressive divorce in the latter third of the twentieth century ushered in a new approach. Divorce had become an avenue for self-expression and individual actualization (Whitehead, 1997). Society no longer viewed divorce as failure but as an option for the freedom to start over. The divorce experience today is generally not met with scorn or social stigma but considered a natural part of the life course for many people.

Legislative changes can alter the experience of divorce with the stroke of pen. In Canada, the Divorce Act of 1968 and revisions in 1985 changed the way people in this country go through divorce. The time a couple was required to be separated before a divorce could be granted changed from seven years to three years and now is one year. In the United States, each state has its own waiting period, which may vary from as soon as a couple can agree on terms to up to 18 months. People going through a divorce across these different waiting periods would have diverse experiences in areas of housing, economic and social conditions, and alternative relationships.

No-fault divorce, whether in its unilateral form (able to be initiated by one spouse) or non-unilateral form, requires no cause for the divorce. The introduction of no-fault divorce in the United States is said to have increased the divorce rate by an average of 6 percent in states that adopted it. After a large jump in divorce rates after the introduction of no-fault divorce, there has been a general convergence of divorce rates among states. Research has pointed to the effects of no-fault divorce laws dying out (Wolfers, 2006) and indicates that some no-fault regions actually have fewer divorces (Weiss & Willis, 1997). This has been explained as a selection effect. Locations in which divorce laws make getting a divorce easier lead to women marrying later in life, which is attributed to a more careful mate selection strategy. The presence

of no-fault divorce laws has been found to be correlated with greater equality in the distribution of work within marriages, which enhances a woman's negotiating strength (Yodanis, 2005).

Research in Europe has also demonstrated the diverse pathways into and out of divorce because of divergent divorce legislation. González & Viitanen's (2009) comparative study of 18 European countries spanning from 1950 to 2003 found that countries that allow unilateral divorce saw an increase of 0.3 to 0.4 divorces per 1000 people for several years after the legislative change. The authors state that these findings are consistent with findings in the United States (Wolfers, 2006). More recent research on the impact of unilateral divorce law on divorce rates confirmed the lasting effect of increased divorce rates (Kneip & Bauer, 2009). Figure 9.1 presents an overview of the diverse nature of divorce patterns among countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).



**Figure 9.1** Number of Divorces per 100 Marriages and Mean Marriage Duration at Divorce, 1995

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2001).

Research on East Asia has revealed the changes in divorce trends since divorce rates started rising in East Asia in the 1980s. The substantial increases in divorce rates in East Asian countries signify a significant change in circumstances and attitudes toward divorce. In the past, divorce carried a considerable stigma and the pressure to remain in a disharmonious marriage was tied primarily to protecting the children, and the protection of a family's honour. Factors that may be influencing these divorce trends include women's increasing economic independence, and "the pressures of the big city environments in which an increasing proportion of East Asian live" (Dommaraju & Jones, 2011, p. 726). Dommaraju and Jones (2011) found that China had

the lowest divorce rate, with a crude divorce rate of around 1.6, with higher divorce rates in majority Muslim Southeast Asian countries.

### Diverse Explanations of Divorce

Apart from the Holy Grail or a cure for cancer, nothing is more elusive than the causes of divorce. Here, we discuss *potential* causes of divorce since we are discussing factors correlated with divorce. We already presented an overview of the determinants of divorce, so this section focuses on the diverse explanations for why divorce happens. The complex life courses for those affected by divorce are attested to here by the diverse ecologies. An ecological approach is not the only theoretical approach to studying divorce but it does provide a comprehensive template to locate factors associated with divorce on a micro to macro continuum. Miller, Perlman, and Brehm (2007) present a detailed look at **ecological correlates of divorce** from the individual ecosystems (Table 9.1) while Fine and Harvey (2006) state that the study of causes of divorce relies on numerous theories and

Table 9.1		
Ecological Correlates of Divorce		
Micro-sociological causes	Individual issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Alcoholism and drug abuse</li> <li>■ Infidelity</li> <li>■ Incompatibility</li> <li>■ Physical and emotional abuse</li> <li>■ Disagreements over finances, especially among older people</li> </ul>
	Dynamics of the relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Poor communication</li> <li>■ Poor conflict resolution skills</li> <li>■ Lack of commitment</li> <li>■ Perceived inequality</li> </ul>
Meso-sociological causes	Age at marriage	<p>Strongest predictor in first five years of marriage. Young spouses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Lack emotional maturity needed for marriage</li> <li>■ Have ill-founded expectations</li> <li>■ Become disappointed or disillusioned with marriage</li> </ul>
	Cohabitation	<p>Adverse selectivity explanation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "Kinds of people who cohabit have lower commitment to marriage and disregard stigma of divorce"</li> </ul> <p>As it becomes normative, cohabitation will no longer be a predictor variable</p>

Second marriage

Adverse selectivity explanation:

- "Kinds of people who get divorced once will do so again"

- May be "divorce prone"

Competing theory: stress of remarriage

- Integration of stepchildren

(continued)

- Interaction with ex-spouses

Parental divorce

- Less likely to believe that marriage can last

- "Learned how to divorce" from parents

Child-bearing

Get married for wrong reasons:

- To legitimize birth, not because committed to one another

Family size:

- Women with small or medium-sized families have lower rates of divorce

- Women with no children or large families have high rates of divorce

Sex of child:

- Sons reduce the risk by 9 percent

- Fathers are more involved when raising sons

Stage of marriage

- Longer duration means lower rate of divorce

- Having Invested more time and energy in marriage means higher cost of starting over

- Couples are more aware of being badly matched early on (first three years)

Place of residence

Urban greater rates than rural

Adverse selectivity explanation:

- Rural people migrate to urban areas before, during, and after divorce

- Migrants have weaker social ties, therefore fewer barriers to disruption

Alternate explanation:

- People who move are risk-takers willing to make changes



<b>Macro- sociological causes</b>	Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ More religious have fewer divorces</li> <li>■ Divorce rate increases when spouses have different religions</li> <li>■ No particular religion has the highest divorce rate</li> </ul>	
	Socio-economic status	<p>Increased rates among poor:</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(continued)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Higher financial insecurity equals stress</li> <li>■ Poor have less to lose in divorce and less to gain in staying married</li> </ul>	
	War	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ War separates couples, who grow apart</li> <li>■ Lonely people get together under conditions that encourage involvement</li> <li>■ Strain of postwar reunion</li> </ul>	
	Economic cycles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Less likely to divorce during recession</li> <li>■ Divorce is costly: establishing two households, dividing assets</li> </ul>	
	Sex ratios divorce rate	Ratio of available alternatives affects	
	Gender expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ When social structures allow women economic independence, divorce rate increases</li> <li>■ Divorce rate most stable when gender roles are egalitarian or when both spouses are high on “feminine” characteristics (nurturance, sensitivity, gentleness)</li> </ul>	
	Social integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Higher social integration equals lower divorce rate</li> <li>■ Highly integrated communities support “pro-family” ideals</li> </ul>	
	Legislation	No-fault and unilateral divorce laws increase the divorce rate	
	Source: Adapted from Miller, Perlman, and Brehm (2007).		

models. The diverse list of theories range in scope from social-psychological to macro-sociological, as can be seen in the following list:

- Stress and coping
- Risk and resilience
- Social exchange and resource
- Investment

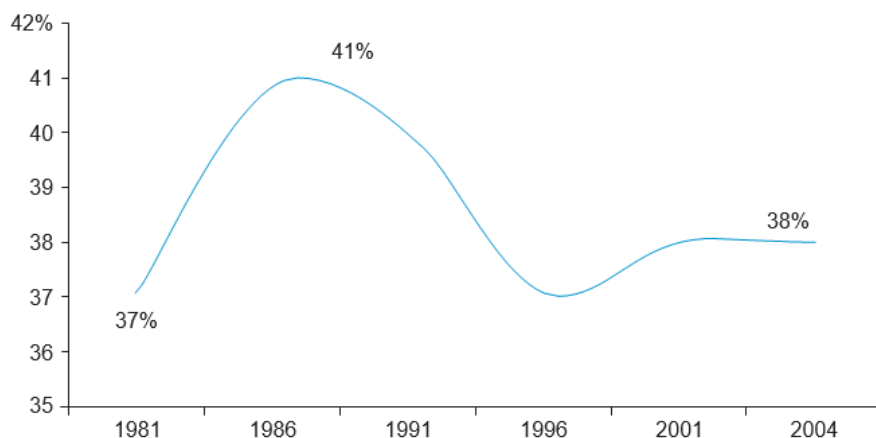
- Behavioural theory
- Deinstitutionalization of marriage
- Gender
- Ecological theory
- Symbolic interactionism and identity
- Disaffection
- Crisis
- Vulnerability, stress, and adaptation
- Cognitive theory
- Cognitive-behavioural theory
- Cognitive-developmental theory
- Account-making
- Coping with loss
- Family systems
- Feminist theory
- Social penetration
- Disillusionment model of dissolution
- Perpetual models of dissolution
- Stage models
- Relational depenetration
- Cognitive emotional adaptation
- Social network
- Stress-related growth
- Relational deterioration model

The use of so many theories to explain one social phenomenon emphasizes the diversity and complexity involved. Fine and Harvey (2006, p. 4) summarize the positives and negatives aspects of this absence of focus:

It is strength in that there is a wealth of different perspectives on divorce and relationship dissolution—in the midst of the diversity of perspectives is, one would hope, a complementarity and synergy that is beneficial for the development of our knowledge base. Creative and innovative solutions to new research questions are more likely when an array of varying theoretical perspective is available to address them; however, the multiplicity of theories is a deficit in that the lack of a singular, unifying perspective makes it more difficult to integrate findings across studies.

## **Diverse Calculations of Divorce Rates**

Calculating divorce rates serves as a good lesson in the importance of knowing how reported statistics have been determined. We are presented with percentages and ratios on a continual basis as social scientists—see, for example, Figure 9.2—but where do those numbers come from and how were they calculated? The most common statistic people are aware of when it comes to divorce is the 50 percent number. You may be surprised to learn that not everyone agrees that 50 percent accurately represents the divorce rate in our society (see Data Box 9.2). Before looking at the most popular methods of calculating divorce rates, it is valuable to review some important aspects of the data that are used to calculate divorce. Rates tell us the relationship between two items. For example, our rate of speed while driving compares the distance we travel in a standard metric of time, hence kilometers (distance) per hour (time). Divorce rates compare the number of divorces and the number of marriages. To begin with, a person is at risk of divorce only if he or she can actually divorce. In other words, he or she must be married (single, widowed, and divorced people cannot get a divorce). To be married, you must be of legal age (typically 18), of sound mind, and (in North America) not already married. It is also important to recognize that divorce is a dyadic-level event. It affects two people yet it is a single divorce, so care must be taken to not double-count divorces. The most common approaches to calculating divorce rates follow, along with the advantages and disadvantages of each.



Total divorce rate, by Province/Territory (2004)														
Percentage of couples who can expect to divorce before their 30th and 50th wedding anniversary														
	CAN	NL	PE	NS	NB	OC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC	YT	NT	NU
Rate before 30th	37.9%	21.6%	29.1%	30.2%	26.9%	48.4%	35.5%	30.6%	27.6%	41.9%	40.8%	34.8%		31.2%
Rate before 50th	41.3	23.7	32.0	33.4	29.8	52.4	38.7	32.6	29.9	45.8	45.1	36.4		37.6
Average duration of marriage for divorced persons (2006)														
Duration (years)	14.5	15.5	16.7	15.9	16.5	16.1	13.8	14.3	14.7	14.0	14.0	15.5	13.5	12.7

**Figure 9.2 Total Divorce Rate—Percentage of Couples Who Can Expect to Divorce Before Their Thirtieth Wedding Anniversary, 1981 to 2004**

Source: Vanier Institute of the Family (2010, p. 47).

## Data Box 9.2

### Four in Ten First Marriages End in Divorce

The traditional definition of family is changing in Canada, with four in 10 first marriages ending in divorce, according to a new study.

For the first time in Canadian history, there are more unmarried people than legally married people age 15 and over in this country, says the study from the Vanier Institute of the Family released Monday in Ottawa.

It was based on data from the 2006 census, and some of the information has been reported in the years since.

“Marriage is still a vitally important part of the experience of families in the fabric of our country and most young people do aspire to marriage,” said Clarence Lochhead, executive director of the Vanier Institute, adding that even people who have divorced or separated will end up partner- ing up again.

“We just have to come to grips with the diver- sity that actually is within our experience. Then we need to find ways to address and take on the chal- lenges that face families, but do it in an inclusive way that makes sense for the reality and not some ideal notion of what a family is or ought to be.”



According to Statistics Canada, about 38 percent of all marriages taking place in 2004 will have ended in divorce by 2035. The total divorce rate was down slightly from its peak of about 41 percent in the mid 1980s, but slightly higher than the rate of about 37 percent recorded in the mid 1990s.

Newfoundland and Labrador had the lowest rate of divorce at 21.6 percent—while Quebec had the highest at 48.4 percent.

The highest proportion of married people was in Newfoundland and Labrador where 54.3 percent were married, while Quebec had the lowest proportion of married couples with only 37.5 percent of adults falling in this category.

For the first time in Canada, there were more couples without children than with children, and this was true throughout the country, with families with children representing a minority of families in all provinces and territories.

For married families with children, 18.6 percent of children live with only one parent. Common-law families are growing faster than any other type of family with one in 10 Canadians living in such relationships and 14.6 percent of children living with common-law parents.

The 2006 census was the first to report on same-sex marriages and 16.5 percent of same-sex couples now marry.

The recent economic downturn has proven to be a stressor for families. The higher cost of living means most families now require two income earners to achieve an average standard of living.

More families are also struggling with debt and poverty. Men are also working longer hours and spending less time with their families.

#### Top 8 Reasons People Marry

1. Feeling that marriage signifies commitment
2. Moral values
3. Belief that children should have married parents
4. It is the natural thing to do
5. Financial security
6. Religious beliefs
7. Pressure from family
8. Pressure from friends

#### Top 5 Reasons Couples Separate or Divorce

1. Different values and interests
2. Abuse—physical and emotional
3. Alcohol and drugs
4. Infidelity
5. Career-related conflict

Source: CBC News (2010).

### Divorces per Marriage

$$\frac{\text{Number of divorces in year XXXX}}{\text{Number of marriages in year XXXX}}$$

This calculation divides the number of divorces in a given year by the number of marriages in the same year. This method is quite popular because of its ease of calculation and isolation to one specific year. The problem with this method is that it overestimates the actual divorce rate because the denominator (number of marriages in the year) is a smaller set of people than are actually at risk of divorce. Everyone married prior to the year of calculation is not included in the set of people who are at risk of divorce.

### Crude Divorce Rate

$$\frac{\text{Number of divorces in year XXXX}}{\text{Mid-year population in year XXXX}}$$

The **crude divorce rate** is calculated by dividing the number of divorces in a given year by the mid-year population. This rate is also quite simple to measure but it is inherently conservative since the denominator (mid-year population) includes many people who are not at risk of a divorce, such as babies, children, and single and widowed individuals.

### Cohort Ever-Married Divorce Rate

$$\frac{\text{Number of first divorces among those born in year XXXX}}{\text{Number of ever-married persons born in year XXXX}}$$

The **cohort ever-married divorce rate** is a more fine-tuned approach that accurately gives a historical account of a group of individuals who are all born in a similar period. The limitations of this approach are that the data are less generalizable to the rest of the population and that the rate will change depending on the year in which it is calculated. The longer the time, the greater the likelihood that divorce may occur.

### Refined Divorce Rate

$$\frac{\text{Number of divorces in year XXXX}}{\text{Number of currently married in the population in year XXXX}}$$

The **refined divorce rate** is a very accurate measure but it is difficult to calculate since, apart from census years, the data are hard to gather.

## **AFTER THE DIVORCE**

### **Effects of Divorce**

The dissolution of marriage has been a popular topic of research in the study of the family across the life course. Its importance is found not in the actual divorce decree itself but in the family interaction leading up to and following it. As a transitional family event, it does not end the family but leads to a reconstruction of it. More complex versions of the family may be created from the divorce as the result of remarriage or cohabitation. Step-parents and step-siblings create new opportunities for adjustment that may be handled successfully or not. Research on divorce continues to try to understand its effects on both children and adults. Although more refined research methods are helping to expose the heterogeneity of pathways into and out of divorce and the divergent outcomes of the participants, the general picture is not good. A recent review of divorce research from the previous decade showed that both children and adults who go through divorce are negatively affected (Amato, 2010). Children of divorced parents, when compared to children of continuously married parents, scored lower on social, emotional, health, and academic outcome measures (Frisco, Muller, & Frank, 2007). The negative effect of divorce on children remains into adulthood. Adult children of divorced parents are more likely to attain less education, to have lower psychological well-being, to report having troubles in their own marriages, and to see these marriages end in divorce (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Barrett & Turner, 2005; Teachman, 2002; Wolfinger, Kowaleski-Jones, & Smith, 2003). Amato (2010) concluded by stating that these more recent findings replicate earlier research and help to establish the relative consistency of the links between the negative impact of divorce on adults and children.

Research during the last decade has reinforced previous work by showing that divorced individuals, compared with married individuals, exhibit more symptoms of depression and anxiety, more health problems, more substance use, and a greater risk of overall mortality (Bierman, Fazio, & Milkie, 2006; Hughes & Waite, 2009; Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger, & Elder, 2006; Waite, Luo, & Lewin, 2009; Williams & Umberson, 2004; Zhang & Hayward, 2006). The strength of associations between divorce and measures of mental health appear to be comparable for women and men (Amato, 2010, p. 658).

Research continues to reinforce the information already known about the detrimental effects of divorce on those involved. New cohorts of young adults will form ideas and experience intimate relationships in a divorce culture (Whitehead, 1997). New and important areas of study in the negative implications of divorce will focus on the diversity of experiences people have with divorce. Past research focusing on group average effects will be replaced by studies that reveal the extensive differences that families experience as they go through the divorce process

(Demo & Fine, 2009). More emphasis will also be placed on the process itself, recognizing that the consequences of divorce on both children and adults are rooted in the quality of the family relationship prior to the marriage ending.

## **Protective and Mitigating Factors**

An examination of the effects of divorce on children across the life course reveals a consistent negative impact. It is important to understand that the event of divorce itself is not the direct cause of these negative outcomes. Causes are more accurately understood to be found in the stressful events leading up to and following the divorce. Many of the correlates to negative outcomes, such as diminishing family income, poor parental interaction, separation from non-resident parent, and continuing conflict between co-parents, point to the potential protective factors that can mitigate the harmful effects of divorce. Recent research has reinforced the belief that children show little negative affect and may even show improvement if divorce ends a high-conflict marriage (Booth & Amato, 2001; Strohschein, 2005). Stability for children, regardless of their parents' marital status, has been shown to mitigate negative child outcomes as well. Divorce is not a single event or a single transition. It often involves a series of changes and transitions as the family members must adjust and adapt to new residential, custody, economic, and relational environments. Cavanagh and Huston (2006) have shown that the number of family structure transitions is linked to child behaviour problems throughout the life course.

## **Children**

The impact of divorce on children and adolescents has been well documented. The topic, like divorce itself, is complicated and even controversial at times. In *Handbook of Stressful Transitions Across the Lifespan*, edited by Thomas Miller (2010), Barczak, Miller, Veltkamp, Barczak, Hall, & Kraus (2010) provide a summary of the most current research and clinical data. They conclude that the quality of the pre- and post-divorce parental relationship is the most important factor in mediating the long-term effects of divorce on children and adolescents.

While some may argue or assume that children and adolescents are sufficiently resilient to simply “get over” the negative effects of divorce throughout their lives, the most recent clinical research findings refute this claim. (Barczak et al., 2010, p. 210)

Barczak et al. (2010) felt that maternal parenting style is the major factor in mediating the experience of divorce concerning younger children's perceived attachment style. This finding is important in terms of understanding the implications of secure attachment versus anxious-ambivalent or avoidant attachment. The researchers believe that current parent-child visitation approaches and guidelines are outdated. The best interests of the child are not being addressed because of the unnecessarily rigid and restrictive approach. Early parental divorce or separation is found to be more negatively related to children's external and internal behavioural expression when compared to parents who divorced later. However, academic grades are seen to suffer more with later divorces. Family breakup is significantly associated with poor adjustment among adolescents, manifested in self-harm behaviours such as drug use and alcohol



consumption. Parental divorce is associated with increased adolescent anxiety and depression as well as negative effects on subjective well-being and self-esteem. The divorce experience was found to affect adolescent males, but not females, in the form of school problems.

An independent effect of divorce and parental distress was also identified. Adolescents of divorced parents report double the levels of distress when compared to adolescents of intact and non-distressed parents. Females seem to demonstrate anxiety and depressive symptoms more openly over the long term than do males. Females of divorced families report more psychological problems and indicate greater interpersonal relationship challenges than their unexposed peers. These findings do not seem to apply to males in similar circumstances. Barczak et al. (2010, p. 213) highlight five summary clinical findings about children and adolescents of divorce.

- (1) Depressive symptoms appear to change in a curvilinear pattern throughout the adolescent years (especially among the females) (depressive symptoms appeared to increase during early- to mid-adolescence and then subsequently declined as subjects approached late adolescence and young adulthood);
- (2) Females experience an ongoing greater number of depressive symptoms in adolescence and early adulthood when compared to their male counterparts;
- (3) Adolescents who experienced parental divorce by age 15 tend to display a sharper increase in the number of depressive symptoms experienced when compared to their peers from non-divorced families;
- (4) Stressful life events experienced shortly after parental marital disruption and divorce appear to mediate the actual effects of parental divorce on the adolescents' depressive symptoms; and finally,
- (5) Time-variable stressful events throughout the adolescents' lives (especially those related to either personal losses or relationship losses) are significantly associated with the trajectories of depressive symptoms in the typical adolescent member of a divorced family.

The conclusion of this report is that there is a price to be paid for marital conflict between parents: the disruption of their children's overall physical and mental health.

### **Box 9.1**

#### **The Impact of Divorce on Children**

▶ The impact of divorce on children: Tamara D. Afifi at TEDxUCSB

## Adult Children

Ahrons (2007) assessed the findings of three longitudinal studies of the impact of divorce on family members' well-being. The Binuclear Family Study followed the lives of divorced families for 20 years. Ninety-eight pairs of former spouses were interviewed in 1979. All had at least one minor child and were randomly selected from the public divorce records in Dane County, Wisconsin. Interviews with both parents were conducted at one, three, and five years after the legal divorce. In the follow-up interviews, family transitions such as remarriage and cohabitation were identified and recorded. Five typologies were created after examining the life courses and responses of the participants. These five types formed a continuum, with very friendly ex-spouses (perfect pals) at one extreme and couples who had nothing to do with each other (dissolved duos) at the other extreme. The three other groups (co-operative colleagues, angry associates, fiery foes) formed the middle of the continuum. Ahrons (2007, p. 58) states: "No single factor contributed more to children's self-reports of well-being after divorce than the continuing relationship between their parents. Children whose parents were cooperative reported better relationships with their parents, grandparents, stepparents, and siblings." Ahrons (2007) concludes by saying that most divorcing parents have a short-term, narrow view of the implications of their continuing relationship. Box 9.2 highlights the fact that adult children also face challenges because of their parents divorcing later in their life course.

### Box 9.2

#### Adults Dealing with their Parents' Divorce

Sonja and Carson met for a coffee to talk about the announcement that their parents were going to divorce. They grew up in a household that was not always peaceful, but their parents seemed to make it through the challenges and difficulties that life presented. Now grown, with families of their own, it seemed difficult for Sonja and Carson to grasp that their parents were getting a divorce. They had been married almost 40 years and neither parent seemed to have any other romantic interests on the side. What was going on?

Sonja was concerned about her mother's relationship network. Her parents had decided to sell the family home and divide the assets. The intergenerational costs of older adult divorces have been researched and the picture for some adult children and their parents is not pretty (Hans, Ganong, & Coleman, 2009). Mom was not going to be able to afford a home in the neighbourhood where all her friends were. What about their parents' shared acquaintances? How would they deal with that?

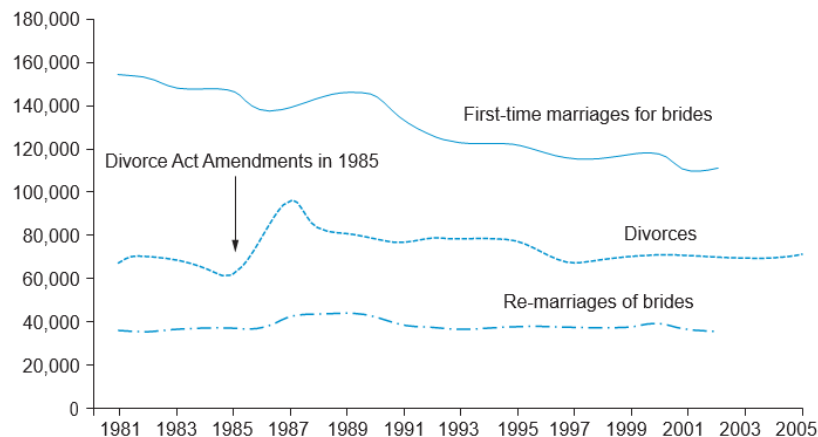
Carson was concerned about what to tell his own children. How would they deal with Christmas, birthdays, and other family celebrations? It was all very disconcerting.

## Remarriage and Repartnering

In Canada, nearly 40 percent of marriages will end in divorce; in the United States, that number is closer to 50 percent. Because a significant portion of the population divorces, the number of people who repartner and remarry is also large (Figure 9.3). It is only the growing segment of post-marriage cohabitators that has kept the number of higher-order marriages in a narrow band of 35 000 to 37 000 per year over the past generation. In Canada, about 10 percent of those who have ever married do so again, with less than 1 percent marrying more than twice. The

Vanier Institute of the Family (2010) states that the majority of Canadians will repartner after a divorce or separation. As time passes, a greater percentage of the divorced population re-enters some form of intimate partnership. After three years, approximately one quarter (26 percent) of divorced women and more than one third (37 percent) of divorced men re-enter conjugal unions. After five years, those numbers climb to 36 percent and 51 percent, respectively. Twenty years later, 69 percent of women and 82 percent of men have entered into committed relationships at least a second time (Table 9.2).

Andrew Cherlin has followed the marriage and divorce trends in the United States for more than 30 years. To describe American culture, he used the phrase *marriage, divorce, remarriage* in 1981. Cherlin (2009) points out that, throughout its history, the United States has had simultaneously higher marriage rates and higher divorce rates than much of the rest of the world: “They partner, unpartner, and repartner faster than do people in any other Western nation . . . ” (pp. 14–15). In other words, having several partnerships is more common in the United States not only because people *exit* intimate partnerships faster but also because they *enter* them faster and after a breakup *re-enter* them faster. Data from the previous decade in the United States show that 69 percent of women and 78 percent of men remarry after divorce. With age comes a decrease in remarriage rates, presumably because of the elderly seeing more risks than benefits to remarriage (King & Scott, 2005).



**Figure 9.3** Number of Marriages and Divorces, Canada, 1981 to 2005

Source: Vanier Institute of the Family (2010, p. 47).

The frequency of divorce and remarriage has led to research about the quality of and dynamics within remarried relationships. Sweeney (2010) provides a summary of recent remarriage literature. It shows that remarried couples are less likely to communicate in both a positive and a negative fashion than first-married couples. Remarried couples are also more likely to withdraw in conflict (Halford, Nicholson, & Sanders, 2007). They also tend to be more egalitarian and more autonomous in decision making about finances and child rearing (Allen, Baucom, Burnett, Epstein, & Rankin-Esquer, 2001).

**Table 9.2** Cumulative Percentage of Repartnering after Marital Disruption

Year	Women			Men		
	Remarried	Cohabited	Total	Remarried	Cohabited	Total
1	0.7%	9.5%	10.2%	0.6%	14.9%	15.5%
2	2.7	17.3	20.0	2.7	23.5	26.3
3	4.2	22.1	26.3	6.3	31.0	37.3
4	5.6	25.9	31.4	10.1	35.8	45.9
5	7.2	28.8	36.0	11.8	38.6	50.5
10	13.5	39.1	52.5	20.4	49.2	69.6
15	16.4	45.4	61.8	23.4	54.3	77.7
20	19.2	49.4	68.6	26.6	55.5	82.1

Source: Vanier Institute of the Family (2010, p. 47).

Second and higher-order marriages tend to be less stable. Bumpass and Raley (2007) report that 40 percent of second marriages will end in divorce or separation by the end of the marriage's first decade, compared to 32 percent for first marriages. Sweeney (2010) reports that, consistent with the increased complexity of remarriages and reconstituted family structures, second marriages report greater marital instability yet no noticeable difference in marriage quality. One explanation put forth is selection effect. The least stable relationships will dissolve quickly and, as a result, not factor into cross-sectional results (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007).

## Stepfamilies and Blended Families

The stepfamily has been termed the *incomplete institution* (Cherlin, 1978). It struggles with unscripted norms and pathways throughout the life course. How affectionate can a stepfather be with his stepdaughter before he is viewed as crossing a line? How much authority does a stepmother have over her stepson's messy room before an abusive verbal exchange takes place? What are the rules for grandparents of stepchildren when it comes to birthdays and other important holidays? These scenarios represent a few of the emotionally charged areas in addition to everyday mundane issues that stepfamilies must try to resolve.

### Image 9.2

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/hand-of-woman-in-white-lace-dress-holding-hand-of-woman-in-black-coat-6437099/>



In Canada, 46 percent of all **stepfamilies** are blended families. Blended families are distinct from stepfamilies in that they may include children from both previously married parents or a child from one of the parents plus the addition of a biological or adopted child to the union. It is well documented that higher-order marriages are more likely to break than first marriages, and each subsequent remarriage has an even bleaker outlook for success. Stepfamilies into which a child is born have better odds of remaining together, as do stepmother families, the latter being indistinguishable from intact families (Vanier Institute of the Family, 2010).

Stepfamilies are more likely to be found in the United States than in any other industrialized country (Sweeney, 2010). Data from the 2004 Survey of Income and Program Participation show that 5.7 million children lived with one biological parent and either a stepparent or an adoptive parent (Kreider, 2008). This represents 10.5 percent of all children living with two parents and is statistically unchanged from 11 percent in 2001 and 10 percent in 1996.

The effects on children residing in blended families or stepfamilies are consistent with expectations. Children raised in stepfamilies do not fare as well as those living with two biological parents in numerous areas of social development. Sweeney (2010) cautions that although recent scholarship supports lower outcomes in the child's educational, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural measures (Artis, 2007; Barrett & Turner, 2005; Brown, 2004, 2006; Deleire & Kalil, 2002; Hofferth, 2006; Manning & Lamb, 2003), the differences tend to be modest. It is also important to note that children raised in stepfamilies have gone through other significant family transitions. Some have lost a parent to death, but the majority has gone through the divorce process along with their biological parents. This alone exposes them to the



detrimental effects already attributed to divorce. More sophisticated studies are needed to distinguish the effects of the divorce process from the effects of the stepfamily living environment.

According to Sweeney (2010), topics in need of further research in the area of stepfamilies are cohabiting family arrangements, the roles and influences of step-grandparents and step-grandchildren, and same-sex parents. Children being raised in a stepfamily environment in which the adults are not married is an increasing phenomenon. How this may affect marital quality and stability and resultant child outcomes compared to stepfamilies in which the adults are married will be a fruitful area of research. The increase in reconstituted families also means that there are more step-grandparents. The roles they play and how they may mitigate negative effects through the family transitions are areas that need further attention (Ruiz & Silverstein, 2007). Lastly, there is the area of same-sex parents. Patterson (2006) asks the question: "Does parental sexual orientation have an important impact on child or adolescent development?" She concludes that, based on recent research, more important than the sexual orientation of the parents is the quality of the family relationships.

## CONCLUSION

Divorce and remarriage are aspects of family life that many people experience. This chapter focused on these topics as processes and not simply as point-in-time events. As we continue to study the family across the life course, we are reminded that pathways are diverse and more frequently less linear. Divorce signals the end of a marriage, a stage that some believe should last a lifetime, but it also signals a new beginning that may involve remaining single, cohabiting, remarrying, and possibly even getting divorced again. Divorce and remarriage highlight the family transitions that influence and affect all of those involved. Divorce may or may not involve children, but when it does, the outcomes require our attention. The lasting negative impact of the average divorce has been well established. Whether anyone ever experiences an *average divorce* is quite another issue.

## SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Social customs regarding divorce have been well documented in Western culture for more than 3000 years.
- Both secular and religious influences have worked to define the place and role of divorce in society.
- According to Statistics Canada, only five official divorces took place prior to Confederation in 1867.
- A variety of social changes over the past 100 years has seen divorce move from a rare to a normative event.
  - Secularization and modernization
  - Increased female paid employment, causing a decrease in financial dependency



- Legislative changes, particularly the Divorce Acts of 1968 and 1985 in Canada
- Greater individualization
- Lower fertility rates
- Divorce is not just an event but also a diverse and varied process. Demo and Fine (2009) describe divorce as “a complex and multidimensional process that unfolds over many years.”
- In the search for causes of divorce, multiple ecological-level variables have been identified as contributors.
  - Individual and relationship dynamic issues at the micro level
  - Age at marriage, the number of marriages, a history of cohabitation, parental divorce, and religious and socio-economic factors at the meso level
  - Sex ratios, geopolitical events, and legislation at the macro level
- Divorce rates are calculated in a variety of ways that produce different reported levels.
  - Divorces per marriage

$$\frac{\text{Number of divorces in year XXXX}}{\text{Number of marriages in year XXXX}}$$

- Crude divorce rate

$$\frac{\text{Number of divorces in year XXXX}}{\text{Mid-year population in year XXXX}}$$

- Cohort ever-married divorce rate

$$\frac{\text{Number of first divorces among those born in year XXXX}}{\text{Number of ever-married persons born in year XXXX}}$$

- Refined divorce rate

$$\frac{\text{Number of divorces in year XXXX}}{\text{Number of currently married in the population in year XXXX}}$$

- A recent review of divorce research from the previous decade showed that both children and adults who go through divorce are negatively affected (Amato, 2010).
- A key mitigating factor in reducing the potential negative effects of divorce for children is to reduce the number of transitions experienced and maintain a level of stability. Other mitigating factors include maternal parenting style and parental conflict.

- With high divorce rates, remarriage has also been on the rise. The Vanier Institute of the Family (2010) states that a majority of divorced Canadians will go on to remarry.
- Blended families are the result of bringing children into a new family from a previously constituted one. These diverse family forms provide additional stress and a need for healthy adjustment if the new unions are to survive.

## Critical Thinking Questions

1. In just 100 years, divorce has gone from being a socially stigmatized event to one that most people will experience across their life course. What mechanisms have been at work to bring about such a change?
2. The process of divorce is complex and diverse. Given the variables and explanations listed in the chapter, do you think we are any closer to understanding the “cause” of divorce?
3. What do you think of the term *expressive divorce* and how it reinforces the idea of marriage becoming more individualized? Is this a good thing?

## Glossary

**blended families** A term used to describe families in which children from one or both of the partners are brought into the union.

**cohort ever-married divorce rate** The rate calculated by dividing the number of first divorces among those born in a given year by the number of ever-married persons born in that same year. This is a more accurate rate but lacks generalizability to the general population and fluctuates depending on the date on which the rate is calculated.

**crude divorce rate** The rate calculated by dividing the number of divorces in a given year by the mid-year population. Although easier to measure than some of the other rates, it is inherently conservative since the denominator (mid-year population in a given year) includes many people who are not at risk of a divorce, such as babies, children, single individuals, and widowed individuals.

**Divorce Act** The Divorce Acts of 1968 and 1985 changed the conditions under which a divorce would be permitted. Permanent marriage breakdown as grounds for divorce was maintained and could be claimed because of adultery, cruelty, or desertion. The main change was a move away from fault-based grounds for divorce to include no-fault grounds. The waiting period for no-fault divorce was reduced to one year in the Divorce Act of 1985.

**DVFM** The divorce variation and fluidity model was developed by David Demo and Mark Fine (2009). The model highlights the potential diversity of pathways into and out of divorce. **ecological correlates of divorce**

Micro level: individual and relationship dynamic issues

Meso level: age at marriage, the number of marriages, a history of cohabitation, parental divorce, and religious and socio-economic factors

Macro level: sex ratios, geopolitical events, and legislation

**higher-order marriages** Subsequent marriages beyond an individual's first marriage.

**no-fault divorce** A divorce in which one party's actions are not solely responsible for the divorce. Irreconcilable differences are often the reason stated for a no-fault divorce.

**refined divorce rate** The rate calculated by dividing the number of divorces in a given year by the number of people currently married in the population in that same year. This is a very accurate measure of the divorce rate but is difficult to calculate since, other than in census years, the data are hard to gather.

**stepfamilies** See *blended families*.

## Connections

<http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/CIR/963-e.htm>  
[www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/divorce/001070-130-e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/divorce/001070-130-e.html)

[www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/society-at-a-glance-2001\\_soc\\_glance-2001-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/society-at-a-glance-2001_soc_glance-2001-en)  
[www.vifamily.ca/node/371](http://www.vifamily.ca/node/371)

[www.nytimes.com/2005/04/19/health/19divo.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/19/health/19divo.html)  
[www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/p70-114.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/p70-114.pdf)