

The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children

I use a divorce-stress-adjustment perspective to summarize and organize the empirical literature on the consequences of divorce for adults and children. My review draws on research in the 1990s to answer five questions: How do individuals from married and divorced families differ in well-being? Are these differences due to divorce or to selection? Do these differences reflect a temporary crisis to which most people gradually adapt or stable life strains that persist more or less indefinitely? What factors mediate the effects of divorce on individual adjustment? And finally, what are the moderators (protective factors) that account for individual variability in adjustment to divorce? In general, the accumulated research suggests that marital dissolution has the potential to create considerable turmoil in people's lives. But people vary greatly in their reactions. Divorce benefits some individuals, leads others to experience temporary decrements in well-being, and forces others on a downward trajectory from which they might never recover fully. Understanding the contingencies under which divorce leads to these diverse outcomes is a priority for future research.

Of all the changes in family life during the 20th century, perhaps the most dramatic—and the most far-reaching in its implications—was the increase in the rate of divorce. Near the middle of the 19th century, only about 5% of first marriages ended

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Key Words: children of divorce, divorce, family-level stressors.

in divorce (Preston & McDonald, 1979). In contrast, demographers estimate that about half of first marriages initiated in recent years will be voluntarily dissolved (Cherlin, 1992). Observers have attributed this change to a number of factors, including the increasing economic independence of women, declining earnings among men without college degrees, rising expectations for personal fulfillment from marriage, and greater social acceptance of divorce (Cherlin, 1992; Furstenberg, 1994; White, 1991).

Remarriage following divorce is common, and nearly one-half of current marriages involve a second (or higher order) marriage for one or both partners (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998, Table 157). Second (and higher order) marriages, however, have an even greater likelihood of dissolution than first marriages. As a result, about one out of every six adults endures two or more divorces (Cherlin, 1992). The shift from a dominant pattern of lifelong marriage to one of serial marriage punctuated by periods of being single represents a fundamental change in how adults meet their needs for intimacy over the life course.

The increase in marital dissolution has had major implications for the settings in which children are nurtured and socialized. Slightly more than half of all divorces involve children under the age of 18. More than one million children experience parental divorce every year (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998, Table 160), and about 40% of all children will experience parental divorce before reaching adulthood (Bumpass, 1990). The high rate of marital disruption, combined with an increase in births outside marriage, means that about half of all children will reside at least temporarily in single-parent households, usually with their

mothers (Castro & Bumpass, 1989). Because of remarriage, about one in seven children currently lives with a parent and a stepparent (Cherlin, 1992), and about one in three children will live with a stepparent for some time prior to reaching age 19 (Glick, 1989). These patterns vary by race. For example, compared with Whites, African Americans are more likely to bear children outside of marriage, more likely to divorce, and more likely to cohabit rather than remarry following divorce (Cherlin, 1992). Nevertheless, regardless of race, the decline in two-parent households, the increase in nonresident parents, and the introduction of parents' new partners (whether married or cohabiting) into the home represent major transformations in the lives of America's children.

The increase in divorce—and the implications of this increase for the lives of adults and children—has generated a high level of interest among social scientists. Indeed, a search of the SOCIOFILE database revealed 9,282 articles published (and dissertations completed) between 1990 and 1999 in which “divorce” appeared in the title or abstract. The authors of these works represent a variety of disciplines, including developmental psychology, clinical psychology, family therapy, sociology, demography, communication studies, family science, history, economics, social work, public health, social policy, and law. The extent and diversity of divorce scholarship pose a sobering challenge to any reviewer attempting to synthesize current knowledge on this topic.

Reviewing the literature on divorce also is challenging because of the ongoing, contentious debate over the consequences of marital disruption for adults and children. Some scholars see the two-parent family as the fundamental institution of society—the setting in which adults achieve a sense of meaning, stability, and security and the setting in which children develop into healthy, competent, and productive citizens. According to this view, the spread of single-parent families contributes to many social problems, including poverty, crime, substance abuse, declining academic standards, and the erosion of neighborhoods and communities (Blankenhorn, 1995; Glenn, 1996; Popenoe, 1996). In contrast, other scholars argue that adults find fulfillment, and children develop successfully, in a variety of family structures. According to this view, divorce, although temporarily stressful, represents a second chance for happiness for adults and an escape from a dysfunctional home environment for children. Poverty, abuse, neglect, poorly funded schools,

and a lack of government services represent more serious threats to the well-being of adults and children than does marital instability (Coontz, 1992; Demo, 1992; Skolnick, 1991; Stacey, 1996).

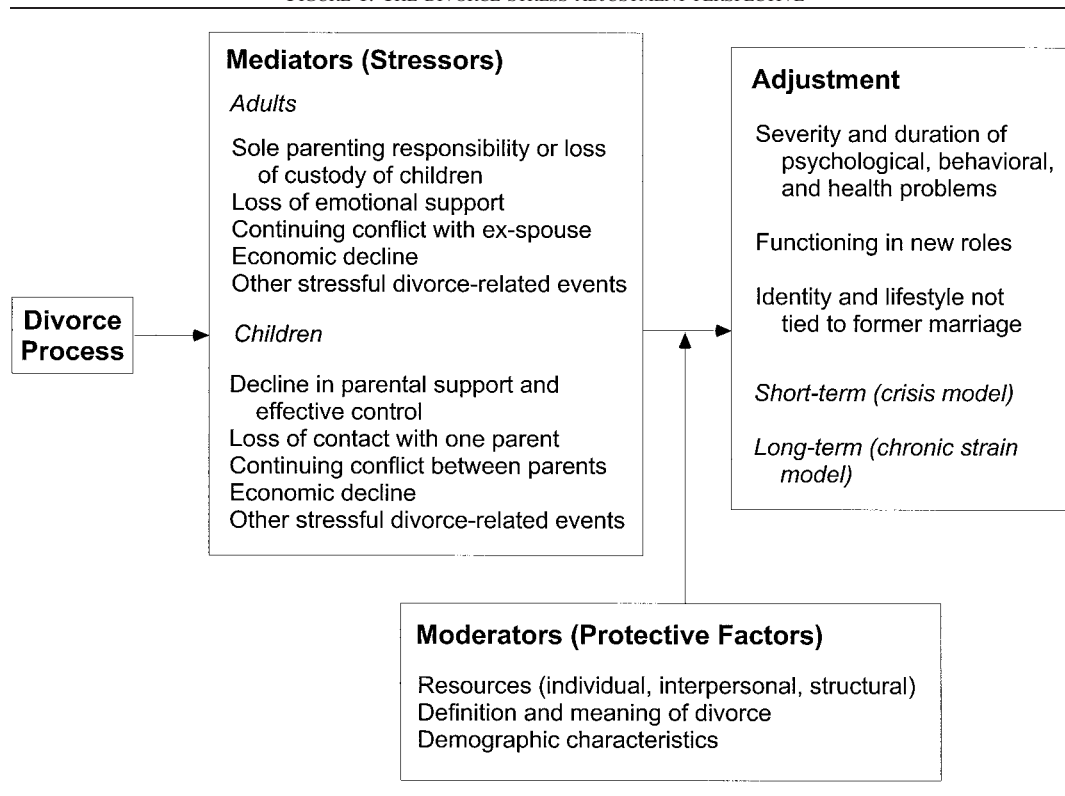
The polemical nature of divorce scholarship makes it difficult to write on this topic without being identified as either a conservative or a liberal voice. Nevertheless, although complete objectivity is impossible, my goal in this article is to assess the state of knowledge on divorce in a balanced and relatively nonpartisan manner. Indeed, a review of current literature might help to inform the debate between those who see divorce as a major social problem and those who see divorce as a necessary and beneficial alternative to mandatory lifelong marriage.

Because it is impossible to cover the full breadth of divorce scholarship in the 1990s in a single article, my review focuses on the consequences of divorce for the well-being of adults and children. I chose this focus because it encompasses, either directly or indirectly, much of the research in this field and because it is central to debates about the rise in marital instability. I omit (or touch only briefly on) many other aspects of divorce, such as legal issues related to custody determination and child support. I also exclude material on the dissolution of cohabiting relationships (including those with children) because we know relatively little about this topic. Readers should note that my review draws on qualitative as well as quantitative research, although I do not usually identify individual studies on the basis of their methodology.

THEORY

Researchers in the 1990s have employed a variety of theories and conceptual perspectives to explain how divorce affects adults and children; these include feminist theory (Carbonne, 1994), attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1992), attribution theory (Grych & Fincham, 1992), symbolic interactionism (Orbuch, 1992), systems theory (Emery, 1994), the social capital perspective (Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996), and the life-course perspective (Amato & Booth, 1997). The largest number of studies, however, begin with the assumption that marital disruption is a stressful life transition to which adults and children must adjust. Many researchers link their work to established stress perspectives, such as family stress and coping theory (Hill, 1949; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Plunkett, Sanchez, Henry, & Rob-

FIGURE 1. THE DIVORCE-STRESS-ADJUSTMENT PERSPECTIVE



inson, 1997), general stress theory (Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981; Thoits, 1995), and the risk and resiliency perspective (Cowan, Cowan, & Schulz, 1996; Hetherington, 1999; Rutter, 1987). Because stress frameworks dominate the literature on divorce, I give them particular attention here. And because these frameworks have much in common, I combine their various elements into a general divorce-stress-adjustment perspective. This conceptual model integrates the assumptions found in many discrete pieces of research, helps to summarize and organize specific research findings from the 1990s, and provides a guide for future research on divorce. This perspective also is useful because it can be applied to children as well as adults.

The Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective

The divorce-stress-adjustment perspective, outlined in the Figure, views marital dissolution not as a discrete event but as a process that begins while the couple lives together and ends long after the legal divorce is concluded. The uncoupling

process typically sets into motion numerous events that people experience as stressful. These stressors, in turn, increase the risk of negative emotional, behavioral, and health outcomes for adults and children. The severity and duration of these negative outcomes varies from person to person, depending on the presence of a variety of moderating or protective factors. Successful adjustment occurs to the extent that individuals experience few divorce-related symptoms, are able to function well in new family, work, or school roles, and have developed an identity and lifestyle that is no longer tied to the former marriage (Kitson, 1992; Kitson & Morgan, 1990).

Thinking of divorce as a process leads to several useful insights. Uncoupling begins with feelings of estrangement—feelings that typically emerge after a period of growing dissatisfaction with the relationship (Kayser, 1993). Because virtually all people enter marriage with the expectation (or the hope) that it will be a mutually supportive, rewarding, lifelong relationship, estrangement from one's spouse is typically a painful experience. Estranged spouses might

spend considerable time attempting to renegotiate the relationship, seeking advice from others, or simply avoiding (denying) the problem. Consequently, the first negative effects of divorce on adults can occur years prior to final separation and legal dissolution. In addition, overt conflict between parents during this period might lead to behavior problems in children—problems that can be viewed as early effects of marital dissolution (Davies & Cummings, 1994).

Furthermore, it is often the case that one spouse wants the marriage to end more than the other spouse does (Emery, 1994). When this happens, the spouse who is considering divorce might mourn the end of the marriage even though it is still legally and physically intact. Indeed, when the marriage is legally terminated, the initiating spouse often experiences a great deal of relief. The spouse who wanted the marriage to continue, in contrast, might not mourn the end of the marriage until the legal divorce is completed. Spouses, therefore, often experience the greatest degree of emotional distress at different points in the divorce process (Emery, 1994). The same principle applies to children. For example, an older child might experience stress prior to the divorce, during the period when the parents' marriage is unraveling. For this older child, the physical separation of constantly warring parents might come as a relief. For a younger child in the same family, however, the departure of one parent from the household might be a bewildering event that generates considerable anxiety. In other words, members of divorcing families can experience different trajectories of stress and adjustment.

Legal divorce does not necessarily bring an end to the stress associated with an unhappy marriage, even for the partner who initiates the divorce. Instead, during the time in which the marriage is ending, and in the immediate postdivorce period, new events and processes (mediators) emerge that have the potential to affect people's emotions, behavior, and health. For adults, mediators include: having sole responsibility for the care of children (among custodial parents); losing contact with one's children (among noncustodial parents); continuing conflict with the ex-spouse over child support, visitation, or custody; loss of emotional support due to declining contact with in-laws, married friends, and neighbors; downward economic mobility (especially for mothers); and other disruptive life events, such as moving from the family home into less expensive accommodation in a poorer neighborhood. With regard

to children, divorce can result in less effective parenting from the custodial parent, a decrease in involvement with the noncustodial parent, exposure to continuing interparental discord, a decline in economic resources, and other disruptive life events such as moving, changing schools, and additional parental marriages and divorces. These mediating factors represent the mechanisms through which divorce affects people's functioning and well-being. (For discussions of mediators, see Amato, 1993; Kitson, 1992; McLanahan & Booth, 1989; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Rodgers & Pryor, 1998; Simons and Associates, 1996.)

It is important to recognize that mediators can be viewed as outcomes in their own right. For example, a particular study might focus on the impact of divorce on single mothers' standard of living. But a declining standard of living, in turn, can have consequences for single mothers' sense of financial security, children's nutrition, and older adolescents' opportunities to attend college. Mediators, therefore, represent short- or medium-term outcomes of divorce that can have additional long-term consequences for adults' and children's well-being.

Moderators introduce variability into the manner in which divorce and mediating factors are linked to personal outcomes. Protective factors act like shock absorbers and weaken the links between divorce-related events and people's experience of stress, and hence the extent to which divorce is followed by negative emotional, behavioral, or health outcomes (Rutter, 1987). Resources that lessen the negative impact of divorce might reside within the individual (self-efficacy, coping skills, social skills), in interpersonal relationships (social support), and in structural roles and settings (employment, community services, supportive government policies). For example, although divorce often brings about an initial decline in emotional support, people vary in their ability to reconstruct social networks following divorce, including how quickly they are able to form new, supportive intimate relationships. Another moderator refers to the manner in which people regard divorce, with some individuals viewing it as a personal tragedy (typically the partner who is left behind) and others viewing it as an opportunity for personal growth or as an escape from an aversive or dysfunctional marriage (typically the partner who initiates the divorce). Finally, a number of demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, and culture

can moderate the effects of divorce. As a result of the particular configuration of moderating factors, some individuals are resilient and others are vulnerable following divorce, resulting in a diversity of outcomes. (For discussions of these and other moderators see Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978; Booth & Amato, 1991; Pearlin et al., 1981; Wheaton, 1990).

Imbedded within the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective are two contrary models. The first, a crisis model, assumes that divorce represents a disturbance to which most individuals adjust over time. According to the crisis model, factors such as personal resources and definitions determine the speed with which adjustment occurs. But given a sufficient amount of time, the great majority of individuals return to their predivorce level of functioning. The second model, a chronic strain model, assumes that being divorced involves persistent strains, such as economic hardship, loneliness, and, for single parents, sole parenting responsibilities. Because these problems do not go away, declines in well-being associated with divorce might continue more or less indefinitely. According to the chronic strain model, factors such as personal resources and definitions determine the level of distress that individuals experience, but divorced individuals do not, in general, return to the same level of well-being they experienced early in the marriage.

Some researchers have argued that stress perspectives tend to focus exclusively on the negative aspects of divorce and ignore positive outcomes for adults (Ahrons, 1994; Wheaton, 1990) and children (Barber & Eccles, 1992; Gately & Schwebel, 1991). For example, women (as well as their children) might feel that they are substantially better off when a relationship with an abusive husband ends. The notion that divorce can be beneficial, however, is not inconsistent with the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective. Many stress theorists, such as Thoits (1995) and Wheaton (1990), have argued that potentially stressful events, such as divorce, can have positive long-term consequences when people resolve their problems successfully. Indeed, the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective explicitly focuses on the contingencies that lead to negative, positive, or mixed outcomes for individuals. Nevertheless, the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective assumes that for most people, the ending of a marriage is a stressful experience, even if much of the stress occurs prior to the legal divorce, is temporary, or is accompanied by some positive outcomes.

The Selection Perspective

The main alternative to the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective is based on the notion that poorly adjusted people are selected out of marriage. According to the selection perspective, certain individuals possess problematic personal and social characteristics that not only predispose them to divorce, but also lead them to score low on indicators of well-being after the marriage ends. Consequently, the adjustment problems frequently observed among the divorced might be present early in the marriage or might predate the marriage. Some evidence is consistent with the assumption that people bring traits to marriage that increase the risk of divorce, including antisocial personality traits, depression, and a general history of psychological problems (Capaldi & Patterson, 1991; Davies, Avison, & McAlpine, 1997; Hope, Power, & Rodgers, 1999; Kitson, 1992; Kurdek, 1990). Whereas the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective assumes that marital disruption causes adjustment problems, the selection perspective assumes that adjustment problems cause marital disruption. Selection also can occur if the best adjusted divorced individuals are especially likely to remarry. If this is true, then the mean level of functioning in the divorced (and not remarried) population should decline over time.

The selection perspective, as applied to children, assumes that at least some child problems observed following divorce are present during the marriage—an assumption consistent with several longitudinal studies (Amato & Booth, 1996; Cherlin et al., 1991; Elliot & Richards, 1991; Hetherington, 1999). Many researchers assume that these problems are caused by parents' marital discord or by inept parenting on the part of distressed or antisocial parents. Of course, to the extent that dysfunctional family patterns are reflections of the unraveling of the marriage, then these early effects on children can be viewed as part of the divorce process. But the selection perspective goes one step further and argues that inherent characteristics of parents, such as antisocial personality traits, are direct causes of dysfunctional family patterns and divorce, as well as child problems. The discovery that concordance (similarity between siblings) for divorce among adults is higher among monozygotic than dizygotic twins suggests that genes might predispose some people to behaviors that increase the risk of divorce (McGue & Lykken, 1992; Jockin, McGue, & Lykken, 1996). Consequently, some children from di-

vorced families might exhibit problems because they have inherited genetic traits from their (presumably troubled) parents. According to this perspective, to the extent that parents' personalities and genetically transmitted predispositions are causes of divorce as well as child problems, the apparent effects of divorce on children are spurious.

RESEARCH ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF DIVORCE FOR ADULTS

Comparisons of Divorced and Married Individuals

A large number of studies published during the 1990s found that divorced individuals, compared with married individuals, experience lower levels of psychological well-being, including lower happiness, more symptoms of psychological distress, and poorer self-concepts (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Davies et al., 1997; Demo & Acock, 1996b; Kitson, 1992; Lorenz et al., 1997; Marks, 1996; Mastekaasa, 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Robins & Regier, 1991; Ross, 1995; Shapiro, 1996; Simon, 1998; Simon & Marcussen, 1999; Simons & Associates, 1996; Umberson & Williams, 1993; White, 1992). Compared with married individuals, divorced individuals also have more health problems and a greater risk of mortality (Aldous & Ganey, 1999; Hemstrom, 1996; Joung et al., 1997; Lillard & Waite, 1995; Murphy, Glaser, & Grundy, 1997; Rogers, 1996; Zick & Smith, 1991). Although the direction of these differences is consistent, their magnitude varies across studies. For example, Hope, Power, and Rodgers (1999) compared the depression scores of married and divorced mothers in a large, national British sample and found an effect size of .56, which translates into a 188% increase in the odds of depression. Other studies suggest smaller differences, however. Because no one has carried out a systematic evaluation of effect sizes in this literature, it is difficult to make claims about the magnitude of group differences on average.

Research also shows that divorced and married individuals differ on a number of variables that can be viewed not only as outcomes in their own right, but also as mediators of the long-term effects of marital dissolution on well-being. Compared with married individuals, divorced individuals report more social isolation (Joung et al., 1997; Marks, 1996; Mastekaasa, 1997; Peters & Leifbroer, 1997; Ross, 1995; Umberson, Chen,

House, Hopkins, & Slaten, 1996), less satisfying sex lives (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994), and more negative life events (Kitson, 1992; Lorenz et al., 1997; Simons and Associates, 1996). Divorced individuals also have a lower standard of living, possess less wealth, and experience greater economic hardship than married individuals (Hao, 1996; Marks, 1996; Ross, 1995; Teachman & Paasch, 1994), although this particular difference is considerably greater for women than men. For parents, divorce is associated with more difficulties in raising children (Fisher, Fagor, & Leve, 1998; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992), less authoritative parenting (Ellwood & Stolberg, 1993; Simons & Associates, 1996; Thomson, McLanahan, & Curtin, 1992), and greater parental role strain among noncustodial as well as custodial parents (Rogers & White, 1998; Umberson & Williams, 1993). Of course, this literature contains some null findings. But the general conclusion that emerges from studies published in the 1990s—that the divorced are worse off than the married in multiple ways—is consistent with research conducted in the 1980s (Kitson & Morgan, 1990) and in earlier decades (Bloom et al., 1978).

Although the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective assumes that marital dissolution increases the risk of negative outcomes, it allows for the possibility that some individuals experience positive changes. Consistent with this notion, several studies show that divorced individuals report higher levels of autonomy and personal growth than do married individuals (Kitson, 1992; Marks, 1996). Acock and Demo (1994) found that many divorced mothers reported improvements in career opportunities, social lives, and happiness following divorce. Similarly, in a qualitative study, Riessmann (1990) found that women reported more self-confidence and a stronger sense of control following marital dissolution, and men reported more interpersonal skills and a greater willingness to self-disclose. In summary, although the majority of studies document the negative consequences of divorce, a small number of studies indicate that divorce also has positive consequences for many individuals. If more studies explicitly searched for positive outcomes, then the number of studies documenting beneficial effects of divorce would almost certainly be larger.

Causation or Selection?

Studies in the 1990s indicate that divorce is associated with a variety of problematic outcomes.

But does divorce lower people's well-being, or are poorly functioning people especially likely to divorce? Consistent with the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective, and contrary to the selection perspective, longitudinal studies show that people who make the transition from marriage to divorce report an increase in symptoms of depression, an increase in alcohol use, and decreases in happiness, mastery, and self-acceptance (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Hope, Rodgers, & Power, 1999; Marks & Lambert, 1998; Power, Rodgers, & Hope, 1999). Given that divorce is a process rather than a discrete event, declines in well-being are likely to begin prior to the legal divorce. In fact, Kitson's (1992) respondents reported (retrospectively) that they had experienced the greatest level of stress prior to making the decision to divorce, the second highest level of distress at the time of the decision, and the least stress following the final separation. Consistent with Kitson's data, longitudinal studies (Booth & Amato, 1991; Johnson & Wu, 1996; Mastekaasa, 1994b, 1997) show that reports of unhappiness and psychological distress begin to rise a few years prior to marital separation. Furthermore, Johnson and Wu (1996) used a fixed-effects model to control for all time-invariant individual variables, thus making it unlikely that selection could account for the increase in distress.

Some longitudinal studies, however, suggest that selection effects operate alongside divorce effects. For example, Mastekaasa (1997) observed personal problems (such as greater alcohol consumption among wives) as early as 4 years prior to divorce. Hope, Rodgers, and Power (1999) found that depression at age 23 predicted becoming a single mother at age 33. Similarly, Davies and colleagues (1997) found that many divorced mothers had a history of depression that predated the marriage. These mothers also reported high levels of adversity in their families of origin, including weak attachment to parents and parental depression. Controlling for these family-of-origin factors decreased the estimated effect of divorce on adult depression (suggesting a selection effect), although the association between divorce and depression remained significant (suggesting divorce causation).

In general, studies support the notion of divorce causation, but a degree of selection also might be operating. This combination can occur in two ways. First, some individuals might be prone to psychological or interpersonal problems prior to divorce but exhibit additional problems

following divorce. That is, long-standing differences between those who divorce and those who remain married might be amplified as divorce becomes imminent. For example, a husband's aggression might contribute to the dissolution of the relationship, but the dissolution of the relationship, in turn, might generate even more serious levels of aggression. Second, some individuals might have long-standing problems that disrupt their marriages, whereas others might be relatively symptom-free until confronted with the stress of marital dissolution. In other words, selection explanations might apply to some groups of people more than others.

Divorce as Crisis or Chronic Strain?

An unresolved issue in the literature of the 1990s is whether divorce represents a temporary crisis to which most individuals adapt or a source of chronic strains that persist indefinitely. Several studies found that unhappiness, distress, depression, alcohol consumption, and health problems had largely subsided 2 or 3 years after separation—a result that supports the crisis model (Booth & Amato, 1991; Goldberg, Greenberger, Hamill, & O'Neil, 1992; Kitson, 1992; Lorenz et al., 1997). In contrast, other studies failed to find improvements in people's functioning during the time since divorce, unless they remarried—a result that supports the chronic strain model (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; DeGarmo & Kitson, 1996; Gray & Silver, 1990; Johnson & Wu, 1996; Mastekaasa, 1995; Neff & Schluter, 1993; Wang & Amato, in press). Furthermore, Umberson and Williams (1993) found that parental strain among divorced fathers increased, rather than decreased, over time. Of course, both the crisis and the chronic strain models might contain some truth. Kitson (1992) found that although half of her respondents improved over time, about one fourth got worse. These results suggest that a crisis model (implying gradual adjustment) might be appropriate for some individuals, and a chronic strain model (implying persistent long-term problems) might be appropriate for others.

Mediators of Divorce Effects

Researchers attempting to identify the mediators of divorce effects have adopted two strategies. Some researchers have examined associations between mediators and measures of well-being using samples composed entirely of divorced individu-

als. Other researchers have tried to make the mean differences in well-being between divorced and married individuals “disappear” by controlling for presumed mediators. Although within-group studies are useful, between-group studies provide stronger evidence of mediation. Nevertheless, the various types of studies generally yield consistent results.

With regard to parenting, adjustment among custodial mothers is negatively associated with difficulty in finding child care (Goldberg et al., 1992), children's misbehavior (Simons and Associates, 1996), and the number of children in the household (Garvin, Kalter, & Hansell, 1993; Kitson, 1992). Correspondingly, loss of contact with children is associated with increased distress among noncustodial fathers (Lawson & Thompson, 1996; Umberson & Williams, 1993). Other studies have shown that poor adjustment is associated with conflict between ex-spouses (Goodman, 1993; Masheter, 1991), lack of emotional support from others (Marks, 1996; O'Connor, Hawkins, Dunn, Thorpe, & Golding, 1998; Ross, 1995), low income (Booth & Amato, 1991; Garvin et al., 1993; Kitson, 1992; Ross, 1995; Shapiro, 1996; Simons & Associates, 1996; Thabes, 1997), and the number and severity of stressful life changes following divorce (DeGarmo & Kitson, 1996; Kitson, 1992; Lorenz et al., 1997; Miller, Smerglia, Gaudet, & Kitson, 1998; O'Connor et al., 1998; Simons & Associates, 1996). Although some exceptions appear in the literature, research in the 1990s generally demonstrated that difficulties associated with solo parenting, continuing discord with the former spouse, declines in emotional support, economic hardship, and other stressful life events account for much of the gap in well-being between divorced and married adults.

Moderating Factors

What factors make some individuals more vulnerable than others to divorce-induced stress? With regard to resources, several studies show that adjustment among divorced individuals is positively associated with education (Booth & Amato, 1991; Demo & Acock, 1996b; Goldberg et al., 1992), employment (Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995; Booth & Amato, 1991; Demo & Acock, 1996b; Kitson, 1992; Wang & Amato, in press), and large networks of supportive kin and friends (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Cotton, 1999; DeGarmo & Forgatch, 1999; Garvin et al., 1993; Goldberg et al.,

1992; Lawson & Thompson, 1996; Thabes, 1997). Support from a new partner appears to be especially beneficial, because studies consistently show that adjustment is higher among divorced individuals who have formed a new romantic relationship (Funder, Harrison, & Weston, 1993; Garvin et al., 1993; Mastekaasa, 1995; Thabes, 1997; Wang & Amato, in press) or have remarried (Demo & Acock, 1996; Hemstrom, 1996; Marks & Lambert, 1998; Shapiro, 1996; Wang & Amato, in press). Remarriage also improves people's standard of living (Kitson, 1992; Teachman & Paasch, 1994) and accumulation of wealth (Hao, 1996).

One particular resource—having a large network of friends and kin—is not always a blessing, however. Miller and colleagues (1998) found that having someone to confide in decreased distress, but receiving material assistance (such as money or housing) increased distress. Of course, people receiving material assistance might be most in need and therefore most distressed. But support also might come with costs, such as feelings of inadequacy or indebtedness on the part of the receiver. Kitson (1992) found that receiving help with services, finances, or information was associated with lower distress; receiving these forms of assistance in conjunction with advice, however, was associated with higher distress. These findings suggest that aid might be more (rather than less) stressful when it comes with strings attached.

Another protective factor involves the manner in which people cognitively appraise the divorce. Longitudinal studies by Booth and Amato (1991) and by Simon and Marcussen (1999) found that people who strongly believed that marriage is a lifelong commitment reported especially high levels of distress following divorce. Adjustment among these individuals might have been difficult because they were troubled by the moral contradiction involved in seeing their own marriages end. Similarly, DeGarmo and Kitson (1996) found that divorce adjustment was easier for women who were not heavily invested in their marital identity. Other studies show that individuals who initiate divorce, compared with those who do not want the marriage to end, tend to be better adjusted in the postdivorce period (Kitson, 1992; Gray & Silver, 1990; Wang & Amato, in press). Consistent with these findings, individuals who report a large number of problems during the marriage tend to function relatively well in the postdivorce period (Booth & Amato, 1991). Indeed, for individuals who are very distressed during the marriage, divorce appears to decrease symptoms

of depression (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Wheaton, 1990). As noted earlier, initiators of divorce and their partners are often on different trajectories of divorce adjustment. These results suggest, therefore, that people who initiate divorce might experience distress, but they do this mainly prior to, rather than following, marital dissolution.

Demographic Variables

Are the consequences of divorce more debilitating for women or men? Some studies suggest that the effects of marital disruption on psychological well-being are stronger for women than men (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Marks & Lambert, 1998; Simon & Marcussen, 1999; Shapiro, 1996). In contrast, other studies show that marital disruption is more debilitating for the psychological well-being and health of men than women (Funder et al., 1993; Hemstrom, 1996; Masheter, 1991; Mastekaasa, 1994a; Peters & Liefbroer, 1997; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Zick & Smith, 1991). Yet other studies show no gender differences in psychological well-being (Booth & Amato, 1991; Mastekaasa, 1995; Ross, 1995; White, 1992) or health and mortality (Lillard & Waite, 1995; Murphy et al., 1997). These studies do not provide evidence that one gender is more vulnerable than the other, overall, following divorce.

The main exception to this conclusion involves economic well-being. Research is consistent in showing that the economic consequences of divorce are greater for women than for men (Bianchi, Subaiya, & Kahn, 1999; Hao, 1996; Kitson, 1992; Marks, 1996; Peterson, 1996; Ross, 1995; Smock, 1994). For example, Bianchi and colleagues found—using matched couples—that custodial mothers experienced a 36% decline in standard of living following separation, whereas noncustodial fathers experienced a 28% increase. Overall, mothers' postseparation standard of living was only about one half that of fathers. Similarly, divorced women, compared with married women or divorced men, report more chronic financial difficulties, such as being unable to pay bills or purchase necessary goods (Fisher et al., 1998; Ross, 1995; Shapiro, 1996; Simons & Associates, 1996). These differences exist because women, compared with men, have more interrupted work histories prior to divorce, experience greater work-family conflict (due to their responsibility for children), and are more likely to experience employment and wage discrimination. In general, studies conducted in the 1990s yield re-

sults similar to those of studies conducted in the 1980s in showing that divorced women, especially if they have custody of children, continue to be economically disadvantaged vis-a-vis married women or divorced men.

Relatively little is known about racial and ethnic differences in divorce adjustment. Kitson (1992) reported that Blacks adjusted to divorce more readily than Whites. In contrast, Neff and Schluter (1993) found that the mean differences in depression among divorced, separated, and married individuals were similar for Blacks, Mexican Americans, and Whites. Similar results for happiness for Blacks and Whites were reported by Aldous and Ganey (1999). Wang and Amato (in press) found no evidence that non-Whites adjusted to divorce more easily than Whites. And Lawson and Thompson (1996) found that the problems reported by divorced Black fathers—financial strain, noncustodial parenting, and difficulty meeting child-support payments—were similar to those reported by divorced White fathers (Umberson & Williams, 1993). Available research, therefore, does not suggest strong racial differences in divorce adjustment in the United States.

Turning to cross-national data, Mastekaasa (1994a) found that divorced and separated individuals had lower levels of psychological well-being than married individuals in 19 countries, including cultures as diverse as Japan, Mexico, South Africa, Britain, Germany, France, and Italy. Stack and Eshleman (1998) reported similar findings in a 17-nation study, and Amato (1994a) reported similar findings in India. Overall, available research suggests that divorce has the potential to create stress in the lives of individuals irrespective of culture or nationality.

RESEARCH ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF DIVORCE FOR CHILDREN

Comparisons of Children from Divorced and Two-Parent Families

Early in the decade, Amato and Keith (1991) published a meta-analysis of 92 studies that compared the well-being of children whose parents had divorced with that of children whose parents were-married to each other. Their meta-analysis showed that children from divorced families scored significantly lower on a variety of outcomes, including academic achievement, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-concept, and social competence. The differences between groups of

children (effect sizes) were small, however, ranging from .08 of a standard deviation for psychological adjustment to .23 of a standard deviation for conduct. For some outcomes, studies conducted in the 1980s yielded smaller effect sizes than earlier studies conducted in the 1960s and 1970s. Amato and Keith (1991) speculated that the gap in well-being between children with divorced and nondivorced parents might have narrowed either because divorce became more socially accepted or because parents were making greater efforts to reduce the potentially disruptive impact of divorce on their children.

During the 1990s, the number of people touched by divorce increased, school-based programs for children of divorce became common, and mediation and education courses for divorcing parents became mandatory in many states (Emery, Kitzmann, & Waldron, 1999). Given these trends, one might expect studies conducted in the 1990s to reveal a continued closing of the gap in well-being between children with divorced parents and children with married parents. An examination of studies conducted in the 1990s, however, does not support this hypothesis.

A large number of studies in the 1990s continued to find that children with divorced parents score lower than children with continuously married parents on measures of academic success (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996), conduct (Doherty & Needle, 1991; Simons and Associates, 1996), psychological adjustment (Forehand, Neighbors, Devine, & Armistead, 1994; Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1994), self-concept (Wenk, Hardesty, Morgan, & Blair, 1994), social competence (Beatty, 1995; Brodzinsky, Hitt, & Smith, 1993), and long-term health (Tucker et al., 1997). Furthermore, effect sizes in the 1990s appear comparable to those of earlier decades. For example, across 32 studies of children's conduct published in the 1990s, the mean effect size was $-.19$, which is not appreciably different from the mean value of $-.18$ for studies conducted in the 1980s, as reported in Amato and Keith (1991). Similarly, across 29 studies of psychological adjustment published in the 1990s, the mean effect size was $-.17$, which is slightly larger than the mean value of $-.10$ for studies conducted in the 1980s, also as reported in Amato and Keith. In general, the small but consistent gap in well-being between children from divorced and two-parent families observed in earlier decades persisted into the 1990s.

As with studies of adults, a few studies suggest

that divorce also has positive consequences for some children. For example, a qualitative study by Arditti (1999) found that many offspring from divorced families, especially daughters, reported developing especially close relationships with their custodial mothers—a finding that is consistent with some quantitative work (Amato & Booth, 1997). In addition, Amato, Loomis, and Booth (1995), Amato and Booth (1997), Hanson (1999), and Jekielek (1998) found that offspring were better off on a variety of outcomes if parents in high-conflict marriages divorced than if they remained married. When conflict between parents is intense, chronic, and overt, divorce represents an escape from an aversive home environment for children. Only a minority of divorces, however, appear to be preceded by a high level of chronic marital conflict (Amato & Booth, 1997). For this reason, divorce probably helps fewer children than it hurts.

CAUSATION OR SELECTION?

The selection perspective holds that differences between children from divorced and nondivorced families are due to factors other than marital disruption, including parents' personality characteristics, inept parenting, predivorce marital discord, or genetic influence. Consistent with a selection perspective, Capaldi and Patterson (1991) found that mothers' antisocial personalities accounted for the association between mothers' marital transitions and boys' adjustment problems. In contrast, other studies found significant estimated effects of divorce even after controlling for aspects of parents' personalities, including depression (Demo & Acock, 1996a) and antisocial personality traits (Simons and Associates, 1996).

Longitudinal studies provide another type of evidence. Cherlin and colleagues (1991) found that children from maritally disrupted families had more postdivorce behavior problems than children from nondisrupted families. These differences, however, were apparent several years prior to divorce, especially for boys. Amato and Booth (1996) found that problems in parent-child relationships (including parents' reports that their children had given them more than the usual number of problems) were present as early as 8 to 12 years before divorce. Aseltine (1996) and Hetherington (1999) obtained comparable results with regard to children's internalizing behavior, externalizing behavior, social competence, and self-esteem, and Doherty and Needle (1991) found com-

parable results for substance abuse among daughters. These longitudinal studies suggest that some of the negative outcomes observed among children with divorced parents are present years before the marriage ends and hence might be due to parental or family problems other than marital dissolution.

Nevertheless, as noted earlier, marital dissolution is a process that usually begins long before the legal divorce, so the existence of elevated levels of child problems prior to parental separation does not necessarily provide evidence of selection. Furthermore, several longitudinal studies show that many postdivorce child problems cannot be traced to a point in time prior to the divorce (Doherty & Needle, 1991; Forehand, Armistead, & Corinne, 1997; Morrison & Cherlin, 1995). For example, Doherty and Needle found that substance abuse and psychological problems among adolescent boys were elevated after, but not prior to, divorce. Consistent with these findings, Hanson (1999) found that differences in behavior and well-being between children from divorced and nondivorced families continued to be significant even after controlling for children's predivorce levels of behavior problems. And Morrison and Coiro (1999) found that parental divorce was followed by an increase in children's behavior problems above predivorce levels. Similarly, two follow-up studies of the 1991 work by Cherlin and colleagues (Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin, & Kiernan, 1995; Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale, & McRae, 1998) found that the gap in psychological well-being between offspring with divorced and married parents increased between adolescence and young adulthood. A noteworthy aspect of the latter study was the use of a random-effects model, which provides strong evidence for divorce rather than selection as the cause of the gap.

With regard to possible genetic influence, one study found that the association between parental divorce and child problems was similar for adopted and biological children (Brodzinsky, Hitt, & Smith, 1993)—a finding that cannot be explained by genetic transmission. Another study based on a large sample of twins (Kendler, Neale, Kessler, Heath, & Eaves, 1992) found that parental divorce predicted offspring depression in adulthood even with genetic resemblance controlled statistically. These studies suggest that even if predivorce family factors (including genetic factors) predispose children to certain emotional and behavioral problems, divorce itself brings about new conditions that exacerbate these differences.

Divorce as Crisis or Chronic Strain?

The crisis perspective holds that children from divorced families, although distressed at the time of marital disruption, show improvements in functioning in the years following divorce. Consistent with this view, some studies show that children's problems decline with time following divorce (Bussell, 1995; Frost & Pakiz, 1990; Goldberg et al., 1992; Jekielek, 1998). Other studies provide contrary evidence. For example, McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) found that the length of time in a single-parent family was not related to children's graduation from high school or risk of a teenage birth. Similar null results were reported by Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992), Machida and Holloway (1991), and Mauldon (1990) for different child outcomes.

Furthermore, the longitudinal studies of Cherlin and colleagues (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995; Cherlin et al., 1998) found that the gap in psychological well-being between offspring from divorced and nondivorced families grew larger—not smaller—with the passage of time. Consistent with this finding, a large number of studies have demonstrated that parental divorce is a risk factor for multiple problems in adulthood, including low socioeconomic attainment, poor subjective well-being, increased marital problems, and a greater likelihood of seeing one's own marriages end in divorce (see Amato, 1999, for a review). Why might these problems persist into adulthood? Two mechanisms seem likely. First, economic hardship due to parental divorce might lead some children to abandon plans to attend college, resulting in lower occupational attainment and wages throughout adulthood. Other offspring who were exposed to poor parental models of interpersonal behavior might have difficulty forming stable, satisfying, intimate relationships as young adults. These considerations suggest that even if some children show improvements in functioning a year or two after marital disruption, delayed effects of divorce might appear only when offspring have reached young adulthood.

Mediators of Divorce Effects

A number of studies indicate that divorced custodial parents, compared with married parents, invest less time, are less supportive, have fewer rules, dispense harsher discipline, provide less supervision, and engage in more conflict with their children (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Hethering-

ton & Clingempeel, 1992; Simons and Associates, 1996; Thompson et al., 1992). Many of these deficits in parenting presumably result from the stress of marital disruption and single parenting. Congruent with this perspective, Larson and Gillman (1999) found that negative emotions were more likely to be transmitted from single mothers to adolescent children than vice versa, especially when mothers were under stress. The quality of parental functioning is one of the best predictors of children's behavior and well-being. Several within-group studies show that either a conflicted relationship with the custodial parent or inept parenting on the part of the custodial parent are linked with a variety of negative child outcomes, including lower academic achievement, internalizing problems, externalizing problems, reduced self-esteem, and poorer social competence (Aseltine, 1996; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbush, 1996; Clark & Clifford, 1996; DeGarmo & Forgatch, 1999; Demo & Acock, 1996; Ellwood & Stolberg, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Simons and Associates, 1996; Tschann, Johnston, Kline, & Wallerstein, 1990). Other studies show that depression among custodial mothers, which is likely to detract from parenting, is related to poor adjustment among offspring (Demo & Acock, 1996a; Mednick, Baker, Reznick, & Hocevar, 1990; Silitsky, 1996; Simons & Associates, 1996).

Although the role of the custodial parent (usually the mother) in promoting children's well-being is clear, the role of the noncustodial parent (usually the father) is ambiguous. A variety of studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s suggest that contact with noncustodial fathers is not related in a consistent manner with children's behavior or well-being (Amato, 1993). However, in a recent meta-analysis of 63 studies of nonresident fathers and their children, Amato and Gilbreth (1999) found that authoritative parenting on the part of noncustodial fathers consistently predicted children's higher academic achievement and lower internalizing and externalizing problems. Amato and Gilbreth also found that studies of noncustodial fathers in the 1990s (e.g., Simons and Associates, 1996; Barber, 1994) were more likely than studies from earlier decades to report positive effects of father contact. These results tentatively suggest that noncustodial fathers might be enacting the parent role more successfully now than in the past, with beneficial consequences for children.

Interparental hostility and lack of cooperation

between parents following divorce is a consistent predictor of poor outcomes among offspring (Bolggar, Zweig-Frank, & Parish, 1995; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbush, 1996; Clark & Clifford, 1996; Ellwood & Stolberg, 1993; Healy, Malley, & Stewart, 1990; Pearson & Thoennes, 1990; Silitsky, 1996; Simons & Associates, 1996; Tschann et al., 1990; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998). Hetherington (1999) found that direct conflict between divorced parents, but not encapsulated conflict (that is, conflict to which children are not exposed), was related to behavior problems among adolescents. Conflict was especially aversive if it involved physical violence or made children feel as if they were caught in the middle. Interparental conflict is not only a direct stressor for children, but also might interfere with children's attachments to parents, resulting in feelings of emotional insecurity (Davies & Cummings, 1994).

Postdivorce economic hardship also is associated with negative outcomes among children (Aseltine, 1996; Bronstein, Stoll, Clauson, Abrams, & Briones, 1994; Mauldon, 1990; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Morrison & Cherlin, 1995; Pearson & Thoennes, 1990; Simons and Associates, 1996). One study found that income stability, rather than total income, predicts children's well-being (Goldberg et al., 1992). Research showing that fathers' payment of child support is positively related to children's school attainment and behavior provides additional support for the importance of income in facilitating children's postdivorce adjustment (e.g., King, 1994; McLanahan, Seltzer, Hanson, & Thompson, 1994).

Finally, the number of negative life events to which children are exposed is a consistent predictor of children's divorce adjustment (Aseltine, 1996; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbush, 1996; Ellwood & Stolberg, 1993; Pearson & Thoennes, 1990; Sandler, Wolchik, Braver, & Fogas, 1991; Sheets, Sandler, & West, 1996; Silitsky, 1996). Events such as moving (Amato & Booth, 1997; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Simons & Associates, 1996) and changing schools (Mednick et al., 1990; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996) appear to be especially disruptive. Unfortunately, moving to poorer neighborhoods is common following divorce as custodial parents are forced to live on smaller household incomes (South, Crowder, & Trent, 1998). Overall, in spite of the fact that some null findings appear in this literature, the majority of studies conducted in the 1990s document the importance of the mediators

outlined in the divorce-stress-adjustment model and also are consistent with research trends from the 1970s and 1980s (Amato, 1993).

Moderating Factors

What factors facilitate children's adjustment to divorce? In relation to resources, one study found that children who use active coping skills (such as problem solving and gathering social support) tend to adjust to divorce more quickly than children who rely on avoidance or distraction as coping mechanisms (Sandler, Tein, & West, 1994). Social support appears to be another protective factor. Samera and Stolberg (1993) found that children's social support from peers was positively related to adjustment as rated by children, teachers, and parents. Comparable findings were obtained by Silitsky (1996) and Teja and Stolberg (1993). Access to therapeutic interventions also appears to improve children's postdivorce well-being. For example, school-based support programs for children with divorced parents are widespread, and evidence suggests that these interventions are beneficial (Emery et al., 1999; Kalter, & Schreier, 1993; Lee, Picard, & Blain, 1994). Programs aimed at divorcing parents also are common. Although parents who attend these programs tend to rate them positively, it is not clear whether these programs benefit children (Beuhler, Betz, Ryan, Legg, & Trotter, 1992; Braver, Salem, Pearson, & DeLuse, 1996).

With regard to cognition, children who place some of the blame for the divorce on themselves tend to be more poorly adjusted (Bussell, 1995). Healy, Stewart, and Copeland (1993), in a study of primary school children 6 months after parental separation, found that one third reported some feelings of self-blame; self-blame, in turn, was related to a variety of child problems, including depression, externalizing problems, and lowered feelings of self-competence. In addition to self-blame, Kim, Sandler, and Jenn-Yum (1997) found that children's perceived lack of control over events mediated some of the impact of divorce-related stress on adjustment.

Studies focusing on custody arrangements following divorce tend to show that children fare better under joint physical custody rather than sole mother or father custody (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbush, 1996). This conclusion should be treated cautiously, however, because especially cooperative parents are more likely to choose and maintain joint physical custody than are other parents. Consequently, it is difficult to determine

whether it is joint physical custody or some characteristic of parents or their postdivorce relationship that is responsible for children's functioning. Children in sole mother custody and sole father custody show few differences (Downey, Ainsworth-Darnell, & Dufur, 1998; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Although many children in single-mother households are disadvantaged by a lack of economic resources, some children in single-father households are disadvantaged by a lack of interpersonal resources (such as single fathers' relatively low level of involvement in school activities), resulting in roughly equal outcomes (Downey, 1994). Furthermore, it appears to matter little whether children reside with a same-gender or opposite-gender parent (Downey & Powell, 1993). A reasonable conclusion is that no particular custody arrangement is best for all children. Indeed, custody arrangements often require modification as children develop and their relationships with parents change (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbush, 1996).

Research yields mixed results with regard to parental remarriage. A meta-analytic review of studies (mostly from the 1970s and 1980s) found that children in stepfamilies were no better off, and in some ways worse off, than children living in single-parent households following divorce (Amato, 1994b). In contrast, several recent studies found that offspring with remarried custodial parents were less depressed (Aseltine, 1996) or had fewer interpersonal problems (Bolgar et al., 1995) than children with single custodial parents. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) found that parental remarriage appeared to benefit African Americans more than Whites. Interestingly, Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbush (1996) found that parental remarriage was associated with fewer child problems, whereas parental cohabitation was associated with more problems, especially among boys. Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992) found few differences, overall, between children in divorced single-parent families and stepfamilies. It might be difficult to reach broad generalizations about the role of parental remarriage in children's adjustment, because these effects vary with children's ages, children's gender, the time since divorce, and other factors (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994). Additional parental divorces, however, appear to be more stressful for offspring than first divorces (Amato & Booth, 1991).

Demographic Variables

In general, evidence for variations in the effects of parental divorce by children's gender and age

is inconsistent. Although some studies find stronger estimated effects for one gender than the other (Doherty & Needle, 1991; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Rodgers, 1994), other studies do not (Aseltine, 1996; Simons & Associates, 1996). Similarly, few studies find that age at time of marital disruption matters (e.g., McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). A few studies of non-White children from divorced families appear in the literature (Bussell, 1995; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Smith, 1997; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996). The number of studies using samples of non-White families is too small, however, to form any firm generalizations.

CONCLUSIONS

Studies conducted during the 1990s, along with studies conducted in earlier decades, allow us to reach several conclusions about the consequences of divorce for adults and children.

First, we know that adults and children from divorced families, as a group, score lower than their counterparts in married-couple families on a variety of indicators of well-being. Second, although selection can account for some of these differences, the evidence is strong that divorce has an impact on well-being net of selection. Third, we have a good grasp of many of the mechanisms through which divorce affects individuals. These mediators include disruptions in parent-child relationships, continuing discord between former spouses, loss of emotional support, economic hardship, and an increase in the number of other negative life events, such as moving. Fourth, although some adults and children adjust relatively quickly to divorce (supporting a crisis model), others exhibit long-term deficits in functioning (supporting a chronic strain model). Fifth, a number of factors moderate the speed and extent of adjustment. For adults, protective factors include resources such as education and employment, support from a new partner, and being the spouse who initiated the divorce. For children, protective factors include the use of active coping skills, support from family and friends, and having access to therapeutic interventions. For adults as well as children, the end of a highly conflicted marriage is likely to be followed by improvements, rather than declines, in well-being.

Although we know a good deal about divorce, this review suggests several substantive areas that would benefit from additional research. First, more attention should be given to the dissolution

of cohabiting relationships. This attention is critical, given that about one fourth of children in single-parent families were born to cohabiting parents (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991). It seems likely that the ending of a cohabiting relationship has consequences for adults and children that are similar to those of divorce, but we have little evidence to support this conclusion. Second, studies of racial and ethnic minorities are frustratingly rare. New research should consider that some groups, such as African Americans, are more likely than Whites to cohabit (rather than marry) and bear children outside of marriage. Given these racial differences, it would make sense to expand the focus of future research beyond divorce to include the instability of all child-bearing unions. Third, researchers have given insufficient attention to interventions for adults and children. An increasing number of states are offering (or mandating) mediation and education courses for divorcing parents, and school-based support programs for children are common. Although some evidence suggests that these interventions are beneficial to adults and children, more evaluation research, especially studies based on randomized trials, is sorely needed.

In conclusion, I return to the contentious debate over divorce that has continued throughout the 1990s. On one side are those who see divorce as an important contributor to many social problems. On the other side are those who see divorce as a largely benign force that provides adults with a second chance for happiness and rescues children from dysfunctional and aversive home environments. Based on the accumulated research of the 1990s—and of earlier decades—it is reasonable to conclude that both of these views represent one-sided accentuations of reality. The increase in marital instability has not brought society to the brink of chaos, but neither has it led to a golden age of freedom and self-actualization. Divorce benefits some individuals, leads others to experience temporary decrements in well-being that improve over time, and forces others on a downward cycle from which they might never fully recover. Continuing research on the contingencies that determine whether divorce has positive, neutral, or negative long-term consequences for adults and children is a high priority. Work on these issues is likely to progress in the next decade. As long as nearly half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce, there will be an enduring need to understand and monitor the implications of mari-

tal dissolution for adults, children, and the larger society.

NOTE

I thank Alan Booth, Stacy Rogers, and Lynn White for useful comments on an earlier version of this article.

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