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# Stated reasons for relationship dissolution in Britain: marriage and cohabitation compared

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## **Biographical notes**

Richard Lampard is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of Warwick. His current research interests include various aspects of union formation and dissolution, social and educational mobility, and the impact of family structure on occupational outcomes. He has a specific interest in the formerly partnered and repartnering.

# **Stated reasons for relationship dissolution in Britain: marriage and cohabitation compared**

## **Abstract**

Data from the second National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles are used to examine stated reasons for the dissolution of co-residential relationships in Britain at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The findings exhibit a degree of continuity with earlier British studies, and resonate with themes identified within a broader international literature. While the ‘serious’ issues of violence and infidelity still feature prominently, a substantial minority of stated reasons appear indicative of relationships based upon relatively ‘weak bonds’. Differences between marital and cohabiting relationships persist within multivariate analyses, suggesting that neither attitudes to relationships nor socio-economic or demographic factors provide satisfactory explanations for their existence. It is speculated that an adequate explanation of these differences would need to take account of an individual’s personal commitment to a specific partner and their level of investment in that specific relationship.

# **Stated reasons for relationship dissolution in Britain: marriage and cohabitation compared**

## **Introduction**

This article analyses data corresponding to self-reported reasons for relationship dissolution among individuals in Britain whose co-residential relationships ended in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>1</sup> Prominent recent analyses of stated reasons for relationship dissolution in the US and the Netherlands have noted the scarcity of studies based on subjective accounts of dissolution, relative to studies focusing on more ‘objective’ data as a way of understanding divorce (Amato and Previti, 2003: 603; de Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006: 485). This highlights the important point that stated reasons for dissolution are not synonymous with causal explanations (2006: 484), hence this article focuses upon *accounts* or *interpretations* of dissolution rather than explanations *per se*.

Stated reasons may reflect a need for ‘satisfactory’ accounts of dissolution, for individuals’ own satisfaction or to help them present themselves to others (Price and McKenry, 1988: 31; Amato and Previti, 2003: 607-608; de Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006: 485). The reasons given may reflect not only an individual’s biographical stage and the context in which they are stated, but also the extent to which dissolution is empirically ‘normal’ and socially acceptable in a society (2006: 483).

Accounts of dissolution reflect subjective interpretations of past situations and decisions, and of the behaviour of both partners. An emphasis on agency within accounts may explain why authors adopt the term ‘motives’ rather than ‘reasons’ (e.g. Hopper, 1993; de Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006). However, even viewed as ‘motives’, stated reasons for dissolution are reconstructions based on meanings ascribed to past events, rather than straightforward indicators of actors’ motivations at that time (Hopper, 1993: 810-811). Nevertheless, Hopper sees studying these reported motives as inherently valuable. Here, stated reasons for dissolution are interpreted as providing evidence about what actors perceive as *credible* accounts of dissolution, whether based on the ‘real’ reasons or reflecting what are perceived as constituting ‘convincing’ or *legitimate* explanations.

The relationship dissolution literature for Britain includes valuable studies of factors relating to the *likelihood* of divorce or separation (e.g. Murphy, 1985; Kiernan and Mueller, 1999). However, while various quantitative academic studies in Europe and the US have specifically focused upon *expressed* reasons for relationship dissolution (e.g. Cleek and Pearson, 1985; Schneider, 1990; Gigy and Kelly, 1993; Amato and Previti, 2003; de Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006), equivalent studies for Britain are still lacking, despite about 45 per cent of marriages now being expected to end in divorce (Wilson and Smallwood, 2008).<sup>2</sup> Data on subjective reasons for relationship dissolution can, however, be found within less-specific British studies: e.g. surveys of divorced men and lone parents (Ambrose *et al.*, 1983; Bradshaw and Millar, 1991), and qualitative studies generating accounts of divorce or cohabitation breakdown (Hart, 1976; Davis and Murch, 1988; Day Sclater, 1997, 1999; Smart and Stevens, 2000).<sup>3</sup> Respondents within these studies often report *multiple* reasons for a particular dissolution; indeed, this may be the (empirical) norm.<sup>4</sup>

A further, notable shortfall within the published research on relationship dissolution, both in Britain and elsewhere, is a lack of systematic examinations of variations in stated reasons for dissolution between marital and cohabiting relationships.<sup>5</sup> This seems surprising, given the stereotype of lower commitment within cohabiting relationships (e.g. Morgan, 2000)<sup>6</sup>, and given that their dissolution rates are higher, even controlling for differences in the characteristics of the individuals involved (Wilson and Stuchbury, 2010).

This article extends the limited literature on stated reasons for relationship dissolution in Britain, more specifically developing a hierarchical analytic typology and comparing marriage and cohabitation, using multivariate analyses to assess how much other factors account for key differences between them. These key differences relate to two conceptually and empirically important distinctions: between accounts including ‘serious’ reasons and other accounts, and, within the latter, between accounts containing references to specific, concrete ‘domestic problems’ and accounts where the absence of such references suggests that the ‘bond’ between the partners may have been relatively weak.

## **Classifying stated reasons for relationship dissolution: key distinctions and factors**

### **‘Serious’ reasons: violence and infidelity**

The conceptual bases of earlier studies’ analytical categorisations of stated reasons for dissolution vary markedly: de Graaf and Kalmijn (2006) distinguish between motives relating to: ‘relational’ issues (about the relationship *between* the partners), ‘behavioural’ problems (involving the behaviour of a *particular* partner), and problems about paid work or the domestic division of labour. Ambrose *et al.* (1983: 49) also distinguish between reasons ‘internal’ and ‘external’ to the relationship, whereas Amato and Previti (2003: 621) use the idea of ‘no-fault divorce’ as a point of reference, noting the ongoing prominence of ‘fault-based’ reasons.

However, a recurring analytical distinction, often explicit if not focal, is between ‘serious’ or ‘severe’ reasons and other reasons, the two principal reasons identified as ‘serious’ being violence and infidelity. Stated reasons for dissolution tend to be more ‘serious’ for subgroups at a relatively low risk of dissolution, including couples with children or traditional religious beliefs (Amato and Previti, 2003: 617; de Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006: 487, 499-500). De Graaf and Kalmijn (2006: 483) state that ‘severe divorce motives (e.g. violence and infidelity) have become less important’; other authors suggest this trend reflects either the declining frequency of ‘serious’ reasons or a lower ‘threshold’ that reasons must reach before dissolution occurs (Price and McKenry, 1988: 34; Kitson, 1992: 126; Amato and Previti, 2003: 617). Alternatively, increased tensions around the gendered household division of

labour and women's increased expectations regarding intimacy may have increased the relative prevalence of other, less 'serious' reasons (de Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006: 483-497; Kitson, 1992). Conversely, 'serious' reasons can become *more* important if cultural change renders relevant behaviour less 'forgivable'; Langhamer (2006) suggests that this had happened in Britain by the 1960s for infidelity, and it may subsequently have happened for violence.

Infidelity's role in the dissolution process varies (Amato and Previti, 2003: 621; Previti and Amato, 2004). It may in itself cause an otherwise stable relationship to end (Day Sclater, 1997, 1999), or may follow on from earlier problems, constituting just one aspect of a process culminating in dissolution (Davis and Murch, 1988: 49-51; Smart and Stevens, 2000: 31-32). Either way, the discovery of infidelity sometimes acts as a divorce 'trigger', but this trigger's *importance* is contingent on the significance of earlier problems (Ambrose *et al.*, 1983: 51; Davis and Murch, 1988: 38). Evidence that infidelity is of greater relative importance as a stated reason for dissolution at longer relationship durations and for low ages at marriage (e.g. Kitson, 1992) suggests that it should sometimes be interpreted as part of a story involving 'change', rather than simply a quantum act of 'betrayal'.

'Less serious' reasons: problems, conflict, or just growing apart?

Price and McKenry (1988: 34) distinguish between reasons relating to problematic behaviour by spouses and reasons relating to personal incompatibility and personal growth, noting an increased emphasis on the latter within US studies, something echoed by contemporaneous British studies (Ambrose *et al.*, 1983; Bradshaw and Millar, 1991). More recently, de Graaf and Kalmijn (2006: 486, 493-494) found a very common, 'relational' motive to be that a

couple ‘grew apart’. However, this was reported in about three-quarters of their cases, so other factors may have ‘caused’ this ‘growing apart’. Conversely, Amato and Previti (2003: 615) reported ‘grew apart’ as a reason for less than a tenth of divorces, disproportionately those involving younger ages at marriage and longer durations (2003: 616-617). In their study, ‘growing apart’ may constitute a more central feature of the dissolution process.

The above disparity highlights that de Graaf and Kalmijn’s analysis does not specifically examine the occurrence of ‘relational’ motives for dissolution *in the absence of* ‘behavioural’ motives. Like infidelity, growing apart as a stated reason for dissolution demonstrates the merits of classifying accounts in an ‘integrated’ way, explicitly addressing their multidimensionality. Considered *in combination* with other reasons, ‘growing apart’ can help one identify accounts characterised neither by ‘serious’ reasons nor by some other, discrete source of discord or conflict.

Conflict was central to Hart’s framework for explaining dissolution (Hart 1976: 80-91), but, viewed collectively, the existing British studies suggest movement away from conflict as a standard, albeit sometimes implicit, feature of dissolution accounts.<sup>7</sup> While recent divorce narratives still often exhibit tension and discord (Day Sclater, 1997, 1999), Ambrose *et al.* (1983) and Davis and Murch (1988) showcase accounts foregrounding an *absence* of desired relationship features, rather than the *presence* of discord or conflict. In addition, the accounts reported by Smart and Stevens (2000: 28-32) include explicit instances of cohabiting partners ‘drifting apart’, a process quite different to the conflict-related ‘growing apart’ documented by Hart (1976: 88-90).

## **Contemporary relationships: ‘bonds’, ‘commitment’ and heterogeneity**

Authors such as de Graaf and Kalmijn (2006: 487) highlight the potential impact of cultural trends identified by social theorists like Giddens and Bauman on the distribution of stated reasons for dissolution. Linked, recurring themes within theoretical discussions of contemporary relationships are a shift from expectations of permanence to expectations of intimacy, a weakening of relationship ‘bonds’, and greater heterogeneity in ‘commitment’ to relationships.

By the mid-1970s, Hart (1976: 100) was already suggesting that people with autonomous, individualised identities might be less ‘bound’ to partners, and less motivated to resolve problems rather than separating. Such individuals may exhibit a distinctive distribution of reasons for dissolution, as may members of subgroups acting as ‘trail-blazers’ in relation to phenomena like cohabitation and ‘pure relationships’, e.g. highly educated, non-religious urban residents (de Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006: 500-501). Assuming that individualisation has not yet homogenised orientations towards coupledness, reasons for dissolution may still reflect such diversity.

In addition, according to social theorists, ‘new’ relationship forms have become prevalent. For example, within the restructuring of intimacy identified by Giddens (1992: 58-63), coupledness increasingly takes the form of ‘pure relationships’. Based on ‘confluent love’, which requires ongoing, active intimacy, these continue only while they are mutually beneficial. Giddens views today’s ‘separating and divorcing society’ as echoing such new orientations towards relationships, implying that relationship dissolution should more often

reflect a lack of intimacy, and perhaps less often reflect infidelity, as sexual exclusivity may be less pivotal (1992: 61-63). Accompanied by a weakening of relationship 'bonds', Bauman's 'virtual relationships' (Bauman 2003: xii) are encouraged by discourses promoting consumerism and the ideas of relationship experts, and lack the inherent barrier against dissolution traditionally provided by the notion of 'commitment' and particular conceptualisations of 'love' (2003: 11-13). Any growth in such relationships might thus be expected to induce a shift towards the least 'serious' reasons for dissolution.

However, Bauman's and Giddens' analyses pay insufficient attention to identifying whether, and conceptualising how, 'bonds' and 'commitment' occur within relationships not governed by traditional norms. Other authors highlight the ongoing salience of 'commitment', 'obligations' and 'care', finding considerable overlap between the nature of commitment within marriages and its nature within cohabiting relationships (e.g. Lewis, 2001: 148; Barlow *et al.*, 2005: 61-62). Nevertheless, commitment within contemporary relationships is heterogeneous. Examining cohabiting relationships, Smart and Stevens (2000: 24-33) distinguish between 'mutual commitment' and 'contingent commitment', the latter characterised by a lack of ties, e.g. an absence of expectations of permanence. Adopting this distinction, Barlow *et al.* (2005: 63-64) found that contingent commitment applied to a quarter of their sample of cohabiting people; they suggest that heterogeneity of commitment may also exist across marriages, albeit to a lesser degree. Hence, even if Bauman and Giddens overstate the contemporary prevalence of 'virtual' and 'pure' relationships, heterogeneity of commitment means that stated reasons for dissolution will sometimes reflect scenarios in which the impetus towards dissolution did not encounter a substantial, inherent barrier.

Notwithstanding broad similarities in commitment between cohabitation and marriage, any variations between them in stated reasons for dissolution may reflect differences in relation to particular *dimensions* of commitment. Lewis (2001: 124-126) highlights the distinction between a ‘moral-normative’ commitment to the *idea* of permanent partnership and two forms of commitment to a *specific* relationship: personal commitment to a particular partner, and ‘having to’ continue a relationship because of ‘investments’ made in it. Barlow *et al.* (2005: 59-60) suggest that small *sub-groups* of cohabiting people may not be as constrained as married people by these relationship-specific forms of commitment. For example, some are self-consciously involved in ‘trial’ marriages; a substantial minority of individuals starting cohabitations, especially at younger ages, do so with a ‘try and see’ orientation (Jamieson *et al.*, 2002).

### **Analysing stated reasons for dissolution: methodological issues**

This section highlights three issues with important methodological implications for different forms of comparison involving stated reasons for dissolution. The first of these is that a key methodological problem when comparing or summarising different *studies* of stated reasons for dissolution is that their data-generating mechanisms vary. For example, while de Graaf and Kalmijn (2006) report findings reflecting unrestricted choices from a list of 20 motives, Amato and Previti (2003: 610-611) derived 18 categories from responses to an open-ended question within a telephone interview, identifying a *maximum* of three reasons per case. Consequently, de Graaf and Kalmijn’s respondents reported, on average, more than six dissolution motives, mostly cited as important (2006: 489), whereas Amato and Previti’s interviewees averaged under 1.2 reasons, with many providing only a single reason, perhaps the most salient one (2003: 615, 624). The markedly greater prevalence of spouses’ problems

and habits as a reason for dissolution in de Graaf and Kalmijn's study may also reflect these different data-generating mechanisms. In British studies, differing research instruments appear to account for the varying visibility of arguments and sexual problems, and the varying prevalence of some specific problems relating to partners' behaviour or characteristics. Variation between samples also makes documenting the historical balance of reasons for dissolution difficult<sup>8</sup>. Hence, notwithstanding some consistent findings, existing studies thus can only provide a *crude* point of reference for this one.

Second, as noted by Barlow *et al.* (2005: 58-59), in the context of examining relationship dissolution bivariate comparisons of *marriage* and *cohabitation* do not compare 'like with like'. Barlow *et al.* consequently identified a range of necessary controls, including age at relationship formation and relationship duration, both of known relevance to stated reasons for dissolution (Amato and Previti, 2003: 604, 616; de Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006: 486). Like another key control, the presence of children, relationship duration may be linked to the 'investment' dimension of commitment. Barlow *et al.* also view religion as a necessary control; more generally, given the possible correspondence between marriage-related attitudes and the moral-normative dimension of commitment, attitudinal measures may be relevant. Past studies of the stated reasons for dissolution have also taken account of education, income and socio-economic status (SES), finding higher SES to be associated with 'relational' explanations and lower SES with 'serious' or 'behavioural' explanations (Kitson, 1992; Amato and Previti, 2003: 611, 616-617). In addition to the above-mentioned demographic, attitudinal and socio-economic factors, this study also considered as possible controls factors affecting the *risk* of dissolution (de Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006: 486).

Third, stated reasons for dissolution typically vary in frequency and meaning according to *gender*. Amato and Previti (2003: 603) suggest that women tend to offer more complex dissolution accounts than men, and de Graaf and Kalmijn (2006: 494-495) noted that women mentioned most divorce motives more frequently, including problems with the domestic division of labour or spouse behaviour. Crucially, they reported women as markedly more likely to cite physical violence, rarely mentioned by men (see also Amato and Previti, 2003: 605). In Britain, Ambrose *et al.* (1983: 49) similarly noted that male respondents seldom reported violence as a reason for dissolution, unlike a substantial minority of Bradshaw and Millar's lone parents (1991: 11). This gender disparity in reporting violence may help explain men's more frequent failure to account for relationships ending (Kitson, 1992; Amato and Previti, 2003: 615), although men may also avoid reporting misbehaviour by citing 'relational' issues (2003: 622). Given the evident gendering of accounts of dissolution, and the consequent inconsistencies of meaning for some categories of reported reasons, this article reports parallel, *sex-specific* analyses.

## Data and measures

This article analyses data from the second National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL II), carried out from 1999 to 2001, and achieving a 63.8 per cent response rate (Erens *et al.*, 2001; NatCen, 2005). It collected information on the reasons for relationships ending from all respondents who had experienced the end of a marriage or a cohabiting relationship (lasting at least a month), although only with respect to the co-resident relationship that had ended most recently. Same-sex relationships were included. Since respondents were aged 17-44, NATSAL II does not cover relationship dissolution at higher ages; consequently, this article's findings also correspond disproportionately to dissolution at shorter durations.

Respondents were shown twelve possible reasons for the end of their relationship, but were only asked to tell interviewers which code letters applied. An additional letter allowed for other reasons, interviewers probing for details where relevant; most were coded into either the twelve pre-determined categories or eleven additional categories (see Table 1). A substantial majority of respondents reported two or more reasons.

This article categorises these stated reasons for dissolution in ways which draw upon themes and ideas from the literature: 'serious' reasons feature within a hierarchical schema which also allows, at the foot of the hierarchy, for dissolution accounts which lack any reference to salient behavioural, relational, family or household-related factors (see Table 2). Hart (1976: 100) suggested that such 'motivations' to divorce were needed to overcome 'barriers' such as commitment; accounts like these may thus indicate an absence of substantial barriers to dissolution, especially where there is no evidence of discord or conflict.

Turning to other measures, NATSAL II recorded attitudes to various aspects of marriage, as well as collecting relevant socio-economic and demographic data. Data specifying when the beginning and end of a relationship occurred allowed the respondent's age when it started, its duration, and the year in which it ended to be considered, as well as whether its end preceded the birth of the respondent's first child.<sup>9</sup>

Within NATSAL II's overall sample of 12,110 respondents, it was unclear whether 6 had had a co-resident relationship. Furthermore, for 5 of the 4,410 who had experienced the end of a co-resident relationship, information about their last relationship was not available. Respondents whose last partners had died (74), who did not answer the reasons for dissolution question (20), or whose *type* of past relationship was unclear (1), are also excluded here. However, respondents lacking data for other independent variables are retained (see Tables 3 and 4). The sample examined thus corresponds to the last 'completed' relationships of 4,310 respondents.<sup>10</sup> Weighting compensates for disproportionalities generated by the survey's multi-stage stratified random sample design.

[Tables 1 and 2]

## Findings and analyses

### Stated reasons for relationship dissolution at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Substantial minorities of respondents reported each of two ‘serious’ reasons for dissolution, i.e. violence and infidelity (see Table 1)<sup>11</sup>; nearly half of cases involved at least one of these (see Table 2). In earlier British studies, infidelity or new relationships invariably featured in a substantial minority of accounts; this study does not indicate any marked change in the importance of either infidelity or ‘serious’ reasons for dissolution more generally. However, it seems possible that a growth in cohabitation may have led to ‘serious’ reasons for dissolution being reported for an *increased* proportion of marriages.

More than a third of respondents reported at least one of a set of reasons involving problems with the relationship or with one or other partner’s characteristics or behaviour; this proportion might have been higher if the pre-determined list had specified issues such as drinking and drug use. A further set of family or household-related problems, mentioned by nearly a fifth of respondents, may also incorporate problematic behaviour by partners, e.g. in relation to money, a recurring issue in earlier British studies. About a third of respondents explicitly reported arguments as a reason, echoing the importance of conflict in earlier studies (e.g. Hart 1976); these respondents usually also cited more specific issues.

Most respondents reported one or more of a range of other reasons, including two-fifths reporting the partners having ‘grown apart’ and a fifth that they had ‘nothing in common’. This resonates with a cluster of factors documented by earlier British studies: relating to incompatibility, ‘not getting on’, and communication issues. Some of these ‘other’ reasons

relate to physical separation for reasons not overtly linked to the relationship; some relate to differences between partners or to changes in the relationship or in one of the partners. What these ‘other’ reasons share is that they do not inherently imply conflict, or either partner having a negative attitude towards the other; where a ‘problem’ is evident, it appears to relate to the ‘disengagement’ of one or both partners. Finally, a very small proportion of respondents only reported reasons which were neither on the list nor matched any of the additional categories.<sup>12</sup>

### Combining reasons: A hierarchical analytic typology

As noted earlier, it is important to examine stated reasons for dissolution simultaneously; Table 2 uses a hierarchy of reasons to allocate respondents to a set of mutually exclusive categories. About an eighth of respondents referred to violence; of nearly a third more who reported infidelity, a substantial minority reported *only* infidelity as a reason. Hence about a quarter of respondents reported a ‘serious’ reason in an uncomplicated way. About a fifth reported infidelity alongside other reasons, suggesting that it was part of a broader process, rather than its discovery being a ‘quantum event’, wholly responsible for the dissolution of a previously stable relationship. Another quarter did not report violence or infidelity, but reported a ‘domestic problem’ of some description, i.e. a problem or issue relating to the relationship, to one or other partner, or to family or household in some other respect. About one in fifteen did not report violence, infidelity or domestic problems, but *did* report arguments, explicitly indicating conflict.

Finally, about a quarter of respondents only reported other reasons, largely those identified in Table 2 as ‘weak bond’ explanations, since these cases can be interpreted as instances where

separation would have been unlikely had a substantial bond existed between the partners, discouraging them from physically separating or acting as a barrier to disengagement translating into dissolution. Such cases appear suggestive of the contemporary forms of relationship identified by Giddens (1992) and Bauman (2003).

Table 2 also indicates that the proportion of respondents who were childless when their relationship ended increases as one descends the hierarchy of categories. Assuming, as suggested earlier, that children increase the likelihood of ‘serious’ reasons for dissolution, treating the categories as hierarchical for ‘seriousness’ seems to have some validity.<sup>13</sup>

The gender differences evident in Tables 1 and 2 echo studies of other national and historical contexts, and remind one that *stated* reasons for dissolution are not synonymous with *actual* reasons. Echoing de Graaf and Kalmijn (2006) and Ambrose *et al.* (1983), men rarely reported violence as a reason, with the counter-balance mainly provided by the conflict and ‘weak bond explanations’ categories. This highlights the need for analyses of both ‘serious’ and ‘weak bond’ reasons to be gender-specific. Setting aside the cases involving violence, women were also markedly more likely to cite infidelity, and relationship or partner-related flaws.<sup>14</sup> Turning to differences between marriage and cohabitation in the stated reasons for dissolution, much greater proportions of marriages ended for the two ‘serious’ reasons. Setting aside the cases involving ‘serious’ reasons, marriages were also more likely to have ended for reasons linked to problems or issues relating to one or other partner, their relationship, or their family or household.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, for over a third of cohabitations, more than twice the figure for marriages, none of the preceding sorts of reasons were given, leaving only explanations relating to arguments or ‘weak bonds’.

This last finding highlights the importance of interpreting *combinations* of reasons. Overall, partners ‘grew apart’ in strikingly similar proportions of marriages and cohabitations (see Table 1). However, the proportions of marriages and cohabitations corresponding to the subset of the ‘weak bond explanations’ category (see Table 2) in which the partners ‘grew apart’ are 10.6 and 16.5 per cent respectively. Hence, for cohabitations, ‘growing apart’ was less frequently accompanied by a more serious or clear-cut problem; more generally, markedly more cohabitations ended for reasons consistent with the couple’s relationship having been ‘virtual’ or ‘pure’ (Bauman, 2003; Giddens, 1992).

### **Multivariate analyses: Persisting differences between marriage and cohabitation**

The multivariate analyses (see Tables 3 and 4) attempt to account for two key differences between marital and cohabiting relationships: first, in the prevalence of accounts including the ‘serious’ reasons of violence and infidelity, i.e. those within the first four categories in Table 2, and, second, in the prevalence of accounts within the ‘domestic problems’ category, as compared to the lowest three categories in the hierarchy.<sup>16</sup> The relevance of various possible determinants of stated reasons for dissolution, as suggested by the literature, is also assessed.

The statistical technique used is binary logistic regression<sup>17</sup>. Differences between categories are thus quantified as odds ratios, which document, for example, a comparison of the odds of reporting a ‘serious’ reason between marital and cohabiting relationships. To facilitate gender comparisons, the same model is used in both the sex-specific analyses for each dependent variable. Before the results from the two pairs of logistic regressions are described, some measures omitted from the models presented are discussed.

The relationship's duration and the respondent's age at its start are both included in the models. Consequently the sum of these, the respondent's age at the relationship's end, is not. Neither the respondent's birth cohort nor the year in which their relationship ended merited addition to the models, providing little evidence of any trends. Earlier studies have proposed age at *first* co-residence as an indicator of orientation towards coupledness; here, this did not supplement the explanatory power of the respondent's age at the start of their *most recently dissolved* relationship.

Distinguishing between 'direct' marriages and those following cohabitation did not improve model fit significantly, so a straightforward distinction between marriage and cohabitation is used. The models omit the former partner's sex, as a flawed data collection process undermined the available measure's reliability; however, there was little evidence of relevant differences according to sexual orientation. Neither the respondent's number of past co-residential relationships, nor the structure of their family of origin, had a significant impact.<sup>18</sup>

Controlling for religious denomination, neither the importance of religion to respondents nor ethnic group merited inclusion. When measures of attitudes to infidelity, premarital sexuality, homosexual relationships, and shared domestic chores were considered, none had a readily interpretable, statistically significant impact which was consistent across the sexes.

The respondent's occupational class (Registrar General's Social Class) lacked a consistent or significant impact within the multivariate analyses, suggesting that broad socio-economic differences lack relevance. While there was some evidence that housing and migration histories are related to stated reasons for dissolution, possibly acting as indicators of lifestyle,

or of the ‘investment’ dimension of commitment (Lewis, 2001: 135-136; Barlow *et al.*, 2005; 60), these relationships’ causal direction(s) could not be established, hence housing-related measures have been omitted. Finally, measures relating to some other potentially relevant characteristics or forms of behaviour, including drug usage, alcohol consumption, and disability, failed to merit inclusion.

To assess the extent to which the overall, bivariate differences between marital and cohabiting relationships can be explained by the other independent variables<sup>19</sup>, one needs as a point of reference the odds ratios from bivariate comparisons of the two relationship types. The odds ratios corresponding to reporting a ‘serious’ reason for dissolution are 3.39 for men and 2.27 for women, with higher odds for marital relationships. The odds ratios corresponding to reporting a ‘domestic problem’, as compared to ‘less serious’ reasons, are 1.67 for men and 1.62 for women.

[Tables 3 and 4]

Tables 3 and 4 show that all but one of the corresponding odds ratios from the multivariate logistic regression analyses are lower, being 2.58, 1.70, 1.43 and 1.70 respectively. The reductions in magnitude largely reflect the explanatory roles of two independent variables: relationship duration and having had a child before the relationship’s end.<sup>20</sup> In short, the bivariate differences between marital and cohabiting relationships reflect, in part, cohabitations having been less likely to have involved parenthood and more likely to have ended after short durations. However, the reduction was never more than two-fifths of a difference’s initial magnitude.<sup>21</sup> Hence a clear majority of the overall difference between

marital and cohabiting relationships remains unaccounted for, a finding discussed further in the concluding discussion.

Having had a child substantially increased the odds of the ‘domestic problems’ outcome, and also, for women, the odds of reporting a ‘serious’ reason for dissolution<sup>22</sup>, echoing other national studies (e.g. Amato and Previti, 2003; de Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006). For men, seeing children as very important to successful relationships substantially increased the odds of reporting a ‘serious’ reason. Children may reduce the likelihood that separation reflects less serious reasons, or encourage people to *report* relatively serious reasons, to ‘legitimate’ the dissolution.

Predictably, Tables 3 and 4 show that stated reasons for dissolution are related to relationship duration. Short durations, i.e. of no more than two years, are associated with lower odds of reporting ‘serious’ reasons, and, for men, durations of under a year are associated with higher odds of only reporting reasons within the ‘weakest’ categories, as opposed to ‘domestic problems’. At short durations, levels of *personal* commitment to, or ‘investment’ in, a specific relationship (Lewis 2001) may be relatively low, increasing the chances of dissolution for ‘less serious’ reasons. Turning to age, starting a co-residential relationship as a relatively young woman is associated with higher odds of reporting a ‘serious’ reason, but also of only reporting reasons falling within the ‘weakest’ categories.<sup>23</sup>

Barlow *et al.* (2005), Lewis (2001) and Jamieson *et al.* (2002) all regard as potentially salient the socio-economic heterogeneity of cohabiting couples. Notwithstanding the limited empirical relevance of class and educational measures<sup>24</sup>, there is some evidence that socio-economic characteristics are relevant. The odds of reporting ‘serious’ reasons are higher for

employed men; economic stability may reduce the likelihood of a less-than-serious issue leading to dissolution. Conversely, unemployment appears associated with an increased risk of dissolution reflecting ‘domestic problems’. Poor health may also be acting as an indicator of socio-economic disadvantages that increase the risk that ‘serious’ problems lead to dissolution. Of course, assuming that these associations reflect socio-economic causes is speculative, not least because causal directions are not always self-evident. Nevertheless, the findings may collectively indicate that reasons for dissolution relate to socio-economic factors in a more *complex* way than a standard occupational class measure can accommodate.

Regional differences may be cultural in origin, rather than socio-economic. The relatively low odds of ‘serious’ reasons for London and, to an extent, Southern England, may indicate greater acceptability of dissolution for less serious reasons, reflecting regional variations in attitudes (Duncan and Smith, 2006). However, the findings provide little *direct* evidence that relationship-related attitudes have the salience implied by Giddens (1992). While some of the available attitudinal measures might have been expected to differentiate between preferences for ‘traditional’ couple relationships and for ‘pure relationships’, only one merited inclusion, in one model: people who saw affection within relationships as markedly more important than sex, a relatively ‘traditional’ perspective, less frequently cited less-than-serious reasons for dissolution. In addition, religion appears of gender-specific relevance: for women, Christian beliefs may reduce the likelihood of dissolution for less-than-serious reasons, whereas Roman Catholic men and men from non-Christian religions may under-report ‘serious’ reasons.

## Concluding discussion

While evidence regarding subjective reasons for dissolution from earlier British studies constitutes a diffuse point of reference, this article's findings are, nevertheless, broadly consistent with what these studies suggest about past patterns and likely trends. Conversely, as a consequence of national differences or different research instruments, the results differ substantially from those for other national contexts (Amato and Previti, 2003; de Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006).

While a substantial minority of respondents reported neither 'serious' issues nor clearly-defined 'domestic problems', 'serious' reasons, i.e. violence and infidelity, remained of considerable importance, especially for women. More generally, neither women's changing situations and expectations nor cultural change seem to have shifted Britain from a situation where women typically account for dissolutions in terms of 'concrete' behavioural, relational or domestic inadequacies, rather than in terms consistent with partners in 'pure' or 'virtual' relationships' (Giddens, 1992; Bauman, 2003) simply having 'grown apart'. Regardless of whether the findings echo *actual* reasons for dissolution or simply reflect *culturally legitimate* accounts, 'weak bond' explanations of dissolution, albeit not unusual, are evidently far from being the norm, even for cohabitation.

The similarities between the distributions of stated reasons for dissolution for marital and cohabiting relationships appear as striking as the differences. Nevertheless, the difference relating to the 'seriousness' of the reasons, which persisted within the multivariate analyses, merits further discussion. While this could reflect the greater barriers to dissolution presented

by formal bonds and legal ties, a substantial minority of marriages ended for reasons within the ‘least serious’ categories, so an emphasis on these ‘barriers’ may be misplaced.

An alternative explanation, resonating with the ideas of Barlow *et al.* (2005) regarding less-committed *sub-groups* of cohabiting people, is that proportionally more cohabiting relationships involve a relatively low level of relationship-specific investment by one or both partners. This could reflect a correlation with *stages* within individuals’ life-courses, or within particular relationships, when this level is likely to be low, e.g. the ‘try and see’ stage within some relationships (Jamieson *et al.*, 2002). Thus, while this article provides very little evidence that the differences in stated reasons for dissolution between marriage and cohabitation reflect a ‘selection effect’ based on differences in attitudes linked to *moral-normative* commitment to coupledness, its findings are consistent with a crucial role for differences in *relationship-specific* commitment. It is, however, difficult to disentangle two competing possibilities: the constraint on dissolution arising from investment in a *relationship*, and personal commitment to a *partner* (Lewis 2001: 125).

Considered alone, differences between marriage and cohabitation in the *distribution* of stated reasons for dissolution do not allow differences between their dissolution *rates* for each reason to be established. However, assuming that the risk of dissolution for ‘serious’ reasons is broadly similar across relationship types, this article’s findings imply a risk of dissolution for ‘weak bond’ reasons over three times as high for cohabiting relationships as for marital relationships. On the other hand, even if proportionally more cohabitations resemble transitory, ‘virtual’ relationships (Bauman, 2003), such relationships may nevertheless constitute only a small minority of cohabitations. In the past, these might instead have been non-resident, ‘dating’ relationships; most cohabiting relationships may more closely resemble

preludes or alternatives to marriage, generating a broadly similar distribution of reasons for dissolution.

While the findings arguably demonstrate the *similarity* of marital and cohabiting relationships as much as they highlight *differences*, the limited age range constrains their generalizability. Later in relationship histories, as the balance of influence of traditional norms of coupledness and individualism alters, cohabitation may less often resemble a prelude or alternative to marriage.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> About three-quarters ended in the 1990s or 2000, the remainder mostly in the late 1980s.

<sup>2</sup> Based on 2005 divorce data (England and Wales).

<sup>3</sup> Recent studies involving the divorced or formerly partnered typically prioritise other issues, e.g. parenting or repartnering (Smart and Neale, 1999; Lampard and Peggs, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> In Hart's analytical framework for dissolution-related factors, derived from subjective accounts, sufficient conditions for dissolution are linked to *three* conceptually distinct dimensions (Hart 1976: 61-102).

<sup>5</sup> See, however, Cupach and Metts (1986) and Schneider (1990).

<sup>6</sup> The extent of any *actual* differences in commitment remains unclear (Jamieson *et al.*, 2002; Barlow *et al.*, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> This resonates with a suggested decline in the 'complaint-based' accounts characteristic of the 1950s-1960s US (Price and McKenry, 1988: 32-34).

<sup>8</sup> Bradshaw and Millar's findings partly relate to lone parents who had never lived with the other parent; Ambrose *et al.*'s and Smart and Stevens' findings are specific to men and former cohabitees respectively.

<sup>9</sup> To protect respondents' identities, only the (calendar) years of these events (and the respondent's birth) were available, reducing some measures' precision.

<sup>10</sup> About 1% of respondents reported still being in a relationship with their last partner, but stopping co-residing (see Table 1). Given the contemporary salience of 'Living-Apart-Together' (Duncan and Phillips, 2010), the status of such 'dissolutions' is debatable. However, given the ongoing normative importance of co-residence, they were retained, for consistency.

<sup>11</sup> Respondents may not have perceived 'another relationship' as constituting infidelity, if no sexual intimacy occurred before their co-resident relationships ended.

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<sup>12</sup> In various ways (e.g. gender balance, marriage/cohabitation balance), this ‘residual’ category resembles the two preceding ones in Table 2.

<sup>13</sup> The ‘Other (unknown)’ category is the hierarchy’s lowest because there is no basis for treating it as containing reasons less ‘weak’ than in the preceding category. Its proportion childless does not differ significantly from those for the two preceding categories.

<sup>14</sup> In Table 2, the similar percentages of each sex in some categories are an artefact of the gender difference for the violence category.

<sup>15</sup> The superficially ‘reversed’ difference for the ‘domestic problems’ category in Table 2 reflects the smaller proportion of marriages where no ‘serious’ reason was specified.

<sup>16</sup> The %nc values in Table 2 highlight additional, interesting distinctions: e.g. between infidelity combined with other reasons and as a sole reason. However, as they do not relate to the marriage/cohabitation dichotomy, they are not pursued here.

<sup>17</sup> Supplementary material, available online, amalgamates the dependent variables within a single, multinomial logistic regression for each sex. The multinomial results are consistent with the findings and interpretations presented here.

<sup>18</sup> Occasionally, the multivariate analyses rendered insignificant a significant *bivariate* relationship involving the former.

<sup>19</sup> For presentational clarity, the categories of the variables in Tables 3 and 4 have been aggregated, maintaining statistically significant distinctions.

<sup>20</sup> Controlling for the respondent having had a child substantially reduces the ‘domestic problems’ odds ratio for women; the impact of other controls counter-balances and obscures this.

<sup>21</sup> Assessed with reference to the parameter estimates (*B*-values).

<sup>22</sup> In about 5 per cent of cases, whether respondents had had children could not be established reliably. Consequently, children’s impact may be under-estimated.

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<sup>23</sup> Overlapping category ranges for the duration and age at co-residence measures reflect the calendar-year basis of the available data.

<sup>24</sup> Male graduates less often reported ‘serious’ reasons, and students’ relationships ended more often for reasons within the ‘weakest’ categories, possibly a life-course stage effect.

## **Acknowledgements**

[See title page file]

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**TABLE 1** Stated reasons for dissolution: original and aggregated categories

<b>Aggregated category</b>	<b>Original categories</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>c</b>	<b>m</b>
Violence (12.7%)	Domestic violence*.	12.7%	<b>21.5</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>17.0</b>
Infidelity (37.3%)	Unfaithfulness or adultery*;	36.6%	<b>40.6</b>	<b>32.1</b>	<b>28.4</b>	<b>51.2</b>
	Another relationship involved.	0.7%	0.8	0.6	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.3</b>
Flaws in relationship or partner (36.0%)	Difficulties with our sex life*;	10.5%	<b>12.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>14.6</b>
	Lack of respect or appreciation*;	25.8%	<b>30.6</b>	<b>20.4</b>	25.1	27.0
	Not sharing household chores enough*;	9.3%	<b>11.8</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>11.5</b>
	Drink, drugs or gambling problem; Mental health or related problem.	2.3% 0.7%	<b>3.2</b> 0.7	<b>1.2</b> 0.8	2.2 0.7	2.4 0.7
Family or household (19.9%)	Money problems*;	15.9%	<b>17.3</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>19.1</b>
	Not having children*;	3.4%	3.1	3.6	<b>2.8</b>	<b>4.4</b>
	Problem with children/step-children;	0.8%	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.8
	Problems with parents/in-laws/family.	0.7%	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.6
Arguments (33.3%)	Arguments*.	33.3%	34.1	32.4	33.3	33.3
Other (58.8%)	Different interests, nothing in common*;	21.1%	21.3	21.0	20.5	22.2
	Grew apart*;	42.5%	<b>37.1</b>	<b>48.4</b>	42.5	42.4
	One of us moved because of a change in circumstances (for example, changed jobs)*;	8.9%	<b>6.8</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>3.0</b>
	Never at home (e.g. always out with friends);	0.4%	0.6	0.2	0.4	0.5
	Age-related problems (e.g. big age difference);	0.5%	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.3
	Lived in/moved to a different country/area;	0.7%	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.5
	Still in relationship, but stopped living together;	0.9%	1.2	0.7	<b>1.4</b>	<b>0.2</b>
	Change of mind/feelings/personality;	1.5%	1.6	1.5	<b>1.9</b>	<b>0.8</b>
	Partner just left without any explanation.	0.2%	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.1
Other (unknown) (1.8%)	Another reason (please say what)* [Reasons not covered by the above]	1.8%	<b>1.0</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>0.6</b>

**Notes:**

- An asterisk denotes a reason that was shown to the respondent, phrased exactly as indicated.
- The percentages in brackets are percentages of the whole sample: n=4,310, consisting of 2,264 women (52.5%) and 2,046 men (47.5%), and of 2,767 cohabitations (64.2%) and 1,543 marriages (35.8%).
- **W** = Women; **M** = men; **c** = cohabitation; **m** = marriage. Figures in bold indicate that a chi-square test for the difference between women and men, or between cohabitation and marriage, was statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ;  $p > 0.05$  for all other comparisons).

**TABLE 2** Stated reasons for dissolution: analytic typology

Analytic category	Definition	%nc
Violence (12.7%) [W 21.5% M 3.0% c 10.4% m 17.0%]	Domestic violence given as a reason.	32.6
Infidelity only (13.4%) [W 14.4% M 12.3% c 10.4% m 18.8%]	Adultery/another relationship was the only reason given.	43.0
Domestic problems plus infidelity (12.2%) [W 12.1% M 12.3% c 9.4% m 17.2%]	Adultery/another relationship given as a reason, plus other reason(s) in the relationship/partner or family/household aggregated categories.	51.9
Other infidelity-related accounts (6.1%) [W 5.2% M 7.1% c 5.2% m 7.6%]	Adultery/another relationship given as a reason, plus other specified reason(s) not leading to classification in the preceding analytic category.	52.3
Domestic problems (24.5%) [W 23.8% M 25.3% c 26.3% m 21.3%]	Violence and adultery/another relationship not given as reasons, but reason(s) given from the relationship/partner or family/household aggregated categories.	53.3
Conflict (6.5%) [W 4.1% M 9.1% c 8.0% m 3.7%]	Arguments given as a reason, but no reasons given from the violence, adultery/another relationship, relationship/partner or family/household aggregated categories.	59.4
'Weak bond' explanations (22.9%) [W 18.0% M 28.4% c 28.0% m 13.8%]	Specified reasons given, but from the 'Other' aggregated category in Table 1 only.	70.6
Other (unknown) (1.8%) [W 1.0% M 2.5% c 2.4% m 0.6%]	Other, uncategorized reasons	64.0

**Notes:**

- **W** = Women; **M** = men; **c** = cohabitation; **m** = marriage.
- $\chi^2_7 = 406.6$  ( $p < 0.001$ ) for women/men;  $\chi^2_7 = 290.7$  ( $p < 0.001$ ) for cohabitation/marriage.
- **%nc** is the percentage of cases in an analytic category who have had no children or for whom the birth of their first child is known to post-date the end of their relationship.

**TABLE 3** Results from a binary logistic regression (Dependent variable: Reported a ‘serious’ reason for relationship dissolution)

Explanatory variable	<i>n</i>	<u>Men</u>		<i>n</i>	<u>Women</u>	
		OR	<i>p</i>		OR	<i>p</i>
<b>Relationship type</b> (RC = Cohabiting)	1143		<b>0.000</b>	1589		<b>0.000</b>
Marital	517	2.58	0.000	1061	1.70	0.000
<b>Education level</b> (RC = No degree#)	1314		<b>0.035</b>	2218		<b>0.350</b>
Graduate	346	0.73	0.035	432	0.90	0.350
<b>Employment status</b> (RC = Other)	282		<b>0.029</b>	969		<b>0.693</b>
Employed	1378	1.43	0.029	1681	1.04	0.693
<b>Region</b> (RC = North/Wales/Scotland)	485		<b>0.014</b>	789		<b>0.001</b>
East	308	1.49	0.013	492	0.99	0.902
South	462	1.03	0.851	760	0.77	0.015
West Midlands	138	0.77	0.241	252	1.25	0.142
Greater London	267	0.86	0.419	357	0.67	0.004
<b>Relig. denomination</b> (RC = None#)	1075		<b>0.000</b>	1452		<b>0.004</b>
Church of England	261	1.00	0.985	618	1.44	0.000
Roman Catholic	135	0.47	0.001	230	1.34	0.055
Other Christian	148	0.75	0.153	274	1.12	0.436
Non-Christian	41	0.22	0.002	76	0.84	0.492
<b>Health status</b> (RC = Very good)	694		<b>0.011</b>	1061		<b>0.004</b>
Good or fair	916	1.35	0.009	1515	1.29	0.003
Bad or very bad	50	2.05	0.038	74	1.76	0.032
<b>Importance of children</b> (RC = Very)	399		<b>0.001</b>	717		<b>0.351</b>
Other	1261	0.65	0.001	1933	1.09	0.351
<b>Affection &gt; Sex</b> (RC = Other)	1272		<b>0.011</b>	1872		<b>0.012</b>
Agree strongly	388	1.39	0.011	778	1.26	0.012
<b>Child by separation</b> (RC = No)	1014		<b>0.574</b>	1240		<b>0.000</b>
Other	646	0.93	0.574	1410	1.59	0.000
<b>Age at start of rel.</b> (RC= Up to 19)	239		<b>0.168</b>	787		<b>0.000</b>
19 to 24	726	0.73	0.060	1159	0.84	0.072
24 or over#	695	0.78	0.142	704	0.64	0.000
<b>Relationship duration</b> (RC = < 1 yr)	208		<b>0.029</b>	277		<b>0.001</b>
< 2 years	410	1.40	0.114	430	1.07	0.676
1 or 2 years	241	1.24	0.363	382	1.63	0.003
2 to 5 years	387	1.93	0.003	683	1.46	0.013
5 to 10 years	250	1.97	0.007	531	1.42	0.036
10 years or more	153	2.31	0.003	331	1.32	0.155
Unknown	11	1.54	0.544	16	0.11	0.009

**Notes:**

- OR = Odds ratio; RC = Reference category; bold *p*-values show variables’ overall significance.
- Model chi-square = 220.9 (24 d.f.) [Men], 243.7 (24 d.f.) [Women]; -2LL = 1922.5 [Men], 3419.6 [Women]; Pseudo- $r^2$  (Cox & Snell) = 0.125 [Men], 0.088 [Women]; *n* = 1,660 [Men], 2,650 [Women]
- ‘Importance of children’ relates to the respondent’s view of the importance of having children to a successful marriage or long term-relationship; ‘Affection > Sex’ relates to the respondent’s view regarding whether company/affection is more important than sex in a marriage or relationship; the ‘East’ region includes Yorkshire and the East Midlands.
- #: Includes a small number of missing values (<18 in all instances).

**TABLE 4** Results from a binary logistic regression (Dependent variable: Reported a ‘domestic problem\*’ as a reason for relationship dissolution)

Explanatory variable	<i>n</i>	<u>Men</u>		<i>n</i>	<u>Women</u>	
		OR	<i>p</i>		OR	<i>p</i>
<b>Relationship type</b> (RC = Cohabiting)	879		<b>0.062</b>	903		<b>0.001</b>
Marital	246	1.43	0.062	383	1.70	0.001
<b>Employment status</b> (RC = FT educ.)	37		<b>0.001</b>	54		<b>0.005</b>
Employed	921	2.08	0.079	829	1.34	0.325
Unemployed, sick or disabled	138	4.19	0.001	121	1.91	0.061
Other (inc. looking after home)	29	2.30	0.139	282	0.91	0.766
<b>Relig. denomination</b> (RC = None#)	711		<b>0.002</b>	747		<b>0.800</b>
Church of England	162	0.87	0.463	259	0.86	0.323
Roman Catholic	111	1.11	0.622	104	1.04	0.874
Other Christian	105	2.33	0.000	132	0.90	0.578
Non-Christian	36	0.87	0.701	44	1.19	0.604
<b>Child by separation</b> (RC = No)	740		<b>0.014</b>	721		<b>0.000</b>
Other	385	1.44	0.014	565	1.79	0.000
<b>Age at start of rel.</b> (RC= Up to 19)	142		<b>0.745</b>	331		<b>0.000</b>
19 to 24	489	1.08	0.705	562	1.54	0.003
24 or over#	494	1.16	0.475	393	1.83	0.000
<b>Relationship duration</b> (RC = < 1 yr)	174		<b>0.104</b>	171		<b>0.067</b>
< 2 years	312	1.69	0.013	262	1.04	0.851
1 or 2 years	185	1.71	0.021	182	1.08	0.724
2 to 5 years	241	1.58	0.043	320	0.93	0.713
5 to 10 years	132	1.40	0.233	218	1.06	0.813
10 years or more	73	1.32	0.408	118	0.61	0.088
Unknown	8	0.24	0.185	15	0.18	0.014

**Notes:**

- OR = Odds ratio; RC = Reference category; bold *p*-values show variables’ overall significance.
- Model chi-square = 67.5 (17 d.f.) [Men], 79.0 (17 d.f.) [Women]; -2LL = 1434.5 [Men], 1703.5 [Women]; Pseudo- $r^2$  (Cox & Snell) = 0.058 [Men], 0.060 [Women]; *n* = 1,125 [Men], 1,286 [Women].
- \*: As compared to reasons belonging only to the conflict, ‘weak bond explanations’ and other (unknown) explanations categories.
- #: Includes a small number of missing values (<18 in all instances).

# **Stated reasons for relationship dissolution in Britain: marriage and cohabitation compared**

## **Supplementary Material (available online): Appendix A**

Tables A1 and A2 contain results from multinomial logistic regressions for men and women respectively. The dependent variable is a composite of the two dependent variables used in the binary logistic regressions discussed within the main text of the article, i.e. it has three categories: ‘Serious’ reasons for dissolution, ‘Domestic problems’ as reasons for dissolution, and ‘Other’ reasons for dissolution. Note that the models reported in Tables A1 and A2 contain *all* the explanatory variables and *all* the categories included in the models reported in Tables 3 and 4 within the main part of the article, and as such are not precisely comparable with those models.

The main additional feature of the multinomial results is thus that they break down the comparison between ‘Serious’ reasons and all the remaining reasons into two *separate* comparisons: between ‘Serious’ reasons and ‘Domestic problems’ as reasons, and between ‘Serious’ reasons and ‘Other’ reasons. The third comparison within the multinomial models, i.e. the comparison between ‘Domestic problems’ as reasons and ‘Other’ reasons, unsurprisingly produces results very similar to the results for the relevant binary logistic regressions, as shown within the main part of the article.

For many of the categories of the various independent variables, out of the three odds ratios presented for each category it is the odds ratio for the comparison between ‘Serious’ reasons and ‘Other’ reasons which has the value that is multiplicatively furthest away from 1, i.e. it is the odds ratio for this comparison which constitutes the largest effect. This is consistent with the idea that the three categories typically behave as a hierarchy, with the category of

‘Domestic problems’ as reasons occupying an intermediate position between the other two categories. In those instances where the odds ratio for the comparison between ‘Serious’ reasons and ‘Other’ reasons does *not* constitute the largest effect, this is typically a reflection of one or more of the odds ratios being statistically non-significant, i.e. in these instances the deviation from the usual hierarchical order can be attributed to sampling error.

Of the apparent deviations from this hierarchical order which are evident within the multinomial results, the main one which *cannot* justifiably be attributed to sampling error relates to woman’s ages at starting co-residential relationships. In this case, starting a co-residential relationship as a relatively young woman is associated with higher odds *both* of reporting a ‘serious’ reason, and *also* of reporting an ‘Other’ reason, as compared to reporting a reason relating to ‘Domestic problems’. (Note that this – substantively plausible – finding is also reported, in effect, within the main text of the article, although it is worded differently as a reflection of the different models used.)

In general, the multinomial results are consistent with the findings and interpretations presented in the main part of the article. The ‘splicing together’ of the two binary dependent variables, and the consequent decomposition of the effects corresponding to ‘Serious’ reasons, lead to measures of model fit, parameter estimates and *p*-values which for the most part appear to differ from those presented in the main part of the article simply as a consequence of the implications for sampling error of this aggregation of models and disaggregation of effects. For example, the model chi-square values mirror the combined values from the binary logistic regressions, with small discrepancies reflecting the degrees of freedom and associated, non-significant quantities of chi-square that arise from the inclusion in the multinomial models of additional variables and categories, which were excluded from the binary logistic regressions because of their statistical non-significance.

**TABLE A1** Results from a multinomial logistic regression (Men)

Explanatory variable	<u>Comparison</u>					
	Serious vs. Domestic prob.		Serious vs. Other		Domestic prob. vs. Other	
	OR	<i>p</i>	OR	<i>p</i>	OR	<i>p</i>
<b>Relationship type</b> (RC = Cohabiting)						<b>0.000</b>
Marital	2.12	0.000	3.05	0.000	1.44	0.060
<b>Education level</b> (RC = No degree#)						<b>0.027</b>
Graduate	0.87	0.465	0.66	0.011	0.76	0.088
<b>Employment status</b> (RC = FT educ.)						<b>0.001</b>
Employed	0.91	0.849	2.04	0.078	2.25	0.056
Unemployed, sick or disabled	0.50	0.200	2.24	0.075	4.47	0.001
Other (inc. looking after home)	0.39	0.167	0.97	0.957	2.47	0.117
<b>Region</b> (RC = North/Wales/Scotland)						<b>0.063</b>
East	1.55	0.030	1.49	0.029	0.96	0.841
South	1.00	0.986	1.07	0.687	1.07	0.688
West Midlands	0.65	0.104	0.88	0.617	1.35	0.219
Greater London	0.89	0.603	0.85	0.422	0.95	0.818
<b>Relig. denomination</b> (RC = None#)						<b>0.000</b>
Church of England	1.09	0.652	0.94	0.728	0.86	0.443
Roman Catholic	0.43	0.002	0.50	0.005	1.15	0.528
Other Christian	0.48	0.001	1.15	0.548	2.41	0.000
Non-Christian	0.23	0.005	0.21	0.002	0.89	0.758
<b>Health status</b> (RC = Very good)						<b>0.025</b>
Good or fair	1.17	0.268	1.48	0.002	1.26	0.083
Bad or very bad	1.75	0.176	1.97	0.104	1.12	0.790
<b>Importance of children</b> (RC = Very)						<b>0.003</b>
Other	0.70	0.020	0.62	0.001	0.89	0.455
<b>Affection &gt; Sex</b> (RC = Other)						<b>0.019</b>
Agree strongly	1.57	0.006	1.29	0.083	0.82	0.214
<b>Child by separation</b> (RC = No)						<b>0.069</b>
Other	0.75	0.079	1.07	0.672	1.42	0.026
<b>Age at start of rel.</b> (RC= Up to 19)						<b>0.293</b>
19 to 24	0.66	0.047	0.78	0.178	1.19	0.420
24 or over#	0.67	0.063	0.85	0.408	1.28	0.253
<b>Relationship duration</b> (RC = < 1 yr)						<b>0.009</b>
< 2 years	0.98	0.941	1.69	0.019	1.73	0.011
1 or 2 years	0.87	0.618	1.49	0.112	1.72	0.024
2 to 5 years	1.40	0.207	2.24	0.001	1.60	0.045
5 to 10 years	1.53	0.176	2.20	0.004	1.44	0.209
10 years or more	1.89	0.073	2.50	0.004	1.32	0.422
Unknown	4.42	0.207	0.98	0.978	0.22	0.171

**Notes:**

- OR = Odds ratio; RC = Reference category; bold *p*-values show variables' overall significance.
- Model chi-square = 302.2 (52 d.f.); -2LL = 3008.9; Pseudo- $r^2$  (Cox & Snell) = 0.166;  $n = 1,660$ .
- #: Includes a small number of missing values (<18 in all instances).

**TABLE A2** Results from a multinomial logistic regression (Women)

Explanatory variable	<u>Comparison</u>					
	Serious vs. Domestic prob.		Serious vs. Other		Domestic prob. vs. Other	
	OR	<i>p</i>	OR	<i>p</i>	OR	<i>p</i>
<b>Relationship type</b> (RC = Cohabiting)						<b>0.000</b>
Marital	1.35	0.014	2.19	0.000	1.62	0.002
<b>Education level</b> (RC = No degree#)						<b>0.248</b>
Graduate	1.00	0.993	0.81	0.123	0.80	0.164
<b>Employment status</b> (RC = FT educ.)						<b>0.007</b>
Employed	0.86	0.591	1.25	0.375	1.45	0.211
Unemployed, sick or disabled	0.60	0.096	1.20	0.566	2.01	0.048
Other (inc. looking after home)	1.11	0.705	1.03	0.917	0.92	0.799
<b>Region</b> (RC = North/Wales/Scotland)						<b>0.002</b>
East	1.00	0.979	0.96	0.789	0.96	0.804
South	0.72	0.012	0.81	0.124	1.13	0.436
West Midlands	1.02	0.913	1.59	0.026	1.56	0.062
Greater London	0.63	0.005	0.71	0.043	1.13	0.522
<b>Relig. denomination</b> (RC = None#)						<b>0.026</b>
Church of England	1.58	0.000	1.29	0.049	0.82	0.183
Roman Catholic	1.31	0.144	1.35	0.124	1.03	0.895
Other Christian	1.19	0.314	1.04	0.803	0.88	0.522
Non-Christian	0.79	0.413	0.90	0.742	1.15	0.676
<b>Health status</b> (RC = Very good)						<b>0.008</b>
Good or fair	1.22	0.052	1.38	0.002	1.13	0.300
Bad or very bad	1.91	0.045	1.95	0.063	1.02	0.962
<b>Importance of children</b> (RC = Very)						<b>0.534</b>
Other	1.14	0.261	1.04	0.732	0.92	0.518
<b>Affection &gt; Sex</b> (RC = Other)						<b>0.030</b>
Agree strongly	1.32	0.012	1.20	0.116	0.90	0.453
<b>Child by separation</b> (RC = No)						<b>0.000</b>
Other	1.20	0.114	2.15	0.000	1.79	0.000
<b>Age at start of rel.</b> (RC= Up to 19)						<b>0.000</b>
19 to 24	0.66	0.001	1.06	0.649	1.61	0.001
24 or over#	0.48	0.000	0.90	0.456	1.89	0.000
<b>Relationship duration</b> (RC = < 1 yr)						<b>0.000</b>
< 2 years	1.05	0.786	1.07	0.714	1.02	0.936
1 or 2 years	1.51	0.039	1.76	0.005	1.16	0.499
2 to 5 years	1.47	0.040	1.41	0.061	0.96	0.834
5 to 10 years	1.35	0.137	1.51	0.047	1.12	0.630
10 years or more	1.58	0.058	1.06	0.825	0.67	0.157
Unknown	0.31	0.237	0.06	0.001	0.19	0.019

**Notes:**

- OR = Odds ratio; RC = Reference category; bold *p*-values show variables' overall significance.
- Model chi-square = 333.8 (52 d.f.); -2LL = 4707.7; Pseudo- $r^2$  (Cox & Snell) = 0.118;  $n = 2,650$ .
- #: Includes a small number of missing values (<18 in all instances).