

Marital Status and Happiness, 1972–1996

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ABSTRACT

Several studies indicate that married persons have higher levels of happiness than persons in other marital categories. In recent years, there has been some debate over whether marriage still involves significant advantages. In 1988, a study by Glenn and Weaver using U.S. national survey data, indicated that there had been a steady decline in the positive relationship between marriage and reported happiness from 1972 through 1986: married females were reporting lower levels of happiness and never-married males were reporting higher levels of happiness. More recent data presented in this thesis indicate that the trends in happiness observed by Glenn and Weaver (1988) have not continued. New data from 1987 through 1996 show an increase in the happiness of both married males and females, and a slight decrease in the happiness of never-married males. Data also indicate that neither life satisfaction, or socioeconomic factors, or cohabitation can explain the relative increase in the happiness of the never-married, compared to the married, observed by Glenn and Weaver (1988) from 1972 through 1986. Contrary to Glenn and Weaver (1988), evidence presented in this thesis suggests that marriage continues to be an important institution: married persons continue to have significantly higher levels of happiness than persons in other marital categories. Further, marriage provides persons with benefits that cannot be obtained from other living arrangements such as cohabitation.

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Chapter 1: Literature Review and Problem Statement

1.1 Introduction

Substantial evidence indicates that married persons experience higher levels of physical and psychological well-being than single, divorced, and widowed persons. Studies of physical health indicate that married individuals have substantially lower morbidity and mortality rates than unmarried individuals. Similar to findings based on physical health studies, findings based on studies of psychological well-being indicate that married persons experience better mental health than unmarried persons. These findings hold for studies that focus on institutionalization, as well as studies that focus on life satisfaction, positive and negative affect, and happiness.

The relationship between marriage and well-being has been explained by two different processes: social selection and social causation. According to the social selection perspective, persons with high levels of well-being are more likely to get married and stay married than persons with lower levels of well-being. On the other hand, the social causation perspective suggests that the marital relationship produces high levels of well-being. Although there appears to be some evidence in support of the social selection perspective, especially in studies that focus on severe forms of mental and physical impairment, other studies provide substantial evidence that social selection factors are not the major determinants of the relationship between marital status and well-being. Researchers in support of the social causation perspective argue that the marital relationship produces high levels of well-being primarily because it provides persons with gratification and rewards, social support, and social control. Although other relationships may provide individuals with these benefits, other relationships cannot provide rewards and gratification, social support, and social control in the same way or to the same extent as the marital relationship.

In recent years, researchers have begun to question whether marriage remains associated with the same high levels of benefits as it has been in the past. Researchers such as Glenn and Weaver (1988) are now suggesting that marriage is no longer associated with the same benefits due to societal changes that have made it more advantageous to be single. In their study, they found that the difference in well-being between married and never-married persons had decreased between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s. According to Glenn and Weaver (1988), married women were experiencing lower levels of happiness, and never-married men were experiencing higher levels of happiness. Findings from a replication of this study conducted by Lee et al. (1991) also appear to support Glenn and Weaver's (1988) argument that the advantages of being never-married are increasing, particularly among males. Other studies conducted since the mid-1980s, however, indicate a continuing advantage for the married. The present study examines this issue using data from the General Social Surveys (GSS) for the years 1972 through 1996.

1.2 Early Studies on Marital Status and States of Well-being

1.2.1 Physical and Mental Health

Several studies of the relationship between marital status and mortality rates indicate that mortality rates for married persons are substantially lower than mortality rates for unmarried persons (Gove 1973; Gove, Style, and Hughes 1990; Verbrugge 1979). In general, data from these studies show that the differences between never-married persons and married persons are smaller than the differences between formerly married persons and married persons. These data also show that the relationship between marital status and mortality is stronger for younger persons than older persons and stronger for males than for females.

Studies on self-reported health indicate that married persons have lower morbidity rates than unmarried persons (Verbrugge 1979; Joung et al. 1997). Verbrugge (1979) found that married persons had lower rates of acute and chronic conditions than unmarried persons. Divorced and separated persons had the highest rates of acute and chronic conditions followed by widowed and never-married persons. Verbrugge (1979)

also found that married persons with a condition (either acute or chronic) were less incapacitated than unmarried persons. Umberson (1992) found that married persons engages in fewer unhealthy behaviors such as smoking and excessive drinking than unmarried persons.

Some researchers argue that the differences in mortality and morbidity across marital statuses can be attributed to psychosocial factors, material circumstances, and health behaviors (Gove 1972, 1973; Gove et al. 1990; Joung et al. 1997; Umberson 1992; Verbrugge 1979). Researchers argue that marriage provides persons with security and social support (Glenn 1975; Gove 1973; Joung et al. 1997; Verbrugge 1979). As a result, married persons are happier and healthier psychologically which may lower their chances of adopting risky behaviors and lifestyles. According to Umberson (1992), married persons are subject to a substantial amount of social control from their spouses. This pressures individuals to stop engaging in their current risky health behaviors and to refrain from engaging in new risky health behaviors in the future.

Other researchers argue that unmarried individuals experience greater economic hardship which contributes to their poorer psychological and physical well-being. Pearlin and Johnson (1977) found that unmarried persons were more likely to experience economic strains than married persons. In addition, unmarried persons who experienced economic hardships appear to be more vulnerable to the effects of limited resources. The combination of greater economic hardship and a greater vulnerability to limited resources may contribute to higher levels of stress and depression. This in turn may adversely affect a person's physical health. Other researchers, such as Joung et al. (1997), argue that married women, much more so than married men, receive material benefits from marriage such as better housing and a better financial situation. They argue that unmarried women are in poor physical health because their financial and housing circumstances cause them to experience more stress. However, Verbrugge (1979), in her study on marital status and health, found that when income is controlled, the marital differentials persist with few exceptions.

Similar to mortality and morbidity studies, studies on the relationship between marital status and institutionalization show that married persons have much lower rates of

institutionalization in mental health facilities than unmarried persons (Gove 1972, 1973; Gove et al. 1990; Martin 1976; Verbrugge 1979). Gove et al. (1990) found that married persons had substantially lower rates of institutionalization than unmarried persons in mental hospitals and chronic hospitals. Verbrugge (1979) found that married persons had much lower rates of residence in mental health institutions than any other marital category. Single persons had the highest institutionalization rates, and formerly married persons had intermediate institutionalization rates. Other studies which focus on more mild forms of mental illness such as anxiety and depression provide similar results (Gove 1972; Gove, Hughes, Style 1983; Gove et al. 1990; Haavio-Mannila 1971; Kessler and Essex 1982; Pearlin and Johnson 1977). These data also show that females have higher rates of mental illness than males.

1.2.2 Subjective Well-being (Life Satisfaction, Positive/Negative Affect, and Happiness)

Most early studies on the relationship between marital status and subjective well-being can be grouped into the following three categories: studies that focus on life satisfaction, studies that focus on positive and negative affect, and studies that focus on avowed happiness. Studies that focus on life satisfaction typically include questions on several "domains" of life such as family, marriage, health, friendships, and job (Campbell, Converse, and Rogers 1976). The answers to these questions are rated on a 7-point likert scale ranging from completely satisfied to completely dissatisfied. Similar to studies of life satisfaction, studies that focus on positive and negative affect typically use a multi-item scale to assess well-being (Bradburn 1969). However, this scale includes both positive and negative items. Emotional well-being is assessed by subtracting an individual's negative affect score from his or her positive affect score. Unlike the studies that focus on life satisfaction or positive/negative affect, studies that focus on avowed happiness typically use a single item survey question to assess well-being (Glenn 1975; Glenn and Weaver 1979, 1981, 1988). Respondents are asked to rate their overall happiness on a scale that consists of three choices: very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy.

Of the studies described above, several indicate that married individuals report greater subjective well-being than any category of unmarried individuals (Andrews and

Withey 1976; Bradburn 1969; Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers 1976; Campbell 1981; Glenn 1975; Gove, Hughes, and Style 1983; Veroff, Douvan, Kulka 1981). Data from these studies also indicate fairly consistently that, after the married, the never-married report the next best subjective well-being, followed by separated, divorced, and widowed individuals, who report the lowest levels of subjective well-being. Findings from these studies indicate that the married are better off than the unmarried for both positive indicators of well-being, such as life satisfaction and happiness (Campbell 1981, Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers 1976; Glenn 1975, Glenn and Weaver 1979; Gove, Hughes, and Style 1983; Shin and Johnson 1977) and for negative indicators of subjective well-being such as anxiety, depression, and negative affect (Bradburn 1969; Gove, Hughes, and Style 1983; Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka 1981).

Life Satisfaction

Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) using life satisfaction measures in their study of subjective well-being, reported that satisfaction in the domains of health, family life, and marriage has the greatest influence in accounting for the level of satisfaction people feel with their life in general. In their study, they found that married persons were the most satisfied with their family life and that in general, separated, divorced, and widowed persons were the most dissatisfied with their family life. After married persons, widowed women had the next highest level of satisfaction with their family life, followed by never-married persons, widowed men, separated persons, and divorced persons. Among unmarried individuals, men were more negative than women in their appraisals of family life, although for married individuals women were slightly more negative in their appraisals of family life. In agreement with Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976), other studies also found that married persons were more satisfied with their family life than unmarried persons (Campbell 1981, Gove, Hughes, and Style 1983, Haavio-Mannila 1971). Studies which asked respondents about their overall life satisfaction or satisfaction with life-as-a-whole also reported that married persons were the most satisfied with their overall life, although in some studies the differences between the married and the unmarried were small (Andrews and Withey 1976; Gove, Hughes, and Style 1983; Haavio-Mannila 1971).

Positive/Negative Affect

According to Bradburn (1969), there are two independent dimensions of psychological well-being: positive affect and negative affect. He argued that a researcher must obtain information on both an individual's negative feelings and positive feelings in order to get a good measure of a person's psychological well-being. Accordingly, he developed the Affect Balance Scale. Positive and negative affect scores were obtained through a questionnaire. Positive affect was obtained by asking respondents to rate their positive feeling states over a three-week period preceding receipt of the questionnaire. Likewise, negative affect was obtained by asking respondents to rate their negative feeling states over the same three-week period. Next, the affect balance score was determined simply by subtracting the individual's negative affect score from his or her positive affect score. Positive balance scores denoted good psychological well-being, while negative balance scores denoted poor psychological well-being.

As previously mentioned, positive affect and negative affect are independent dimensions. In his study, Bradburn (1969) found high inter-correlation among positive affect items; average Q's, a measure of the association between items, were .50 for women and .51 for men. He also found high inter-correlation among the negative affect items; average Q's were .54 for both women and men. However, he found no relationship among items between the two clusters; average Q's were .09 for women and .02 for men.

Bradburn (1969) found that married persons were higher in positive affect and lower in negative affect than unmarried persons. Accordingly, married persons' affect balance scores indicated better psychological well-being than persons in other marital categories. After the married, balance scores of the never-married were the next best, followed by those of the separated, divorced, and widowed. Of married persons, the psychological well-being of men was greater than that of women, though in unmarried categories only slight differences occurred between men and women in measures of psychological well-being. Similar to the findings of Bradburn (1969), other studies that include measures of negative affect (e.g. excessive worrying, anxiety, depression, and feelings that one might have a nervous breakdown) found that married persons reported

considerably lower levels of negative affect than unmarried persons (Gove 1972; Gove, Hughes, Style 1983; Gove and Shin 1989a; Gove, Style, and Hughes 1990; Gurin, Veroff, and Feld 1960, Kessler and Essex 1982; Pearlin and Johnson 1977; Thoits 1983; Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka 1981). In general, data from these studies also show that females have higher levels of negative affect than males.

Happiness

Several studies using avowed happiness to assess subjective well-being found that married persons were happier than never-married, separated, divorced, and widowed persons (Bradburn 1969; Glenn 1975; Glenn and Weaver 1979; Gove, Hughes, and Style 1983; Gurin, Veroff, and Feld 1960; Shin and Johnson 1977; Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka 1981; Zollar and Williams 1977). Bradburn (1969) found that a substantially greater percentage of married persons reported that they were "very happy" than never-married, separated, divorced, and widowed persons. After the married, more never-married persons reported that they were "very happy" than separated, divorced, and widowed persons. More women reported that they were "very happy" than men for the majority of the marital categories. In agreement with Bradburn (1969), Gove, Hughes, and Style (1983) found that married persons were happier than all categories of unmarried persons. Never-married persons reported the next highest level of happiness, followed by widowed and divorced persons who reported the least overall happiness. For all of the marital categories, females reported greater happiness than males. In agreement with these studies on marital status and happiness, Shin and Johnson (1977), Glenn (1975), and Zollar and Williams (1983) all found that married persons were happier than unmarried persons. Even when controlling for age, education, and income, studies still found that married persons were happier than unmarried persons (Glenn 1975; Zollar and Williams 1983).

1.3 Why is Marriage Associated with Well-being?

According to Gove, Style, and Hughes (1990), the relationship between marriage and well-being has been explained by two different processes: social selection and social causation. According to the social selection perspective, persons with high levels of well-

being are more likely to get married and stay married than persons with lower levels of well-being. The social causation perspective, on the other hand, suggests that the marital relationship produces high levels of well-being.

1.3.1 Social Selection

As indicated above, several studies show that marriage has a strong positive relationship to well-being. While the findings on the relationship between marital status and psychological well-being are well established, the problem interpreting the findings remains unsolved. One may argue that: a) marital status has an effect on well-being, referred to as social causation; b) that well-being has an effect on marital status, referred to as a social selection; c) both well-being and marriage are influenced by one or more common causes; d) both social selection and causation processes influence the relationship between marital status and psychological well-being.

Researchers in support of social selection hypotheses have argued that persons who are emotionally or mentally unstable are less likely to marry, and if they do, they are less likely to stay married (Martin 1976; Mastekaasa 1992, 1994; Rushing 1979; Turner and Gartrell 1978). Mastekaasa (1992), in a study of 9,000 unmarried persons, found that psychological well-being significantly predicted transition into marriage for women ages 20–39 and for men ages 26–39. As levels of psychological well-being increased, the probability of marrying also increased. In a later study, Mastekaasa sampled of 20,215 women and 19,126 men, twenty years of age and older, and found that poor psychological well-being predicted later marital dissolution (Mastekaasa 1994). For both men and women, he found that the average level of psychological well-being of those who later separated or divorced was significantly lower than that of those who were stably married. Also, as expected, good psychological health predicted marital stability. An increase of one unit on Mastekaasa's (1994) well-being index was associated with roughly a 30% decline in the separation rate.

Other findings deviate from, but do not necessarily contradict the argument that emotionally and mentally unstable persons are selected out of marriage. For example, Forthofer et al. (1996), studied the effects of clinically significant psychiatric disorders on the timing of first marriage, and found that psychiatric disorders were significantly and

positively associated with early first marriage, and negatively associated with on-time and late first marriage. Adolescents with a history of any psychiatric disorder were more likely to marry by age 18 than adolescents without a history of a disorder. However, adolescents who did not marry by age 18 were less likely to marry later if their histories included one or more significant psychiatric disorder. The effects of psychiatric disorders on the timing of first marriage did not vary systematically by type of disorder, gender, or cohorts.

Although the Forthofer et al. (1996) study does not address selection out of marriage through separation and divorce, research indicates that early marriage is associated with increased marital instability (Booth and Edwards 1985). Booth and Edwards (1985) found that the relationship between early marriage and marital instability could be best understood in terms of the role performances of young spouses. Role performance, consisting of measures of the dissatisfaction with the performance of one's spouse and the problematic behavior of one's spouse, was a significant factor in explaining marital instability among those who married early.

Overall, evidence suggests that persons who are emotionally and mentally unstable are less likely to marry, and if they do marry, are less likely to stay married. Some evidence also suggests that persons with psychiatric problems are selected into early first marriages. A proportion of these persons may then be selected out of marriage as a result of problematic behavior. However, studies that focus on persons with severe impairment tend to show the most support for the social selection perspective (Forthofer et al. 1996; Gove et al. 1990; Turner and Gartrell 1978).

Although social selection factors may be associated with marital status, Gove et al. (1990) suggest several reasons for viewing social selection factors as only minor determinants in the relationship between marital status and poor psychological well-being.

1. Studies indicate that persons who divorce and remarry are about as happy with their marriage as persons who have been married only once (Campbell,

Converse, and Rodgers 1976, Glenn and Weaver 1977; Gove et al. 1990; Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka 1981).

2. Studies found that persons who had been widowed reported that adjusting to the loss of their spouses had been very difficult. Gove and Shin (1989b) found that both widows who remarried and those who remain single reported similar levels of difficulty and hardship at the loss of their spouses and that selective factors were not important predictors of remarriage (Gove and Shin 1989b).
3. Marriage is consistently found to be one of the most important correlates of psychological well-being for studies of life satisfaction (Campbell 1981; Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers 1976), happiness (Bradburn 1969; Glenn 1975; Gove et al. 1990; Shin and Johnson 1977), and for studies of mild forms of mental illness such as anxiety and depression (Bradburn 1969; Gove 1972; Gove et al. 1983, 1990; Gurin et al. 1960; Kessler and Essex 1982; Pearlin and Johnson 1977; Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka 1981). If social selection factors accounted for the relationship between marriage and the high levels of psychological well-being and satisfaction, controlling for competence would eliminate or reduce substantially the association between marriage and well-being. However, according to Gove et al. (1990), when studies control for socioeconomic factors, which may be taken as proxy variables for competence, the relationship between psychological well-being and marital status is not substantially changed.
4. Studies show that social support received through marriage and other family ties has a negative relationship with mortality (Berkman and Syme 1979; Gove 1973; Gove et al. 1990; Umberson 1992). Studies of the relationship between mortality and marital status indicate that for disorders such as leukemia and aleukemia where one's emotional state is unrelated to the etiology of the disorder and interacts minimally with the potential effectiveness of treatment, there is no relationship between marital status and mortality (Gove 1973; Gove et al. 1990).

5. Studies show that family relationships other than marriage do not have the same positive effect on the individual's well-being (Gove et al. 1990; Gove, Hughes, with Galle 1983; Hughes and Gove 1981). Hughes and Gove (1981) found that unmarried adults who live with others to whom they are related, by birth, marriage, or kinship experienced lower levels of psychological well-being than unmarried adults who live alone. However, married persons have higher levels of psychological well-being than unmarried persons regardless of whether unmarried persons live alone or with others.
6. Studies support the argument that the relationship between marital status and well-being is not primarily a matter of selection, because cross-sectional repeated surveys on mortality, mental illness, and happiness do not indicate a change with age in the relative levels of well-being of the married and the non-married (Glenn 1975; Glenn and Weaver 1988; Gove et al. 1990). If selection was the primary determinant in the relationship between marital status and well-being, we would expect to find the well-being of the married increasing and the well-being of the unmarried decreasing as the birth cohort ages. As the cohort ages, the married category would gain more persons with high levels of well-being while the unmarried category would be left with an increasingly large proportion of persons with low levels of well-being. However, studies that follow a birth cohort over time as it ages indicate that there is little change in the levels of happiness of married persons and never-married persons.

1.3.2 Marriage as a cause of well-being

As discussed above, several studies show that marriage has a strong positive relationship to well-being. Some researchers argue that the relationship between marriage and psychological well-being results from the selection of healthier individuals into marriage and the emotionally unstable out of marriage. Other researchers provide strong evidence against the social selection perspective. They argue that although some individuals are selected out of marriage due to poor psychological profiles, social selection factors are not major determinants of the relationship between marital status and

psychological well-being. If social selection is not the primary determinant of the relationship between marital status and psychological well-being, then there may be something about marital relationships that cause high levels of well-being.

The literature indicates that three main aspects of marriage that bring about high levels of well-being for individuals; marriage provides individuals with gratification and rewards, social support, and social control. Although other living arrangements may also provide individuals with these benefits, the literature suggests that other living arrangements, such as non-marital cohabitation cannot provide individuals with gratification and rewards, social support, and social control in the same way or to the same extent as marriage.

Gratification and Rewards

According to Gove et al. (1990), marriage provides individuals with a sense of identity and belonging, and a strong positive sense of self-worth and mastery. According to Gove et al. (1990) marriage may enhance well-being in the following ways: First, a person's sense of identity and belonging is produced by being embedded in a regularized relationship, such as marriage, in which personal ties are defined by substantial rights and obligations. Second, the perceived appraisals by those with whom an individual regularly interacts substantially affects an individual's overall evaluation of his or her worth. Generally, marriage may provide individuals with a positive and regularized relationship, which in turn may enhance well-being by enhancing overall sense of worth. Third, an individual's sense of mastery, control, and competence may be determined in large part by his or her perceived success at meeting role expectations that are attached to important identities. Since married persons rate marriage very high in importance, and the majority of married persons report that they are in happy marriages, it seems safe to conclude that most married persons are successfully meeting their role expectations. As a result of successfully meeting role expectations within marriage, a person may experience a greater sense of mastery, control, and competence, which in turn, enhances his or her well-being.

Social Support and Social Control

Several researchers argue that marriage provides individuals with a type of social support that helps to protect them from life strains and depression (Gove et al. 1990; Kessler and Essex 1982; Pearlin and Johnson 1977; Umberson et al. 1996). Pearlin and Johnson (1977) found that marriage “can function as a protective barrier against the distressful consequences of external threats” (pp. 717). Although marriage cannot prevent social and economic problems from occurring, it can protect individuals from experiencing high levels of psychological distress. Kessler and Essex (1982) found that marriage protects individuals from life strains and depression, because it provides people with a confiding intimate relationship that directly affects their ability to cope. Kessler and Essex (1982) also found that intimate relationships increased effective coping by enhancing self-esteem and an individual’s sense of mastery. Other researchers, such as Horwitz, McLaughlin, and White (1997), argue that marriages have both positive and negative sides, and that the difference in the levels of these aspects has a stronger impact on mental health than the absolute levels of support or problems (pp. 133). In their study, they found that married persons with more supportive spouses reported less depression, and those with less supportive and problematic spousal relations reported more depression. They also found that support by a spouse could offset the negative impact of problematic relationships with family and friends, as well as problems within the marriage, on mental health. In agreement with Horwitz, McLaughlin, and White (1997), Umberson et al. (1996) found that social support from one’s spouse and children was inversely associated with depression, while strain in relationships with one’s spouse was positively associated with depression. These effects were similar for both men and women.

Other studies indicate that social support and social integration can have an impact on both physical and mental health. For example, Gove (1973) found that married persons have much lower mortality rates than unmarried persons when their psychological states (1) appear to play a direct role in death, such as suicide, homicide, and accidents, (2) are directly related to acts such as alcoholism that frequently lead to death, and (3) would appear to affect their willingness and ability to undergo the drawn–

out and careful treatment required for diseases such as tuberculosis (pp. 61). He argues that marriage provides people with close, meaningful social ties which result in higher levels of psychological well-being and more careful and responsible behaviors, both of which reduce mortality rates.

In agreement with Gove (1973), other researchers find that marriage is associated with lower mortality rates, lower levels of risky behavior, and higher levels of healthy behavior (House, Landis, and Umberson 1988; Umberson 1988, 1992). These researchers focus on the social control of health behaviors. They argue that family relationships involve meaning and obligation, which contribute to social control. Social control is a mechanism by which social relationships affect health behaviors, which in turn, affect health outcomes. According to Umberson (1987), social control of behaviors occurs through both internal and external influences: through the internalization of norms, and through sanctioning behavior that is defined as unconventional or deviant. Through social control, Umberson states that “family relationships may provide social control of health behaviors indirectly by affecting the internalization of norms for healthful behavior, and directly by providing informal sanctions for deviating from behavior conducive to health” (pp. 309).

Family members adhere to internalized norms through self-enforcement partly because deviation from these norms may be destructive to important relationships. These relationships involve rewards and commitment (Umberson 1987). Norms for healthy behavior may also be enforced through regulations and sanctions (Umberson 1987). For example, an individual may be told or reminded by his or her spouse to not engage in unhealthy or risky behaviors, such as excessive drinking, fast driving, staying up too late, smoking, and eating junk food. At the same time, an individual may also be reminded to engage in healthy behaviors, such as exercising, regular eating, and sleeping. An individual who at first fails to adhere to norms for healthy behavior may eventually comply, because if he or she does not, his or her spouse may threaten to end the relationship (e.g. in the case of excessive drinking). Also, it may be easier for family members to engage in healthy behaviors, such as exercising, regular eating, and sleeping,

because family members often coordinate their schedules so as to do these things together (Umberson 1987).

1.3.3 The Importance of the Quality of Marriage

As seen above, studies indicate that married persons are happier and healthier than persons in any other marital status group. However, it is important to note that the quality of marriage contributes significantly to overall psychological well-being. For example, Glenn and Weaver (1981) found that marital happiness was the most important factor in predicting overall happiness for both men and women. They also found that most persons report high levels of happiness with their marriages. In contrast, Glenn and Weaver (1981) found that persons who reported low levels of happiness with their marriages had lower levels of psychological well-being than any other marital status category. In agreement with Glenn and Weaver (1981), Gove et al. (1983), found that most persons report high levels of satisfaction with their marriages, and that the psychological well-being of those persons also tends to be very high. Similar to Glenn and Weaver (1981), they also found that the well-being of unhappily married persons tends to be very low. In summary, it appears that most marriages are “good marriages” and that these marriages contribute significantly to the overall psychological well-being of persons. In contrast, poor marriages have a strong negative effect on the overall psychological well-being of persons.

In agreement with Glenn and Weaver (1981) and Gove et al. (1983), other researchers also find that good marriages are associated with good mental health, and that poor marriages are associated with poor mental health (Horwitz et al. 1997; Umberson et al. 1996). In these studies, a good marital relationship is characterized by an individual’s feelings of receiving adequate emotional support from his or her spouse, while a poor marital relationship is characterized by feelings of receiving inadequate spousal emotional support and experiencing relationship strain (Horwitz et al. 1997; Umberson et al. 1996). Both Horwitz et al. (1997) and Umberson et al. (1996) found that persons in good marriages reported less depression, while persons in poor marriages reported more depression. In both studies, these effects did not vary much by gender.

As seen from the research discussed above, married persons have better mental and physical well-being than divorced, separated, widowed, and never-married persons. Although this finding is well supported, some debate remains about whether social selection or marriage itself is the cause of the high levels of well-being for married persons. Of the research that has been discussed in this thesis, some provides support for the social selection perspective: that persons with good physical and mental health are selected into marriage, and that those with poor physical and mental well-being are selected out of marriage through divorce or through remaining single. Other research under discussion provides substantial evidence that marriage itself contributes to the physical and mental well-being of persons. The increase in physical and mental well-being seems to occur primarily because marriage provides people with social support and social control that persons in other situations do not receive, or do not receive to the same extent. It has also been noted above that the quality of marriage is particularly important for the well-being of married individuals.

1.4 More Recent Studies on Marital Status and States of Well-being

In the late 1970s and early 1980s Glenn and Weaver conducted three important studies all of which found that married persons had considerably higher levels of overall happiness than divorced, separated, widowed, and never-married persons (Glenn 1975; Glenn and Weaver 1979; Glenn and Weaver 1981). These studies also indicated that females were slightly happier than males.

In their 1979 study, Glenn and Weaver found that the estimated positive effect of being married was significant and was stronger for both males and females than the estimated effect of any other predictor variable, including variables such as family income, level of education, employment, and occupational prestige.

Although there was a strong positive relationship between marital status and happiness, studies by Glenn (1975) and Glenn and Weaver (1981) indicated that the quality of the marriage was an important contributor to a person's level of overall happiness. In their studies on the relationship between marital happiness and overall happiness, Glenn (1975), and Glenn and Weaver (1981) found that marital happiness was

significantly and positively related to the overall happiness of males and females. In these studies, the majority of people reported that their marriages were very happy. However, these studies also found that persons with unhappy marriages had lower levels of overall happiness than unmarried persons.

As a result of these studies, Glenn and Weaver (1981) argued that marriage, especially a good marriage, was the most important determinant of a person's overall happiness, because marriage provided people with an important primary social relationship that in the contemporary United States was difficult to establish outside of the conjugal family. They also argued that the psychological support and security that people received from the marriage relationship could not be readily derived from other relationships with kin or children.

Glenn and Weaver (1981) asserted that contrary to popular belief, the increasing instability of individual marriages did not reflect a decrease in the importance of the institution of marriage. On the contrary, they argued that spouses depended too heavily on the marital relationship for their personal happiness. As a result, spouses terminated their unsatisfactory marriages, but rather than abandon the institution of marriage, many remarried and entered into remarriages that were satisfactory.

However, in 1988 Glenn and Weaver seriously questioned whether the positive relationship between being married and reported happiness still existed. In their study using General Social Surveys data they reported a steady decline in the positive relationship between being married and happiness, while at the same time these data indicated an increase in the happiness of never-married persons. As a result of these changes, Glenn and Weaver (1988) argued that ". . . it [was] time to question the belief, widely held by family social scientists, that the institution of marriage in this society remains as strong and viable as ever" (pp. 323).

Using General Social Surveys data from 1972 through 1986, Glenn and Weaver (1988) reported the percentage of respondents by age groups (18+, 25–39) who said they were very happy by sex, marital status, and year (1972–1976 and 1982–1986), and also regressed reported happiness on marital status, by sex for each year 1972–1986. The

reported findings indicated a decrease in the reported happiness of married persons and an increase in the reported happiness of never-married persons.

The findings from Glenn and Weaver (1988) indicated that the changes took place within two groups of people: never-married males and married females. First, there was a significant increase in reported happiness for never-married males from the 1972–76 surveys to the 1982–86 surveys. The greatest increase came about for males ages 25–39. Second, there was a significant decrease in the reported happiness of married females from the 1972–76 surveys to the 1982–86 surveys. Once again, the greatest change took place in the 25–39 age group. Glenn and Weaver (1988) predicted that the gap in reported happiness levels of married persons and never-married persons would continue to decrease due to societal changes in marriage and non-marital heterosexual relationships that lessened the differences between married and unmarried persons.

Lee et al. (1991) replicated and extended the Glenn and Weaver (1988) analysis by adding three years of new data from the General Social Surveys (1987–89) to the original analysis in order to determine whether reported happiness of never-married persons had continued increasing and the reported happiness of married persons had continued decreasing. In the extended analysis, Lee et al. (1991) reported the relation of marital status to personal happiness, by year and gender, for respondents ages 18 and older, and respondents ages 25–39. Unlike Glenn and Weaver's (1988) analyses, Lee et al.'s (1991) extended analyses compared the married to the never-married rather than comparing the married to all persons with an unmarried status (divorced, separated, widowed, and never-married) combined. Lee et al. (1991), in agreement with Glenn and Weaver (1988), found a significant increase in the reported happiness of never-married males. However, Lee et al. (1991) also indicated that the decrease in the reported happiness of married women was no longer significant. While Lee et al. (1991) found that the happiness gap between the married and never-married still exists for males, unlike the Glenn and Weaver (1988) study, they attributed this solely to the increase in happiness in never married persons. Other findings of Lee et al. (1991) included an increase in the proportion of never-married females in 1988 and 1989 who reported themselves to be very happy. Although Lee et al. (1991) argued that the trend identified

by Glenn and Weaver (1988) was not as strong as was originally indicated, they agreed with Glenn and Weaver (1988) that more never-married persons reported greater happiness in the 1980s than in the early 1970s.

More recent data on psychological well-being suggests that marriage is still an important institution, providing benefits that can be measured in greater reported happiness and less depression than alternatives to marriage such as nonmarital cohabitation. For example, Kurdek (1991) in a sample of 6,573 respondents from the National Survey of Families and Households taken in March 1987 and May 1988 found that married persons reported greater global happiness and less depression than cohabiting persons and other single persons. Mirowski and Ross (1995), in a U.S. national probability study of 2,019 respondents, found that being married was significantly and negatively correlated with depression. Mastekaasa (1993) using survey data from the Norwegian Level of Living Surveys (a repeated survey for years 1980, 1983, 1987, and 1991), in a sample of about 5,000 respondents for each survey year, reported that the level of anxiety and depression was higher for cohabiting women than for married persons or never-married persons who lived alone. However, for men he found that there was little difference in the levels of anxiety and depression for cohabiting persons and married persons.

Other studies comparing the married to the unmarried, indicate that societal changes have not brought about a significant decrease in the psychological benefits that married persons receive, nor a significant increase in the psychological benefits that never married persons receive. Instead, recent studies seem to indicate that the married are receiving the same or more psychological benefits than they were in the past, and that the unmarried are even worse off psychologically than they were in the past. For example, Mastekaasa (1993) using survey data from the Norwegian Level of Living Surveys (a repeated survey for years 1973, 1980, 1983, 1987, and 1991), in a multi-level probability sample of 3,900 in 1973 and 5,000 in the later surveys, found that the differences in well-being of the married and the unmarried were increasing or remaining stable. When comparing later survey responses of men and women to the 1973 survey, Mastekaasa (1993) found that subjective well-being, which is a general measure of anxiety and

depression, had become worse for never-married men and women. The decrease in subjective well-being for never-married men occurred in every survey after the 1973 survey. The Mastekaasa (1993) findings are in direct conflict with the findings reported in the Glenn and Weaver (1988) study which indicates that the situation of never-married persons is becoming more favorable, especially for never-married males.

In a later international comparison study, Mastekaasa (1994) found that generally speaking there was a relationship between marital status and psychological well-being; married persons reported the best psychological well-being, followed by never-married persons, and lastly, the previously married. This study was conducted using data that were collected as a part of a cross-national study of value systems (See Listhaug et al. 1983). Interviews were conducted with representative samples of the population ages 18–79 in the various countries. The average sample size was 1,200, though the U.S. sample consisted of 2,310 persons. In this study, psychological well-being included reported feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and symptoms of distress and depression. When looking at the U.S. sample alone, Mastekaasa (1994) showed that compared to the currently married, the never-married reported significantly less positive affect, happiness, and satisfaction. These findings disagreed with the Glenn and Weaver (1988) study which found that the difference in reported happiness between the married and the never-married was no longer significant in 1986.

Marks (1996) using 1992–93 survey data from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study that included 6,876 men and women respondents who graduated from Wisconsin high schools in 1957, found that men not-currently-married had less favorable personality profiles than married men. Divorced or separated men were significantly less extroverted, conscientious, and intelligent than married men. Divorced or separated men were also found to be more neurotic than married men. Never-married men resembled divorced or separated men in that they also exhibited more neurotic traits and less extroverted traits. However, in the case of single women, separated, divorced, and never-married women were found to be more intelligent and more open to new experiences than married women. Also, never-married women did not differ significantly from married women in their reported ratings of psychological distress. Although separated or

divorced women were also found to exhibit significantly fewer neurotic traits than married women, overall they reported more psychological distress than married women.

Overall Marks (1996) found that separated, divorced, and widowed men and women reported more psychological distress than their married counterparts. This is in agreement with several other studies. Although, she found that never-married women were not significantly different from married women in their reported ratings of psychological distress, this was clearly not the case for never-married men, who fared much worse than married men. These findings do not support the trend uncovered in the Glenn and Weaver (1988) study that being never-married was particularly advantageous for males.

1.5 Problem Statement

In the early studies discussed above, there appears to be a strong positive relationship between marital status and psychological well-being. These studies indicate that married persons experience significantly greater levels of psychological well-being than unmarried persons. After married persons, never-married persons typically have the next best levels of psychological well-being, followed by divorced, separated, and widowed persons, who experience the lowest levels of psychological well-being.

In the mid-to-late 1980s though, a study by Glenn and Weaver indicated that the benefits of marriage were diminishing. In their study, they found that the happiness of married persons was decreasing, and the happiness of never-married persons was increasing. The gap in happiness between the married and the never-married was shrinking primarily because married women were reporting less happiness and never-married men were reporting more happiness. Glenn and Weaver (1988) concluded that the benefits of being married were declining due to societal changes that have made it more advantageous than it was in the past to be single. They suggested that alternatives to marriage, such as non-marital heterosexual cohabitation may now provide many with benefits that were formerly available only through marriage. They go on to suggest that the quality of close, serial relationships experienced by never-married persons may have contributed to the increase in their happiness levels, especially for never-married men. Social, cultural, and economic changes may have also brought about better educational and job opportunities, which may have contributed to an increase in happiness for never-married persons. Findings in a replication and extension of the Glenn and Weaver (1988) study conducted by Lee et al. (1991) provided additional support to the argument that never-married persons are experiencing higher levels of happiness than they were in the past. However, this study did not support the argument that married persons are experiencing lower levels of happiness than they did in the past. Also, the Lee et al. (1991) study included only three additional years' worth of data.

The purpose of this thesis is to replicate and extend the Glenn and Weaver (1988) analysis in order to determine whether the indicated trends in the happiness of married

and never-married persons has continued to hold in more recent years. More specifically, this thesis will try to answer the following questions: Are the benefits of marriage diminishing? Are married persons experiencing less happiness in more recent years than they were in the past? Are the advantages of being single increasing? Are never-married persons experiencing higher levels of happiness than they were in the past? When controlling for income and education, are never-married persons experiencing higher levels of happiness than they were in the past? Are the differences in happiness between the married and never-married reported by Glenn and Weaver (1988) due to never-married persons deriving greater satisfaction from their close serial relationships with friends and family than they did in the past? What effect does gender have on the overall happiness of married persons and never-married persons? As was the case in the Glenn and Weaver (1988) analysis, this thesis will use data from all of the currently available sample years of the General Social Surveys. However, since the Glenn and Weaver (1988) analysis, ten additional years of data are now available. This thesis includes data from the 1972 through 1996 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center. The surveys are administered each year to an independently drawn sample of about 1,500 English-speaking people, 18 years and older, who are living in non-institutionalized arrangements in the United States of America. It is hoped that access to more than two decades of data will provide better insight into the trends in happiness of married and never-married persons.

Chapter 2: Data and Methods

The research was quantitative, and was conducted by using a secondary source, the General Social Surveys. The General Social Surveys are interviews designed by James A. Davis and conducted by the National Opinion Research Center. They are administered each year to an independently drawn sample of about 1,500 English speaking people, 18 years or older, who are living in non-institutionalized arrangements in the United States of America. The interviews are conducted during February, March, and April of each year, and consist of a face-to-face interview that lasted about 60–90 minutes in which respondents were asked several questions. The interview data are then carefully coded.

The sample used from the General Social Surveys was a full probability sample for all years, with the exception of 1972–76, where block quota sampling was used. More specifically, the samples for the years 1972–1974 were multi-stage area probability samples to the block or segment level. At the block or the segment level, the interviewer began a travel pattern at the first dwelling unit from the northwest corner of the block and proceeded in a specified direction until the quotas had been filled. Because quotas do not account for not-at-homes or for persons who resist an interviewer, there is a greater chance of sample biases in a block quota sample than in a full probability sample.

In 1975, the sampling procedure was upgraded to a full probability sample (Although for years 1975 and 1976, half the sample was collected using block quota sampling, while the other half was collected using full probability sampling. This was done in order to make comparisons between the two different sampling procedures). The full probability sample was a stratified, multi-stage area probability sample of clusters of houses in the continental United States. The selection of geographic areas at successive stages was in accordance with the method of probabilities proportional to size, and unlike the block quota sampling, this sample provided interviewers with an inventory of identifiable households, each with a known probability of selection. For the surveys conducted from 1977 through 1993, the same sampling procedure was used, and all of these samples were full probability samples.

In 1994, two major changes occurred in the General Social Surveys. First, the traditional core was substantially reduced in order to allow for the creation of mini-modules. These are blocks of about 15 minutes that were devoted to some combination of small to medium sized supplements. Further, the mini-modules were added to provide greater flexibility for incorporating innovations and to include important items proposed by the social science community. Second, a new biennial, split-sample design was introduced which consists of two parallel sub-samples of 1,500 cases each. The two sub-samples both contain the identical core. Also included in Sample A were a standard, topical module, the mini-modules, and an International Social Survey Program (ISSP) module on women, work, and the family. Similar to sample A, sample B contains a second topical module, mini-modules, and an ISSP module on the environment. Although separate topical, mini-, and ISSP modules were fielded for the A and the B samples, some items were included on both samples.

The scope of the research in this thesis is limited to United States citizens who are currently residing in the United States. Therefore, the results of this research are meant to hold true for United States citizens, 18 years or older, who live in non-institutionalized settings. Also, in this thesis, there are no distinctions made based on race and ethnicity, but instead people are categorized and compared only by gender and marital statuses.

The analysis in this thesis contains a total sample size of 35,284 cases of men and women (their sex was determined by the interviewer, and in this analysis, 1 = male, 2 = female) who were asked to rate their overall happiness on a 3-point scale (very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy). Respondents were asked: "Taken all together, how would you say things are these days: would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?" They were also asked the following question to determine their marital status: "What marital status are you currently occupying? Are you married, divorced, separated, widowed, or never-married?" In this analysis, 1 = not too happy, 2 = pretty happy, and 3 = very happy.

In this analysis, the age of the respondent was determined by the respondent's date of birth. Respondents were asked: "In what year were you born?" "What is your date of

birth (Month, Day, Year)?” In this analysis, the range for age is 18 through 90 years of age.

Education was measured by asking respondents the following questions: “What is the highest grade in elementary school or high school that you finished and got credit for?” “If Finished 9th through 12th grade: Did you ever get a high school diploma or a GED certificate?” “Did you complete one or more years of college for credit, not including schooling such as business college, technical or vocational school?” “Do you have any college degrees?” “If yes: What degree or degrees?” In this analysis, education was coded by the respondent’s number of years of education: 0 through 20 years.

Income was measured by asking respondents the following question: “In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year before taxes, that is?” The respondents’ answers to the family income question are summarized into five variables – income1972, income1977 (which includes 1973–1977), income 82 (which includes 1978–1982), income 86 (which includes 1983–1986), and income 1991 (which includes 1987–1991). These variables were standardized within each survey year (z-scored), then transformed into a single income variable that represents the relative differences in income within each year. This variable controls for changes in the income dimension of social class over time.

The following statements were used to measure life satisfaction. Respondents were told: “For each area of life I am going to name, tell me the number that shows how much satisfaction you get from that area.” “The city or place you live in.” “Your non-working activities, hobbies and so on.” “Your family life.” “Your friendships.” “Your health and physical condition.” In this analysis, 1 = none, 2 = a little satisfaction, 3 = some satisfaction, 4 = a fair amount of satisfaction, 5 = quite a bit of satisfaction, 6 = a great deal of satisfaction, and 7 = a very great deal of satisfaction (Cronbach’s alpha = .68).

Following the same format as Glenn and Weaver (1988), with data from each of the 21 surveys, the responses were tabulated to the happiness question by sex and marital status, first for respondents 18 and older, second for respondents ages 25–39, and third

for respondents 18–31 (Tables 1, 2, and 3 in Glenn and Weaver 1988). In the same way as Glenn and Weaver (1988), the data were pooled from the first five surveys (1972–1976), the middle five surveys (1982–1986), and the last five surveys (1992–1996). Also, data was compared from the first five surveys and the last five surveys (Tables 1 and 2 in Glenn and Weaver 1988), and data from the first (1972) and the last (1996) surveys (Table 3 in Glenn and Weaver 1988). With the data from each survey (1972–1996), happiness was regressed on marital status which was coded dichotomously: married *versus* all other statuses, separately for males and females 18 and older, and then separately for males and females 25–39. For this set of regressions, “very happy” was coded 3, “pretty happy” was coded 2, and “not too happy” was coded 1, and the ordinal scale was treated as if it were interval (Table 4 in Glenn and Weaver 1988). Two-tailed significance tests were used for all of the tests described above.

In order to provide tentative evidence about social selection *versus* social causation (i.e. whether happiness affects marital status or marital status affects happiness), Glenn and Weaver (1988) traced a 7–year birth cohort that was ages 18–24 in 1972 until it was ages 32–38 in 1986. In the same way as Glenn and Weaver (1988), a 7–year birth cohort was traced that was ages 18–24 in 1972 until it was ages 42–48 in 1996 (Table 5 in Glenn and Weaver). Unlike Glenn and Weaver (1988), this analysis compared only the married to the never-married.

In order to determine whether life satisfaction can account for the increase in happiness of the never-married in recent years, several regressions were performed with data from all of the survey years. First, happiness was regressed on marital statuses which were coded dichotomously; never-married *versus* married, divorced *versus* married, and widowed *versus* married, and year 1972–1986, separately for males and females 18 years of age and older (Model 1). Second, happiness was regressed on marital statuses (in the same way described above) and three interaction terms—never-married * year 1972–1986, divorced * year 1972–1986, and widowed * year 1972–1986, separately for all males and females 18 years of age and older (Model 2). Third, happiness was regressed on marital statuses (in the same way described above), year 1972–1986, three interaction terms—never-married * year 1972–1986, divorced * year 1972–1986, widowed

* year 1972–1986, and two life satisfaction variables—satisfaction with family and satisfaction with friends, separately for all males and females 18 and older (Model 3). Fourth, happiness was regressed on marital statuses (in the same way described above), year 1972–1986, three interaction terms—never-married * year 1972–1986, divorced * year 1972–1986, widowed * year 1972–1986, and all five life satisfaction variables: satisfaction with family, satisfaction with friends, satisfaction with leisure activities, satisfaction with health, and satisfaction with city, separately for all males and females 18 and older (Model 4). After completing the regressions described above (Model 1–4), the exact same process was repeated separately for males and females ages 25–39. In all of the regressions, “very happy” was coded 3, “pretty happy” was coded 2, and “not too happy” was coded 1, and the ordinal scale was treated as if it were interval. Two-tailed significance tests were used for all of the tests described above.

Using an approach similar to that of the control for measures of life satisfaction, several regressions were performed with data from all of the surveys in order to determine if socioeconomic factors could account for the increase in happiness of the never-married in recent years. First, happiness was regressed on marital statuses which were coded dichotomously – never-married *versus* married, divorced *versus* married, and widowed *versus* married, year 1972–1986, income, and three interaction terms—never-married * year 1972–1986, divorced * year 1972–1986, and widowed * year 1972–1986, separately for all males and females 18 years of age and older (Model 1). Second, happiness was regressed on marital statuses (in the same way described above), year 1972–1986, education, and three interaction terms—never-married * year 1972–1986, divorced * year 1972–1986, and widowed * year 1972–1986, separately for all males and females 18 years of age and older (Model 2). Third, happiness was regressed on marital statuses (in the same way described above), year 1972–1986, both income and education, and three interaction terms—never-married * year 1972–1986, divorced * year 1972–1986, and widowed * year 1972–1986, separately for all males and females 18 years of age and older (Model 3). After completing the regressions described above (Models 1–3), the exact same process was repeated separately for males and females 25–39. In all of the regressions, “very happy” was coded 3, “pretty happy” was coded 2, and “not too happy”

was coded 1, and the ordinal scale was treated as if it were interval. Two-tailed significance tests were used for all of the tests described above.

Finally, happiness was regressed on marital statuses (in the same way described above), year 1972–1986, three interaction terms—never-married * year 1972–1986, divorced * year 1972–1986, widowed * year 1972–1986, income, education, and five life satisfaction variables: satisfaction with family and satisfaction with friends, satisfaction with hobbies, satisfaction with health, and satisfaction with city, separately for all respondents, males, and females 18 years of age and older. The exact same process was repeated separately for all respondents, males, and females ages 25–39. In all of the regressions, “very happy” was coded 3, “pretty happy” was coded 2, and “not too happy” was coded 1, and the ordinal scale was treated as if it were interval. Two-tailed significance tests were used for all of the tests described above.

Chapter 3: Replication and Extension Of Glenn and Weaver (1988)

The findings from Glenn and Weaver (1988) indicated that the relationship between marital status and reported happiness declined from 1972 to 1986 and that the decline was greater for males than for females and greater for younger adults than for older adults. The data show that from 1972–1976 to 1982–1986 there was a significant increase in the percentage of never-married men who said that they were “very happy” and a significant decrease in the percentage of married women who said that they were “very happy” (Tables 1–3). More specifically, data from the Glenn and Weaver (1988) study show a significant increase in the percentage of never-married males 18 and older who said that they were “very happy” (+6.3%), and a significant increase in the percentage of never-married males 25–39 who said that they were “very happy” (+11.1%). Unlike the findings for never-married males, the data for the two age groups (18 and older, 25–39) do not indicate a significant change in the percentage of never-married females who said that they were “very happy.” The data also show a significant decrease in the percentage of married women 18 and older who said that they were “very happy” (–3.4%), and a significant decrease in the percentage of married women 25–39 who said that they were “very happy” (–6.3%). However, the data for the two age groups (18 and older, 25–39) do not indicate a significant change in the percentage of married men who said that they were “very happy.”

Since the Glenn and Weaver (1988) study, new data show that in more recent years a decline has occurred in the happiness of never-married persons and an increase has occurred in the happiness of married persons (Tables 1–3). More specifically, about 21 percent of never-married males and 22 percent of never-married females 18 and older said that they were “very happy” in 1992–1996, a drop of 1.4 percent for never-married males and 2.9 percent for never-married females from the 1982–1986 surveys. Of never-married respondents ages 25–39, about 22 percent of males and 18 percent of females said that they were “very happy” in 1992–1996, a drop of 2.6 percent for males and 6.1

percent for females since the 1982–1986 surveys. Although the overall data from 1972–1976 to 1992–1996 still indicate that a significant increase occurred in the percentage of never-married males in both age groups (18 and older, 25–39) who said that they were “very happy,” the changes are no longer as great as they were from 1972–1976 to 1982–1986. For married respondents, about 39 percent of males and 40 percent of females 18 and older said that they were “very happy” in 1992–1996, a significant increase of 3.8 for males since 1982–1986. For married respondents 25–39, about 36 percent of males and 38 percent of females said that they were “very happy” in 1992–1996, a significant increase of 5.8 for married males, and an increase (not significant) of 1.5 for females since the 1982–1986 surveys. Overall data from 1972–1976 to 1992–1996 show an increase (non-significant) for both age groups (18 and older, 25–39) in the percentage of married males who said that they were “very happy.” For married women, the overall data from 1972–1976 to 1992–1996 continue to indicate a significant decrease in the percentage of females 18 and older who said that they were “very happy,” although for the 25–39 age group the data show there is no longer a significant decrease in the percentage of married females who said that they were “very happy.”

Since the Glenn and Weaver (1988) study, more recent data show that there is no longer a significant decrease in the happiness gap between never-married and married males ages 18–31 from the 1972 to 1996 surveys (Table 3). This is primarily due to a significant decrease in the percentage of never-married males 18–31 who said that they were “very happy” (–11.1%) from 1986 to 1996, and an increase (not significant) in the percentage of married males 18–31 who said that they were “very happy” (+4.8%) from 1986 to 1996.

Table 4 shows the regression of coefficients on year: the married were coded 1 and all other marital statuses were coded 0. Since neither Table 1 nor Table 2 shows much change in the reported happiness of separated, divorced, and widowed persons (in general), Table 4 reflects primarily the changes in reported happiness of married and never-married persons. In Table 4, data from Glenn and Weaver (1988) indicate that over time the effect of marital status on happiness had declined significantly for males 18 and older, and for males and females 25–39 from 1972 to 1986. However, although new data

from 1972 to 1996 continue to show that the effect of marital status on happiness has declined significantly for females 25–39, new data for males indicate that the effect of marital status on happiness has not declined significantly for either age group (18 and older, 25–39).

Using an approach similar to Glenn and Weaver (1988) Table 5 provides tentative evidence on the direction of the relationship between marital status and reported happiness which supports the social causation perspective and not the social selection perspective. The social selection perspective argues that people with high levels of psychological well-being are more likely to get selected into marriage, while people with low levels of psychological well-being are more likely to get selected out of marriage. Therefore, if social selection effects were solely responsible for the relationship between marriage and happiness, then as we followed the cohort of married and never-married persons as they aged, we would expect to find an increasingly lower percentage of never-married persons who said that they were “very happy.” This outcome would be expected because the never-married persons with good mental health would be selected into marriage over time. This would leave an increasingly high percentage of never-married persons with poor psychological well-being in the never-married category as the cohort ages over time. At the same time, we would expect to see the same or a slightly higher percentage of married persons who said that they were “very happy.” However, this analysis does not show a significant decrease in the percentage of never-married respondents in the birth cohort (ages 18–24 in 1972 to ages 42–48 in 1996) who said that they were “very happy” over time.

Overall, the replication and extension of Glenn and Weaver (1988) indicates that the trends in the happiness levels of never-married and married persons have not continued. The data from more recent years suggest that Glenn and Weaver’s (1988) predicted trends have reversed somewhat. For example, the data indicate that a slight decline has occurred in the happiness of never-married men and a slight increase in the happiness of married women in more recent years. The data also indicate an increase in the happiness of married males in more recent years.

In their paper Glenn and Weaver (1988) suggested that as a result of societal changes that occurred primarily during the 1980s, the differences in the circumstances of married and never-married persons had lessened. According to Glenn and Weaver (1988), due to socially approved alternatives to marriage, such as cohabitation, along with changes that have occurred in marital and non-marital heterosexual relationships, never-married persons may now be able to obtain many of the benefits that were previously available only to married persons. For example, Glenn and Weaver (1988) suggested that societal changes now make it possible for persons to obtain regular sexual relations without stigma, and due to easy access to divorce, marriage no longer provides persons with the financial and emotional security that it once did. These societal changes may have improved the subjective quality of life for never-married persons, and as a result of the improvement in the subjective quality of life, never-married persons may now be experiencing more happiness than they were in the past.

In the following chapter, this issue will be explored by looking at life satisfaction, socioeconomic factors, and living arrangements (cohabiting vs. non-cohabiting) of never-married persons to determine if changes in life satisfaction, socioeconomic factors, and living arrangements explain the relative increase in happiness of the never-married, compared to the married, from 1972 to 1986.

3.1 Tables 1–5

Table 1. Percentage of respondents age 18 and older to U.S. National Surveys Who Said They Were "Very Happy" by Sex and Marital Status, 1992–1996.

| Males | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Marital Status | 1992–1996 % (n) | Change (1972-76 to 1982-86) | Change (1982-86 to 1992-96) | Overall Change (1972-76 to 1992-96) |
| Never-married | 21.2 (774) | +6.3* | –1.4 | +4.9* |
| Married | 39.3 | –2.0 | +3.8* | +1.8 |
| Separated or Divorced | 17.2 (511) | +0.9 | –0.5 | +0.4 |
| Widowed | 19.7 (147) | –1.2 | –1.4 | –2.6 |
| Total | 30.6 | –1.9 | –2.8** | –1.4 |

| Females | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Marital Status | 1992–1996 % (n) | Change (1972-76 to 1982-86) | Change (1982-86 to 1992-96) | Overall Change (1972-76 to 1992-96) |
| Never-married | 22.1 (788) | +0.1 | –2.9 | –2.8 |
| Married | 39.8 | –3.4* | +0.1 | –3.3* |
| Separated or Divorced | 18.0 (879) | +2.1 | –1.4 | +0.8 |
| Widowed | 22.6 (589) | +6.4* | –6.4** | –0.1 |
| Total | 29.5 | –3.7** | –2.8** | –6.4*** |

Source: Combined data from the 1972–96 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test

Table 2. Percentage of respondents ages 25–39 who said they were "very happy," by sex and marital status, 1992–1996.

| Males | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Marital Status | 1992–1996 % (n) | Change (1972-76 to 1982-86) | Change (1982-86 to 1992-96) | Overall Change (1972-76 to 1992-96) |
| Never-married | 21.7 (382) | +11.1* | –2.6 | +8.5* |
| Married | 35.8 (590) | –3.7 | +5.8* | +2.0 |
| Separated or Divorced | 16.2 (154) | +3.1 | +0.4 | +3.6 |
| Total | 28.2 | –2.1 | +1.3 | –0.9 |

| Females | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Marital Status | 1992–1996 % (n) | Change (1972-76 to 1982-86) | Change (1982-86 to 1992-96) | Overall Change (1972-76 to 1992-96) |
| Never-married | 18.3 (356) | +10.7 | –6.1 | +4.5 |
| Married | 38.0 (773) | –6.3* | +1.5 | –4.8 |
| Separated or Divorced | 16.2 (308) | +1.7 | –1.1 | +0.5 |
| Total^o | 28.4 (1449) | –6.8** | –1.8 | –8.5*** |

Source: Combined data from the 1972–96 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

^oIncludes a few persons who were widowed,

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test

Table 3. Percentage of respondents ages 18–31 who said they were "very happy," by sex and marital status, 1996.

| Marital Status | 1996 % (n) | Change (1972 to 1986) | Change (1986 to 1996) | Overall (1972 to 1996) |
|-------------------|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Both Sexes | | | | |
| Never-married | 21.7 (401) | +12.5 | -5.5 | +7.0 |
| Married | 39.9 (243) | -7.3 | +9.3 | +2.0 |
| Difference | -18.2 | +19.8** | -14.8* | +5.0 |
| Males | | | | |
| Never-married | 20.2 (193) | +20.2** | -11.1* | +9.1 |
| Married | 30.5 (105) | -6.8 | +4.8 | -2.0 |
| Difference | -10.3 | +27.0** | -15.9 | +11.0 |
| Females | | | | |
| Never-married | 23.1 (208) | +1.3 | +0.7 | +2.0 |
| Married | 47.1 (138) | -9.0 | +12.4 | +3.4 |
| Difference | -24.0 | +10.3 | -11.7 | -1.4 |

Source: The 1972, 1986, and 1996 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test

Table 4. Regression (unstandardized) of reported happiness on marital status, by sex 1972–1996.

| Year | Males | | Females | |
|---|-----------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| | Age 18 or Older | Ages 25–39 | Age 18 or Older | Ages 25–39 |
| 1972 | .257 | .292 | .300 | .577 |
| 1973 | .313 | .314 | .433 | .518 |
| 1974 | .423 | .305 | .396 | .517 |
| 1975 | .282 | .373 | .309 | .252 |
| 1976 | .369 | .420 | .315 | .338 |
| 1977 | .312 | .247 | .215 | .238 |
| 1978 | .255 | .263 | .263 | .211 |
| 1980 | .214 | .123 | .271 | .315 |
| 1982 | .308 | .239 | .274 | .269 |
| 1983 | .228 | .110 | .201 | .299 |
| 1984 | .287 | .195 | .299 | .282 |
| 1985 | .237 | .145 | .212 | .206 |
| 1986 | .207 | .093 | .311 | .332 |
| 1987 | .282 | .364 | .275 | .300 |
| 1988 | .370 | .398 | .311 | .288 |
| 1989 | .230 | .266 | .194 | .204 |
| 1990 | .370 | .366 | .319 | .370 |
| 1991 | .199 | .245 | .277 | .282 |
| 1993 | .266 | .133 | .241 | .176 |
| 1994 | .293 | .259 | .287 | .327 |
| 1996 | .310 | .285 | .348 | .371 |
| Relationship of year to Regression Coefficients | | | | |
| Glenn & Weaver (1972–1986) | | | | |
| r | -.554* | -.797** | -.550 | -.632* |
| b | -.007 | -.017 | -.008 | -.016 |
| r | -.202 | -.196 | -.278 | -.438* |
| b | -.002 | -.003 | -.002 | -.006* |

Source: The 1972 through 1996 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

Note: Married = 1; all other marital statuses = 0.

Regression of coefficients on year.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test

Table 5. Percentage of respondents in the birth cohort ages 18–24 in 1972 who said they were "very happy," by marital status, both sexes, 1972–1996.

| Year (Ages) | Married (n) | Never–Married (n) | Difference between Married and Never-married |
|--|-------------|-------------------|--|
| 1972 (18–24) | 38.0 (79) | 17.1 (111) | 20.9 |
| 1973 (19–25) | 33.0 (112) | 22.6 (115) | 10.4 |
| 1974 (20–26) | 35.0 (137) | 18.7 (91) | 16.3 |
| 1975 (21–27) | 39.1 (138) | 13.8 (94) | 25.3 |
| 1976 (22–28) | 41.7 (151) | 19.5 (79) | 22.2 |
| 1977 (23–29) | 36.7 (139) | 20.8 (72) | 15.9 |
| 1978 (24–30) | 39.7 (184) | 22.7 (66) | 17.0 |
| 1980 (26–32) | 33.1 (163) | 27.7 (47) | 5.4 |
| 1982 (28–34) | 33.0 (194) | 25.5 (55) | 7.5 |
| 1983 (29–35) | 32.6 (187) | 19.0 (42) | 13.6 |
| 1984 (30–36) | 36.6 (153) | 22.2 (36) | 14.4 |
| 1985 (31–37) | 25.6 (160) | 25.0 (40) | 0.6 |
| 1986 (32–38) | 36.0 (164) | 24.1 (29) | 11.9 |
| 1987 (33–39) | 35.7 (182) | 15.4 (52) | 20.3 |
| 1988 (34–40) | 41.8 (146) | 21.1 (19) | 20.7 |
| 1989 (35–41) | 38.3 (149) | 14.7 (34) | 23.6 |
| 1990 (36–42) | 39.5 (124) | 12.9 (31) | 26.6 |
| 1991 (37–43) | 34.9 (146) | 38.2 (34) | –3.3 |
| 1993 (39–45) | 39.0 (159) | 18.5 (27) | 20.5 |
| 1994 (40–46) | 35.3 (252) | 16.0 (50) | 19.3 |
| 1996 (42–48) | 39.1 (225) | 14.3 (49) | 24.8 |
| Relationship Of year to Percentages | | | |
| <hr/> | | | |
| Glenn & Weaver (1972–1986) | | | |
| r | –.472 | +.576* | –.598* |
| b | –.405 | +.457 | –.861 |
| <hr/> | | | |
| r | +.068 | –.045 | +0.06 |
| b | +.035 | –.036 | +0.07 |

Source: The 1972 through 1996 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.
Regression of percentages on year.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test

Chapter 4: Why Are the Never-married Becoming Happier?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Glenn and Weaver (1988) found that the happiness of never-married men increased from 1972 to 1986. They suggested that the increase in happiness may be due to societal changes that improved the subjective quality of life for never-married persons, especially for men.

This thesis will explore this issue by first looking at the life satisfaction of never-married persons to see if greater satisfaction among never-married persons may have contributed to their relative increase in happiness, compared to the married, in the mid to late 1980s. Second, this thesis will look at the objective quality of life of never-married persons to see if improvements in income and education have contributed to the relative increase in happiness of never-married persons, compared to married persons, in the mid to late eighties. In the past, married persons may have had more income and education that may have contributed to their overall happiness. Now, due to societal changes, never-married persons, especially men, may be receiving more income and education. As a result, they may be experiencing higher levels of happiness. Third, this thesis will look at both the subjective and the objective quality of life of the never-married to see if both life satisfaction, and income and education together can explain the relative increase in happiness of the never-married, compared to the married, over time. Finally, I will look American Changing Lives data on cohabitation in order to determine whether cohabitation improves the happiness of never-married persons.

4.1 The Satisfaction of the Never-married

Tables 6–8 show the results of the regressions of happiness on marital status, satisfaction, and survey year¹, for all respondents (Table 6), for male respondents (Table 7), and for female respondents (Table 8) 18 years and older, for the years 1972 through 1986. For all respondents, Model 1, Table 6 indicates that being never-married, divorced,

¹ Survey year was coded 0 for 1972, 1 for 1973, and so forth up to 1996.

or widowed has a significant and negative effect on reported happiness. It also shows that being female has a significant and positive effect on happiness. Over time a significant increase occurred in the happiness of respondents ages 18 and older from 1972 to 1986.

In Model 2, Table 6 we see that for both never-married and widowed persons the effect of time on happiness is positive and significant: both never-married and widowed persons' happiness increased at a faster rate over time than married persons' happiness. In Models 3 and 4, the satisfaction variables are added in, first just satisfaction with family and friends, and second, the remaining three satisfaction variables, in order to determine if life satisfaction accounts for the relative increase in happiness of the never-married, compared to the married, over time. Both Models 3 and 4 indicate that life satisfaction contributes significantly and positively to happiness, although neither satisfaction with family and friends, nor all of the satisfaction variables together can explain the relative increase in the happiness of the never-married, compared to the married, over 1972 through 1986. However, in both Models 3 and 4, the interaction term is no longer significant for the never-married, although there is little change in the size of the coefficient (Model 1, Never-married * Year unstandardized $b = .0068$, Models 2 and 3, Never-married * Year unstandardized $b = .0061$, and $.0054$). For widowed respondents, the effect of time on happiness remains significant and positive even after the satisfaction variables are added to the analysis.

For males and females separately, Tables 7 and 8 indicate that being never-married, divorced, or widowed has a significant and negative effect on happiness for both males and females. Model 2, Table 7 shows that the effect of time on happiness is significant and positive for never-married males 18 and older, although for females (Model 2, Table 8), the interaction term is not significant for the never-married. When satisfaction with family and friends is added to the analysis, the effect of time on happiness remains significant and positive for never-married males (Model 3, Table 7). When the remaining three satisfaction variables are added to the analysis, we find that the effect of time on happiness continues to remain significant and positive for never-married males 18 and older. For females, the effect of time on happiness is significant and positive for both the widowed and divorced, although neither satisfaction with family and friends, nor all of

the satisfaction variables together can explain the relative increase in happiness of widowed and divorced women, compared to married women, over time. In Models 3 and 4 of Tables 7 and 8, life satisfaction contributes significantly and positively to happiness for males as well as females.

Tables 9–11 show the results of the regressions of happiness on marital status, satisfaction, and survey year, for all respondents (Table 9), for males (Table 10), and for females (Table 11), ages 25–39, for the years 1972 through 1986. Similar to the findings for persons 18 and older, Tables 9–11 indicate that being never-married, divorced, or widowed has a significant and negative effect on happiness for all respondents, for males, and for females. Model 2 in Tables 9–11 shows that the effect of time on happiness is significant and positive for the never-married; for all respondents (Model 2, Table 9), for males (Model 2, Table 10), and for females (Model 2, Table 11): never-married persons' happiness increased at a faster rate over time than married persons' happiness. Although satisfaction with family and friends contributes significantly and positively to happiness, it does not explain the relative increase in happiness for all respondents or for males 25–39, compared to the married, over 1972 to 1986 (Model 3, Tables 9 and 10). The interaction term for the never-married remains significant for all respondents (.0115) as well as for males (.0158). However, for both divorced and never-married females, satisfaction with family and friends does seem to explain their relative increase in happiness, compared to the married, over time. In Table 11, Models 3 and 4, the interaction term for the never-married falls from a significant unstandardized b of .0147 to a non-significant unstandardized b of .0072 (Model 3) and .0076 (Model 4) when the life satisfaction variables are added to the analyses. For the divorced, the interaction term falls from a significant unstandardized b of .0142 to a non-significant unstandardized b of .0053 (Model 3) and .0029 (Model 4) when the life satisfaction variables are added to the analyses. When all of the life satisfaction variables are entered in the analysis, the interaction term Never-married * Year becomes non-significant for all respondents, and males, although the coefficients do not change much in size (however, for all respondents, and for males the coefficients are still significant at the .10 level on a two-tailed test). For all respondents, the interaction term for the never-married falls from a

significant unstandardized b of .0115 in Model 3 to a non-significant unstandardized b of .0090 in Model 4. In a similar fashion, for males, the interaction term Never-married * Year falls from a significant unstandardized b of .0158 in Model 3 to a non-significant unstandardized b of .0117 in Model 4. For females, however, Model 4 of Table 11 does seem to suggest that life satisfaction may explain the relative increase in happiness for both never-married and divorced persons, compared to married persons, over time.

Overall, although satisfaction with family and friends, as well as satisfaction with all five of the variables together (satisfaction with family, friends, hobbies, health, and city) contribute significantly and positively to happiness in all of the analyses discussed above (for all respondents ages 18 and older, 25–39; for males ages 18 and older, 25–39; and for females ages 18 and older, 25–39), life satisfaction does not explain the relative increase in happiness for all respondents ages 18 and older, and 25–39 or for never-married males ages 18 and older, and 25–39, compared to the married, over time from 1972 to 1986. However, for females ages 25–39, life satisfaction may explain the relative increase in happiness for the never-married and the divorced, compared to the married, over time.

4.2 Socioeconomic Factors of the Never-married

Tables 12–14 show the results of the regressions of happiness on marital status, socioeconomic variables (income and education), and survey year for all respondents (Table 12), for males (Table 13), and for females (Table 14), ages 18 and older, for the years 1972 through 1986. Table 12 indicates that being never-married, divorced, or widowed contributes significantly and negatively to happiness. Table 12 also indicates that all of the interaction terms; Never-married * Year, Divorced * Year, and Widowed * Year, are significant and positive: all unmarried persons' happiness increased at a faster rate over 1972 to 1986 than the happiness of married persons. Although the socioeconomic variables contribute significantly and positively to happiness, neither income (Model 1), or education (Model 2), or income and education together (Model 3) explain the relative increase in the happiness of unmarried persons (i.e. never-married, divorced, and widowed), compared to married persons, over 1972 to 1986. The interaction terms for both the never-married and the widowed remain significant in all

three models. Although the interaction term for the divorced does become non-significant, the coefficients do not change much in size (unstandardized b falls from a significant .0066 in Model 1 to a non-significant .0056 in Model 2, and a non-significant .0065 in Model 3). In all of the Models, being female contributes significantly and positively to happiness.

Similar to the findings for all respondents, when controlling for socioeconomic factors, Tables 13 and 14 show that being never-married, divorced, or widowed has a significant and negative effect on happiness for males (Table 13) and for females (Table 14). Models 1–3 in Table 13 indicate that the effect of time on happiness is significant and positive for never-married males: respondents' happiness increased at a faster rate over 1972 to 1986 for the never-married than for the married. However, for females (Table 14), none of the interaction terms are significant for the never-married. Instead, Table 14 indicates that divorced and widowed persons happiness increased at a faster rate than married persons happiness over 1972 to 1986. Although socioeconomic variables contribute significantly and positively to the happiness of males and females, Models 1–3 in Tables 13 and 14 show that neither income, or education, or both income and education together, explain the relative increase in happiness for never-married males or for unmarried females (never-married, divorced, and widowed females), compared to the married, over 1972 to 1986.

Similar to the findings for respondents 18 and older, Tables 15–17 indicate that being never-married, divorced, or widowed has a significant and negative effect on happiness for all respondents (Table 15). Tables 16 and 17 indicate that being never-married or divorced has a significant and negative effect on happiness for males and females. For the widowed (males and females), the same relationship exists, although the coefficients are not significant. Tables 15–17 also indicate that all of the interaction terms for the never-married are significant and positive: all never-married respondents, never-married males, and never-married females happiness increased at a faster rate, compared to the married, over 1972 to 1986. Although in all of the models socioeconomic variables contribute significantly and positively to happiness, Models 1–3 in Tables 15–17 show that neither income, or education, or both income and education

together, explain the relative increase in happiness for all never-married respondents, never-married males, or never-married females, compared to the married, over 1972 to 1986.

Tables 18 and 19 show the results when both life satisfaction and socioeconomic variables are controlled for at the same time. In both of the Tables, all of the life satisfaction variables, and the socioeconomic variable income contribute significantly and positively to happiness. However, for the most part, satisfaction and socioeconomic variables do not explain the relative increase in happiness for never-married males in both age groups (18 and older, 25–39), compared to the married, over 1972 to 1986. Although the interaction term becomes non-significant for never-married males 25–39 (unstandardized $b = .0127$), the coefficient does not change much in size from the analyses with just the socioeconomic variables (unstandardized $b =$ a significant $.0191$). For females, Tables 18 and 19 show that satisfaction and socioeconomic variables may explain the relative increase in happiness of never-married females ages 25–39, compared to the married, over 1972 to 1986.

Overall, similar to the findings for life satisfaction, socioeconomic variables do not account for the relative increase in happiness for never-married males, compared to the married, from 1972 to 1986. Further, when controlling for both satisfaction and socioeconomic factors, the data indicate that both satisfaction (a subjective indicator of happiness) and socioeconomic factors (an objective indicator of happiness) together do not explain the relative increase in the happiness of never-married males, compared to married males, from 1972 to 1986.

4.3 Cohabitation

Glenn and Weaver (1988) suggested that cohabitation was one of the possible explanations for the relative increase in the happiness of the never-married (especially for never-married males), compared to the married, from 1972 to 1986. Due to societal changes in non-marital heterosexual relationships, alternatives to marriage, such as cohabitation, may now provide persons with benefits that were formerly available only to married persons. For example, cohabiting persons may receive companionship and

regular sexual relations without stigma, which may have contributed to their relative increase in happiness, compared to the married, from 1972 to 1986. Research, however, does not support this argument (Kurdek 1991; Horwitz and White 1998; Nock 1995; Popenoe and Whitehead 1999). Studies indicate that compared to marriage, cohabitation is associated with higher levels of depression, alcohol problems, lower levels of relationship commitment and stability, lower levels of relationship happiness (which for studies of married persons contributes significantly and positively to overall happiness), and lower levels of integration (Kurdek 1991; Horwitz and White 1998; Nock 1995; Popenoe and Whitehead 1999). Popenoe and Whitehead (1999) also found that cohabitation increases the risk of domestic violence for women, and the risk of physical and sexual abuse for children. Overall, research indicates that cohabitation is not helpful and may be harmful for persons. Cohabiting can negatively impact an individual's well-being and his or her ability to establish a strong lifelong relationship in the future (Popenoe and Whitehead 1999).

Glenn and Weaver (1988) were unable to examine whether cohabitation could explain the relative increase in happiness of the never-married, compared to the married, over 1972 to 1986, because the General Social Surveys do not contain any information on cohabiting persons. Although no one cannot know for certain whether cohabitation could explain the relative increase of happiness of the never-married, compared to the married, over 1972 to 1986, it is possible to look at the effect of cohabitation on happiness by using data from another study. For this purpose, this section will be addressing data from the American Changing Lives (ACL) study that were collected in 1986 and 1988. The data from the American Changing Lives study were based on a national representative sample of persons in the United States ages 18 and older. Similar to the General Social Surveys, the American Changing Lives study contains information on marital statuses and a happiness question (that is identical to the one in the GSS) where respondents rate their overall happiness as "not too happy," "pretty happy," or "very happy." However, unlike the General Social Surveys, the American Changing Lives study also contains information on cohabitation that allows the association between happiness and cohabitation to be measured within marital status categories. In this thesis, the mean

differences in happiness by marital statuses are examined. The married are compared to all other marital categories, and currently cohabiting persons are compared to non-cohabiting persons within each marital category.

In agreement with the literature, Table 20 shows that for all respondents, in general, the married have higher levels of happiness than persons in other marital categories, including those who cohabit. Also, there is a greater percentage of the married who said that they were “very happy” (33.7%) for all of the marital categories, except for the widowed cohabiting (57.8) and the divorced cohabiting (36.1%). Of the never-married, 25.7 percent of the respondents said that they were “very happy.” However, the mean happiness for the never-married and the never-married cohabiting is significantly lower than the mean happiness for the married (mean happiness for the married = 2.25, mean happiness for the never-married = 2.12, and the never-married cohabiting = 2.12 and 1.92 respectively), and the percent “very happy” for the never-married cohabiting is significantly lower than the percent “very happy” for the married. For the never-married, cohabiting persons have significantly lower levels of happiness than non-cohabiting persons, and a lower percent of cohabiting never-married persons said that they were “very happy” than non-cohabiting never-married persons (significant at the .10 level on a two-tailed test).

For males (Tables 21), in general, the married have higher levels of happiness than persons in other marital categories, regardless of whether they cohabit. The mean happiness for the never-married cohabiting is significantly lower than the mean happiness for the married, and a significantly lower percentage of never-married cohabiting persons said that they were “very happy” than married persons. Table 21 also shows that for never-married males, cohabiting persons have significantly lower levels of happiness than non-cohabiting persons (mean for cohabiting never-married males = 1.80, compared to a mean of 2.19 for never-married males who are not cohabiting), and a significantly lower percentage of never-married cohabiting persons said that they were “very happy” than never-married persons who do not cohabit. Only 9.8 percent of cohabiting never-married males said that they were “very happy,” compared to 28.8 percent of non-cohabiting never-married males.

In general, for females, the married have higher levels of happiness than females in other marital statuses, regardless of whether they cohabit (Table 22). Also, a larger percentage of married females said that they were “very happy” than the majority of the other marital categories. However, according to this data, never-married females who cohabit are not significantly different from married females, although a greater percentage of married females said that they were “very happy” (percent “very happy” for the married = 34.4) than never-married cohabiting females (percent “very happy” for the never-married = 18.7). Never-married females who cohabit have similar levels of happiness as never-married females who do not cohabit, although there is a lower percentage of never-married cohabiting females that said that they were “very happy” than never-married non-cohabiting females. Mean happiness for cohabiting and non-cohabiting never-married females are 2.08 and 2.02 respectively, and percent “very happy” for cohabiting and non-cohabiting never-married females are 21.8 and 18.7 respectively.

Overall, Tables 20–22 show that never-married cohabiting males are much worse off than both the married and never-married non-cohabiting males. These findings directly contradict Glenn and Weaver’s (1988) suggestion that the never-married were getting happier as a result of alternatives to marriage, such as cohabitation. Contrary to what Glenn and Weaver (1988) suggested, these data show that cohabitation decreases happiness for never-married males, and as a result, increases the gap in happiness between the married and the never-married.

Overall, the data presented in Tables 6–22 indicate that none of the following indicators; life satisfaction, socioeconomic factors, and cohabitation, can effectively explain the trend in happiness for never-married males during 1972 and 1986 that was reported by Glenn and Weaver (1988).

4.4 Tables 6–22

Table 6. Regression of happiness on marital status, satisfaction, and survey year, for both male and female respondents 18 years and older, for the years 1972–1986.

| All Respondents | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Gender | .0667*** | .0662*** | .0278** | .0460*** |
| Never-married | -.233*** | -.282*** | -.192*** | -.192*** |
| Divorced | -.366*** | -.407*** | -.278*** | -.274*** |
| Widowed | -.279*** | -.341*** | -.256*** | -.261*** |
| Year | .0024* | -.0001 | -.0025 | -.0026 |
| Never-married * Year | — | .0068* | .0061 | .0054 |
| Divorced * Year | — | .0056 | .0062 | .0064 |
| Widowed * Year | — | .0089** | .0101** | .0113** |
| Satisfaction with Family | — | — | .0979*** | .0662*** |
| Satisfaction w/ Friendships | — | — | .0954*** | .0463*** |
| Satisfaction with Hobbies | — | — | — | .0346*** |
| Satisfaction with Health | — | — | — | .0626*** |
| Satisfaction with City | — | — | — | .0641*** |
| Constant | 2.255*** | 2.272*** | 1.155*** | .767*** |
| r-squared | .048 | .049 | .150 | .204 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

Note: Male = 0 and Female = 1 in this analysis.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test.

Table 7. Regression of happiness on marital status, satisfaction, and survey year, for male respondents 18 years and older, for the years 1972–1986.

| Males | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Never-married | -.240*** | -.307*** | -.223*** | -.223*** |
| Divorced | -.364*** | -.365*** | -.213*** | -.241*** |
| Widowed | -.305*** | -.331*** | -.286*** | -.347*** |
| Year | .0030* | .0010 | -.0029 | -.0030 |
| Never-married * Year | — | .0096* | .0102* | .0089* |
| Divorced * Year | — | .0004 | .0031 | .0040 |
| Widowed * Year | — | .0039 | .0112 | .0181* |
| Satisfaction with Family | — | — | .0779*** | .0484*** |
| Satisfaction w/ Friendships | — | — | .0901*** | .0453*** |
| Satisfaction with Hobbies | — | — | — | .0323*** |
| Satisfaction with Health | — | — | — | .0524*** |
| Satisfaction with City | — | — | — | .0658*** |
| Constant | 2.254*** | 2.267*** | 1.302*** | .940*** |
| r-squared | .044 | .045 | .126 | .174 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test.

Table 8. Regression of happiness on marital status, satisfaction, and survey year, for female respondents 18 years and older, for the years 1972–1986.

| Females | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Never-married | -.227*** | -.244*** | -.163*** | -.164*** |
| Divorced | -.365*** | -.433*** | -.324*** | -.298*** |
| Widowed | -.271*** | -.347*** | -.249*** | -.236*** |
| Year | .0019 | -.0011 | -.0023 | -.0024 |
| Never-married * Year | — | .0027 | .0014 | .0014 |
| Divorced * Year | — | .0089* | .0080 | .0074 |
| Widowed * Year | — | .0107* | .0098* | .0098* |
| Satisfaction with Family | — | — | .119*** | .0835*** |
| Satisfaction w/ Friendships | — | — | .0976*** | .0464*** |
| Satisfaction with Hobbies | — | — | — | .0362*** |
| Satisfaction with Health | — | — | — | .0694*** |
| Satisfaction with City | — | — | — | .0625*** |
| Constant | 2.323*** | 2.343*** | 1.048*** | .670*** |
| r-squared | .050 | .051 | .172 | .230 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test.

Table 9. Regression of happiness on marital status, satisfaction, and survey year, for both male and female respondents ages 25–39, for the years 1972–1986.

| All Respondents | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Gender | .0749*** | .0743*** | .0397* | .0630*** |
| Never-married | -.221*** | -.349*** | -.211*** | -.205*** |
| Divorced | -.342*** | -.447*** | -.280*** | -.267*** |
| Widowed | -.271*** | -.211 | -.113 | -.0893 |
| Year | .0007 | -.0034 | -.0037 | -.0025 |
| Never-married * Year | — | .0162*** | .0115* | .0090 |
| Divorced * Year | — | .0136** | .0078 | .0061 |
| Widowed * Year | — | -.0092 | -.0124 | -.0171 |
| Satisfaction with Family | — | — | .105*** | .0711*** |
| Satisfaction w/ Friendships | — | — | .0914*** | .0390*** |
| Satisfaction with Hobbies | — | — | — | .0380*** |
| Satisfaction with Health | — | — | — | .0661*** |
| Satisfaction with City | — | — | — | .0633*** |
| Constant | 2.240*** | 2.267*** | 1.107*** | .707*** |
| r-squared | .047 | .050 | .150 | .206 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

Note: Male = 0 and Female = 1 in this analysis.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test.

Table 10. Regression of happiness on marital status, satisfaction, and survey year, male respondents ages 25–39, for the years 1972–1986.

| Males | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Never-married | -.191*** | -.319*** | -.209*** | -.203*** |
| Divorced | -.309*** | -.421*** | -.269** | -.295*** |
| Widowed | -.0486 | -.485 | -.485 | -.477 |
| Year | .0042 | -.0007 | -.0033 | -.0022 |
| Never-married * Year | — | .0166** | .0158* | .0117 |
| Divorced * Year | — | .0148 | .0128 | .0115 |
| Widowed * Year | — | .0712 | .0798* | .0753* |
| Satisfaction with Family | — | — | .0770*** | .0478*** |
| Satisfaction w/ Friendships | — | — | .0835*** | .0332** |
| Satisfaction with Hobbies | — | — | — | .0394*** |
| Satisfaction with Health | — | — | — | .0461*** |
| Satisfaction with City | — | — | — | .0747*** |
| Constant | 2.205*** | 2.237*** | 1.301*** | .920*** |
| r-squared | .032 | .036 | .108 | .166 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test.

Table 11. Regression of happiness on marital status, satisfaction, and survey year, for female respondents ages 25–39, for the years 1972–1986.

| Females | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Never-married | -.254*** | -.373*** | -.228*** | -.234*** |
| Divorced | -.359*** | -.471*** | -.288*** | -.253*** |
| Widowed | -.329*** | -.138 | -.0206 | -.0448 |
| Year | -.0021 | -.0055* | -.0042 | -.0030 |
| Never-married * Year | — | .0147* | .0072 | .0076 |
| Divorced * Year | — | .0142* | .0053 | .0029 |
| Widowed * Year | — | -.0285 | -.0335 | .0384 |
| Satisfaction with Family | — | — | .142*** | .1010*** |
| Satisfaction w/ Friendships | — | — | .090*** | .0399*** |
| Satisfaction with Hobbies | — | — | — | .0361*** |
| Satisfaction with Health | — | — | — | .0781*** |
| Satisfaction with City | — | — | — | .0526*** |
| Constant | 2.343*** | 2.366*** | .942*** | .586*** |
| r-squared | .057 | .060 | .191 | .243 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test.

Table 12. Regression of happiness on marital status, education, income, and survey year, for both male and female respondents ages 18 and older, for the years 1972–1986.

| All Respondents | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Gender | .0764*** | .0663*** | .0761*** |
| Never-married | -.265*** | -.286*** | -.270*** |
| Divorced | -.365*** | -.405*** | -.366*** |
| Widowed | -.272*** | -.337*** | -.271*** |
| Year | -.0014 | -.0004 | -.0015 |
| Never-married * Year | .0102*** | .0069* | .0101*** |
| Divorced * Year | .0066* | .0056 | .0065 |
| Widowed * Year | .0086* | .0094** | .0088* |
| Education | — | .0044*** | .0034*** |
| Income | .0741*** | — | .0070*** |
| Constant | 2.257*** | 2.220*** | 2.220*** |
| r-squared | .060 | .050 | .060 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

Note: Male = 0 and Female = 1 in this analysis.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test.

Table 13. Regression of happiness on marital status, education, income, and survey year, for male respondents ages 18 and older, for the years 1972–1986.

| Males | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Never-married | -.301*** | -.310*** | -.303*** |
| Divorced | -.354*** | -.362*** | -.354*** |
| Widowed | -.245*** | -.321*** | -.243*** |
| Year | .0001 | .0007 | .0000 |
| Never-married * Year | .0118** | .0095* | .0117** |
| Divorced * Year | .0019 | .0002 | .0018 |
| Widowed * Year | .0019 | .0038 | .0019 |
| Education | — | .0042*** | .0022 |
| Income | .0630*** | — | .0600*** |
| Constant | 2.256*** | 2.217*** | 2.231*** |
| r-squared | .053 | .046 | .053 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test

Table 14. Regression of happiness on marital status, education, income, and survey year, for female respondents ages 18 and older, for the years 1972–1986.

| Females | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Never-married | -.210*** | -.251*** | -.218*** |
| Divorced | -.364*** | -.431*** | -.367*** |
| Widowed | -.272*** | -.345*** | -.272*** |
| Year | -.0027 | -.0015 | -.0030 |
| Never-married * Year | .0069 | .0030 | .0069 |
| Divorced * Year | .0095* | .0090* | .0095* |
| Widowed * Year | .0112** | .0112** | .0114** |
| Education | — | .0046*** | .0044** |
| Income | .0867*** | — | .0817*** |
| Constant | 2.335*** | 2.290*** | 2.284*** |
| r-squared | .065 | .052 | .066 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test

Table 15. Regression of happiness on marital status, education, income, and survey year, for both male and female respondents ages 25–39, for the years 1972–1986.

| All Respondents | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Gender | .0834*** | .0796*** | .0875*** |
| Never-married | -.320*** | -.367*** | -.338*** |
| Divorced | -.376*** | -.447*** | -.382*** |
| Widowed | -.147 | -.203 | -.145 |
| Year | -.0041* | -.0039* | -.0045* |
| Never-married * Year | .0187*** | .0167*** | .0189*** |
| Divorced * Year | .0128* | .0140** | .0130* |
| Widowed * Year | -.0096 | -.0088 | -.0090 |
| Education | — | .0117*** | .0099*** |
| Income | .1030*** | — | .0936*** |
| Constant | 2.242*** | 2.116*** | 2.117*** |
| r-squared | .070 | .056 | .074 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

Note: Male = 0 and Female = 1 in this analysis.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test

Table 16. Regression of happiness on marital status, education, income, and survey year, for male respondents ages 25–39, for the years 1972–1986.

| Males | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Never-married | -.315*** | -.334*** | -.327*** |
| Divorced | -.422*** | -.426*** | -.426*** |
| Widowed | -.445 | -.489 | -.452 |
| Year | -.0011 | -.0011 | -.0013 |
| Never-married * Year | .0191** | .0169** | .0191** |
| Divorced * Year | .0171 | .0157 | .0174 |
| Widowed * Year | .0676* | .0727* | .0690 |
| Education | — | .0136*** | .0098*** |
| Income | .1030*** | — | .0932* |
| Constant | 2.219 | 2.060*** | 2.092*** |
| r-squared | .060 | .045 | .064 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test

Table 17. Regression of happiness on marital status, education, income, and survey year, for female respondents ages 25–39, for the years 1972–1986.

| Females | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Never-married | -.311*** | -.395*** | -.336*** |
| Divorced | -.363*** | -.469*** | -.371*** |
| Widowed | -.0582 | -.129 | -.0546 |
| Year | -.0066* | -.0062* | -.0072** |
| Never-married * Year | .0163* | .0153* | .0169* |
| Divorced * Year | .0119 | .0145* | .0123 |
| Widowed * Year | -.0286 | -.0283 | -.0287 |
| Education | — | .0105*** | .0102*** |
| Income | .1030*** | — | .0930*** |
| Constant | 2.345*** | 2.237*** | 2.221*** |
| r-squared | .077 | .065 | .080 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test

Table 18. Regression of happiness on marital status, satisfaction, education, income, and survey year, for respondents ages 18 and older, for the years 1972–1986.

| | All Respondents | Males | Females |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Gender | .0501*** | — | — |
| Never-married | -.179*** | -.219*** | -.136*** |
| Divorced | -.255*** | -.242*** | -.263*** |
| Widowed | -.248*** | -.309*** | -.226*** |
| Year | -.0033* | -.0036 | -.0308 |
| Never-married * Year | .0071* | .0102* | .0030 |
| Divorced * Year | .0067 | .0047 | .0072 |
| Widowed * Year | .0128*** | .0188* | .0116* |
| Satisfaction with Family | .0683*** | .0493*** | .0867*** |
| Satisfaction w/ Friendships | .0438*** | .0452*** | .0421*** |
| Satisfaction with Hobbies | .0319*** | .0298*** | .0340*** |
| Satisfaction with Health | .0588*** | .0470*** | .0672*** |
| Satisfaction with City | .0627*** | .0665*** | .0597*** |
| Education | .0005 | .0026 | -.0012 |
| Income | .0350*** | .0287*** | .0397*** |
| Constant | .797*** | .937*** | .721*** |
| r-squared | .201 | .173 | .227 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test.

Table 19. Regression of happiness on marital status, satisfaction, education, income, and survey year, for respondents 25–39, for the years 1972–1986.

| | All Respondents | Males | Females |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Gender | .0713*** | — | — |
| Never-married | -.181*** | -.202*** | -.183* |
| Divorced | -.224*** | -.296** | -.197*** |
| Widowed | -.0591 | -.453 | .0923 |
| Year | -.0032 | -.0027 | -.0037 |
| Never-married * Year | -.0096 | .0127 | .0068 |
| Divorced * Year | -.0056 | .0129 | .0016 |
| Widowed * Year | -.0152 | .0733 | -.0386 |
| Satisfaction with Family | .0765*** | .0516*** | .1060*** |
| Satisfaction w/ Friendships | .0364*** | .0309** | .0380*** |
| Satisfaction with Hobbies | .0316*** | .0369*** | .0285*** |
| Satisfaction with Health | .0625*** | .0431*** | .0749*** |
| Satisfaction with City | .0596*** | .0712*** | .0497*** |
| Education | .0066*** | .0093*** | .0038 |
| Income | .0595*** | .0640*** | .0530*** |
| Constant | .659*** | .824*** | .582*** |
| r-squared | .213 | .183 | .244 |

Source: The 1972 through 1986 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.

***Significant at the .001 level on a two-tailed test.

Table 20. Happiness of married, cohabiting, and non-cohabiting persons by marital status, with “not too happy” coded 1, “pretty happy” coded 2, and “very happy” coded 3.

| Marital Status (all respondents) | Mean Happiness | N | Std. Deviation | % Very Happy |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Married | 2.25 | 1978 | .60 | 33.7 |
| Never-married | 2.12 ^a | 186 | .62 | 25.7 ^a |
| Never-married cohabiting | 1.92 ^{ab} | 50 | .59 | 13.7 ^a |
| Separated | 1.81 ^a | 63 | .68 | 15.1 ^a |
| Separated cohabiting | 2.05 | 5 | .40 | 9.2 |
| Divorced | 1.97 ^a | 227 | .60 | 16.6 ^a |
| Divorced cohabiting | 2.29 ^b | 64 | .59 | 36.1 ^b |
| Widowed | 2.10 ^a | 289 | .66 | 27.2 ^a |
| Widowed cohabiting | 2.55 | 4 | .65 | 57.8 |
| Total | 2.19 | 2867 | .62 | 30.4 |

Source: The 1986 and 1988 American Changing Lives.

a = the mean for category is significantly different from the married, $p \leq .05$

b = the mean for cohabiting category is significantly different from the non-cohabiting category within marital statuses, $p \leq .05$

Table 21. Happiness of married, cohabiting, and non-cohabiting males by marital status, with “not too happy” coded 1, “pretty happy” coded 2, and “very happy” coded 3.

| Marital Status (for males only) | Mean Happiness | N | Std. Deviation | % Very Happy |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Married | 2.27 | 1020 | .60 | 34.9 |
| Never-married | 2.19 | 104 | .60 | 28.8 |
| Never-married cohabiting | 1.80 ^{ab} | 28 | .61 | 9.8 ^{ab} |
| Separated | 1.42 ^a | 23 | .64 | 7.5 ^a |
| Separated cohabiting | 2.06 ^b | 5 | .42 | 10.0 |
| Divorced | 1.93 ^a | 86 | .58 | 13.4 ^a |
| Divorced cohabiting | 2.42 ^b | 20 | .54 | 41.9 ^b |
| Widowed | 1.96 ^a | 60 | .53 | 17.6 ^a |
| Widowed cohabiting | — | — | — | — |
| Total | 2.21 | 1341 | .61 | 31.2 |

Source: The 1986 and 1988 American Changing Lives.

a = the mean for category is significantly different from the married, $p \leq .05$

b = the mean for cohabiting category is significantly different from the non-cohabiting category within marital statuses, $p \leq .05$

Table 22. Happiness of married, cohabiting, and non-cohabiting females by marital status, with “not too happy” coded 1, “pretty happy” coded 2, and “very happy” coded 3.

| Marital Status (for females only) | Mean Happiness | N | Std. Deviation | % Very Happy |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Married | 2.23 | 959 | .60 | 32.4 |
| Never-married | 2.02 ^a | 82 | .65 | 21.8 |
| Never-married cohabiting | 2.08 | 22 | .55 | 18.7 |
| Separated | 2.02 ^a | 40 | .61 | 19.4 |
| Separated cohabiting | — | — | — | — |
| Divorced | 1.99 ^a | 140 | .61 | 18.4 ^a |
| Divorced cohabiting | 2.22 ^b | 41 | .63 | 32.7 |
| Widowed | 2.13 ^a | 239 | .66 | 29.3 ^a |
| Widowed cohabiting | 2.69 | 3 | .57 | 69.2 |
| Total | 2.18 | 1526 | .62 | 29.6 |

Source: The 1986 and 1988 American Changing Lives.

a = the mean for category is significantly different from the married, $p \leq .05$

b = the mean for cohabiting category is significantly different from the non-cohabiting category within marital statuses, $p \leq .05$

Chapter 5: Conclusions

In their study of marital status and happiness, Glenn and Weaver (1988) found that the happiness of never-married persons had increased from 1972 to 1986, especially for never-married males. Over the same period of time, they also found that the happiness of married persons had decreased, especially for married females. Accordingly, Glenn and Weaver (1988) summed up their findings by asserting that the “differences in the circumstances of married and unmarried persons have lessened” (pp. 322). They argued that societal changes in marital and non-marital heterosexual relationships may now make it possible for the never-married to obtain benefits that were formerly available only to the married. At the same time, Glenn and Weaver (1988) argued that the benefits of being married had diminished. They argued that divorce, along with societal accepted alternatives to marriage such as cohabitation, had weakened the institution of marriage, because marriage no longer provides persons with the financial and emotional security that it once did. As a result of the societal changes discussed above, Glenn and Weaver (1988) predicted that the gap in happiness between married and never-married persons would continue to shrink in the future.

From the present study, there were three main findings. First, this study found that the trends observed by Glenn and Weaver (1988) in the happiness of never-married males and married females have not continued. More recent data indicate that a slight decline has occurred in the happiness of never-married males and that a slight increase has occurred in the happiness of married females. Since the Glenn and Weaver (1988) study, data also indicate that the happiness of married males has increased. Second, this study found that neither life satisfaction nor socioeconomic factors could explain the relative increase in the happiness of the never-married, compared to the married, from 1972 to 1986. Neither satisfaction with family and friends nor all of the life satisfaction variables together explained the relative increase in happiness of never-married males, compared to married males, that Glenn and Weaver (1988) observed from 1972 to 1986. Neither income, or education, or income, education, and life satisfaction together explained the relative increase in happiness of never-married males, compared to married

males, from 1972 to 1986. Third, this study found that cohabitation does not improve the happiness of never-married males. Contrary to what Glenn and Weaver (1988) suggested, the data indicate that never-married cohabiting males were significantly less happy than both married males and never-married non-cohabiting males.

In summary, the information presented in this thesis suggests that the trends in the happiness of married and never-married persons uncovered by Glenn and Weaver (1988) have not continued, and that the trends have reversed somewhat in more recent years. The happiness of never-married persons has not continued to increase, nor has the happiness of the married continued to diminish. Today, the evidence continues to suggest that the married have significantly higher levels of happiness than the never-married. Regardless of the societal changes in marital and non-marital heterosexual relationships, the married continue to receive benefits that persons of other marital statuses do not receive.

It is not clear why Glenn and Weaver (1988) found that the happiness of never-married males had increased over 1972 to 1986. Although both subjective and objective quality of life indicators were examined in this thesis, neither changes in the subjective quality of life, nor changes in the objective quality of life of the never-married, can adequately explain the relative increase in the happiness of never-married, compared to the married, observed by Glenn and Weaver (1988) over 1972 to 1986. Although life satisfaction and socioeconomic factors do contribute positively to the happiness of never-married males, contrary to what Glenn and Weaver (1988) suggested, cohabitation does not improve the happiness of never-married males.

Although several changes have been made in the sampling and administration of the General Social Surveys over the past 25 years, it does not seem likely that the trends observed by Glenn and Weaver (1988) were due solely to sampling error. The sampling and administration procedures of the General Social Surveys were improved from the 1970 surveys to the 1980 surveys: if anything, this would increase the likelihood that more “unhappy” people completed the survey for the 1980 surveys than for the 1970 surveys. However, although unlikely, there is still a possibility that the trends in happiness of the never-married that were observed by Glenn and Weaver (1988) could be

due to sampling error that occurred within the year. More years of data are needed in order to determine if the trends observed by Glenn and Weaver (1988) will be reversed, or if they will hold in the future.

The possibility of a period effect cannot be ruled out. Institutions in the United States may have adapted to accommodate an increasing number of never-married persons in recent years. Changes in institutions may have contributed to the increase in the relative happiness of never-married persons, compared to the married, from 1972 to 1986 that was observed by Glenn and Weaver (1988). However, data since the Glenn and Weaver (1988) study indicate that the happiness of never-married persons has decreased from 1986 to 1996. These findings suggest that married persons still receive benefits that persons in other marital categories do not receive.

In their paper, Glenn and Weaver suggested that the importance marriage had diminished, and that “it was time to question the belief, widely held by family social scientists, that the institution of marriage in this society remains as strong and viable as ever” (Glenn and Weaver 1988, pp. 323). Although the happiness of the never-married may have increased in recent years, it is clear from the data presented in this thesis that marriage is still an important institution: married persons continue to have significantly higher levels of happiness than persons in other marital categories. Further, marriage provides persons with benefits that cannot be obtained from other living arrangements such as cohabitation. Compared with cohabitation, marriage provides persons with higher levels of relationship commitment, stability, happiness, and integration, all of which contribute positively to persons’ psychological well-being. Accordingly, never-married cohabiting persons experience lower levels of happiness than married persons. Never-married cohabiting persons also experience lower levels of happiness than non-cohabiting never-married persons. Contrary to Glenn and Weaver (1988), evidence suggests that cohabitation is at best unhelpful for persons, and may actually be detrimental to persons’ psychological well-being. Marriage, on the other hand, continues to be associated with good mental and physical health.

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