

Chapter 1

Introduction



Dimitri Mortelmans

Abstract This book gathers studies from across Europe and Israel. It presents the latest insights in studies on family dynamics from a European perspective. The book covers both macro and micro level studies and deals with causes and consequences of uncoupling. The long-term research agenda for divorce researchers is promising and bursting with new opportunities, new challenges and new exciting discoveries to be made. This book is a first step in this direction showing the newest developments collected in one volume.

Keywords Divorce · Europe · Causes of divorce · Consequences of divorce

In memory of Jaap Dronkers – “do you mind if I briefly interrupt?”...

... with a story that starts in Florence, November 2002. Jaap Dronkers, Matthijs Kalmijn, and Michael Wagner founded the *European Network for the Sociological and Demographic Study of Divorce*. Its mission: “to gather European researchers working on relationship dissolution”. The first and soon to be annual *Divorce Conference* was attended by 30 researchers, presenting and discussing their work on the causes and consequences of divorce in both national and international comparative perspectives. The network quickly grew in size as more and more researchers saw the benefits of mutual exchange and dialogue. Over the years, colleagues from Europe, the US, Canada, Australia, and South Africa have presented their work at the conference. As of 2019, the network is called “EUDIV – The European Divorce Network”. This volume collects work from over 30 authors from more than 10 countries on a wide range of themes surrounding relationship dissolution. It is therefore only fitting that it opens by paying homage to one of our founding fathers.

This book is dedicated to Jaap Dronkers. It is impossible to overstate his influence on the continuing expansion of both the field of dissolution research and our

D. Mortelmans (✉)
University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium
e-mail: dimitri.mortelmans@uantwerpen.be

network. Jaap was not only a divorce researcher, he was also active in sociology of education, in elite studies and an often heard voice in the Dutch public debate. His sudden passing on the 30th of March 2016 sent shockwaves through many academic circles, not in the least our own. We will remember Jaap as the driving force behind the network, with relentless energy that resulted in volunteers throughout Europe to organize the Divorce Conference and to continuously exchange our knowledge on relational break-ups. During our meetings, Jaap's finger was always the first to be raised, often before the presentation had ended. Numerous young researchers have been stimulated by his supportive comments or his recommendations. He inspired many experienced researchers, post-docs and professors to push themselves to the limit in their analyses. It falls to me as editor, in name of all authors of this book and members of the network, to honour Jaap Dronkers and thank him for the contributions he made to our field as a source of inspiration, as a colleague, and as a friend.

1.1 Divorce Research in Europe

This volume is entitled *Divorce in Europe* and gathers studies from across Europe and Israel. The book connects two crucial concepts that are at the heart of our network: divorce and Europe. We focus on *divorce* as the phenomenon of interest. In its strictest form, divorce is the legal dissolution of a marriage. It is captured in official statistics and can be compared across countries. As will be shown in the first part of this book, figures on divorce rates have been on the rise for decades and seem to be levelling off or have started to decline in recent years for some countries. On the other hand, divorce can also be understood as the sociological phenomenon of uncoupling that incorporates much more realities than its strict legal significance might reveal. A first source of heterogeneity underlying the concept of divorce is *who* is divorcing? When this field of inquiry started to develop, this question was easily answered by referring to a heterosexual couple that dissolved their marriage. Currently, many countries have opened up marriage to include homosexual couples, who also face divorce. Furthermore, marriage has lost its central place as cohabitational splits entered the scope of divorce researchers. Even though we still use the term divorce, it is no longer the exclusive decoupling of married spouses. Rather, it became an umbrella term for all uncoupling processes, irrespective of gender composition or legal bond.

Second, we do not only take into account *who* is divorcing but also *the moment* a divorce is occurring. Divorce is not a moment in time, but a process which leads to heterogeneity in the way studies treat the ending and the beginning of a relationship (Demo and Fine 2015). Marital quality in a relationship deteriorates and conflicts may rise or partners may estrange from each other. Even though sociologists and demographers often consider the split of a relationship as a discrete phenomenon, i.e. an event in daily life, ending a long-term relationship is far from a single event. For methodological feasibility, either the moment a partner moves out or the legal divorce (if any) is considered as the actual moment of breaking up. But not only the

end of the marriage is a source of unclarity. Where does one start when recording the length of a relationship? From the moment two people acknowledge their relationship as being romantic in nature? From the moment they move in together? Or from the moment they officially marry? Or is it whichever comes first? In times of tv shows like “married at first sight”, one can even be married *before* having a romantic relationship with one’s spouse. Whether or not a dating period is taken into account or not, can be important for considering the actual length of a relationship we see dissolve. The temporal dimension of divorce is complex and multifaceted and therefore should be studied as such. Although, data limitations will again continue to limit our potential options in real life modelling.

On top of these coresidential (who), or temporal (when) dimensions, we also need to consider the life course perspective in coupling and uncoupling. When discussing divorce, the impression could be raised that people have one long-term relationship, married or not, which might be dissolved somewhere during the life course. In reality, life, but also the heart will go on. Repartnering is inherent to the life course of formation and dissolution of partnerships. When new partners enter the life course, new love but also new conflicts may arise potentially resulting in higher order break-ups (and more new partnerships). As divorce is often regarded as something people experience only once, we do yet not have much insight in these subsequent processes of bonding and unbonding. At present, divorce research is predominantly focussed on divorce as a singular term despite the plurality of the concept.

Defining and delineating the concept of divorce in itself clearly reveals the complexities to be solved before we can actually start studying the phenomenon. These intricacies only multiply when we move past the process or the event itself. The field of divorce studies is divided into three domains: causes, processes and consequences of divorce. Not all fields have been developed to the same degree. For example, we have little in-depth insights in the process of divorce. Most findings concern the economic, psychological and social consequences of divorce for potential actors involved: adults, parents, grandparents, children and networks of friends and relatives. The field of antecedents is also widely documented with classic determinants as educational level or parental divorce (intergenerational inheritance of a break-up risk) and more surprising ones like mobile phone penetration (Zhang et al. 2018) or special marriage dates (Kabátek and Ribar 2018). A comprehensive overview of all known causes, processes and consequences of divorce is beyond the scope of this introduction. For example, in their 1991 meta-analysis, Amato and Keith (1991) identified eight domains of consequences of divorce on children, additionally influenced by several socio-demographic background characteristics. Summarizing them all would require a volume in itself. We therefore refer the interested reader to some excellent overview articles on causes of divorce (Lyngstad and Jalovaara 2010), or consequences (Amato 2000, 2014; Amato and James 2010).

The second central element in the title of the book is *Europe*. As we have outlined at the start of this introduction, the book gathers research from Europe and Israel, because it grew out of the yearly European Divorce conference. Even though the European research tradition on divorce came long after that of the US, and even

though the *encyclopedia of divorce* (Emery 2013) showed that divorce is a world-wide phenomenon present in every country around the globe, we do believe that the European context, with all its heterogeneity, is an interesting one for scholars studying a phenomenon like divorce. First, the macro perspective shows that divorce trends are evolving at a different pace across Europe and started in different time periods. This is not only true for the north-south gradient with Scandinavia as the forerunner and southern Europe as a region characterised by more stable marriages. As will be shown in this volume, also Eastern Europe does not show a uniform pattern in divorce figures, even though the end of the Communist Era is a period effect affecting all them at the same time. Even the mere legal recognition of divorce shows a great disparity, with Malta being the final European country in 2011. This last point shows the relevance of the legal context of divorce in Europe. Even though all countries have adopted the possibility for marriages to dissolve, the procedures to do so are quite different. In a country like Italy the separation-divorce dichotomy is preserved. In other countries, the no-fault divorce has been introduced while among them, legal inertia or administrative speed determines the timing of a divorce. Second, differences are not only relevant on the macro-level. At the micro-level, the composition of marriages and cohabitations (Wagner and Weiß 2006) or the determinants of divorce like education level differ to a great extent across Europe (Harkonen and Dronkers 2006). Many single-country and comparative studies have shown that causes and consequences of divorce often run parallel (e.g. in US and Europe) but certainly not always (Amato and James 2010). In-depth comparative studies are still needed to disentangle the puzzle of interwoven complexities. The cultural and structural dimensions across Europe that both shape different pathways out of a relationship will be of particular importance in future research.

Before turning to a potential future of European divorce research, we offer a brief overview of this volume. We present new insights in divorce and relationship dissolution, inspired by, and guided by the European Divorce Network.

1.2 This Volume

The volume is divided into five parts. Each part considers a different dimension of relational break-ups. We begin with a macro approach looking on divorce trends, followed by four parts with micro-level studies. These studies either consider the antecedents of divorce or its consequences. The number of chapters dealing with consequences were further classified as based on the population of interest, i.e. consequences for adults, for children and for the parent-child relationship.

Part I introduces a new strand of research in the field. For several years, we observed that divorce rates have more or less plateaued in several countries. Some countries even show declining divorce trends. The question arises: what we are actually observing? Is this a signal that marriages, or even relationships in general, have started to become more stable again? Or is it a signal that marriages are becom-

ing more and more selective? If unmarried cohabitations are more prevalent, then more stable divorce figures might be hiding more than they reveal.

In Chapter 2, Boertien takes on this puzzle and considers whether or not unions have become more stable over time. Looking at ‘stability of unions’ was a necessary conceptual switch to overcome the issues of underrepresentation of cohabitations. This conceptual step went hand in hand with an empirical switch, as official records of divorces are becoming less useful to study divorce trends. Self-reported relationship status, based on surveys, is now central in analyses on international divorce trends. Boertien took all self-declared, co-resident couples and marriages as a starting point for his exploration of empirical trends in union stability. Using retrospective union histories from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Understanding Society, he tested how estimates of trends in union stability over time might have been biased. The results show that the data source has a considerable influence on the resulting trend. Prospective data suggested a reversal in the divorce trend where retrospective data showed a continuing trend towards more instability.

In Chapter 3, Wagner reviews theoretical concepts and empirical results on divorce trends. The chapter starts with a consideration of macro- and micro-level theories on union dissolution and the way both (could) interact. At the micro-level, four hypotheses were developed that can explain the upward trend in the divorce rates: (1) the declining marital quality hypothesis, (2) the hypothesis of decreasing barriers, (3) the hypothesis of an increasing legitimization of separation, and (4) the increasing opportunities hypothesis. These micro-level hypotheses were grounded in two interrelated macro developments of sociocultural change and socio-structural change. In a second part, Wagner investigated the empirical evidence. A crucial question in this respect was whether the divorce rates were influenced more profoundly by period or cohort effects. Even though many studies concluded that period effects outweigh cohort effects, the empirical results did not reach a convincing convergence. The empirical evidence on both the micro- and the macro-level was scattered and inconclusive as well. The chapter concludes with a plea to introduce feedback loops and self-reinforcing processes to the field in order to integrate the micro- and macro-level more firmly.

Chapter 4 is also concerned with divorce trends, but these authors turn their attention to Eastern Europe. Härkönen, Billingsley and Hornung looked at divorce trends in seven former communist countries. Their focus was on the transition period starting with the decline of communist economy in the 1980s up to the economic revival after the turn of the millennium. Using retrospective relationship histories, they estimated the evolution of divorce risks across the transition period of these countries. A first exploratory analysis showed signs of increasing divorce trends during the transition period. The results indicated that these increases could to a large degree be attributed to the transition itself and not to other societal changes. A second hypothesis tested whether the increase in divorce trends could be explained by a different composition of marriages. Controlling for educational attainment, fertility behaviour, cohabitation history, and presence of stepchildren, did not alter the findings. This showed how robust the increase in the divorce trends are. A final

step in the chapter was to compare the trends across these seven countries. Here the authors found a substantial difference in timing and duration of the increase in divorce rates.

Part II of the book considers divorce risks at the individual level. Whereas part I showed macro-level effects on divorce rates or contained pleas to integrate both the macro and the micro-level, the remaining parts focus on the micro-level determinants (and consequences) of a relational break-up.

Chapter 5 deals with a long-standing question in divorce research: why do higher educated women have a lower risk on a break-up than lower educated women? In order to get insights in cross-national differences in the negative educational gradient in dissolution risks among women, Van Damme used two waves of the Gender and Generations Survey (GGS) panel for six European countries. The chapter includes both married and cohabiting women. Based on Levinger's social exchange theory, the author identified attractions to stay in a relationship as well as barriers to leave. The negative gradient was present in all countries, except for Russia. When trying to explain the gradient, attractions did not explain the difference but rather suppressed it. Barriers to leave the relationship on the other hand did explain the differences between low, middle and higher educated women. The author showed that whoever had more to lose socially and economically was less likely to end her relation.

Chapter 6 brings insights from Israel on the protective effect of having children on the risk to dissolve a marriage. The protective factor of children had already been documented in low fertility countries across Europe and in the US, but raised the question whether or not these effects were similar in a high-fertility country like Israel. Kaplan, Endeweld, and Herbst-Debby used a 13-year administrative panel to estimate divorce risks while controlling for the presence of children as well as ethnic composition and economic circumstances of the couple. The results decomposed the complex effect of having children on divorce risks. Overall, having young children and having more than one child decreased the risk of a dissolution. However, these effects changed when looking more closely into ethnic background and class. Major differences were found between Israeli-Jews and Israeli-Palestinians, whereby the latter had significantly lower divorce risks when they had children. In addition, a strong socio-economic gradient was found with lower income strata, showing a higher likelihood to split, irrespective of having children or the number of children one has. Only among the highest incomes, having more children increased the risk of divorce.

As indicated before, a considerable part of this volume is devoted to the consequences of divorce. Part III looks at the consequences of divorce for the divorcing ex-partners. There is considerable diversity in these consequences, as well as the extent to which they are experienced both positively and negatively.

Chapter 7 focuses on divorce in later life, the so-called gray divorce. Consequences of divorce in midlife or later were expected to be substantially different and Högnäs looked at loneliness at older age as a potential outcome of an earlier break-up. A first question raised in this chapter is whether or not (social or emotional) loneliness was different for younger and older divorcees, taking the age of 50 as a turning

point. Building upon that question, protective effects of remarriage, health and work were taken into account. The Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) provided the longitudinal data for the study. Contrary to the formulated hypotheses, the results did not show any effects of divorce at older age on loneliness. Rather, divorce before age 50 was associated with higher odds of social loneliness. Irrespective of the age at divorce, divorced men showed a higher degree of emotional loneliness than their married counterparts. Employment status did not influence this relationship, but health attenuated part of the relationship between divorce and loneliness.

Chapter 8 also focuses on the effects of divorce in old-age. In this chapter, Maes, Thielemans, and Tretyakova looked at intergenerational support older divorcees receive from their adult children in Russia. Russia was an interesting setting in this respect for two reasons. First, women are automatically given sole custody of the children after divorce. Second, the elderly care system in Russia is highly dependent on personal savings and intra-familial support. State support is as good as absent. This context gave rise to differential gendered effects in receiving support after a marital break-up. Studying divorced Russian men in this Russian context therefore provided new insights in intergenerational relationships when state support is minimal. The 2016 Living Conditions Survey allowed the authors to investigate four types of support: financial, material, housework and care during illness. As hypothesized, divorced elderly men received less support on all four domains than divorced women or still married men. These results pointed to a substantial and problematic divorce penalty for Russian single elderly men. Unsurprisingly, this group also had one of the highest poverty risks in the country.

Chapter 9 jumps to a different country context, Belgium, but also looks at a potentially vulnerable group of divorcees: migrant populations. Not intergenerational support, but the financial consequences of a break-up were central in this chapter. Mortelmans, Van den Berg and Thielemans looked at the coping strategies to overcome financial distress after a divorce. The chapter took population diversity into account as not only Belgian but also Moroccan, Turkish and Southern European backgrounds were studied. The study considered three coping strategies ex-partners can use after a relational break-up: increasing ones labour market attachment, repartnering, and returning to the parental home. Longitudinal register data were used to estimate latent growth models of income trajectories before and after the break. Overall, the authors observed a gender gap in economic consequences as women tended to lose more relative income than men. The hypothesized penalty for migrant groups was not found. Their economic weaker position did not worsen economic consequences after a break-up compared to the non-migrant group. Concerning the coping strategies, the authors found that only Belgian men and women were benefitting from an increased employment. Repartnering was beneficial across groups in a similar fashion. Returning to the parental home did not show the expected beneficial effect for migrant groups. This was explained by the weak socio-economic position of the migrant parents, who were not able to alleviate the financial situation of their divorced adult children.

Chapter 10 takes a gendered approach to understanding the relationship between subjective wellbeing and parenthood following a break-up. Using the Divorce in

Flanders survey, Jenkinson, Matthys, and Matsuo looked at a multidimensional operationalisation of wellbeing and its influence on (lone) parents' wellbeing. Three dimensions were taken into account: evaluative wellbeing (life satisfaction), affect (hedonic wellbeing), and eudemonia. The results showed that through experiencing a divorce, whether or not as a parent, ex-partners reported lower levels on all dimensions of subjective wellbeing. In addition, the results were gendered with men having significantly lower life satisfaction than women. For emotional wellbeing and vitality, these results were reversed with women having lower scores than men. These differences showed the importance of a multi-dimensional measurement of subjective wellbeing. The different dimensions used in the chapter illustrated how men and women might cognitively evaluate their lives in a similar fashion while going opposite directions when it concerns their actual lived experiences of positive and negative emotions.

Chapter 11 takes a theoretical perspective and looks at the consequences of divorce for the nuclear (parents – children) and extended (grandparents) family networks. De Bel and Van Gasse started out from three existing theories on family networks. The Family Systems Theory regards family relationships to be interdependent. This implies that changes in subsystems influence other subsystems in the family. Divorce was a clear example of how conflict between two partners can influence other subsystems, e.g. the parent-child subsystem. The Configurational Approach rests on the principle of mutually oriented people. Thereby, the individual level was connected to dyads that are themselves part of larger family structures. The third perspective is called the Sharing Group Perspective. This perspective was based on the premise that a group of people, like families, produce a common good together. A significant characteristic of these groups were their functional, structural and cognitive interdependences. From these three frameworks, the chapter looks at ways in which network approaches could give new answers to old questions and, reversely, poses new questions about the consequences of divorce that have not yet been answered or cannot not be answered today. The authors summarized their arguments in the Multi Actor Family Network Approach.

In Part IV we bring together studies that look at the parent-child relationship. While a parental break-up ends the (legal) ties and duties between former partners, it does not relinquish a parent-child relationship.

Chapter 12 looks at shared physical custody. As a living arrangement after divorce, shared physical custody is slowly becoming integrated in European family life. Nevertheless, resistance against the shared residence of children after a break-up has generated a public debate on the desirability of shared physical custody. Fučík looked at the Czech Republic to analyse the attitudes of men and women towards the acceptability of shared custody. As a first step, the chapter looks at the historical evolution of public debates on divorce and its potential harmful effects on children. Sole custody is shown to be under fire as women's roles in particular are shifting and fatherhood is reinterpreted and gains importance in public debates. For the empirical section, data from the Czech Household Panel Survey and the European Value Survey (EVS) was used in a gendered and age-related perspective. The results showed that men are more in favour of shared physical custody, as are

younger groups in the Czech population. No effects were found from family status (affluence) or gender-role attitudes. However, conservative attitudes on divorce influenced the opinion on shared custody, leading the author to conclude that divorce-related attitudes are of greater importance than gender-role attitudes.

Chapter 13 concerns the basic emotion of guilt and its relationship to divorce. Kalmijn looks into guilt felt by parents towards their children and defines the emotion as the negative feelings that arise from having done something wrong. As such, guilt is an obvious feeling that may arise in a divorce context. This study looked into the relationship between guilt and divorce and identified potential moderators for the relationship. The results from a representative Dutch survey showed that the feelings of guilt were indeed strong for divorced parents. Being single or repartnered after the break-up made no difference. In general, mothers showed more guilt than fathers, but this was irrespective of marital status. There were no gender differences that could be related to the divorce itself. The age of the child did not change the pattern of guilt. Parents felt more guilty for younger children but again this effect was similar in the married and in the divorced group. Despite the absence of age and gender effects, significant interaction effects were found for personality, financial problems, and drug use. Testing for altruism, empathy, and social norms, all yielded results in the expected direction. The moral dimension, however, turned out to be weaker than the role of altruism. The author concludes that this first exploration of feelings of guilt is only a stepping stone for further explorations of the moderating role of guilt in studies on depression after divorce or the perception of the parental role.

Chapter 14 considers the father-child relationship after divorce. When looking at the father-child bond, Maslauskaitė and Tereškinas differentiated between “caring for” (intimacy and approval) and “caring about” (conflict and lack of paternal authority). With this multidimensional operationalisation of quality of the relationship, they aimed to go beyond classic studies of father-child contact or child support. The data for the study came from the study *Fathering after Union Dissolution* in Lithuania. The results showed that higher levels of personal wellbeing and involved fatherhood lead to more “caring for” relationships and fewer “caring about”. Concerning more structural factors, like socio-economic resources or new family transitions like multi-partner fertility or repartnering, no or effects opposite from expectations were found. In Lithuania, men were encouraged by their new partners to be more involved with their children from previous marriages and they also showed higher conflict resolving behaviour towards their children. The authors conclude that the negative effects of new partners or new biological children that have been found in earlier research did not hold when quality of the relationship, rather than father-child contact frequency, was taken into account.

Part V brings children to the centre of attention. Both childbearing and consequences for children are included in this fifth part.

Chapter 15 looks at gender differences in multi-partner fertility. Divorce is not the end point of one’s life course, nor of someone’s fertility history. Jalovaara and Kreyenfeld compared ‘familialistic’ Germany and ‘de-familiarized’ Finland, to look at gender differences in multi-partner fertility. Within Germany, separate anal-

yses were made for East and West Germany due to the substantial differences in female labour market attachment in both regions. For Finland, longitudinal register data were used. The German data came from the PAIRFAM panel study. The differences in the three areas were considerable. Multi-partner fertility was highest in East Germany and lowest in West Germany. Consistent in all three was that foreign born men and women had a lower likelihood of multi-partner fertility, whereas early first child-bearing increased this likelihood. The results of education were only as expected in Finland, with the lower educated having higher multi-partner fertility. In Germany, no correlation between the education level and the fertility measure was found. Overall, women have a higher likelihood of having a second or third child (after the divorce) than men. Given their lower probability of repartnering, this was surprising. The authors conclude with a plea to include birth figures for both men and women, since multi-partner fertility showed that merely looking at the female data no longer represents societal reality.

Chapter 16 is based on the observation that children, or in this case adolescents, are increasingly often living in two homes after a divorce. Gähler and Fallesen inquired what the effect would be of living in a shared physical custody arrangement on the wellbeing of adolescents. The authors used a four-country longitudinal study with an oversampling of people with a migrant background. In order to overcome often used simplified dichotomies in family research (such as “single-parent family” or “reconstituted family”), the authors used 15 family categories to encompass the complexity of living arrangements adolescents find themselves in. Adolescents’ emotional and psychological status was operationalised using three indicators: internalizing problems, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. The outcomes showed that overall, adolescents in intact families fared the best, even compared to reconstituted families. Within these families, the presence of a new partner and resources did not make a difference. Rather, it was spending a balanced amount of time in the mother’s and father’s household that clearly improved the wellbeing of adolescents. However, this overall effect was more limited when both households were asymmetrical (e.g. one single parent and one reconstituted family).

Chapter 17 can be situated in one of the largest research streams in the field of divorce studies: the educational attainment of children after divorce. Havermans, Swicegood, and Matthijs place themselves in the ‘diverging destinies’ tradition by looking at the role of social class in the educational outcomes of children after divorce. Rather than academic achievement, the outcome variable in the study was school engagement. This multi-dimensional non-cognitive outcome has been proven in earlier studies to correlate with many educational outcomes, but had not yet received proper attention in divorce research. Using the LAGO-data, the authors tested both the floor hypothesis (expecting to see less negative effects of divorce among children of lower educated parents because these already start at lower levels of academic achievement) and the social origin compensatory hypothesis (due to fewer resources, divorce has worse effects on children among the lower educated). The results predominantly supported the floor hypothesis, as the decline in resources after divorce showed a higher impact among middle and higher educated parents

than among the lower educated. Nevertheless, support for the social origin hypothesis on the other hand was found in the protection of the father-child relationship after divorce among higher educated parents.

1.3 What Will the Future Bring?

Closing this preamble, I want to look at the development of divorce research in Europe over the last two decades and take a peek into the future. When the divorce network started, many participants brought country-level analyses on either trends of divorce, i.e. antecedents and consequences of divorce. The field of divorce in Europe was explored and step-wise knowledge on the European diversity was gained. In these starting days, many have held a plea for appropriate data to study couple dynamics. Some panel studies like the GSoep or the BHPS were already available, but in general there was a lack of large-scale and longitudinal data to study either causes or consequences of break-ups. Furthermore, cohabitation was not as widespread as it is today, leading to an almost exclusive focus on marriages in these starting days. By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, the situation had changed dramatically. Heavy investments in European research infrastructure have led to a completely new landscape in family studies: EU-SILC, Share, ESS, GGP (with the harmonized histories) all opened up new areas and possibilities for divorce studies. These large scale databases were locally complemented with targeted divorce studies like the Divorce in Flanders study, the Fathering after Union Dissolution in Lithuania survey or general family panel studies like the German Pairfam. After this huge catching up, a new development in family research data arose: the registers. Starting in Scandinavia, many European countries have opened up their administrative data for scientific research. As marriage and to some extent cohabitation is officially registered, family research and divorce studies in particular benefitted greatly from the longitudinal structure of register data. What the future holds on the data front is difficult to predict, but the European Union at least continues to invest in large-scale data infrastructures that have been developed since the turn of the century, which means that new survey data will continue to be available. Register data have proven their value for both scientific and policy oriented research. Even the new GDPR legislation does not block the pathway of using large-scale administrative data. A promising new road could be the linking of survey data and register data. Registers have the advantage of being reliable, large scale and longitudinal but lack the subjective indicators we often need in our theories. Where both data sources can be joined (in a legal way, since technically this is often already possible) new possibilities of more refined analyses on family dynamics will arise.

Also qualitative research and mixed methods could contribute at the development of the field. Up to now, and this book is a perfect illustration thereof, the field of divorce studies is dominated by the quantitative perspective. Large and longitudinal datasets, event histories and multilevel models help hypotheses to be tested. Parameters, model specifications and significance are at the core of the insights on

causes and consequences of divorce. As happened in other domains, the rise of qualitative studies and mixed method approaches have deepened the insights and provided surprising new insights that quantitative measures had not spotted yet. This wider development in the social sciences is only slowly entering the field of divorce studies. But if our aim is to understand the complexity we described earlier, we will have to embrace qualitative insights and combine them, mixed or not, to advance our knowledge in a continuous complex world of family dynamics.

Apart from the data and the methodology, what will the theoretical development in this field bring us? As mentioned earlier, theories on causes and consequences of break-ups have already been developed for many years. Many theories on divorce start from the economic specialization argument (Becker 1981; Becker et al. 1977), whereby the division of labour in a family determines its stability. Others rely more on social exchange theory (Levinger 1976) that stipulates that relationships either have attractions that keep people together, contain barriers that prevent people from leaving the relationship or bring attractive alternatives outside the relationship. Alternatively, marital quality (or better: relationship quality) is a major focal point when looking at relationship stability. When considering consequences, the stress-adjustment perspective of Amato (2000) is an often referred to theory alongside many other consequence-specific theories. When looking at future theoretical developments, we see a greater influence of gender theories, and more specifically gender role perspectives (Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015; Goldscheider et al. 2015) in demographic theorizing. As gender roles in society develop, so do the gender relations within families. Next to gender roles, also the nature-nurture discussion could enter the domain of family dynamics. Genetic influences in the intergenerational transmission of divorce have already been studied in twin studies (D'Onofrio et al. 2007a, b). But the increased availability of indicators from blood samples (e.g. in Understanding Society or Share), the gene-environment interaction is increasingly fed with data that wait for researchers to be analysed.

But next to existing theories, we also need to take into account the blind spots in our domain. Even though lack of knowledge often originates from lack of data, there are still some domains where our knowledge is fairly limited. A research program ahead of us is the analysis of gains of divorce. The domain of consequences is dominated (for obvious reasons) by the study of negative consequences. But divorce can also be liberating and have a positive effect on the subsequent life courses of divorcees. As early as 2003, Coltrane and Adams (2003) stressed that individual self-fulfilment and self-actualization is not necessarily found in the current relationship but could also be achieved in the next one. Also, the current research is still adult-centred, or rather, partner-centred. Too little information is sought among the children of divorcees, or the (grand)parents, or in the broader social network surrounding a former couple. Again, the price of collecting multi-actor data is considerable but so are the new insights in the dynamics and the consequences of divorce in a wider perspective.

A final domain to look at is policy. In Europe, we have seen a substantial change in divorce laws over the last few decades. Divorce was made easier and became less stigmatized, both sociologically and legally. No-fault divorce is now the standard in

most European countries. Nevertheless, divorce laws are only a small part of the story. Divorce is one of the forces behind the massive change in family life of the past decades. The family kaleidoscope (Mortelmans et al. 2016) in Europe and abroad shows a never seen diversity and a complexity barely manageable by current-day legislation. Social and family policy is focused on the weakest members in the former relationships, often the women and children. But fundamental principles in current-day legislation still rely on the male-breadwinner and the two-partner family. Cohabitation is to some extent integrated into the law but shared custody still shows a high diversity across Europe. Furthermore, life-course perspectives in legislation that acknowledge new family realities and multiple family dynamics across the life course are far from common.

The long-term research agenda for divorce researchers is clearly bursting with new opportunities, new challenges and new exciting discoveries to be made. I leave the reader now to explore the newest developments that are collected in this volume from the next chapter onwards. I hope that you, dearest reader, will raise your finger as Jaap Dronkers always did during our presentations with his simple “do you mind if I briefly interrupt?”. You are welcomed into our network, and you should feel welcome to briefly interrupt us ... we are eager to learn from you.

Acknowledgement This chapter benefited from the support of the Centre for Population, Family and Health (CPFH) at the University of Antwerp and the Flemish Agency of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (Grant number: 140069), which enabled Open Access to this chapter.

References

- Amato, P. R. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62(4), 18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01269.x>.
- Amato, P. R. (2014). The consequences of divorce for adults and children: An update. *Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja*, 23(1), 5–24.
- Amato, P. R., & James, S. (2010). Divorce in Europe and the United States: Commonalities and differences across nations. *Family Science*, 1(1), 2–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19424620903381583>.
- Amato, P. R., & Keith, B. (1991). Parental divorce and the well-being of children: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 110(1), 26–36.
- Becker, G. S. (1981). *A treatise on the family*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Becker, G. S., Landes, E. M., & Michael, R. T. (1977). An economic analysis of marital instability. *Journal of Political Economy*, 85(6), 1141–1187. <https://doi.org/10.1086/260631>.
- Coltrane, S., & Adams, M. (2003). The social construction of the divorce “problem”: Morality, child victims, and the politics of gender. *Family Relations*, 52(4), 363–372. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2003.00363.x>.
- D’Onofrio, B. M., Turkheimer, E., Emery, R. E., Harden, K. P., Slutske, W. S., Heath, A. C., et al. (2007a). A genetically informed study of the intergenerational transmission of marital instability. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(3), 793–809. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00406.x>.
- D’Onofrio, B. M., Turkheimer, E., Emery, R. E., Maes, H. H., Silberg, J., & Eaves, L. J. (2007b). A children of twins study of parental divorce and offspring psychopathology. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 48(7), 667–675. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2007.01741.x>.

- Demo, D. H., & Fine, M. A. (2015). Divorce. In C. A. Price, K. R. Bush, & S. J. Price (Eds.), *Families and change: Coping with stressful events* (5th ed., pp. 139–160). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Emery, R. E. (Ed.). (2013). *Cultural sociology of divorce: An encyclopedia*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Esping-Andersen, G., & Billari, F. C. (2015). Re-theorizing family demographics. *Population and Development Review*, 41(1), 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2015.00024.x>.
- Goldscheider, F. K., Bernhardt, E., & Lappegård, T. (2015). The gender revolution: A framework for understanding changing family and demographic behavior. *Population and Development Review*, 41(2), 207–239. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2015.00045.x>.
- Harkonen, J., & Dronkers, J. (2006). Stability and change in the educational gradient of divorce. A comparison of seventeen countries. *European Sociological Review*, 22(5), 501–517. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcl011>.
- Kabátek, J., & Ribar, D. C. J. J. o. P. E. (2018). Not your lucky day: Romantically and numerically special wedding date divorce risks. *Journal of Population Economics*, 31(4), 1067–1095. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-017-0684-6>.
- Levinger, G. (1976). A social psychological perspective on marital dissolution. *Journal of Social Issues*, 32(1), 21–47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1976.tb02478.x>.
- Lyngstad, T. H., & Jalovaara, M. (2010). A review of the antecedents of union dissolution. *Demographic Research*, 23, 257–291.
- Mortelmans, D., Matthijs, K., Alofs, E., & Segaert, B. (Eds.). (2016). *Changing family dynamics and demographic evolution: The family kaleidoscope*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Wagner, M., & Weiß, B. (2006). On the variation of divorce risks in Europe: Findings from a meta-analysis of European longitudinal studies. *European Sociological Review*, 22(5), 483–500. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcl014>.
- Zhang, J., Cheng, M., Wei, X., & Gong, X. (2018). Does Mobile phone penetration affect divorce rate? Evidence from China. *Sustainability*, 10(10). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10103701>.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

