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EFFECTS OF SPOUSE PRESENCE DURING THE INTERVIEW ON SURVEY RESPONSES CONCERNING MARRIAGE

WILLIAM S. AQUILINO

Abstract Data from the 1987–88 National Survey of Families and Households were used to examine the correlates of spouse presence during face-to-face interviews and the impact of spouse presence on responses to sensitive questions concerning marriage. Results suggest that variation in interview privacy can be a source of response effects in survey data on marriage. When spouses were present during the interview, subjective assessments of the utility of marriage were more positive, higher estimates of spouse contributions to housework were obtained, and men gave lower estimates of the likelihood of marital dissolution. There was some indication that spouse presence led to a greater willingness to report sensitive factual information concerning the marriage. Respondents were more likely to report cohabiting with the spouse before marriage if the spouse was present, and self-reported levels of marital conflict were higher. Implications of these findings for survey design are discussed.

Introduction

This article investigates a potential but often neglected source of response error in interview data on marital quality: the extent to which having a spouse present in the room or able to overhear the interview affects responses to sensitive questions concerning marriage. Researchers who collect data on marriage, and those who analyze extant

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data, rarely describe or control this potential source of error in their data.

A great deal of the data used to study marriage is collected through household surveys. Survey researchers have long recommended that interviews on such sensitive interpersonal topics be conducted in privacy (Back and Stycos 1959; Bradburn and Sudman 1979; Moser and Kalton 1972; Warwick and Lininger 1975). Privacy during an interview decreases problems associated with self-presentation and thus reduces tendencies toward socially desirable responding to threatening survey questions (Sudman and Bradburn 1974).

In many cases, however, the interview setting makes it difficult to achieve complete privacy. Although interviewers may suggest to respondents that they talk in private, they cannot always control the behavior of other family members. Interviewers may be reluctant to antagonize respondents by insisting on complete privacy and thereby jeopardizing completion of the interview. Insistence on privacy may suggest to respondents that the survey will ask about negative aspects of the marriage. Thus, in most household surveys, from 25 to 50 percent of interviews are conducted within the earshot of others, usually other family members (Bradburn and Sudman 1979).

How might lack of privacy influence the survey responses of married respondents? There may be differences between what respondents are willing to say to an interviewer and what they will reveal to a spouse. Spouse presence may make it more difficult to reveal negative aspects of the marital relationship and may encourage respondents to provide answers that please their mates (Anderson and Silver 1987). Survey responses may be altered or shaded if respondents openly discuss sensitive questions with their spouses. To the extent that survey responses vary by degree of interview privacy, interviewing some respondents in private and some in the presence of others will increase measurement error. In studies that obtain data on marriage from both partners, interviewing spouses together will also raise the likelihood of *correlated* measurement error between the two reports (Thomson and Williams 1984).

THE LIKELIHOOD OF SPOUSE PRESENCE IN FACE-TO-FACE SURVEYS

Spouse presence during an interview is most likely not a random occurrence but may reflect in part the preferences and living situation of respondent and spouse. Thus, any association between spouse presence and responses to questions on marriage may be spurious, since spouse presence will itself be correlated with a number of variables related to marital interaction. Models of privacy effects should control for these possible mediating variables. The approach taken in this anal-

ysis is first to develop a model predicting the likelihood of spouse presence, then to use those predictors as control variables in estimating the impact of spouse presence on responses.

Of primary concern in specifying a model of privacy effects is the possibility that spouse presence itself is related to styles of marital interaction, specifically to marital companionship. Spouse presence during an interview should be much more likely among marital partners who typically spend a great deal of free time together than among partners who have separate activities. Therefore, marital companionship was used as a predictor of privacy and as a control variable in modeling privacy effects on survey responses, rather than as a dependent variable.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE ON PRIVACY EFFECTS

Despite the high prevalence of third-party presence in surveys, relatively few studies have described the magnitude of privacy effects on responses to sensitive questions. I found no studies that specifically described the effect of spouse presence on answers to sensitive questions concerning marriage. The small empirical literature on third-party presence has produced mixed results: a number of studies have reported some significant effects, while others have found no effects on sensitive items.

Bradburn and Sudman (1979), in a national sample of nearly 1,200 adults, reported that spouse presence during the interview increased item nonresponse to questions on sex and income. They found, however, no stable, predictable effects of third-party presence on sensitive items concerning the respondents' own and friends' illicit drug use, although respondents who had a child present during the interview were less likely to report that they or their friends had ever used marijuana. They concluded that, overall, there was only weak evidence that lack of privacy affected survey responses.

In a survey of married Soviet emigrants to the United States, Anderson and Silver (1987) concluded that privacy had little effect on couple agreement concerning prior living conditions and economic status. Being interviewed together versus separately did not consistently lead to a pattern of increased similarity of responses between spouses on either factual or attitudinal items. Interview privacy also had no impact on the tendency to overreport voting in postelection surveys (Silver, Abramson, and Anderson 1986).

Several studies, however, have reported substantial effects of third-party presence. Women in third world countries were less likely to admit knowledge of contraception, and having ever used contraception, if their husband or other females (such as mother-in-law) were

present during the interview (Casterline and Chidambaram 1984). The effects were especially strong for husband presence.

Taietz (1962) measured attitudes of elderly Dutch respondents toward living with their children (the traditional elderly living arrangements at that time) versus living independently in old age. When adult children were present during the interview, elderly respondents were more likely to “express the view that old people are happiest when they live in the same house with their children” (p. 99).

Evidence for privacy effects on survey responses is strongest in studies of adolescent drug use. Gfroerer (1985), with data from 1979 and 1982 national drug use surveys, found strong evidence that lack of privacy during the interview resulted in less reporting of illegal drug use by 12–17-year-olds, even though anonymous, self-administered questionnaires were used. Similarly, adolescents tend to underreport current drug use when identifying information is included on the cover of the questionnaire (Malvin and Moskowitz 1983). One such study, however, found that the presence of other family members had no effect on adolescents’ reports of illicit drug use, even when parents were in the same room as the adolescent respondent (Zanes and Matsoukas 1979).

In sum, the small literature on interview privacy suggests that spouse presence may influence responses to sensitive questions. The general hypothesis of this research is that respondents interviewed with spouse present will give more positive subjective assessments of their marriage, and will be less likely to reveal sensitive factual information about the marriage, than respondents interviewed in private.

SUBJECTIVITY OF SURVEY QUESTIONS

The influence of third-party presence may depend in part on the type of question asked. When factual information is requested, the presence of others who are knowledgeable about the subject matter of the interview may actually increase the accuracy of responses. It may be harder to forget or to misrepresent factual information when someone who knows the truth is nearby (Mitchell 1965). It was expected, therefore, that privacy effects would be stronger for subjective assessments of marriage than for factual questions asking about events and behaviors.

Methods

THE DATA SET

Data are taken from the 1987–88 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH; Sweet, Bumpass, and Call 1988). The NSFH col-

lected detailed family life interviews from 13,017 respondents drawn through a multistage area probability sample of the contiguous United States. Face-to-face interviews averaging 102 minutes in length were conducted from March 1987 to May 1988. One respondent per household was randomly selected from residents 19 years of age or over. The screening response rate was 91 percent, and 74 percent of eligible respondents were interviewed successfully. The subsample selected for this analysis consisted of all married respondents ($N = 6,882$; 3,141 men and 3,741 women).

Although the NSFH was a face-to-face survey, a portion of the data was collected through self-administered questionnaires (SAQs), including most of the data on marital quality and marital companionship (see tables 1 and 2 for the lists of variables measured by SAQ). A booklet containing 13 different SAQs was given to respondents at the start of the interview; at various points in the interview, interviewers instructed respondents to turn to a certain page and complete questions on a specific topic, such as their marriage. Thus, third parties within earshot were aware of the general theme of the SAQ.

During the 3-day training conference, and in the NSFH Interviewer Instruction Manual, interviewers were told to conduct all interviews in privacy so that respondents could answer candidly and not be influenced by the presence of other household members. However, interviewers were given no explicit instructions on how to insure privacy, or on what to do if third parties began listening at some point in the interview.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis proceeded in two steps: first, a logistic regression model predicting the likelihood of spouse presence was fit. Predictors of spouse presence were then used as control variables in modeling the impact of spouse presence on responses to sensitive survey questions.

Predicting spouse presence. The dependent variable in modeling spouse presence is dichotomous, coded 1 if the spouse was present for more than 15 minutes of the interview, 0 otherwise. Several aspects of marriage were included as predictors in the logistic regression model (see table 1 for a list of predictors and item wording). Marital companionship, measured by the frequency of time spent alone with the spouse talking or sharing activities, was included since couples with a high degree of companionship might be more likely to want to share the experience of being interviewed. Marriage length and remarriage may be correlated with the propensity of couples to share activities and were included in the model. Styles of marital interaction, especially companionship patterns, may vary by social class (Rubin 1976). Thus,

Table 1. Item Wording, Mean, Standard Deviation, and Mode of Administration for Independent Variables in Model Predicting Spouse Presence

Variable Name and Wording	Mean	SD	Mode ^a
Age of respondent—How old were you on your last birthday?	42.76	15.49	Intvr
Sex of respondent (percent male; interviewer observation)	.46	.50	Intvr
Race—Which of the groups on this card best describes you?			Intvr
Black	.12	.32	
Mexican American	.05	.22	
Parent status (computed from household roster)			Intvr
Empty nest	.24	.43	
Children 0–5 at home	.29	.45	
Children 6–12 at home	.27	.45	
Children 13–18 at home	.21	.41	
Children 19+ at home	.10	.30	
Household size (computed from household roster)	3.32	1.41	
Respondent remarried—Altogether, how many times have you been married?	.23	.42	
Marriage length (in months; computed from marriage date)	205	181	Intvr
Marital companionship—During the past month, about how often did you and your spouse spend time alone with each other, talking, or sharing an activity? ^b	4.92	1.42	Self
Companionship data missing	.03	.18	Self
Respondent employment (computed from employment history)			Intvr
Unemployed	.02	.15	
Not in labor force	.32	.47	
Spouse employment (computed from spouse employment history)			Self
Unemployed	.02	.14	
Not in labor force	.20	.40	
Employment data missing	.23	.42	
Respondent education (computed from education history)	12.66	3.13	Intvr
Couple income (total income from all sources, past year, in thousands)	37.00	24.30	Intvr
Income data missing	.17	.38	
Housing type (interviewer observation)			Intvr
Trailer	.06	.23	
Apartment	.09	.29	
Missing	.03	.17	

NOTE.—*N* = 6,645.
^a Intvr = interviewer-administered; Self = self-administered.
^b Coded as follows: 1 = never, 2 = once a month, 3 = two or three times a month, 4 = once a week, 5 = two or three times a week, 6 = almost every day.

socioeconomic status (SES) was expected to have some impact on the probability of spouse presence. Respondent’s education and the couple’s income were included in the model as measures of SES.

The availability of spouses to be present during an interview may also depend on the work situation of both respondent and spouse. Respondents who are unemployed or not in the labor force can be interviewed during the day, when spouses are likely at work. Spouses who are unemployed or not in the labor force may spend much more time at home than employed spouses and are thus more likely to be nearby during the interview. Thus, employment status of both respondent and spouse was included in the model.

Achieving interview privacy would also be more difficult in smaller dwellings that have fewer rooms. The likelihood of spouse presence should be higher among those living in trailers and apartments than in single-family houses. The age, race, and sex of respondent, household size, and presence of children were also included in this model, but without specific predictions concerning direction of effects.

Modeling the impact of spouse presence on responses. Eleven dependent variables concerning marriage and premarital cohabitation were selected for analysis (see table 2 for variables and item wording). Variables were chosen to cover a wide range of issues relevant to marital interaction, and to tap sensitive information not readily revealed to others.

The independent variable was the degree of spouse presence. Upon completion of the interview, NSFH interviewers answered this question: During how much of the interview was the spouse or partner *present or able to overhear* the interview (coded as follows: 0 = not

Table 2. Item Wording, Sample Size, Mean, and Mode of Administration for Dependent Variables concerning Marriage

Variable Name and Wording	N of Cases ^a	Mean (SD)	Mode ^b
Subjective assessment of marriage:			
1. Marital happiness ^c	6,335	5.96 (1.35)	Self
2. Utility of marriage ^d	6,005	3.66 (.71)	Self
3. Role fairness ^e	6,384	2.95 (.38)	Self
4. Probability of marriage ending ^f	5,988	1.37 (.73)	Self

Table 2. (Continued)

Variable Name and Wording	N of Cases ^a	Mean (SD)	Mode ^b
Reports of events and behaviors:			
5. Own housework ^g	6,039	29.42 (20.49)	Self
6. Spouse's housework ^g	5,657	25.18 (20.29)	Self
7. Frequency of disagreements ^h	6,093	1.71 (.69)	Self
8. Coital frequency ⁱ	5,133	7.00 (6.59)	Self
9. Ever separated from spouse ^j	6,545	.08 (.28)	Intvr
10. Cohabited with current spouse ^k	6,595	.24 (.43)	Intvr
11. Cohabited with anyone else ^l	6,645	.09 (.28)	Intvr

^a Sample sizes for regression analysis are less than 6,882 (the total sample of married couples) because of missing data.

^b Self = self-administered; Intvr = interviewer-administered.

^c Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage? Coded on a 7-point scale from 1 = very unhappy to 7 = very happy (midpoints on the scale were not labeled).

^d Even though it may be very unlikely, think for a moment about how various areas of your life might change if you separated: your living standard, social life, career opportunities, overall happiness, sex life, and being a parent. Response codes were 1 = much worse, 2 = worse, 3 = same, 4 = better, 5 = much better. Variable was the average over the six areas, with coding reversed.

^e How do you feel about the fairness in your relationship in each of the following areas: household chores, working for pay, spending money, and child care? Response codes were 1 = very unfair to me, 2 = somewhat unfair to me, 3 = fair to both, 4 = somewhat unfair to spouse, 5 = very unfair to spouse. Variable was the average over the four areas.

^f It is always difficult to predict what will happen in a marriage, but realistically, what do you think the chances are that you and your spouse will eventually separate or divorce? Response codes were 1 = very low, 2 = low, 3 = about even, 4 = high, 5 = very high.

^g Write in the approximate number of hours per week that you or your spouse normally spend doing the following things. Variable is total hours over nine areas of household tasks.

^h How often, if at all, in the last year have you had open disagreements about each of the following: household tasks, money, spending time together, sex, having a child, in-laws, the children? Coded 1 = never, 2 = less than once a month, 3 = several times a month, 4 = about once a week, 5 = several times a week, 6 = almost every day. Variable is averaged over the seven categories.

ⁱ About how often did you and your spouse have sex during the past month?

^j Sometimes couples live apart from each other for a time because of disagreements, but then live together again. Has this ever happened in your current marriage? Coded 1 = yes, 0 = no.

^k Nowadays many unmarried couples live together; sometimes they eventually get married and sometimes they don't. Did you and your spouse live together before you were married? Coded 1 = yes, 0 = no.

^l Did you live with anyone else of the opposite sex before your marriage? Coded 1 = yes, 0 = no.

at all, 1 = a few minutes, 2 = more than 15 minutes, 3 = most or all of the interview)? Two dummy variables were constructed from these data: (1) *spouse present some of the time* was coded 1 if the spouse was present more than 15 minutes but not for the entire interview, 0 otherwise; (2) *spouse present all the time* was coded 1 if the spouse was present during most or all of the interview, 0 otherwise. *Spouse not present* or present a few minutes was the omitted category in regression models. One drawback of the “present some of the time” category is that there is no information in the data indicating when in the interview the spouse was present.

Independent variables from the equation predicting the likelihood of spouse presence (see table 1) were included as control variables in models of response effects. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models were fit for the eight continuous dependent variables; logistic regression was used with the three categorical dependent variables.

Results

INCIDENCE OF SPOUSE PRESENCE

Spouse presence was fairly common in NSFH interviews with married respondents (data not shown). Overall, a spouse was present for more than 15 minutes in 36 percent of the interviews; in one-quarter of the cases, the spouse was present the entire time. Men were much more likely than women to have their spouse in the same room. Wives were present more than 15 minutes in about half the interviews with men; husbands were nearby in only one-quarter of the interviews with married women. Further, spouses were present the entire time in 35 percent of the interviews with married men, compared with only 16 percent of the interviews with married women.

PREDICTING THE LIKELIHOOD OF SPOUSE PRESENCE

The logistic regression model predicting spouse presence is presented in table 3. As expected, marital companionship was highly and positively related to spouse presence during the interview. Thus, marital companionship is a strong selection factor in interview privacy and needed to be controlled in the response effects models.

The sex difference in spouse presence described above was highly significant in the regression model, with men much more likely than women to have their spouse present. Women may spend more time at home than men and thus may be more likely to be at home during their husbands' interviews. Wives may also be more curious than hus-

Table 3. Logistic Regression Model Predicting the Likelihood of Spouse Presence during the Interview

Independent Variable	Coefficient	t-Ratio
Age of respondent	.014	3.085**
Sex (male)	.882	14.820***
Race (vs. white/other):		
Black	−.453	−4.831***
Mexican American	−.502	−3.691***
Parent status (vs. nonparent):		
Empty nest	−.168	−1.544
Children 0–5 at home	−.044	−.499
Children 6–12 at home	−.090	−1.045
Children 13–18 at home	−.299	−3.236**
Children 19+ at home	−.368	−2.927**
Household size	.022	.613
Respondent remarried	.019	.222
Length of marriage (months)	.001	.659
Marital companionship	.104	4.823***
Companionship data missing	.186	1.159
Respondent employment (vs. employed):		
Unemployed	−.264	−1.414
Not in labor force	−.182	−2.482*
Spouse employment (vs. employed):		
Unemployed	.888	4.755***
Not in labor force	.481	6.191***
Spouse employment data missing	−.685	−8.760***
Respondent education	−.094	−9.079***
Couple income (log)	−.106	−3.661***
Income data missing	.730	2.880**
Housing type (vs. single-family):		
Trailer	.460	3.949***
Apartment	.558	5.699***
Housing type data missing	−.472	−1.416
Intercept	.278	

NOTE.—Dependent variable is coded 1 if spouse was present for more than 15 minutes of the interview, 0 otherwise. $N = 6,645$.

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

bands about a family survey, since wives in general tend to be more attuned than husbands to interpersonal relationship processes (Thompson and Walker 1989). Spouse presence becomes more likely with age (although not with length of marriage). This may reflect the tendency of retired couples (and older couples in general) to spend more time together at home than younger couples.

Blacks and Chicanos were less likely than whites ($p < .001$) to have their spouse present at the interview. It is not clear why such strong racial differences in interview privacy exist. Having adolescent (13–18 years of age) and adult children (19 years of age and older) living at home decreased the likelihood of spouse presence, compared to nonparents, while having coresident younger children had no significant effect.

Both the respondent's and spouse's work situation were significantly related to spouse presence. Respondents not in the labor force, such as full-time homemakers, were more likely than employed respondents to have privacy during the interview, most likely because the interview could be conducted during the day when the spouse was at work. Spouses who were unemployed or not in the labor force were significantly more likely to overhear the interview than employed spouses, since they would likely spend much more time at home than employed spouses.

Socioeconomic status was negatively related to spouse presence. Both education and income had highly significant ($p < .001$) negative effects on spouse presence, net of housing type, household size, and employment status. The SES effect is not consistent with expected social class differences in styles of marital interaction. Rubin (1976), for example, suggested that husbands and wives in working-class marriages are more likely to have separate spheres of activities than partners in middle-class marriages. Given that companionship patterns are controlled in the model, the SES indicators may reflect the more crowded living circumstances of lower- and working-class respondents. The findings for housing type support this view (table 3). Respondents living in apartments were about 75 percent more likely, and those in trailers about 60 percent more likely, to have their spouse present than respondents living in single-family homes. The smaller amount of living space makes it more difficult for spouses to remain out of earshot during the interview.

SPOUSE PRESENCE AND RESPONSE EFFECTS

Item wording, means, standard deviations, and sample sizes for the 11 dependent variables concerning marriage are given in table 2. Four of these variables tap subjective assessments of the marital relation-

ship: marital happiness, utility of marriage, role fairness, and the probability of marital dissolution. Seven variables concern factual information on events and behaviors: the respondent's own and spouse's housework hours, frequency of disagreements, coital frequency, and whether or not the respondent was ever separated from this spouse, ever cohabited with this spouse before marriage, and ever cohabited with anyone else. Dependent variables 1 through 8 in table 2 were asked on SAQs, while variables 9, 10, and 11 were asked directly by the interviewers. Ostensibly, use of SAQs should have prevented the interviewer, the spouse, and any others in the room from hearing answers to sensitive questions. If use of SAQs is sufficient to guarantee privacy, the presence of others should have a greater impact on interviewer-administered than on self-administered items.

All dependent variables in this analysis were measured early in the interview, during the first 30 minutes for most respondents. The housework SAQ was asked first, followed by the question on temporary separations, questions on cohabitation, and finally the marital relations SAQ containing the subjective items on marriage, marital disagreement, and coital frequency.

Results of the regression equations linking spouse presence to response effects are presented in table 4. There are two sets of models included in table 4, one set estimated with no control variables (model 1), and one set estimated with controls for age, sex, race, parental status, age of coresident children, household size, remarriage, length of marriage, marital companionship, own employment, spouse's employment, education, income, and housing type. Regression results are not presented for the control variables, since these are not the focus of this article (the full equations are available upon request from the author). To explore whether husbands and wives were differentially affected by privacy, sex-by-spouse-presence interaction terms were tested in each model.

Subjective variables. In the models with no control variables, there appear to be substantial effects of spouse presence on subjective assessments of marriage, especially when the spouse was present the entire time. The differences are in the direction of more positive reports about the marriage. With no controls, spouse presence is associated with reports of higher marital happiness and marriage utility, a greater tendency to say that marital roles are unfair to the spouse, and a lower perceived probability of marital dissolution. These effects are reduced in magnitude when control variables are introduced into the models, and the effect for marital happiness becomes nonsignificant. Other analyses (not shown) identified marital companionship as the primary control variable that reduced the effects of spouse presence on the subjective variables. In models with all controls except compan-

Table 4. Impact of Spouse Presence during the Interview on Survey Responses: Unstandardized Regression Coefficients from OLS and Logistic Regression Models (Standard Errors in Parentheses)

	Mode of Administration ^a	Model 1: No Controls		Model 2: With Controls	
		Spouse Pres- ent Some of the Time	Spouse Pres- ent All of the Time	Spouse Pres- ent Some of the Time	Spouse Pres- ent All of the Time
Subjective assessments:					
Marital happiness	Self	-.02 (.05)	.21 (.04)***	-.08 (.05)	.05 (.04)
Utility of marriage	Self	-.04 (.03)	.09 (.02)***	-.05 (.03)	.06 (.02)*
Fairness of roles	Self	.05 (.02)**	.07 (.01)***	.00 (.02)	.04 (.02)*
Presence × male interaction				.01 (.03)	-.06 (.02)*
Probability of marriage ending	Self	.00 (.03)	-.09 (.02)***	.07 (.04)	.08 (.03)*
Presence × male interaction				-.09 (.06)	-.15 (.04)***

Events and behaviors:					
Own housework (hours/week)	Self	-2.68 (.83)**	-6.28 (.62)***	.86 (.73)	-.06 (.59)
Spouse's housework (hours/week)	Self	7.37 (.83)***	9.05 (.63)***	3.39 (.71)***	2.31 (.58)***
Marital disagreement	Self	.09 (.03)**	-.05 (.02)*	.13 (.03)***	.06 (.02)**
Coital frequency (per month)	Self	-.37 (.29)	-.09 (.22)	-.24 (.26)	.39 (.21)
Ever separated from spouse	Intvr	-.10 (.14)	-.32 (.11)**	.01 (.15)	-.09 (.12)
Cohabited with current spouse	Intvr	.23 (.09)**	-.04 (.07)	.30 (.10)**	.15 (.08) ⁺
Ever cohabited with anyone else	Intvr	.02 (.14)	.08 (.10)	-.09 (.15)	.04 (.11)

NOTE.—Model 1 has no control variables. Model 2 controls for age, sex, race, parental status, age of coresident children, household size, re-marriage, length of marriage, own employment, spouse's employment, education, income, housing type, and marital companionship. Ordinary least squares regression models were fit for the first eight dependent variables in the table; logistic regression models were fit for the last three variables in the model.

^a Self = self-administered; Intvr = interviewer-administered.

+ $p < .06$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

ionship, a significant effect for marital happiness was still obtained (data not shown). Adding marital companionship as a control variable also reduced the size of the effect for marriage utility, although the spouse-presence effect is still significant in the model with all controls. Respondents were significantly more likely to indicate that they would be worse off after separation or divorce if the spouse was present the entire time.

Significant sex-by-spouse-presence interactions ($p < .05$) were obtained in the models for role fairness and probability of marriage ending (i.e., in the models with all controls included; see table 4). Women whose spouse was present for the entire time were slightly but significantly more likely than men with spouse present to indicate that the division of labor was unfair to their spouse (a perception more favorable to the spouse). Privacy had no effect on men's ratings of role fairness. Men reported a lower likelihood of separation or divorce if their wives were present, while women indicated a higher likelihood if husbands were present.

In sum, then, these analyses provide evidence that spouse presence may influence subjective assessments of marriage, even though the absolute magnitude of effects is small. Except for women's estimates of the probability of marital dissolution, the significant effects are in the direction of more positive assessments of the marriage under spouse-present conditions.

Factual variables. In models with no controls, significant spouse-presence effects were obtained on five of the seven event and behavior variables. Spouse presence was associated with lower estimates of own weekly housework and higher estimates of spouse's housework, lower frequency of marital disagreement, and a lower likelihood of reporting a marital separation from current spouse. Including control variables in the analyses reduced the spouse-presence effects on two of the five variables to nonsignificance: estimates of own housework and likelihood of reporting a temporary separation from the spouse. Even with all controls, however, significant effects were obtained for three of the seven objective variables. Respondent's estimates of their spouses' weekly housework were 2–3 hours higher when the spouse was present for all or part of the interview. One possible explanation for this effect is that respondents may simply ask their spouses how much time they spend in various tasks. Asking the spouse outright may be especially likely in situations in which respondents are unsure of their spouse's contribution and might underestimate it. A second possibility is that spouse presence increases the tendency to provide estimates that please the spouse.

Small but significant effects were found for frequency of disagreements and cohabitation with current spouse. Respondents gave *higher*

estimates of these events when spouses were present than when interviewed in private. These findings suggest that, with factual items, lack of privacy does not necessarily pull responses in the direction of increased positive self-presentation. It would be more difficult to deny having cohabited prior to marriage if one's spouse, who obviously knows the truth, is nearby. Spouse presence also did not significantly reduce the likelihood of reporting a cohabitation with someone other than the spouse, information that is also likely to be known by most spouses. Similarly, it may be harder to deny or forget marital disagreements when spouses are nearby, and it is possible that some respondents verified their answers with their spouse before recording them.

Discussion

Analysis of NSFH data from married respondents showed that: (1) spouse presence is quite common in household surveys of married couples, especially in interviews with married men; (2) spouse presence is not a random occurrence in surveys of married respondents but is a function of marital companionship, employment status of respondent and spouse, SES, housing type, and the age, race, and sex of respondent; and (3) after controlling for these potential mediating variables, spouse presence influenced responses to a number of sensitive questions concerning marriage and thus is a potential source of response effects in survey data on marriage.

The hypothesis concerning subjective assessments of marital quality was supported in part. Spouse presence resulted in more positive responses concerning marriage utility, a lower perceived probability of marital dissolution among husbands, and a more favorable view of role fairness among wives. Although significant, these effects were small in magnitude. The hypothesis concerning factual items was not supported. On factual items, spouse presence appeared to be associated with an increased, rather than a decreased, tendency to reveal sensitive information about the marital relationship. Respondents were more likely to report cohabiting before marriage, and reported more conflict, if spouses were present. Estimates of housework time were an exception. More housework time was attributed to spouses if they were present, most likely because at least some respondents obtained the spouse's own estimates. Thus, this research does not suggest that spouse presence always increases response bias. The direction of response effects depends on the nature of the question.

One difficulty in assessing the import of these findings is that, despite the control variables included in the models, spouse presence may act as a proxy for other variables unmeasured in the analysis. In terms of

privacy effects on subjective items, a central question is the degree to which inclusion of marital companionship as a control variable reduced potential selection effects, since spouse presence may be correlated with styles of marital interaction not included in the models. A more definitive assessment of response effects would be obtained from an experimental design with respondents randomly assigned to spouse-present or spouse-absent conditions. With such a design self-selection effects could be ruled out in estimating response bias.

The survey methods used in the NSFH to maximize privacy and confidentiality, such as use of SAQs, did not prevent respondents from being influenced by the presence of others during the interview. Significant privacy effects were found for the self-administered as well as for the interviewer-administered items. It is likely, then, that some respondents do not keep the contents of the self-administered forms entirely private and may discuss both questions and answers with their spouse during the interview. It is also possible that, even without discussion, spouse presence alters subtly (even unconsciously) a respondent's frame of mind when answering sensitive questions. The interview may not feel completely private when the spouse is nearby, even though the content of the questionnaire and the respondent's answers are hidden from the spouse.

Implications for Survey Design and Analysis

Face-to-face surveys. In designing a survey on marriage, this research suggests that the need for privacy may depend on the goals of data collection. If the intent is to measure the occurrence, timing, and frequency of specific events or behaviors, the need for privacy diminishes. In these circumstances, in fact, data quality may actually improve if partners are interviewed together. The emphasis on privacy should be greater when survey goals include measuring a married respondent's subjective experience and perceptions of the marital relationship, areas in which problems of self-presentation and confidentiality concerns might skew responses in a positive direction. Privacy issues become especially acute when the study design involves contrasting the subjective marital experiences of both partners. Interviewing spouses in each other's presence can only increase the magnitude of correlated measurement error (Thomson and Williams 1984), thus making it difficult to interpret similarities and differences in the reports of husbands and wives. The extent to which interviewers can enforce interview privacy, when they are essentially guests in the respondent's home, is an open question, and one that needs more experimental research.

In all data-collection efforts with married respondents, more infor-

mation on third-party presence should be collected from interviewers. The NSFH asked interviewers to record only the identity of others present and the approximate amount of time they were present during the interview. In addition, it would be very helpful to know whether respondents discussed any survey questions with their spouses, whether spouses collaborated in answering any questions or in filling out self-administered forms, and whether third parties were seriously listening in or involved in other activities. Interviewers should record not only the occurrence of such intrusions but the places in the interview at which it happened. This would provide analysts with a much greater ability to estimate effects due to lack of privacy.

Mail and telephone surveys. The potential effects of spouse presence point up a weakness in collecting data from married couples through mail surveys. With no interviewer present in the home to monitor collaboration between spouses, it is likely that some couples who respond to mail surveys will discuss questions and answers or fill out the forms together. Further, there is no way in mail surveys to measure reliably the extent of interview privacy or the extent to which information was shared between spouses. Privacy cannot be controlled in analyzing couple data from mail surveys.

The implications of this research for telephone surveys are less clear. Interviewers have less control over the interview setting when conducting an interview by telephone than when they are in the respondent's home. By telephone, it is very difficult for the interviewer to know during the interview whether anyone else is present or listening in, although this can be asked specifically at the end of the interview. There are advantages to the telephone mode, however. By telephone, others present in the room cannot hear the questions and may have little information upon which to guess the meaning of the answers. Telephone interviews may feel more private, since third parties only hear one side of the conversation (they hear answers, but not questions). The presence of others may well have different effects in telephone and face-to-face surveys, but more research is needed to elucidate those differences.

Data analysis. In using extant survey data for research, such as public use data sets like the NSFH, analysts should at least examine the possibility of response effects due to privacy in their preliminary analyses. Since most available national data sets include some information on the extent and type of third-party presence, it is possible both to assess the magnitude of effects on relevant variables and to control for such effects in substantive analyses. Again, controlling for spouse presence is especially important in analyses using data from both members of the dyad, since the magnitude of correlated measurement errors may vary by degree of privacy.

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