are reporting relatively high levels of satisfaction. The scale used to measure satisfaction had a maximum value of 151, so the satisfaction levels being reported are much closer to “very satisfied” than to “very dissatisfied.”

The data displayed in Figure 11.16 don’t distinguish happily married couples from unhappily married ones, leaving open the possibility that only unhappy couples experience declines in satisfaction. A study by Huston and associates examined this issue (Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001). Beginning two months after their wedding and continuing throughout the first two years of their marriage, 152 newlyweds were interviewed and asked a series of questions about their relationship. Among other things, the couples were asked how much love and affection they expressed and received when interacting with their mate. The couples were then contacted annually over the next 11 years, allowing Huston and colleagues to examine changes in love and affection during the first two years of marriage for four types of couples: happily married couples, unhappily married couples, couples who divorced early (before their 7th anniversary) and those who divorced late (after being married at least 7 years).

Figure 11.17 presents some of the key findings from this investigation. First, notice that all four groups experienced declines in love and affection over the first two years of marriage. Second, as one might expect, this deterioration is steeper in couples that divorced (dotted lines) than in those that remained married (solid lines). Third, this deterioration rate doesn’t distinguish happily married couples from unhappily married ones. Looking only at the solid lines in Figure 11.17, we can see that happily married couples start out with greater love and affection than do unhappily married ones, and they maintain this difference throughout the first two years of marriage. Fourth, if we focus only on couples who divorced (the dotted lines in Figure 11.17), we can see that couples who divorced late started out with greater love and affection than did those who divorced early. In fact, as newlyweds, late-divorcing couples showed as much love and affection as did couples who remained happily married. Collectively, these findings indicate that marital dissolution is best