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THE LONG-TERM ROLE OF NEWLYWED CONSCIENTIOUSNESS AND  
RELIGIOUSNESS IN MARRIAGE

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THE LONG-TERM ROLE OF NEWLYWED CONSCIENTIOUSNESS AND  
RELIGIOUSNESS IN MARRIAGE

by

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## Dedication

To Catica, for everything...

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To coworkers who have become friends...

To friends who have practically become coworkers...

To extended family who never lost faith...

To a wife and children who have made greater sacrifices than expected and have offered greater benevolence than warranted...

...I give my deepest thanks.

THE LONG-TERM ROLE OF NEWLYWED CONSCIENTIOUSNESS AND  
RELIGIOUSNESS IN MARRIAGE

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This dissertation is the third in a series of studies that examine the link between individuals' personal dispositions and their experiences in marriage. While prior work has focused on the association between dispositions and marital satisfaction, this study focuses on dispositions that are linked to marital stability. Using longitudinal data from a rural sample from Pennsylvania, I examine the association between two qualities—conscientiousness and religiosity—and both the *occurrence of* and *timing of* divorce. Additionally, I test whether the

associations between these dispositional qualities and divorce are mediated or moderated by newlywed levels of personal commitment or by changes in personal commitment over the first two years of marriage. That is, are dispositional qualities associated with divorce *through* personal commitment (a mediation mechanism) or *in the absence of* personal commitment (a moderation mechanism)? The results suggest that the direct effects of religiosity are associated more strongly with the *occurrence* of divorce, while the direct effects of conscientiousness are associated more strongly with the *timing* of divorce. Additionally, the occurrence of divorce is predicted by both spouses' qualities, while the timing of divorce is largely predicted by the husbands' qualities. The investigations of the mediating/moderating role of personal commitment received little support in these data.

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## **Background Literature and Research Questions: Chapter One**

The pursuit of a good marital match sometimes seems to spare no expense. Time, energy, and money are sacrificed in the pursuit of securing the affection of Mr. or Ms. Right. And rightly so, since people make marital choices with the expectation that the partnership will last a lifetime—for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. The efforts expended in order to make a good choice belie a core cultural assumption about marital success: that the success or failure of a marriage rests on choosing the right person to marry. With Tseitel and her sisters in *Fiddler on the Roof*, many individuals yearn for “a matchless match,” seeking qualities like kindness and warmth, understanding, responsibility, intelligence, fairness, honesty, and so forth (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997; Fletcher & Simpson, 2000; Huston & Geis, forthcoming). But which of these or other qualities really matter for the long-term success or failure of one’s marriage? Further, what is the process by which a given quality influences marriage? That is, will a given quality make one’s marriage more satisfying, more stable, both, or neither? These questions are addressed in this paper, as part of a growing body of work that is exploring whether and how individuals’ personal dispositions matter for marriage. More specifically, this project is the third in a series of papers examining the associations between specific personality constructs and consequent marital outcomes (see Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000; and Miller, Caughlin, & Huston, 2003).

## INDIVIDUAL MATTERS IN MARRIAGE

The study of individual traits and dispositions focuses on those qualities that differentiate one person from another, that are fairly stable over time, and that capture how the individual characteristically thinks (perceptions), feels (emotions), and behaves (actions). Dispositions are relevant to, and become manifested in, trait-specific kinds of situations. For example, a man's extraversion may be important for *beginning* a relationship (by helping him feel comfortable about approaching a woman in whom he is interested), while agreeableness may be more important for *continuing* that relationship (by making him someone with whom it is enjoyable to interact). The study of these and other traits focuses on qualities of people that account for how they react to particular types of situations.

Some dispositions, such as the Big Five personality factors (Costa & McCrae, 1992), can be assessed using standard personality scales. In addition, other elements of a person's identity may be similarly related to aspects of their marriage. Attitudes, values, beliefs, and other characteristics may all be associated with how a person approaches marriage and how he or she functions within the context of marriage. The properties that define us as individuals, then, provide the foundation upon which our marriages are built.

These properties, as elements of a person's psychological makeup, may be associated with marriage in a number of ways. First, they may be related to a

person's generalized approach to the idea or institution of marriage. Suppose Barry is a fiercely independent person, almost the polar opposite of his personable coworker, Warren. One might presume that Barry's reaction to the institution of marriage might be very different from Warren's. Barry might think that marriage itself is not important (a perception); he may experience a feeling of anxiety by the idea of being "tied down" by a partner (an emotion); and he might "play the field" or interact with potential partners in ways that discourage any expectation of monogamous commitment (an action). Warren, on the other hand, might place a higher value on marriage and hope to be married someday (a perception); he has a sense of emotional security when he thinks about committing his life to one person (an emotion); and he talks with potential partners about his eventual desires for family life (an action). The dispositions of the two men influence a broad range of reactions (perceptions, emotions, behaviors, etc.) that have consequences for their marriages. As a result, Warren and Barry each have a very different approach to relationships and marriage, rooted in their personal dispositions.

Second, in addition to links between a person's psychological makeup and their *general* approach to relationships/marriage, psychological makeup may be associated with how a person functions within the *specific* context of their own marriage (which I will call "relationship-specific phenomena"). These phenomena do not include, for example, a husband's general propensity to be

loving, but rather his love specifically for *his* wife; it does not encompass a woman's ambivalence about relationships in general, but how ambivalent she feels specifically toward *her own* husband; it applies not to how a man thinks about responsibilities in relationships generally, but to what obligations he feels he has taken on by his *own* marital vows. Suppose, for example, that Warren meets and eventually marries Carla. One day, a few years later, Warren notices one of the other couples from their Lamaze class get into a spat on the way to their car. As a result, Warren compares their marriage to his own and concludes that he and Carla have a close bond (a perception); he is filled with a sense of satisfaction and happiness about his own marriage (an emotion); and/or he spontaneously reaches out and puts his arm around Carla's waist as they walk to their car (an action). Barry, who by this time has also married, to the surprise of Warren and their other coworkers, reacts to his own marriage less favorably. He resents his wife Amelia for her demands on his time (a perception), feels annoyed by Amelia's persistent demands for his attention (an emotion), and repeatedly has heated arguments with Amelia, often threatening to leave her and their daughter (an action). Again, these reactions are relationship-specific in that they are directed toward the precise context of the individual's own marriage, as opposed to the institution of marriage generally. The links between dispositional qualities and relationship-specific phenomena are complex as, for example, when a

disposition elicits behavior from a partner that, in turn, creates satisfaction or dissatisfaction within the marriage.

This paper will focus on how individuals function within the specific context of their own marriage—how they think and behave as a mate and how they feel about their partner and marriage—and how this functioning is associated with the basic dispositional qualities that distinguish individuals from one another.

#### **STABILITY AND SATISFACTION: WHICH QUALITIES MATTER?**

Typically, discussions of marital success focus on two central relationship-specific phenomena: marital satisfaction and marital stability. Conceptually, this choice is appealing; we are interested in who stays together and who's happy about doing so. But which traits or qualities matter for these phenomena? Which qualities make marriage enjoyable (satisfying) and which make it last (stable)? Further, are the qualities that make marriage enjoyable the same qualities that make it last?

Conventional wisdom might suggest that some qualities are simply good for marriage; that is, they should enhance marital stability *and* satisfaction. However, research suggests that this is not necessarily the case. Miller and his colleagues (Miller et al., 2003), for example, found that individuals with a high level of trait expressiveness (people who might be described as warm, helpful, kind, aware of others' feelings, and so forth) were particularly satisfied with their



marriages and tended to view their spouses in a positive light. However, this quality was unrelated to marital stability—expressive individuals were no less likely to divorce than inexpressive people. Similarly, Caughlin and his associates (Caughlin et al., 2000) found that neurotic individuals (those who are particularly moody and emotionally labile) are less satisfied in their marriages than others. But, as with expressiveness, this disposition was not associated with marital stability—neurotic individuals were no more likely to split up than others. Personality qualities, then, that are associated with marital satisfaction may not necessarily be linked to marital stability, and the qualities that influence marital stability may not necessarily do so through satisfaction.

Why, though, might a given quality be associated with success in terms of satisfaction, but not success in terms of stability? Simply put, marital stability and marital satisfaction are not the same *kinds* of success. There is more to marital stability than how happy or unhappy the marriage is. While it is true that happy couples stay together and unhappy couples often split up, it is equally true that some couples stay together without being particularly happy about the relationship (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In these cases, they remain committed to the marriage for reasons other than marital satisfaction.

Which qualities might predict a person's propensity to stay married even when they are not happy with the marriage? One possibility is conscientiousness, which, as its name suggests, is a quality that is related to a person taking a

conscientious or purposeful approach to life. It is comprised of a person's dutifulness (Costa & McCrae, 1992), reliability and self-control (Nemechek & Olson, 1999), and his/her proneness to be hardworking, traditional, practical, and careful (Botwin et al., 1997). This general disposition might make a person more careful and mindful about entering or exiting a marriage. In addition to conscientiousness, some kinds of commitment—and thus marital stability—may be influenced by religion (Johnson, 1991). To the degree that a person considers marriage to be a sacred relationship generally, she or he may be unlikely to break her or his own marital vows, even if marital satisfaction wanes. It may be that qualities like these are associated with marital stability, regardless of the level of individuals' satisfaction with the relationship.

While there are certainly other qualities that matter for the stability of marriage, the focus of this paper will be on these two qualities—conscientiousness and religiousness (also called religiosity). I will review the marital literature that examines each quality and outline what implications each one has for various aspects of marital success. I will review research that examines how these qualities influence marriage, and I will give particular attention to the processes by which they might be associated with marital stability. I will then test whether these qualities are associated with marital stability and, if so, whether that association is because the qualities are linked to building a

highly-satisfying marriage or because they are linked with increased marital stability in the absence of a happy marriage.

### **CONSCIENTIOUSNESS IN MARRIAGE**

Conscientiousness is a broad personality trait that encompasses a person's tendency to follow social norms, to act in accordance with a sense of duty, to be self-controlled rather than impulsive, to be dependable, and to behave purposefully or systematically (see, for example, McCrae & John, 1992; Nemechek & Olson, 1999). Unfortunately, much of the personality research in the marital literature has focused on how the trait of neuroticism influences marriage. Other traits, by comparison, have received less attention, conscientiousness being one of those that is often overlooked in the marital literature generally (Bouchard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 1999; see also Bono, Boles, Judge, & Lauver, 2002). Further, while the research on conscientiousness that does exist suggests that this trait generally enhances marriage, very little of the research specifically targets the influence of conscientiousness on marital stability and no research whatsoever has explored specific processes by which this trait may matter for marriage.

#### **Conscientiousness and Marital Stability**

One possible reason for the relative absence of research targeting the processes that link conscientiousness and stability has to do with the developmental nature of the research question. That is, if we are interested in

how conscientiousness influences which couples split up and which couples stay together, we have to assess individuals' conscientiousness and then follow their relationships over time. We would ideally want to have an early assessment of the trait (either before marriage or very early in marriage), then track the couples over a number of subsequent years to see if those who began marriage with high levels of conscientiousness turn out to be those that stay in their marriages over time. Clearly, longitudinal designs like this are less common than cross-sectional designs, partly because the costs associated with gathering longitudinal data can be prohibitive. The conscientiousness studies reviewed in this dissertation, as a result, rarely include longitudinal data, particularly longitudinal data that spans many years.

There are a few exceptions, a small set of studies that have examined the link between conscientiousness and marital stability by tracking couples over time to see which couples stayed together and which divorced. Kelly and Conley (1987) documented that individuals who have high levels of impulse control, especially when it is the husband, have long lasting marriages. Tucker and her associates (Tucker, Friedman, Wingard, & Schwartz, 1996) used the Terman Life-Cycle Study data to demonstrate that those who are high in conscientiousness tend to have stable marriages. Kurdek (1993) found that wives' conscientiousness was associated with *whether* couples divorced over a 5-year period, and husbands' conscientiousness was associated with *when* the couple divorced (among those

that did, indeed, divorce); the more conscientious the husband was, the longer the marriage lasted before it broke up. Finally, Roberts and Bogg (2004) showed that conscientious women are “more likely to marry and stay married” over the period from age 21 to age 43 (Roberts & Bogg, 2004, p. 337) and that social responsibility, a component of conscientiousness, in early adulthood was related to a lower probability of later divorce (Roberts & Bogg, 2004).

Taken together, these studies suggest that there is an association between conscientiousness and marital stability over time. It appears that conscientious individuals are more likely to marry and less likely to divorce than others. Additionally, conscientiousness tends to delay the timing of divorce among couples who do eventually split up. However, while this work demonstrates a link between conscientiousness and lasting marriage, it tells us nothing about the mechanisms by which this link functions. None of the studies outlined above gave any attention to the intrapersonal or interpersonal processes that connect a person’s conscientiousness with his or her subsequent marital stability. We are left, then, to speculate about the possible processes by which conscientiousness is related to marital stability.

Multifaceted commitment frameworks (such as Johnson, 1991, 1999; Stanley & Markman, 1992) offer some interesting possibilities. Johnson’s concept of *personal commitment* is comprised of a person’s reasons for *wanting* to stay in a relationship and is grounded in the emotional climate of the marriage

(those aspects of the marriage that make it a rewarding experience). In addition, he also discusses two types of what others (such as Stanley & Markman, 1992) call *constraint commitment*. The first of these, *moral commitment*, is experienced by the individual as internal constraints to leaving the relationship (that is, the person feels he or she *ought to* stay married); the second, structural commitment, is experienced as a sense of external constraints that trap a person in a relationship (that is, the person feels he she *has to* stay married). Furthermore, it may be that these types of constraint commitment become relevant for the stability of a relationship only when personal commitment wanes. That is, if Derek is happy with his marriage to Harriet and *wants to* stay married to her, we have no reason to expect that he would experience feelings of constraint about whether he *ought to* stay with Harriet or whether he *has to* stay with her. Such feelings of constraint would presumably become salient only when the affective rewards of marriage are low.

Thus, introducing the concept of a highly-conscientious person into Johnson's (1991) framework leads to two hypothetical mechanisms through which conscientiousness might influence long-term marital stability. First, it may operate through the mechanism of personal commitment, because the person takes a careful, planful approach to maintaining a high-quality relationship over time. Second, conscientiousness may become significant in the absence of personal commitment, because the person experiences an internal sense of constraint and

acts in what he or she feels is a dutiful, socially expected way. Because the longitudinal research on conscientiousness noted above did not examine the mechanisms by which this quality matters for marriage, it is impossible to know whether either of these hypothetical mechanisms explains the link between conscientiousness and marital stability. However, other literature on conscientiousness and how it functions in marriage may help us build a case for either or both of the above possibilities. Because most of the research on conscientiousness targets outcomes that would be included in Johnson's (1991) category of personal commitment, I will review that work first, followed by thoughts about how conscientiousness might be related to constraint commitment.

### **Personal Commitment**

The first possibility of how conscientiousness may influence marriage is that highly conscientious people may make a purposeful effort to improve the emotional climate of the marriage. Research on relationship maintenance indicates that marital quality is enhanced when spouses engage in purposeful, strategic, intentional acts designed to strengthen the marital bond (see Canary, Stafford, & Semic, 2002; and Doherty, 2001, for example). This planfulness is one of the major components of conscientiousness (McCrae & John, 1992), so one would expect that conscientiousness would be linked to maintenance strategies that promote positive marital outcomes. Specifically, highly conscientious individuals would presumably take a particularly planful,

intentional approach to maintaining their relationship, resulting in a highly enjoyable emotional climate and, as a result, a high degree of personal commitment. The marital literature on conscientiousness suggests several ways in which this happens.

First, research suggests that conscientious spouses make positive *evaluations of their marriage*. These individuals report high levels of marital happiness or satisfaction (Roberts & Bogg, 2004; Robins, Caspi, & Moffit, 2000), and satisfaction is also bolstered by subcomponents of conscientiousness, such as impulse control (Kelly & Conley, 1987; Robins et al., 2000) and traditionalism (Robins et al., 2000). Beyond satisfaction, per se, highly conscientious people still see their marriages in a constructive light. Conscientious persons rate their marriages favorably on scales of global and multidimensional marital quality or adjustment (which often involve a mix of marital satisfaction and other aspects of the relationship, such as trust, equality, and communication patterns, as in Bouchard et al., 1999; Robins et al., 2000; Robins, Caspi, & Moffit, 2002), and their relationships improve in overall quality during early adulthood (Robins et al., 2002). Furthermore, subcomponents of conscientiousness, such as dependability, have been associated with higher levels of relationship quality in early marriage (Kurdek, 1999).

Second, conscientiousness enhances the emotional climate of marriage by influencing *spouses' perceptions of one another*. Conscientious individuals, for



example, are less likely to anticipate that their spouse will cheat on them (Buss & Shackelford, 1997) and are more likely to think highly of their spouse in a number of other ways. Conscientious wives report that their husbands are more caring, more supportive, and less controlling than non-conscientious wives do (Furukawa et al., 2002) and are less likely to complain about their husband being condescending or unfaithful (Buss, 1991). Conscientious husbands, for their part, are less likely to complain that their wives are moody, self-centered, alcoholic, or emotionally constricted (Buss, 1991).

Finally, the emotional climate of marriage is influenced by conscientiousness in that this trait is associated with *how spouses behave* in marriage. For example, when individuals want to get their spouses to do something, they might engage in any number of strategies to influence their partner, some of which are congenial while others are quite hostile. Highly conscientious individuals tend to use reason, rather than one of the less-genial tactics, in order to influence their spouse (Buss, 1992), and they report less conflict and abuse in their marriages (Robins et al., 2002). Additionally, they are less likely to anticipate that they will be unfaithful to their spouses, possibly since conscientiousness indicates relatively high levels of impulse control and the ability to delay gratification, making these individuals less likely to act on sexual opportunities that arise (Buss & Shackelford, 1997).

In addition to conscientious spouses' planfulness in maintaining a high-quality marriage, they may have been particularly planful about the selection of a mate in the first place, thus reducing the impulse to later reconsider whether they made a prudent choice. We might assume that a highly planful, careful individual might be *less* likely than others to marry or to take *longer* to get to the altar because of excessive attention placed on making the right marital choice, but this does not seem to be the case. Roberts and Bogg's (2004) conclusion is that the highly conscientious are *more* likely to marry in the first place. Perhaps these individuals take a planful approach to marriage that predates their actual courtship. Perhaps they develop firm ideas, early on, about the kind of person they want to marry. Thus, they approach dating as a purposive step toward marriage, weeding out ill-fitting matches relatively quickly and targeting others that would likely make good spouses. They may be unlikely to "waste their time" dating for entertainment alone; nor would they be likely to persistently cling to partners who do not share their plans for future marriage, waiting for that person to come around. Instead, they likely end the relationship and move on, searching for someone else who is a better fit.

In short, this body of research consistently suggests that conscientious spouses make particular efforts to make theirs a good marriage; they treat each other in positive ways, they think highly of one another, and they evaluate their marriage favorably. We would expect, following Johnson's (1991) reasoning

about personal commitment, that these enjoyable relationships would then be more stable over time.

### **Internal Constraint: Beyond Personal Commitment**

In addition to creating a positive emotional climate in marriage, conscientious individuals might increase relationship commitment in other ways, particularly when personal commitment declines. We might expect a conscientious person to honor marital vows as a matter of duty, to persevere through marital difficulties while maintaining high devotion to the relationship, and so forth. As discussed above, though, these processes may not be relevant for relationships when personal commitment is high but may become salient in the absence of personal commitment.

In an interesting examination of how personality influences the things that individuals wish for, King and Broyles (1997) discovered that conscientious individuals tended to wish for “realistic, no-nonsense types of wishes and few impulsive wishes” (p. 71). While King and Broyles were not examining marital processes, their work suggests an intriguing implication for the link between conscientiousness and marital commitment. It suggests that a highly-conscientious spouse may be less likely to engage in “the grass is greener” thinking when marital problems occur; they may constrain fantasies about what their lives might be like without their spouse. This planful, thoughtful approach to marriage may mean that conscientious individuals might be particularly careful

about the decision to leave a spouse and might, as a result, be able to endure marital problems with increased resilience.

In sum, none of the research on conscientiousness and marital stability attends to the probable mechanisms by which the two phenomena might be connected, and we are left to speculate about the nature of this association. Integrating commitment frameworks (Johnson, 1991; Stanley & Markman, 1992) into the literature on conscientiousness suggests that this quality may bolster marital stability in either of two ways: (a) by increasing various aspects of personal commitment (relationship evaluations, perceptions about one's spouse, and interactional behaviors) or (b) by increasing a person's sense of internalized relationship constraints. This dissertation seeks to address some of these possibilities, in order to explore the longitudinal connection between conscientiousness and marital stability.

### **Issues to Consider in the Conscientiousness Literature**

There are several research issues that have implications for what conscientiousness means in marriage, each of which will be discussed below. The first of these has to do with whether the impact of conscientiousness on relationships is due to the *level* of conscientiousness in each partner, per se, or to the *similarity* of the partners' levels of conscientiousness. Second, some of the literature gives attention to gender and how it affects the relationship between conscientiousness and marriage. Finally, methodological issues in the study of

conscientiousness may have implications about the conclusions we draw regarding the importance of this trait for marriage.

### ***Partner Similarity of Conscientiousness***

A few studies have attempted to explore whether the benefits of conscientiousness stem from the level of the trait or from the similarity of conscientiousness, regardless of the particular level. If the level of conscientiousness is important, those higher in conscientiousness should have the best relationships. If similarity of conscientiousness is important, couples in which the partners are most like each other should have the best relationships. They can even be very low in their level of conscientiousness—as long as both partners are similarly low—and still have a good relationship.

It is difficult to draw conclusions from the extant literature about the similarity of partners' conscientiousness in relationships. Watson and his colleagues argue that their data indicate “little systematic evidence of dyadic similarity or ‘assortative mating’ ... in the Big Five” (Watson, Hubbard, & Weise, 2000, p. 426), and others report little evidence of partner similarity on conscientiousness (Gattis, Berns, Simpson, & Christensen, 2004). Conversely, Botwin and his associates (Botwin et al., 1997) found that individuals preferred partners whose personalities were like their own in terms of conscientiousness. Further, they report that, in addition to preferences, individuals did indeed pair up with actual partners who were similar to themselves on measures of

conscientiousness. However, since these analyses were cross-sectional, it is possible that the personality of the actual partner influenced the report of one's preferences, rather than vice versa. Either way, the individuals' ideal and actual partners matched their own levels of conscientiousness.

Moreover, the findings about how this similarity influences the marriage are also mixed. Nemechek and Olson (1999) report that couples who were similar on conscientiousness had greater marital adjustment, but others (such as Gattis et al., 2004; Kurdek, 1993; and Robins et al., 2000) tested similar hypotheses and found no evidence that similarity of conscientiousness was particularly important. Kurdek (1993), for example, found that while husbands' and wives' conscientiousness was important for divorce within his sample, similarity of conscientiousness was not related to whether couples divorced or to when the divorce occurred among couples that did split up.

In short, the findings about the importance of the similarity of conscientiousness for marriage are mixed. Nemechek and Olson (1999) conclude that similarity is important and increasing similarity of conscientiousness benefits marriage, while others (Kurdek, 1993; Robins et al., 2000) found no association between similarity of conscientiousness and positive outcomes for the relationship. This small branch of the research on conscientiousness and its tentative conclusions about similarity are dwarfed by the larger body of work suggesting a consistent link between the level of conscientiousness and strong

marriages. Thus far, the findings about the *level* of conscientiousness appear much more compelling than the work on *similarity* of conscientiousness.

### ***Sex Differences***

Sex is an important factor in some of the research on the connection between conscientiousness and marriage. From an evolutionary perspective, we assume that a given phenomenon operates similarly for males and females, and that only “in those narrow pockets where men and women have confronted recurrently different adaptive challenges are the sexes predicted to differ” (Botwin et al., 1997, p. 109). From this perspective, intimacy constitutes one of those areas in which men and women have confronted different challenges. Historically, the interaction and joining of the sexes has posed a number of risks for women, relative to men. First, as the physically weaker of the sexes, women are more vulnerable to the possibility of abuse in relationships than men are. Second, sexual interaction is more costly for women, since a man can walk away from an unwanted pregnancy more readily than a woman can. Third, women have historically been dependent on their husbands, in a financial sense, more than men have been dependent on their wives. Thus, it stands to reason that women may be more cautious about entering relationships than men are and may place a higher value on potential partners’ conscientiousness. A high level of conscientiousness in a man might signal to a woman a degree of protection against the risks of intimacy. Male conscientiousness suggests a level of self-restraint that might be

seen as insurance against physical abuse and irresponsible sexual behavior, and women may interpret a man's conscientiousness as a sign of his ability to be a stable, committed provider who will supply resources to her and to their children (Robins et al., 2000).

Consistent with this reasoning, some report that women are higher than men in constraint (Robins et al., 2002), and women feel more strongly about the importance of conscientiousness than men do (Botwin et al., 1997). In addition, one study reports that males' (but not females') constraint may influence both partners' relationship quality and satisfaction (Robins et al., 2000), while another study reports that *both* husbands' and wives' conscientiousness influenced their partners' overall marital quality, though each spouse's traits influenced the relationship in unique ways (Botwin et al., 1997). Finally, men's and women's conscientiousness are associated in different ways with spouses' susceptibility to infidelity (Buss & Shackelford, 1997) and whether/when couples divorce (Kurdek, 1993).

However, it is difficult to make sweeping statements about gendered patterns of conscientiousness, since some research counters the above conclusions (such as whether men and women are different on conscientiousness, as in Botwin et al., 1997) and other research suggests that this trait operates similarly for men and women (Bouchard et al., 1999; Watson et al., 2000). Taken together, the conflicting results about gendered patterns of conscientiousness parallel the mixed



results from research on other traits: some reporting gendered patterns of the link between personality and relationships, and others reporting no differences (see, for example, the discussion about the neuroticism research in Watson et al., 2000). We can only make tentative conclusions, then, about how conscientiousness might be influenced by gender, and what implications that may have for marriage.

If, however, we take the gendered findings at face value, we might conclude, as have others, that conscientiousness in marriage operates consistently with a male dominance model (Robins et al., 2000). Men are lower in conscientiousness than women are, so the average female is more conscientious than the average male. As a result, the average male might describe a fair proportion of his pool of eligibles as “conscientious partners,” by his own standard, and thus may have relatively little trouble finding a partner who is sufficiently conscientious. Females, on the other hand, make mate selection choices from among a relatively restricted range of possibilities in terms of conscientiousness. Thus, a “conscientious partner” by the female standard may be harder to come by. As a result, conscientiousness may be a fairly precious commodity for women; they feel more strongly than men do about finding conscientiousness in a partner, and the presence or absence of this trait seems to make more of a difference for the woman’s experience in marriage than for the man’s.

In summary, further research is needed to definitively establish gendered patterns in the way that conscientiousness operates in marriage. However, some of the existing research seems to indicate that conscientiousness does indeed operate differently for the sexes. Conscientiousness seems to matter more to women than to men, meaning that husbands' conscientiousness is particularly salient for their wives' experience in marriage, while wives' conscientiousness does not seem to have the same impact on husbands' experiences.

### ***Methodological Issues***

There may be methodological issues that need to be considered in drawing conclusions about the role conscientiousness might play in marriage. These issues have to do with sample selection, and the subsequent generalizeability of the research.

Watson and his colleagues (Watson et al., 2000), for example, found that conscientiousness was important for relationship satisfaction within a dating but not a married sample. While this conclusion might, on the surface, suggest that conscientiousness is relatively unimportant in marriage, the difference between their dating and married samples may have occurred for methodological, rather than substantive, reasons. Following the reasoning presented by Botwin and his colleagues, (Botwin et al., 1997) the argument can be made that differences in any given quality between premarital and marital relationships suggest that: (a) a selection effect occurs as individuals break up with those who do not share the

quality, and/or (b) couples converge in the quality over the transition to marriage (Botwin et al., 1997). Applying Botwin's reasoning to the Watson results would mean that any married samples would exhibit a restricted range of conscientiousness, due to selection effects. That is, individuals with especially low levels of conscientiousness may not have the qualities that can promote enduring relationships. As such, they would be "weeded out" of the mating pool before marriage could occur. Subsequently, conscientiousness may be particularly important in dating, but less important in marriage, since the married sample has unavoidably been filtered in terms of conscientiousness.

Also, the sampling procedures used in Watson's work may be particularly problematic for making comparisons about conscientiousness. Their married sample may be artificially high on any quality that is related to healthy marriages, because the sample was drawn from the membership rolls of a marriage enrichment organization (with a mean length of marriage of seventeen years), while the dating sample consisted of undergraduate psychology students and their dating partners. Because everyone in the married sample was involved in an organization whose mission is to promote marital health, the sample would be unlikely to include many couples who possess qualities that might undermine marriage. Particularly low levels of conscientiousness in such a group would be highly unlikely. Thus, the effects of selection bias in their sample may have been particularly strong—even more than the Botwin reasoning suggests.

Botwin's second hypothesis, that couples converge in a given quality over the transition to marriage, suggests that conscientiousness changes as couples marry. While that possibility has not been tested directly, Neyer and Asendorpf's (2001) analyses suggest that personality shapes relationships more than relationships shape personality and that beginning a relationship (either cohabitation or marriage) moderated personality maturation in German young adults over a four-year period.

Similarly, there may be a natural maturational process that increases one's conscientiousness over the same time period that individuals typically enter marriage. Neyer and Asendorpf (2001) report that conscientiousness increased over time in a sample of young adults. As individuals approach adulthood, then, they naturally become more conscientious. As a result, individuals who are unacceptably low in conscientiousness, in terms of normative expectations for maintaining a relationship, become rarer over time. Eventually, an increasing proportion of individuals will have attained a level of conscientiousness that meets the basic standards expected within social relationships. Conscientiousness may subsequently become less important for relationship quality as maturational development simultaneously occurs. Thus, while conscientiousness may be particularly important in the formative stages of intimacy and for younger individuals in relationships, it may be less important for marriage longitudinally and less important, generally, as individuals mature.

Each of these possibilities needs further attention if we are to make firm conclusions about the extent to which conscientiousness matters for marriage and the role it plays in developing relationships over time.

### **Summary of the Research on Conscientiousness**

In sum, conscientiousness is connected with marriage and appears to be linked to aspects of marriage that would be associated with personal commitment. Specifically, highly conscientiousness individuals report favorable marital evaluations, such as high marital satisfaction, adjustment, or quality (as in Kelly & Conley, 1987; Roberts & Bogg, 2004; and Robins et al., 2000). In addition, it is also linked to spouses' positive perceptions about one another—reporting one's spouse to be someone who is caring and supportive, having fewer complaints about specific aspects of the spouse's demeanor and behavior, and harboring less suspicion about the possibility of spousal infidelity (as in Buss, 1991; Buss & Shackelford, 1997; and Furukawa et al., 2002). Also, conscientiousness is connected to healthy marital behavior, such as reporting the use of reason as an influence strategy, and reporting lower levels of conflict, abuse, and/or infidelity (as in Buss, 1992; Buss & Shackelford, 1997; and Robins et al., 2002).

Alternately, while none of the conscientiousness and marital stability literature tests these associations, it is plausible that conscientiousness strengthens marriage by some process beyond the emotional climate of the marriage. Specifically, conscientious individuals may have higher levels of constraint

commitment than others. In addition, the literature contains persistent issues that may be pertinent to drawing conclusions about conscientiousness. First, the research suggests that the level of individuals' conscientiousness is important, rather than the similarity of conscientiousness between spouses. Second, gender analyses offer mixed results but suggest that male conscientiousness may be more salient for relationship outcomes than female conscientiousness. Finally, sampling and design issues need to be carefully considered in this research so that we do not make misleading conclusions about the importance of conscientiousness in marriage.

The literature suggests, generally, that conscientiousness seems to benefit marriage, both in terms of the emotional climate of the marriage as well as the stability of the marriage. However, the body of research on the processes by which conscientiousness influences marital stability is very small and has not given attention to the commitment processes that may link conscientiousness, as a dispositional trait, with long-term marital stability. Thus, we know little about the mechanisms by which conscientiousness plays a role in long-term marital stability.

## **RELIGIOUSNESS AND MARRIAGE**

In addition to the effects of conscientiousness, various aspects of religion—affiliation, religious homogamy, etc.—all seem to be related to marital outcomes. Here, though, the focus is on religiosity as a dispositional quality, part

of a person's general psychological makeup. Internalizing religious principles into one's psychological makeup would likely reduce the probability of divorce. Cognitively, religiousness might enhance one's sense of commitment to marriage; behaviorally, religiousness may influence the way spouses treat each other and, consequently, influence their marital outcomes.

Because many individuals report that religion is important to them and that they participate in religious activities regularly (see Dollahite, Marks, & Goodman, 2004; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001; Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003), their religion serves as what Huston (2000) calls an *ecological niche* within which their marriage operates. It may have a cognitive influence on relationships by shaping the psychological makeup (consistent patterns of attitudes, beliefs, and values) of the individuals, as well as their relationship-specific cognitions (such as relationship expectations, evaluative criteria for relationship success, and so forth). These psychological aspects of religiousness may then shape individuals' interpersonal interactions. Indeed, religious teachings include ethical codes that are intended to guide human behavior, including the behaviors that individuals enact in social relationships. In fact, many religious charges are clearly interpersonal in nature. Several of the Judeo-Christian Ten Commandments deal with appropriate attitudes and behavior with regard to other people and their possessions (such as the proscriptions against killing, coveting, committing adultery, etc.).

It is not surprising, then, that research has demonstrated an empirical link between religion and interpersonal relationships in general (King, 2003, Ellison & Anderson, 2001; Piedmont, 1999), and family relationships in particular (see King, 2003, for a review). This literature shows, for instance, that the empirical links between spirituality and family functioning are widely applicable, pertaining to people from various backgrounds, and are not limited to particularly religious samples (Mahoney et al., 2001).

Naturally, this influence extends to the marital relationship, and there is a substantial body of research on how religion affects marriage (see reviews in Call & Heaton, 1997; Mahoney, 2005; Mahoney et al., 2001, 2003; Weaver et al., 2002), with implications for the work of family researchers and practitioners. Daly, for example, contends that the lack of focus on spirituality in theoretical work represents part of a disjunction between “family theory” and “the *implicit* theories families live by” (Daly, 2003, p. 771, emphasis in original), and Carlson and his colleagues call for practitioners to attend to religious matters in their efforts to promote healthy family functioning (Carlson, Kirkpatrick, Hecker, & Killmer, 2002).

Mahoney and her associates (Mahoney et al., 2001) assert that there are two central themes to the research on the link between religion and marriage. The first theme is that there are both positive and negative consequences of religion in marriage and family life; that is, religion provides both resources and risks for



families (Mahoney et al., 1999; Mahoney, 2005; see also Dollahite et al., 2004).

The other is that marital research must make a distinction between effects that are unique to religion and those that overlap other non-religious phenomena.

### **Positive and Negative Outcomes of Religion**

Call and Heaton (1997) and Mahoney and her colleagues (Mahoney et al., 2001) hypothesize a number of cognitive and interpersonal mechanisms by which religion may promote marital satisfaction and stability. First, religion offers couples opportunities to participate in joint activities, thus promoting intimacy (Call & Heaton, 1997; Mahoney et al., 2001). Second, it gives couples a chance to support each other's beliefs and develop shared values (Mahoney et al., 2001). Third, religion encourages spouses to think and act in ways that are protective of the relationship, in that spouses are taught that the marital relationship is sacred, which promotes marital commitment (Call & Heaton, 1997; Mahoney et al., 2001), and that they should act in ways they believe God would condone (Mahoney et al., 2001). Fourth, some religions emphasize complementary sex-roles that may create mutual dependency between spouses that may reduce the likelihood of separation. Fifth, religious institutions communicate proscriptions against non-marital sex, sometimes upholding penalties, including excommunication, for violation. As a result, a person who is committed to such a religious organization would presumably be less likely to foster extramarital attraction or pursue sexual alternatives to marriage. Sixth, religion provides

spiritual and social resources to individuals that help them in times of need, as couples and families turn to their religious community for support during times of family or marital stress (Abbott & Meredith, 1986; Van Der Poel & Greeff, 2003). Finally, religious beliefs prompt couples to use other spiritual resources (such as prayer) to help them overcome marital strife (Butler & Harper, 1994; Butler, Gardner, & Bird, 1998; Butler, Stout, & Gardner, 2002). These processes suggest that religion shapes the beliefs and values that comprise a person's psychological makeup and offers resources that can be used during times of difficulty. Additionally, by shaping individuals' beliefs and values, their interpersonal behavior may also be influenced by religion. As a result, religion may promote satisfaction, commitment, and stability of the marriage.

Conversely, religion may be harmful to marital relationships in a number of ways: religious persons may tolerate inappropriate behavior (like abuse) because they feel that their marital vows should never be broken (Mahoney et al., 1999) or they may experience spiritual failure and/or excessive guilt when marital troubles arise (Mahoney et al., 2001, 2003). Religion becomes especially problematic when spouses differ in religious affiliation or activity or when religious doctrines are misapplied (Dollahite et al., 2004; Exline, 2002; Mahoney, 2005; Mahoney et al., 2001). In fact, religious differences between individuals weaken stability even more than does the mutual absence of religiousness within a marriage (Call & Heaton, 1997). Reviews of the marital literature suggest that

these religiously-generated problems occur less frequently than the benefits of religion, but they are nonetheless important, particularly because of their implications for marital therapy (Mahoney et al., 1999; Mahoney et al., 2003).

In sum, greater individual religiousness and religious similarity are generally linked with greater marital satisfaction and stability. Overall, religion generally facilitates healthy family functioning, though it can become destructive when it is distorted/abused or when spouses are religiously dissimilar.

### **The Unique Effects of Religion on Marriage**

The second major theme that Mahoney and her colleagues discuss, and one that has implications for these analyses, is that research on religion and marriage should separate the effects of religion that are uniquely religious from those that are psychosocial, or secular, in nature (Mahoney et al., 2001, Mahoney et al., 2003; Mahoney, 2005). The secular effects of religion are those effects that result from religion but that also result from other, non-religious institutions and affiliations. Religious social support, for example, might be considered a secular effect of religion, because non-religious groups, like a neighborhood book club, might offer the same kind of social support for marriage (Mahoney et al., 2001). This distinction between the secular and unique effects of religion is important because, without the clarification of the unique effects of religion on family life, we might argue that the inclusion of religion is nothing more than a proxy for non-religious variables in the science of human behavior (Mahoney et al., 2001).

## **The Dimensions of Religion that Influence Marriage**

It is important to note, however, that not all of the many dimensions of religion (Call & Heaton, 1997) matter for relationships. Research on religion can be organized around the idea that proximal measures of religion matter most for family life, while distal measures are of less importance (Mahoney et al., 2001). Proximal aspects of religion are those with the most direct connection with the marital relationship itself, which then influence both marital behavior and marital evaluations.

Religious affiliation or denomination, for example, is one construct that is distal to the marital relationship and, as such, is a relatively unimportant predictor of outcomes. With regard to interpersonal forgiveness, religious denomination does not predict pro-social behavior, while internalized religiousness does (Fincham, 2000). Similarly, religious denomination is unrelated to the propensity of spouses to consider divorce (Booth & White, 1980), to actual rates of marital dissolution (with several notable exceptions, as in Lehrer and Chiswick, 1993), and to marital conflict (Curtis and Ellison, 2002). In each of these examples, the more proximal, internal construct of religious activity or religiousness proved to be more important for marital outcomes than the distal construct of affiliation.

Following the same logic, spouses' own religiousness is more proximal than the religiousness of their respective families of origin (Botwin et al., 1997). Further, similarity of religious activity is highly important to the relationship.

That is, relatively high levels of church attendance promote stability while low levels of attendance weaken it, and dissimilarity of attendance (where one spouse is highly active and the other is less active) weakens stability even further (Call & Heaton, 1997).

In sum, data from normative samples suggests that, in general, religion seems to promote a number of positive outcomes for marriage, and those outcomes are principally linked with internalized religiousness rather than religious affiliation. The more proximal the construct is, the more powerful it is as a predictor of marital outcomes. Further, religious similarity (both of internalized religiousness and of affiliation) is important for the positive effects of religion on marriage.

#### **BRIDGING THE LITERATURES: CONSCIENTIOUSNESS AND RELIGIOSITY**

While religiousness appears to affect the state of one's marriage in the ways outlined above, there may not be a link between *changes* in religiousness and changes in the marriage over time. Booth, Johnson, Branaman, and Sica's (1995) work failed to find a strong relationship between religious and marital changes. In discussing their results, however, they propose that the reason for the lack of findings may have been the absence of change in religiousness and marital quality over time; rather, they "are both stable characteristics, resulting in too little variance to detect effects" (p. 669). This suggests that religiousness may operate somewhat like a personality trait, in that it demonstrates relatively little

individual variability over time. Consequently, any discussion of religiousness as an enduring individual disposition should include a discussion of personality research as well, with attention given to personality constructs, such as conscientiousness, that may be particularly related to religiosity (McCrae, 1999).

Still, the scientific study of religion is based on an assumption that religion is more than simply a spiritual spin-off of personality research—that religiosity contributes unique variance to our understanding of various outcomes in behavioral sciences. Indeed, current research has provided some evidence that religiousness is a distinct phenomenon from traditional psychological measures, such as personality (MacDonald, 2000; Piedmont, 1999; Rodgeron & Piedmont, 1998). There has even been the suggestion that some dimensions of religiousness represent a sixth major personality factor (Piedmont, 1999). Consequently, researchers should control for the influences of the secular when investigating the functioning of religion in human phenomena (Mahoney et al., 2001, 2003; Mahoney, 2005).

It is important, then, for future research on the effects of religiousness to also include measures of personality constructs. Only then can one conclude that religiousness makes a unique contribution to the study of human outcomes (in this case, marital outcomes), and only then can one examine the specific mechanisms by which each type of quality—religious and secular—influences marital outcomes.

Religion and marriage research often neglects to do so, however. For example, in a recent special issue of the *Journal of Personality* devoted to the intersection of religion and personality research, McCrae (1999) noted that surprisingly little was said about conscientiousness as a personality factor that would presumably be related to religiousness. Of the five factors of personality dimensions that have consistently been identified in personality research, one would expect conscientiousness should be highly related to religiousness, inasmuch as religious codes (a) include behavioral proscriptions that demand self-control and (b) encourage perseverance of discipleship despite temptations or tribulations. The absence of a focus on conscientiousness, consequently, from an entire issue of the *Journal of Personality* that was devoted to personality and religion is surprising. In fact, McCrae (1999) critiqued the participating authors' work in that very little of their content contained any mention of a five-factor model of personality at all.

Others, however, have demonstrated a link between religiousness and conscientiousness, both empirically and theoretically. The strength of one's superego (conscientiousness) is directly related to his/her religiousness (Rasmussen & Charman, 1995), and individuals with various types and levels of religiousness are significantly different on several personality measures, including conscientiousness (Wiebe & Fleck, 1980). Since conscientiousness, as a

personality factor, is related to self-control and perseverance, it is conceptually linked to individual qualities that are often promoted by religious traditions.

Given the prominence of literature on religion and marriage, it is surprising to find no specific focus on conscientiousness in the research on religion and marriage. Much of the marital literature includes some attention to religion and/or personality (such as Abbott & Meredith, 1986, for example), but that is rarely the focus of the investigation, and there is never a specific focus on conscientiousness. Consequently, though the two branches of literature remain fairly distinct, it seems plausible that both religiousness and personality make a difference in marital quality. The unique interpersonal and cognitive processes by which each does so remain to be explored, as is the question of how the two dispositions (religiousness and conscientiousness) relate to one another in their impact on marital satisfaction and stability.

Furthermore, along with Piedmont (1999) and Mahoney (2005), I argue that the study of religiousness is more than the theologizing of personality theory, but that personality and religiousness may each have a unique effect on marital outcomes. Future research on how personal dispositions influence marital outcomes (particularly marital stability) should focus on these traits. Paralleling the discussion of conscientiousness above, multifaceted commitment frameworks (Johnson, 1991; Stanley & Markman, 1992) suggest several possible mechanisms by which religiousness may influence marital stability. First, religiosity might



operate through personal commitment, as when a religious husband consciously strives to treat his wife in a way that he believes God would sanction or when a religious wife is prone to make benevolent attributions of her husband's behavior. Second, religiosity may trigger the mechanism of internalized constraint, such as when a religious person stays in his marriage because he believes that leaving his wife would displease God. As with the discussion of conscientiousness outlined above, this second commitment mechanism seems unlikely to be experienced by an individual unless personal commitment is low.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In sum, while marital research suggests that personal dispositions shape various aspects of marriage, little attention has been given to either (a) the traits that might be particularly associated with marital stability, or (b) the processes by which that association functions. Furthermore, the conscientiousness and the religiosity branches of the general marital literature remain fairly distinct bodies of research, which is surprising given that the two dispositions are conceptually related.

With this project, I hope to address each of those issues: I empirically examine qualities that are theoretically linked with marital stability; I explore the processes through which those qualities may matter; and I acknowledge the interrelated nature of religiosity and conscientiousness by including them simultaneously in the analyses. Thus, I tested the following research questions:

- Research Question 1a: Are husbands' and wives' conscientiousness and religiosity each directly associated with the *occurrence* of divorce?
- Research Question 1b: Are husbands' and wives' conscientiousness and religiosity each directly associated with the *timing* of divorce?
- Research Question 1c: Do either or both of these qualities directly predict the *occurrence* of divorce multivariately (when controlling for the competing quality)?
- Research Question 1d: Do either or both of these qualities directly predict the *timing* of divorce multivariately?

Further, I tested the indirect processes by which these dispositional traits influence long-term marital stability. As discussed in the review above, the first possibility is that a person's qualities may influence divorce through personal commitment, by boosting attitudes and behaviors that are associated with wanting to stay in the relationship. Thus, personal commitment may *mediate* the link between one's traits and divorce.

- Research Question 2a: Is the link between spouses' dispositional qualities (religiosity or conscientiousness) and the *occurrence* of divorce mediated by the amount of personal commitment?
- Research Question 2b: Is the relationship between spouses' dispositional qualities and the *timing* of divorce mediated by the amount of personal commitment?

The second possibility of the mechanisms through which these traits may matter for marital stability is that they become salient when personal commitment is low. Analytically, this assertion suggests a moderation model, where personal dispositions matter for marital stability, but only in the absence of personal commitment.

- Research Question 3a: Is the relationship between spouses' dispositional qualities (religiosity or conscientiousness) and the *occurrence* of divorce moderated by the degree of personal commitment, such that conscientiousness and religiosity predict divorce only when personal commitment is low?
- Research Question 3b: Is the relationship between these dispositional qualities and the *timing* of divorce similarly moderated by the degree of personal commitment?

## **Method: Chapter Two**

### **PARTICIPANTS**

In 1980-81, marriage records from four counties in central Pennsylvania were used to identify newlywed couples and invite them to participate in the PAIR (Processes of Adaptation in Intimate Relationships) Project, a research study on courtship and marriage under the direction of Dr. Ted L. Huston, who was, at the time, on the faculty at the Pennsylvania State University. In order for the couples to be eligible for participation, they needed to speak English, be in their first marriage, have a local address or telephone number, and intend to stay in the study area for at least two years. Of those who were contacted, 42% agreed to participate, resulting in a total sample of 168 couples who were, on the whole, demographically similar to non-respondents in the area (see Robins, 1985). The couples were largely members of the working class, were mostly Caucasian, and were relatively young: men and women were 24.1 and 21.8 years old, respectively. Additionally, the modal participant had a high school degree; almost as many dropped out of high school as completed college.

Though the original design was intended to study the couples as newlyweds (Phase 1) and then at annual intervals over the first two years of marriage (Phases 2 and 3), Huston and his colleagues contacted couples again between their thirteenth and fourteenth year of marriage (Phase 4). The total *Ns* for Phases 1-3 were 168, 142, and 131, with almost three quarters of the attrition

occurring as a result of couples moving away and losing contact with the research team. At Phase 4, the PAIR team was able to gather marital status data on 164 of the original 168 couples, using information gathered from direct contact with the spouses or their parents and from court records (Huston et al., 2001). Over the course of fourteen years, 105 couples had stayed married, 56 had divorced, and 3 had experienced the death of one of the spouses. For Phase 4, 100 still-married couples and 50 divorced individuals agreed to participate in the full-length interview. Thus, the divorce rate in this sample was 34%, slightly lower than the national average for couples after 13 years of marriage (Huston et al., 2001).

Those few couples who had lost one of the spouses to death or who could not be located at Phase 4 did not have divorce data and were thus excluded from these analyses. As a result, the sample used in the majority of the analyses (RQs 1a, 1c, 2a, 3a) is comprised of the 161 couples for whom Phase 1 and Phase 4 data were available. Analyses pertaining to the *timing* of divorce naturally included only those couples that did eventually divorce, restricting the sample size for those analyses (RQs 1b and 1d) to the 56 couples mentioned above. Furthermore, analyses examining marital change as a mediator/moderator of divorce *timing* (RQs 2b and 3b) excluded an additional eight couples who were divorced prior to Phase 3 (their second anniversary), and thus did not have marital change data. For purposes of clarity, these *Ns* will be reported in the footnotes of the tables where the results are displayed.

## **PROCEDURES**

At each of the first three phases of data collection, husbands and wives participated in in-depth face-to-face interviews about the nature of their marital relationships. These interviews were conducted by male-female pairs of trained interviewers and generally took place in the couples' homes. Each couple was given \$30 for their participation in the study, was asked to fill out standard consent forms, and was given an opportunity to ask any questions about the research study. Next, spouses were separated (in different rooms) and interviewed by the interviewer of her or his own sex.

At Phase 1, a broad range of data were gathered about the respondents' backgrounds (including family backgrounds, employment history, courtship, etc.), their personal qualities (including personality measures, leisure preferences, etc.), and their marriages (including measures of love, satisfaction, ambivalence, relationship maintenance, etc.). At subsequent phases, identical measures about the marriage were used to assess changes in marital quality, roles, patterns, and so forth.

Because the PAIR Project had been relocated to the University of Texas at Austin between Phases 3 and 4, the final wave of data was gathered from a distance. Thus, rather than being interviewed in person, the respondents completed a mail-in questionnaire, and the main interview was conducted over the phone using a set of interview scales that the couples had received through the

mail. At this phase, respondents were asked to complete the phone interview in a separate room where they would not be overheard, though the interview was structured such that even were a partner to eavesdrop, they would not be able to make any sense of their spouse's answers.

At each phase, the face-to-face interviews were followed by a series of daily diary interviews which were conducted over the telephone (for details, see Huston, Robins, Atkinson, & McHale, 1987). These interviews assessed daily behavioral patterns in affection, negativity, leisure, communication, and companionship. The bulk of the data used in this study come from the main interview at Phase 1, though marital change was captured using data from the Phase 1 and Phase 3 main interviews, and the marital outcome data come from both personal contact and court records, as described above.

## **MEASURES**

### **Independent Variables**

Religiosity was measured during the Phase 1 main interview, as part of a series of questions that had to do with the respondent's background. Individuals were asked whether they were *very religious*, *somewhat religious*, *not very religious*, or *not at all religious*. For these analyses, the item was recoded on a 0-3 scale, with *not at all religious* coded 0 and *very religious* coded 3. On average, the mean level of religiosity for wives and husbands in this sample is 1.87 and 1.78, respectively, with most people reporting that they are somewhat religious.

During the same interview, respondents filled out the 16 PF personality questionnaire, a widely-used, psychometrically sound inventory (Cattell, Eber, & Tatsuoka, 1970). The questionnaire is composed of a battery of items about individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behavior across a number of settings and is a standard inventory for measuring personality factors (Gerbing & Tuley, 1991). The questionnaire measures 16 specific first-order personality traits, and a set of second-order factors that parallel the Big Five (Cattell, 1996), one of which is conscientiousness. High values on this trait reflect a disposition that could be described as moralistic, persistent, responsible, controlled, prudent, and restrained (see, for example, John, 1990). Three missing values for husbands and three additional missing values for wives were estimated using the Missing Value procedure of SPSS. The EM algorithm converged in 8 iterations, and Little's MCAR test was nonsignificant ( $p = .274$ ), indicating that there was no systematic pattern to the missing values in these data.

Difference scores for religiosity and conscientiousness were computed for inclusion as control variables in these analyses, because such differences may be important predictors of marital functioning (as suggested in the review and discussion above). Campbell and Kashy (2002) suggest that difference scores can be calculated either by (a) multiplying the two spouses' values together on the variable of interest (creating an interaction term) or by (b) computing the absolute value of the difference between the husband's and wife's scores. They suggest



using the first option when the researcher is interested in various potential combinations of husband-wife differences and using the second option when similarity itself is the phenomena of interest. Because the literature reviewed in this paper makes a stronger case for the importance of general similarity/differences than for specific gender combinations and because the literature about the effects of the gender combinations reveals mixed results, I calculated differences using the absolute values for each quality. Thus, I created one score reflecting husband-wife differences in conscientiousness and a second score reflecting husband-wife differences in religiosity.

### **Process Variables for Mediation and Moderation Hypotheses**

Earlier analyses with the PAIR Project couples indicate that divorce is predicted by both (a) newlywed marital evaluations and (b) how those evaluations change over the first two years of marriage (Huston et al., 2001). However, the *occurrence* of divorce is associated with the changes in evaluations, consistent with a disillusionment model of marital dissolution, while the *timing* of divorce is associated with the newlywed evaluations.

In terms of the *occurrence* of divorce, then, individuals who come to see their spouse and marriage in a markedly less positive light over the first two years of marriage are increasingly likely to split up down the road. Conversely, individuals who evaluate their spouse and marriage much the same over those early years are much less likely to end up divorced. In terms of predicting the

*timing* of divorce within a sample composed entirely of eventual divorcers, the changes in marital evaluations are largely unimportant, since all the eventually-divorcing couples' marital evaluations are declining similarly over time, as suggested above. Within this group of dissolving marriages, it is the level of the newlywed evaluations that is the key predictor of the *when* the marriage will dissolve. Not surprisingly, the more enamored spouses were as newlyweds, the longer their marriages lasted before dissolving (Huston et al., 2001).

I incorporated these earlier findings into my analyses by using *changes* in personal commitment as the mediator or moderator when predicting the *occurrence* of divorce and using the *newlywed* level of personal commitment as a mediator/moderator when predicting the *timing* of divorce.

### ***Newlywed Personal Commitment***

Another prior research study using PAIR data was likewise incorporated into these analyses. Johnson, Caughlin, and Huston's (1999) investigation of Johnson's (1991) commitment model used data from Phase 4 and concluded that subscales of personal commitment all loaded highly on one factor, as expected. I designed my personal commitment measure around their measure, except that the data used here are taken from earlier phases, rather than from Phase 4.

Unfortunately, the *couple identity* items included in the Johnson et al. (1999) analyses using Phase 4 data were not collected at Phases 1-3, and were thus unavailable for inclusion here. However, the other two components of the

Johnson et al. personal commitment measure, which include assessments of love and satisfaction, were available at Phases 1 and 3 and were included in these analyses.

The Phase 1 and 3 love component was based on two items taken from the Braiker and Kelly (1979) Personal Relationship Questionnaire (PRQ). These data were gathered during the main interviews and asked respondents “To what extent do you love [spouse’s name] at this stage?” and “How much do you need [spouse’s name] at this stage?” Each item was measured on a 9-point Likert scale with response choices ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*). While the PRQ includes a number of other items used to measure love, the Johnson et al. (1999) paper used only these two items so that their measure would parallel that used by Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998).

Satisfaction was measured using the Phase 1 and Phase 3 scores on the Marital Opinion Questionnaire, which was adapted from a life satisfaction scale created by Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976). These data were likewise gathered during the main interview. Participants were asked to think of their marriage over the past two months, and then characterize it in terms of descriptive statements that were pitted against one another (see items in Table 1). Each choice was separated by a set of seven checkboxes, and respondents put a checkmark in the box that represents where their feelings fell between the two poles of opposing statements. Some of the items were recoded so that, for each

pair, higher values indicated a more favorable evaluation of the marriage. As in Johnson et al. (1991), the eight items were averaged together and had high internal consistency, with alpha levels ranging from .866 to .948.

**Table 1. Descriptive pairs included in the MOQ**

---

|   |
|---|
| miserable ... enjoyable                                   |
| hopeful ... discouraging                                  |
| empty ... full  |
| interesting ... boring                                    |
| rewarding ... disappointing                               |
| doesn't give me much chance ... brings out the best in me |
| lonely ... friendly                                       |
| worthwhile ... useless                                    |

---

In addition, one global satisfaction item asked “how satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with your marriage over the past two months, all things considered?” Respondents were asked to check one of seven boxes which were anchored by the labels *completely satisfied* and *completely dissatisfied* at opposite ends. This score was then averaged with the descriptive statement scale score discussed above, with alpha levels ranging from .748 to .939 in these data. As with the conscientiousness data discussed above, missing values at Phase 3 were missing at random and were thus imputed using the Missing Value procedure in SPSS.

These two subscales—love and satisfaction—were then averaged together. However, as the two scales were measured on different metrics (a 9-point metric for love and a 7-point metric for satisfaction), the original scores had to be recalculated onto a common measurement metric before combining them into a

single score. Since the resulting scores would subsequently be used to create change scores (as outlined below), I could not create a common metric based on z-scores, as they would have made cross-time comparisons on a given variable impossible. This is because standardized scores are based on the distribution of the variable, so changes in the variable distribution from one phase to another alter the metric of the z-scores. For example, a person with a score of 5 on the satisfaction scale at Phase 1 and a 5 on the same scale at Phase 3 will inaccurately *appear* to have changed over time if the sample distribution of satisfaction at Phase 3 is at all different than that of Phase 1.

Instead of using z-scores, then, I created a percentage-based common metric, by dividing the highest possible scale value into the respondents' individual scores on that scale. Thus, the new score reflected a percentage of total possible scale points. To continue with the example proposed above, a value of 5 on the satisfaction scale represents 71.43% of the seven possible satisfaction scale points at Phase 1 *and* 71.43% of the seven possible points at Phase 3, which circumvents the problems associated with using z-scores for this type of scale creation. Additionally, the resulting love and satisfaction scores were both based on a common percentage-based metric, so the two scores could be averaged together to create one personal commitment scale.

As noted above, newlywed marital evaluations are significantly associated with the timing of divorce in these data (Huston et al., 2001). Thus, these scales

are used as the mediator/moderator process variables in analyses predicting the timing of divorce (RQs 2b and 3b).

### ***Changes in Personal Commitment***

In addition to the Phase 1 level of personal commitment, I also created a Phase 3 personal commitment score. These two scores illustrate respondents' personal commitment at two points in time: as newlyweds and at the beginning of the third year of marriage.

Prior analyses with these data have indicated that negative marital change over this time period is an important predictor of whether divorce occurs by Phase 4 (Huston et al., 2001), as reviewed above. In order to capture changes in personal commitment over this time period, I subtracted the newlywed score from the Phase 3 score. Negative values, consequently, indicate decreases in personal commitment between Phases 1 and 3, while positive values indicate increases in personal commitment during that time. This change score was then included as the mediator/moderator in analyses predicting the occurrence of divorce (RQs 2a and 3a).

### **Outcome Variables: Whether and When Divorce Occurred**

In all of these analyses, the ultimate outcome of interest is whether couples stayed together or not and, if not, how long their marriages lasted before they divorced. These data were gathered at Phase 4, as discussed above. At that phase, respondents who were no longer married to their original PAIR partner

were asked a series of questions about the nature of the divorce, including when it occurred. For respondents who were not participating in Phase 4 of the study, marital status and divorce dates (if applicable) were gathered using court records. Again, the PAIR team successfully obtained this information for all but four of the original 168 couples (Huston et al., 2001).

## Results: Chapter Three

### DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS

Table 2 includes the descriptive statistics for the variables included in these analyses. Means and standard deviations, as well minimum and maximum values, are displayed in the table. These numbers suggest several points of interest. First, while most of the couples were still married at Phase 4, about a third of them had divorced, and those divorces took place, on average, about 5 ½ years after the couples were wed. In terms of the dispositional qualities, the sample as a whole falls between *somewhat* and *not very religious* and is moderately conscientious. Not surprisingly, the mean values of the newlywed personal commitment scores indicate that most couples begin marriage with very favorable evaluations of their marriage. On average, though, these evaluations decline slightly by Phase 3.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the analysis sample**

|                                  | <i>N</i> | Mean  | SD   | Minimum | Maximum |
|----------------------------------|----------|-------|------|---------|---------|
| Occurrence of divorce            | 161      | .35   | 0.48 | 0.00    | 1.00    |
| Timing of divorce                | 56       | 5.57  | 3.68 | 0.00    | 13.00   |
| H religiosity                    | 161      | 1.78  | 0.70 | 0.00    | 3.00    |
| W religiosity                    | 161      | 1.88  | 0.69 | 0.00    | 3.00    |
| H conscientiousness              | 161      | 5.64  | 1.81 | 0.23    | 9.59    |
| W conscientiousness              | 161      | 5.20  | 1.83 | 0.23    | 9.59    |
| Difference in religiosity        | 161      | 0.48  | 0.62 | 0.00    | 3.00    |
| Difference in conscientiousness  | 161      | 2.03  | 1.42 | 0.00    | 7.70    |
| H newlywed personal commitment   | 161      | 0.92  | 0.09 | 0.59    | 1.00    |
| W newlywed personal commitment   | 161      | 0.93  | 0.11 | 0.21    | 1.00    |
| H changes in personal commitment | 153      | -0.06 | 0.10 | -0.58   | 0.13    |
| W changes in personal commitment | 153      | -0.08 | 0.12 | -0.78   | 0.27    |



Table 3 displays the bivariate correlation matrix for the dependent, independent, and mediator/moderator variables used in these analyses. These numbers indicate that husbands' and wives' levels of religiosity are modestly correlated ( $r = .36, p < .001$ ), whereas husbands' and wives' levels of conscientiousness are not significantly correlated ( $r = .10, n.s.$ ), suggesting that the variables are not so highly correlated that multicollinearity is a problem in these analyses. Likewise, within-person correlations on the predictor variables do not pose problems for multicollinearity, though religiosity and conscientiousness are also correlated with one another ( $r = .23, p < .01$  for husbands and  $r = .32, p < .001$  for wives).

**Table 3. Bivariate correlations for the variables included in the analyses**

|                                      | 1        | 2      | 3        | 4       | 5      | 6      | 7     | 8     | 9       | 10    | 11      | 12   |
|--------------------------------------|----------|--------|----------|---------|--------|--------|-------|-------|---------|-------|---------|------|
| 1. Divorce (a)                       | 1.00     |        |          |         |        |        |       |       |         |       |         |      |
| 2. Timing of divorce                 | (b)      | 1.00   |          |         |        |        |       |       |         |       |         |      |
| 3. H religiosity                     | -0.22**  | -0.16  | 1.00     |         |        |        |       |       |         |       |         |      |
| 4. W religiosity                     | -0.27*** | 0.05   | 0.36***  | 1.00    |        |        |       |       |         |       |         |      |
| 5. H conscientiousness               | -0.07    | 0.36** | 0.23**   | 0.08    | 1.00   |        |       |       |         |       |         |      |
| 6. W conscientiousness               | -0.13†   | 0.20   | 0.03     | 0.32*** | 0.10   | 1.00   |       |       |         |       |         |      |
| 7. Difference in religiosity         | 0.17*    | -0.26* | -0.38*** | -0.17*  | -0.14† | 0.01   | 1.00  |       |         |       |         |      |
| 8. Difference in conscientiousness   | -0.16*   | 0.04   | 0.09     | 0.11    | 0.05   | -0.20* | -0.04 | 1.00  |         |       |         |      |
| 9. H newlywed personal commitment    | -0.09    | 0.43** | 0.04     | 0.01    | 0.24** | 0.13   | -0.04 | 0.11  | 1.00    |       |         |      |
| 10. W newlywed personal commitment   | -0.17*   | 0.35** | -0.07    | 0.06    | -0.01  | 0.05   | 0.00  | 0.07  | 0.42*** | 1.00  |         |      |
| 11. H changes in personal commitment | -0.17*   | -0.01  | 0.27***  | 0.25**  | 0.03   | 0.02   | -0.10 | -0.05 | -0.06   | 0.06  | 1.00    |      |
| 12. W changes in personal commitment | -0.32*** | 0.36*  | 0.09     | 0.16*   | 0.14†  | 0.06   | -0.07 | -0.06 | 0.15†   | -0.12 | 0.36*** | 1.00 |

Notes:

(a) Divorce was dummy coded so that *Married at Phase 4* was coded 0 and *Divorced by Phase 4* was coded 1.

(b) Cannot be computed because one of the variables is constant: all couples with Timing data are divorced.

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## TESTS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Because some of the variables included in the analyses were not normally distributed, the analyses reported here were performed twice: once using the original variables and once using transformed variables. However, because the data transformations did not significantly improve the distributions of the variables or alter the results of the analyses, the findings reported here are based on the original, untransformed data.

The approach to the analyses addressed the question of whether/how personal qualities influence either the occurrence of divorce or the timing of divorce. Because the first of these dependent variables is dichotomous while the second is continuous, the research questions associated with each of these outcomes were tested using different procedures. Research questions regarding the occurrence of divorce (RQs 1a, 1c, 2a, and 3a) were tested using binary logistic regression, while the hypotheses regarding the timing of divorce (RQs 1b, 1d, 2b, and 3b) were tested using standard OLS regression.

In addition, these questions presuppose an actor-partner model that, while not directly discussed above, underlies much of the marital literature. An actor-effect in marital research occurs when a person's marital outcomes are associated with his or her *own* dispositional qualities, such as when a man who is generally optimistic in life evaluates his own marriage particularly favorably. Conversely, a partner-effect occurs when one person's outcomes are associated with his or her

*spouse's* qualities, such as when a woman is unhappy with her marriage because her husband is emotionally labile. In the analyses proposed here, the outcome variable of interest is divorce, a couple-level phenomenon, rather than an individual-level phenomenon such as marital satisfaction, so partner-effects are invariably involved. Thus, it is unreasonable to assume that a couple-level outcome is generally influenced by only one spouse's qualities. As a result, all analyses included both spouses' qualities as predictors of divorce and both spouses' personal commitment as possible mediator/moderator variables.

#### **THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN PERSONAL DISPOSITIONS AND WHETHER/WHEN COUPLES DIVORCE**

I tested the preliminary research questions using univariate and multivariate regression. The univariate tests (RQs 1a and 1b) explored whether the dispositional qualities were each related to the occurrence/timing of divorce. The multivariate tests (RQs 1c and 1d) examined whether each quality predicts divorce after controlling for the other dispositional qualities and the difference scores.

The univariate regression coefficients (see Table 4) indicate that, of the four predictors, only husbands' and wives' religiosity are significantly associated with the occurrence of divorce. For husbands' religiosity, the odds ratio is .51 ( $p < .001$ ); for wives' religiosity, the odds ratio is .42 ( $p < .001$ ). These odds ratios indicate that each unit increase in men's religiosity is associated with a 49%

decrease in the likelihood of divorce and each unit increase in wives' religiosity is associated with a 58% decrease in the likelihood of divorce.

**Table 4. Univariate hierarchical logistic regression coefficients for the occurrence of divorce on independent and mediating variables**

| Predictor                        | B       | SE   | Odds Ratio | % change |
|----------------------------------|---------|------|------------|----------|
| <i>Dispositional Variables</i>   |         |      |            |          |
| H religiosity                    | -0.68** | 0.25 | 0.51       | -0.49    |
| W religiosity                    | -0.86** | 0.26 | 0.42       | -0.58    |
| H conscientiousness              | -0.08   | 0.09 | 0.92       | -0.08    |
| W conscientiousness              | -0.15†  | 0.09 | 0.86       | -0.14    |
| <i>Difference Variables</i>      |         |      |            |          |
| Difference in religiosity        | 0.55*   | 0.27 | 1.73       | 0.73     |
| Difference in conscientiousness  | -0.25*  | 0.13 | 0.78       | -0.22    |
| <i>Process Variables</i>         |         |      |            |          |
| H changes in personal commitment | -3.50*  | 1.76 | 0.03       | -0.97    |
| W changes in personal commitment | 6.28*** | 1.78 | 0.00       | -1.00    |

Note:  $N = 161$ .

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

The “Model 1” portion of Table 5 displays the multivariate results. When all four dispositional traits (and the difference scores) are included in one regression model, husbands' and wives' religiosity are still the strongest predictors of divorce, though these associations are not as powerful as the univariate associations. Husbands' religiosity only marginally predicts divorce when controlling for the other dispositional characteristics, but wives' religiosity remains significant. The odds ratio of .46 indicates that, for every unit increase in wives' religiosity, there is a 54% decrease in the likelihood that the couple will eventually divorce.

**Table 5. Multivariate hierarchical logistic regression coefficients for the occurrence of divorce on independent and mediating variables**

| Predictor                        | Model 1 |      |            |          | Model 2 |      |            |          |
|----------------------------------|---------|------|------------|----------|---------|------|------------|----------|
|                                  | B       | SE   | Odds Ratio | % change | B       | SE   | Odds Ratio | % change |
| <i>Dispositional Variables</i>   |         |      |            |          |         |      |            |          |
| H religiosity                    | -0.62†  | 0.33 | 0.54       | -0.46    | -0.73*  | 0.36 | 0.48       | -0.52    |
| W religiosity                    | -0.78*  | 0.33 | 0.46       | -0.54    | -0.73*  | 0.36 | 0.48       | -0.52    |
| H conscientiousness              | 0.10    | 0.12 | 1.10       | 0.10     | 0.17    | 0.14 | 1.19       | 0.19     |
| W conscientiousness              | -0.15   | 0.13 | 0.86       | -0.14    | -0.18   | 0.14 | 0.83       | -0.17    |
| <i>Difference Variables</i>      |         |      |            |          |         |      |            |          |
| Difference in religiosity        | 0.11    | 0.33 | 1.12       | 0.12     | 0.04    | 0.35 | 1.04       | 0.04     |
| Difference in conscientiousness  | -0.30†  | 0.16 | 0.74       | -0.26    | -0.40*  | 0.18 | 0.67       | -0.33    |
| <i>Process Variables</i>         |         |      |            |          |         |      |            |          |
| H changes in personal commitment |         |      |            |          | 0.12    | 2.29 | 1.12       | 0.12     |
| W changes in personal commitment |         |      |            |          | -6.57** | 2.04 | 0.00       | -1.00    |

Note:  $N = 161$ .

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

In terms of the *timing* of divorce, only one of the four predictors—husbands’ conscientiousness—is significantly associated with the dependent variable univariately (see Table 6 below). Neither wives’ conscientiousness nor either spouse’s religiosity was significantly associated with the longitudinal timing of divorce. The standardized beta for husbands’ conscientiousness is .36 ( $p < .01$ ), indicating that, among those couples that divorce by the fourteenth year of marriage, each unit increase in the conscientiousness level of the husband is associated with a .81-year (almost 10-month) delay in the timing of divorce. Thus, marriages involving particularly conscientious husbands last, on average, years longer than those involving husbands with low levels of conscientiousness in these data.

**Table 6. Univariate hierarchical regression coefficients for timing of divorce on independent and mediating variables**

| Predictor                       | B       | SE   | $\beta$ | t     |
|---------------------------------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| <i>Dispositional Variables</i>  |         |      |         |       |
| H religiosity                   | -0.70   | 0.60 | -0.16   | -1.17 |
| W religiosity                   | -0.22   | 0.61 | -0.05   | -0.35 |
| H conscientiousness             | 0.81**  | 0.28 | 0.36    | 2.85  |
| W conscientiousness             | 0.43    | 0.29 | 0.20    | 1.48  |
| <i>Difference Variables</i>     |         |      |         |       |
| Difference in religiosity       | -1.43*  | 0.71 | -0.26   | -2.01 |
| Difference in conscientiousness | 0.26    | 0.39 | 0.04    | 0.27  |
| <i>Process Variables</i>        |         |      |         |       |
| H newlywed personal commitment  | 15.12** | 4.35 | 0.43    | 3.48  |
| W newlywed personal commitment  | 8.73**  | 3.19 | 0.35    | 2.74  |
| <b>R-square change</b>          |         |      |         |       |

Note:  $N = 56$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

However, the multivariate analyses (presented in Table 7) indicate that after controlling for each spouses' dispositions, husbands' religiosity ( $\beta = -.33, p < .05$ ) and husbands' conscientiousness ( $\beta = .35, p < .05$ ) predict the timing of divorce. The signs of these two betas are opposite however, indicating that husbands' conscientiousness is associated with delayed divorce while their religiosity is associated with earlier divorce.

In sum, the multivariate analyses indicate that husbands' and wives' conscientiousness and religiosity influence different aspects of divorce in these data. Generally speaking, the occurrence of divorce is associated with religiosity more than conscientiousness. In addition, the timing of divorce is linked to

characteristics of husbands, rather than of wives, with each of the husbands' qualities influencing the timing of divorce in opposite ways.

**Table 7. Multivariate hierarchical regression coefficients for timing of divorce on independent and mediating variables**

| Predictor                       | Model 1 |      |         |        | Model 2 |      |         |       |
|---------------------------------|---------|------|---------|--------|---------|------|---------|-------|
|                                 | B       | SE   | $\beta$ | t      | B       | SE   | $\beta$ | t     |
| <i>Dispositional Variables</i>  |         |      |         |        |         |      |         |       |
| H religiosity                   | -1.45*  | 0.65 | -0.33   | -2.24  | -1.03   | 0.64 | -0.23   | -1.60 |
| W religiosity                   | -0.30   | 0.67 | -0.07   | -0.45  | -0.32   | 0.65 | -0.07   | -0.49 |
| H conscientiousness             | 0.79*   | 0.34 | 0.35    | 2.34   | 0.55    | 0.36 | 0.25    | 1.55  |
| W conscientiousness             | 0.34    | 0.33 | 0.16    | 1.03   | 0.28    | 0.32 | 0.13    | 0.89  |
| <i>Difference Variables</i>     |         |      |         |        |         |      |         |       |
| Difference in religiosity       | -1.52*  | 0.73 | -0.28   | -2.06  | -1.57*  | 0.71 | -0.29   | -2.22 |
| Difference in conscientiousness | 0.23    | 0.41 | 0.08    | 0.55   | 0.14    | 0.39 | 0.05    | 0.34  |
| <i>Process Variables</i>        |         |      |         |        |         |      |         |       |
| H newlywed personal commitment  |         |      |         |        | 6.66    | 5.45 | 0.19    | 1.22  |
| W newlywed personal commitment  |         |      |         |        | 4.42    | 3.48 | 0.18    | 1.27  |
| R-square change                 |         |      |         | 0.29** |         |      |         | 0.09* |

Note:  $N = 56$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## **PERSONAL COMMITMENT AS A MEDIATOR OF DIVORCE AND ITS TIMING (RQS 2A AND 2B)**

Research Questions 2a and 2b focus on the possibility that the association between religiosity/conscientiousness and the occurrence or timing of divorce is mediated by personal commitment. As noted above, these analyses employ data about newlywed levels of personal commitment and the changes in personal commitment over the first two years of marriage, depending on whether the dependent variable in each analysis is the occurrence of divorce or the timing of

divorce. Again, the occurrence of divorce is associated with change in marital evaluations, so the change variables were used in models predicting *whether* divorce occurs; conversely, the timing of divorce is associated with newlywed marital evaluations, so the initial level of personal commitment is included in models predicting *when* divorce occurs.

The mediation hypotheses were tested using Baron and Kenny's (1986) technique. However, because I am interested in *two* simultaneous mediation processes (the change in *husbands'* personal commitment and the change in *wives'* personal commitment), the Baron and Kenny technique was modified following the adaptation made by Martino, Collins, and Ellickson (2004), who tested the possibility of a "multiply mediated association" (p. 249) between their predictor and outcome variables.

Martino et al. (2004) assert that mediation is established when the following associations are significant: (a) the predictor is associated with the outcome, (b) the mediator is associated with the outcome, and (c) the presence of the mediator reduces the impact of the predictor on the outcome. Their subsequent application of this thinking to a multiple-mediation model suggests the following criteria upon which evidence of multiple-mediation rests: (a) the predictor is associated with the outcome, (b) the mediating variables are significantly associated with the outcome when entered simultaneously into the



model, and (c) each mediator contributes to the reduction of the effect of the predictor on the outcome.

With regard to Condition C, the reduction in the effects of the significant predictors on the outcome variables was tested to see if it is statistically significant using a modification of the Sobel test (see Sobel, 1982; Baron & Kenny, 1986; and Martino et al., 2004). This tests the significance of the indirect effects included in the model. In these analyses, a significant Sobel statistic would indicate that religiousness or conscientiousness influences divorce through personal commitment; spouses with such qualities maintain high personal commitment and thus avoid (or postpone) divorce. On the other hand, a nonsignificant Sobel statistic would indicate that much of the association between one's religiousness or conscientious and the occurrence/timing of divorce operates through some mechanism beyond that of personal commitment.

The "Model 1" and "Model 2" sections of Table 5 display the results of the hierarchical logistic regression used to test the mediation hypotheses for the occurrence of divorce. Model 1 includes only the predictor and difference variables, and Model 2 adds the mediator variables to the model to examine whether they contribute predictive power to the prior model. In terms of the mediation hypotheses, Condition A is significantly demonstrated for wives' religiosity (as outlined above); only wives' religiosity significantly predicted the likelihood of divorce when controlling for the other personal dispositional

qualities and for differences in those qualities. Condition B of the hypothesis is supported in that one of the mediator variables, the changes in wives' personal commitment, is a significant predictor of divorce.

However, Condition C was only marginally supported in that the Sobel (1982) test revealed that the slight reduction in the effect of wives' religiosity on divorce was only marginally significant (Sobel statistic = -1.72,  $p < .10$ ). As a result, we cannot say with confidence that the effect of wives' religiosity on divorce is significantly mediated by the change (or lack of change) in personal commitment processes.

In terms of the timing of divorce, both of the husbands' qualities predict the outcome, as noted above (see the "Model 1" section of Table 7). Conditions B and C are not satisfied, however, because newlywed personal commitment is unrelated to the timing of divorce and the Sobel statistics (.01,  $p = .99$  for religiosity and -.01,  $p = .99$  for conscientiousness) are not significant. As with the tests of the occurrence of divorce, reported above, we cannot conclude that the link between husbands' religiosity or conscientiousness and divorce is mediated by newlywed levels of personal commitment.

As a group, these results offer little support for the idea that personal commitment mediates the link between religiosity/conscientiousness and divorce (either the occurrence or timing of divorce). That is, there is little evidence that

personal commitment changes the association between divorce and either of these qualities in the PAIR data.

**PERSONAL COMMITMENT AS A MODERATOR OF DIVORCE AND ITS TIMING  
(RQS 3A AND 3B)**

Research Questions 3a and 3b tested whether the association between divorce and either religiosity or conscientiousness was moderated by personal commitment; specifically, these questions had to do with whether the dispositional qualities predicted divorce or its timing when personal commitment was low. As with the analyses reported above, moderation was tested using hierarchical logistic regression (when predicting the *occurrence* of divorce) and hierarchical OLS regression (when predicting the *timing* of divorce). Also, these tests used *changes* in personal commitment when the dependent variable was the *occurrence* of divorce and newlywed personal commitment when the dependent variable was the *timing* of divorce.

Interaction terms representing the moderator variables were calculated by multiplying each of the independent variables (religiosity and conscientiousness) by the hypothesized moderator for each spouse. This resulted in four interaction terms for predicting each outcome.

The four interaction terms for predicting *whether* divorce occurs included:

1. husbands' religiosity X changes in personal commitment,
2. husbands' conscientiousness X changes in personal commitment,

3. wives' religiosity X changes in personal commitment, and
4. wives' conscientiousness X changes in personal commitment.

Similarly, four interaction terms for *when* divorce occurs included:

1. husbands' religiosity X newlywed personal commitment,
2. husbands' conscientiousness X newlywed personal commitment,
3. wives' religiosity X newlywed personal commitment, and
4. wives' conscientiousness X newlywed personal commitment.

A separate hierarchical regression model was used to test each of these moderation mechanisms and explore the relationship between one's personal dispositions and divorce. The first block of each regression model included three sets of predictor variables: first, the independent variables (each spouse's religiosity and conscientiousness); second, the difference variables; and third, the personal commitment score that was used to create that model's interaction term.

In the model for the first interaction term described above, for instance, the variable for husbands' changes in personal commitment was included in Block 1. The interaction term itself was then added in the second block of the model. The significance of both the interaction term and the change in R-square for the second block was used to determine whether the moderation variable was a meaningful predictor of divorce. Thus, each model tests whether the interaction term is significantly associated with the dependent variable, even after controlling

for the unique effects of the interaction term's components (as well as the other controls outlined above).

Because there were eight total moderation variables, the results are displayed in eight data tables: four tables of results for the tests of moderation on the *occurrence* of divorce (Tables 8 through 11) and an additional four tables of results for the tests of moderation on the *timing* of divorce (Tables 12 through 15). These tables indicate that the results of these analyses are largely non-significant. Thus, when controlling for the effects of each component of the interaction term and the other predictor/difference variables, most interaction terms do not add significantly to the predictive power of the model in which they are included.

**Table 8. Hierarchical logistic regression coefficients for the occurrence of divorce on the interaction of husbands' religiosity and positive changes in personal commitment over time**

|                                  | Model 1 |      |            |          | Model 2 |      |            |          |
|----------------------------------|---------|------|------------|----------|---------|------|------------|----------|
|                                  | B       | SE   | Odds Ratio | % change | B       | SE   | Odds Ratio | % change |
| H religiosity                    | -0.58†  | 0.34 | 0.56       | -0.44    | -0.56†  | 0.34 | 0.57       | -0.43    |
| W religiosity                    | -0.71*  | 0.33 | 0.49       | -0.51    | -0.73*  | 0.34 | 0.48       | -0.52    |
| H conscientiousness              | 0.10    | 0.13 | 1.11       | 0.11     | 0.12    | 0.13 | 1.13       | 0.13     |
| W conscientiousness              | -0.17   | 0.13 | 0.84       | -0.16    | -0.19   | 0.14 | 0.83       | -0.17    |
| Difference in religiosity        | 0.10    | 0.33 | 1.10       | 0.10     | 0.07    | 0.34 | 1.08       | 0.08     |
| Difference in conscientiousness  | -0.34*  | 0.17 | 0.71       | -0.29    | -0.35*  | 0.17 | 0.71       | -0.29    |
| H changes in personal commitment | -2.29   | 1.99 | 0.10       | -0.90    | -2.13   | 2.02 | 0.12       | -0.88    |
| Interaction term                 |         |      |            |          | 3.06    | 3.12 | 21.25      | 20.25    |

Note:  $N = 161$ .

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ .

**Table 9. Hierarchical logistic regression coefficients for the occurrence of divorce on the interaction of husbands' conscientiousness and positive changes in personal commitment over time**

|                                  | Model 1 |      |            |          | Model 2 |      |            |          |
|----------------------------------|---------|------|------------|----------|---------|------|------------|----------|
|                                  | B       | SE   | Odds Ratio | % change | B       | SE   | Odds Ratio | % change |
| H religiosity                    | -0.58†  | 0.34 | 0.56       | -0.44    | -0.58†  | 0.34 | 0.56       | -0.44    |
| W religiosity                    | -0.71*  | 0.33 | 0.49       | -0.51    | -0.75*  | 0.34 | 0.47       | -0.53    |
| H conscientiousness              | 0.10    | 0.13 | 1.11       | 0.11     | 0.11    | 0.13 | 1.11       | 0.11     |
| W conscientiousness              | -0.17   | 0.13 | 0.84       | -0.16    | -0.20   | 0.14 | 0.82       | -0.18    |
| Difference in religiosity        | 0.10    | 0.33 | 1.10       | 0.10     | 0.01    | 0.34 | 1.01       | 0.01     |
| Difference in conscientiousness  | -0.34*  | 0.17 | 0.71       | -0.29    | -0.34*  | 0.17 | 0.71       | -0.29    |
| H changes in personal commitment | -2.29   | 1.99 | 0.10       | -0.90    | -2.29   | 2.04 | 0.10       | -0.90    |
| Interaction term                 |         |      |            |          | 1.89    | 1.57 | 6.59       | 5.59     |

Note:  $N = 161$ .

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ .

**Table 10. Hierarchical logistic regression coefficients for the occurrence of divorce on the interaction of wives' religiosity and positive changes in personal commitment over time**

|                                  | Model 1  |      |            |          | Model 2  |      |            |          |
|----------------------------------|----------|------|------------|----------|----------|------|------------|----------|
|                                  | B        | SE   | Odds Ratio | % change | B        | SE   | Odds Ratio | % change |
| H religiosity                    | -0.72*   | 0.36 | 0.49       | -0.51    | -0.72*   | 0.36 | 0.49       | -0.51    |
| W religiosity                    | -0.72*   | 0.36 | 0.49       | -0.51    | -0.74*   | 0.36 | 0.48       | -0.52    |
| H conscientiousness              | 0.17     | 0.14 | 1.19       | 0.19     | 0.17     | 0.14 | 1.19       | 0.19     |
| W conscientiousness              | -0.18    | 0.14 | 0.83       | -0.17    | -0.18    | 0.14 | 0.83       | -0.17    |
| Difference in religiosity        | 0.04     | 0.35 | 1.04       | 0.04     | 0.04     | 0.35 | 1.04       | 0.04     |
| Difference in conscientiousness  | -0.40*   | 0.18 | 0.67       | -0.33    | -0.40*   | 0.18 | 0.67       | -0.33    |
| W changes in personal commitment | -6.54*** | 1.94 | 0.00       | -1.00    | -6.57*** | 1.95 | 0.00       | -1.00    |
| Interaction term                 |          |      |            |          | -0.61    | 3.10 | 0.54       | -0.46    |

Note:  $N = 161$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 11. Hierarchical logistic regression coefficients for the occurrence of divorce on the interaction of wives' conscientiousness and positive changes in personal commitment over time**

|                                  | Model 1  |      |            |          | Model 2  |      |            |          |
|----------------------------------|----------|------|------------|----------|----------|------|------------|----------|
|                                  | B        | SE   | Odds Ratio | % change | B        | SE   | Odds Ratio | % change |
| H religiosity                    | -0.72*   | 0.36 | 0.49       | -0.51    | -0.78*   | 0.37 | 0.46       | -0.54    |
| W religiosity                    | -0.72*   | 0.36 | 0.49       | -0.51    | -0.71*   | 0.36 | 0.49       | -0.51    |
| H conscientiousness              | 0.17     | 0.14 | 1.19       | 0.19     | 0.15     | 0.14 | 1.16       | 0.16     |
| W conscientiousness              | -0.18    | 0.14 | 0.83       | -0.17    | -0.16    | 0.14 | 0.85       | -0.15    |
| Difference in religiosity        | 0.04     | 0.35 | 1.04       | 0.04     | -0.01    | 0.36 | 0.99       | -0.01    |
| Difference in conscientiousness  | -0.40*   | 0.18 | 0.67       | -0.33    | -0.40*   | 0.18 | 0.67       | -0.33    |
| W changes in personal commitment | -6.54*** | 1.94 | 0.00       | -1.00    | -6.73*** | 1.94 | 0.00       | -1.00    |
| Interaction term                 |          |      |            |          | 1.28     | 1.11 | 3.59       | 2.59     |

Note:  $N = 161$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 12. Hierarchical regression coefficients for the timing of divorce on the interaction of husbands' religiosity and newlywed personal commitment**

|                                 | Model 1 |      |         |        | Model 2 |      |         |       |
|---------------------------------|---------|------|---------|--------|---------|------|---------|-------|
|                                 | B       | SE   | $\beta$ | t      | B       | SE   | $\beta$ | t     |
| H religiosity                   | -1.05   | 0.65 | -0.24   | -1.62  | -0.95   | 0.63 | -0.21   | -1.52 |
| W religiosity                   | -0.36   | 0.65 | -0.08   | -0.56  | -0.17   | 0.63 | -0.04   | -0.27 |
| H conscientiousness             | 0.48    | 0.35 | 0.21    | 1.35   | 0.53    | 0.34 | 0.24    | 1.55  |
| W conscientiousness             | 0.32    | 0.32 | 0.15    | 1.00   | 0.34    | 0.31 | 0.16    | 1.10  |
| Difference in religiosity       | -1.65*  | 0.71 | -0.30   | -2.32  | -1.44*  | 0.69 | -0.26   | -2.08 |
| Difference in conscientiousness | 0.16    | 0.40 | 0.06    | 0.41   | 0.09    | 0.38 | 0.03    | 0.24  |
| H newlywed personal commitment  | 10.27*  | 4.68 | 0.29    | 2.19   | 9.10†   | 4.55 | 0.26    | 2.00  |
| Interaction term                |         |      |         |        | 11.45*  | 5.37 | 0.25    | 2.13  |
| R-square change                 |         |      |         | 0.35** |         |      |         | 0.06* |

Note:  $N = 56$ .

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 13. Hierarchical regression coefficients for the timing of divorce on the interaction of husbands' conscientiousness and newlywed personal commitment**

|                                 | Model 1 |      |         |        | Model 2 |      |         |       |
|---------------------------------|---------|------|---------|--------|---------|------|---------|-------|
|                                 | B       | SE   | $\beta$ | t      | B       | SE   | $\beta$ | t     |
| H religiosity                   | -1.05   | 0.65 | -0.24   | -1.62  | -1.05   | 0.65 | -0.24   | -1.60 |
| W religiosity                   | -0.36   | 0.65 | -0.08   | -0.56  | -0.33   | 0.66 | -0.07   | -0.51 |
| H conscientiousness             | 0.48    | 0.35 | 0.21    | 1.35   | 0.49    | 0.36 | 0.22    | 1.37  |
| W conscientiousness             | 0.32    | 0.32 | 0.15    | 1.00   | 0.29    | 0.33 | 0.13    | 0.88  |
| Difference in religiosity       | -1.65*  | 0.71 | -0.30   | -2.32  | -1.56*  | 0.74 | -0.29   | -2.11 |
| Difference in conscientiousness | 0.16    | 0.40 | 0.06    | 0.41   | 0.13    | 0.41 | 0.04    | 0.31  |
| H newlywed personal commitment  | 10.27*  | 4.68 | 0.29    | 2.19   | 11.44*  | 5.27 | 0.32    | 2.17  |
| Interaction term                |         |      |         |        | 1.36    | 2.73 | 0.07    | 0.50  |
| R-square change                 |         |      |         | 0.35** |         |      |         | 0.00  |

Note:  $N = 56$ .

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 14. Hierarchical regression coefficients for the timing of divorce on the interaction of wives' religiosity and newlywed personal commitment**

|                                 | Model 1 |      |         |        | Model 2 |      |         |       |
|---------------------------------|---------|------|---------|--------|---------|------|---------|-------|
|                                 | B       | SE   | $\beta$ | t      | B       | SE   | $\beta$ | t     |
| H religiosity                   | -1.21†  | 0.63 | -0.27   | -1.92  | -1.21†  | 0.64 | -0.27   | -1.90 |
| W religiosity                   | -0.27   | 0.65 | -0.06   | -0.42  | -0.29   | 0.69 | -0.06   | -0.42 |
| H conscientiousness             | 0.73*   | 0.32 | 0.33    | 2.27   | 0.73*   | 0.33 | 0.33    | 2.24  |
| W conscientiousness             | 0.27    | 0.32 | 0.13    | 0.86   | 0.28    | 0.33 | 0.13    | 0.85  |
| Difference in religiosity       | -1.47*  | 0.71 | -0.27   | -2.07  | -1.46*  | 0.72 | -0.27   | -2.04 |
| Difference in conscientiousness | 0.15    | 0.40 | 0.05    | 0.38   | 0.16    | 0.40 | 0.05    | 0.39  |
| W newlywed personal commitment  | 6.63*   | 2.98 | 0.27    | 2.22   | 6.63*   | 3.01 | 0.27    | 2.20  |
| Interaction term                |         |      |         |        | -0.51   | 5.53 | -0.01   | -0.09 |
| R-square change                 |         |      |         | 0.40** |         |      |         | 0.00  |

Note:  $N = 56$ .

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .



**Table 15. Hierarchical regression coefficients for the timing of divorce on the interaction of wives' conscientiousness and newlywed personal commitment**

|                                 | Model 1 |      |         |        | Model 2 |      |         |       |
|---------------------------------|---------|------|---------|--------|---------|------|---------|-------|
|                                 | B       | SE   | $\beta$ | t      | B       | SE   | $\beta$ | t     |
| H religiosity                   | -1.21†  | 0.63 | -0.27   | -1.92  | -1.27†  | 0.64 | -0.29   | -1.98 |
| W religiosity                   | -0.27   | 0.65 | -0.06   | -0.42  | -0.23   | 0.65 | -0.05   | -0.35 |
| H conscientiousness             | 0.73*   | 0.32 | 0.33    | 2.27   | 0.69*   | 0.33 | 0.31    | 2.07  |
| W conscientiousness             | 0.27    | 0.32 | 0.13    | 0.86   | 0.29    | 0.32 | 0.13    | 0.89  |
| Difference in religiosity       | -1.47*  | 0.71 | -0.27   | -2.07  | -1.69*  | 0.78 | -0.31   | -2.17 |
| Difference in conscientiousness | 0.15    | 0.40 | 0.05    | 0.38   | 0.19    | 0.40 | 0.07    | 0.47  |
| W newlywed personal commitment  | 6.63*   | 2.98 | 0.27    | 2.22   | 5.32    | 3.53 | 0.21    | 1.51  |
| Interaction term                |         |      |         |        | -2.34   | 3.33 | -0.11   | -0.70 |
| R-square change                 |         |      |         | 0.40** |         |      |         | 0.01  |

Note:  $N = 56$ .

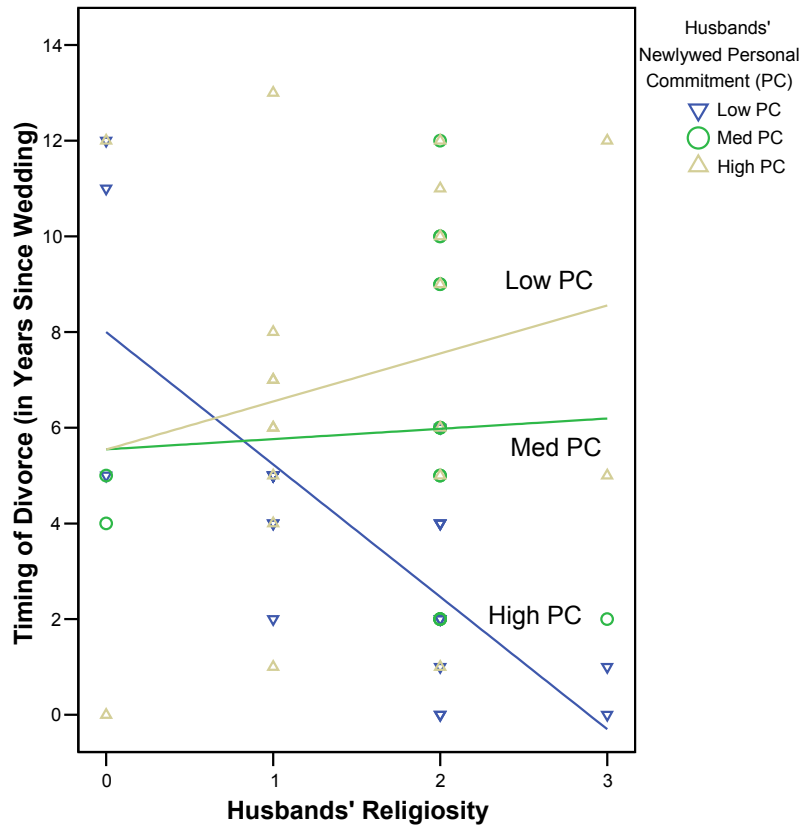
†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

The only exception to this pattern is the interaction between husbands' religiosity and newlywed personal commitment, which is a significant predictor of the timing of divorce ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $p < .05$ , see Table 12). Figure 1 displays the relationships between these variables and illustrates that, when personal commitment is low, highly religious husbands have longer lasting marriages, as was hypothesized. However, when personal commitment is high, marriages involving a religious husband end more quickly.

The moderation tests, taken together, offer very little support for the idea that either conscientiousness or religiosity increases marital stability in the absence of personal commitment. This pattern was seen only with regard to the link between husbands' religiosity and the timing of divorce. Generally, spouses'

religiosity and conscientiousness influence marital stability independently of personal commitment.

**Figure 1. Association between Husbands' Religiosity and the Timing of Divorce at Various Levels of Personal Commitment**



## Discussion: Chapter Four

This study examined the associations between whether/when divorce occurs and two interrelated personal dispositions—conscientiousness and religiosity (RQ 1). In addition, I was interested in *how* each of these qualities is related to divorce longitudinally: through a mediating mechanism (RQ 2) or a moderating mechanism (RQ 3). Results from the RQ1 analyses indicated that the two qualities are indeed longitudinally linked to divorce in these data, though each quality is associated with divorce in different ways. Both spouses' religiosity influence *whether* couples divorce, while the *timing* of divorce was more closely associated with husbands' qualities (in particular, their conscientiousness).

The small body of longitudinal research examining the impact of conscientiousness on divorce (i.e., Kelly & Conley, 1987; Kurdek, 1993; Roberts & Bogg, 2004; Tucker et al., 1996) includes findings that are similar to these: that conscientiousness, generally speaking, increases marital stability. In particular, these results were very similar to Kurdek's (1993) report that wives' conscientiousness was associated with *whether* couples split up, while husbands' conscientiousness was associated with *when* they split up (though, with the PAIR Project, the strength of the wives' association was only marginally significant, as illustrated in Table 4 above). Generally speaking, these analyses are a part of a growing literature that reports a consistent, longitudinal link between

conscientiousness and divorce. Slight differences between the results from the studies included in this growing literature may be due either to differences in how conscientiousness was measured or to variation among the analytical models employed in each study. For the most part, prior longitudinal studies tested models that included a broader range of personality constructs than I used here, each of which is slightly different (Kelly & Conley, 1987; Kurdek, 1993; Tucker et al., 1996). Perhaps more importantly, none of the other longitudinal studies (Kelly & Conley, 1987; Kurdek, 1993; Roberts & Bogg, 2004; Tucker et al., 1996) included a focus on religion or religiosity.

The connection between religiosity and divorce is also in keeping with the research on religion and families (as reviewed above; see also Call & Heaton, 1997; Mahoney et al., 2001). These analyses indicate that greater religiosity—conceptualized as a proximal psychological disposition rather than as denominational affiliation—generally lowers the probability of divorce. Thus, these analyses support the position that religiosity is an important predictor of marital stability. The results reported here indicate that husbands' and wives' religiosity were the most consistent predictors of long-term divorce.

In regard to the *timing* of divorce, however, the effect of religiosity was the opposite of what I had expected. Specifically, among those couples that do eventually divorce, religiosity is associated with the breakup occurring *earlier* rather than later. This, at first, might seem surprising, but it may be in keeping

with Mahoney et al.'s (1991) suggestion that religion poses specific risks for marriage, as summarized in the opening chapter of this dissertation. One possibility is that a highly religious person might feel that it is the religious code, over and above marital vows, that should not be broken. Thus, some relationship indiscretions, such as infidelity, would be seen not only as a violation of interpersonal trust but also a violation of God's commandments. A highly religious person would be unlikely to consider contextual forces that, for a less religious individual, might "justify" infidelity. As a result, forgiveness may not be offered to the offender, and divorce may follow fairly quickly. It may even be that, for the highly religious, a broader range of issues would fall under the umbrella of fundamental violations of trust than for individuals who are not particularly religious; to the extent that a religious person sees the marriage as a sacred relationship that ought to live up to a higher standard than others' relationships, that standard may be particularly difficult to achieve. As pointed out by Mahoney et al. (2001, 2003), highly religious individuals may experience a sense of failure and guilt when they experience marital trouble. And these feelings may lead to a relatively quick demise of the relationship. This is all speculative, of course, given that the PAIR Project does not include direct measures of this phenomenon. However, these data do indicate that more religious men are less prone to divorce, but when they *are* headed for marital dissolution, it happens earlier if the husband is highly religious.

Taken together, the direct effects suggest that religiosity is more closely associated with *whether* couples divorce, while conscientiousness is more closely associated with *when* they divorce. This suggests that religiosity may be connected with individuals' attitudes about marriage as an institution; that is, they are less likely to consider divorce to be a valid option for them. Among those that will eventually divorce, however, marriages involving highly-religious husbands end earlier, possibly due to unmet expectations about the marriage itself. Conscientiousness, on the other hand, is not as closely connected with *whether* couples divorce in these data. This quality comes into play more fully for the *timing* of divorce. A person with a high degree of conscientiousness is someone who is persevering; thus, this quality does not seem to keep a person from considering divorce as much as it seems to influence how long they "stick with it" in their marriage.

#### **INDIRECT MECHANISMS**

These analyses did not shed much light on the mechanisms by which the associations between divorce and personal dispositions occur, however. Most of my analyses had to do with exploring *how* conscientiousness and religiosity are associated with longitudinal marital stability, but little support was found for the various possibilities tested.

The mediation tests indicated that the link between wives' religiosity and divorce was only marginally mediated by the changes in personal commitment

over the early years of marriage. Furthermore, while the strength of the association between the husbands' qualities and the timing of divorce was reduced with the addition of the mediator variables to the regression model, subsequent tests indicated that this change was not significant.

The moderation analyses, also, yielded little helpful information about the link between divorce and conscientiousness or religiosity. Only one of the eight moderation tests was significant: among couples who eventually divorce, husbands' religiosity is associated with a postponement of the breakup when newlywed personal commitment is low. Considering that marriages involving religious husbands end particularly early in these data, this moderation result was surprising. However, this may make sense in light of the discussion, as presented above, that religious spouses may leave quickly if the relationship does not conform to the ideal image they hold for marriage. The quickest divorces involving religious husbands happen for those couples with high newlywed love and satisfaction (personal commitment), suggesting that those couples become disillusioned when the newness of the relationship wears off. Religious husbands with *less* personal commitment, on the other hand, may have more realistic expectations for marriage and thus may be less subject to disillusionment as they settle into married life. In other words, perhaps they do not hold such high ideals for marriage, because their own experiences with marriage suggest a relationship

that is a bit more “down to earth” and they are consequently somewhat resistant to disappointment.

As before, the specifics were not tested in these data, so we are left to speculate about the significance of this finding until further work in this area is done. In short, this was the only significant moderation test, so the results as a whole tell us little about the nature of the specific mechanism by which either religiousness or conscientiousness is associated with marital stability.

#### **METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

A major limitation of these analyses is that data were not available to directly test different types of constraint commitment processes (moral or structural commitment) in marriage over time. This is critical because these analyses suggest that constraint commitment, as a uni-dimensional construct, is unrelated to divorce, when it may be that religiosity and conscientiousness are important for one kind of constraint commitment but not the other (such as for moral but not structural commitment; see Johnson, 1991). Without a direct measure of either of those types of commitment, I cannot explore that possibility in these data.

Had measures of these processes been available, it would have been possible to more accurately test whether they occur in the absence of personal commitment. Ideally, the question of alternative commitment mechanisms could be approached using various mediation models, each one examining a different



hypothetical commitment process. Further, a moderated mediation model (Baron & Kenny, 1986) could have tested whether the various constraint processes (such as moral commitment) operate more strongly for one group (low personal commitment) than another (high personal commitment group).

In addition, the analyses involving the timing of divorce as an outcome variable may have been hampered by limitations due to sample size. With an *N* of less than 60, these analyses might have simply lacked the power to detect meaningful differences among those couples that eventually divorced. Therefore, the marginally significant results from these analyses may be more meaningful than at first glance and may be of interest for future analyses involving larger samples. While the hypotheses were not confirmed, husbands' dispositions, spousal differences in religiosity, and newlywed levels of personal commitment might each be relevant issues to consider in further research.

Furthermore, the structure of these analyses was based, in part, on the idea that researchers should focus on the unique effects of religiosity by controlling for secular phenomena in their analyses. It may be, however, that doing so comes at the cost of any conceptual or empirical overlap between the constructs. It would be instructive, as a result, to examine the shared variance between these qualities, rather than the unique variance. That alternative approach would provide an interesting perspective on the issue of how these qualities matter for marital

stability and might suggest that it is what the qualities have in common that predicts ultimate marital stability.

Despite the methodological limitations of these analyses, it is interesting that husbands' and wives' religiosity were consistent univariate and multivariate predictors of divorce. While these analyses were unable to confirm the hypothetical processes by which religiosity matters for marriage, this study suggests that further work in this area is warranted. These analyses used a one-item religiosity measure that was associated with outcomes more than 14 years later. That this crude measure yielded these results is impressive. Future investigations into the impact of religiosity (as a personal disposition) on marriage would do well to incorporate stronger measures of one's religiousness.

A highly-nuanced, proximal measure of the role of religiousness in marriage is found in Mahoney and Pargament's work on sanctification (Mahoney et al., 1999, 2001, 2003; Mahoney, 2005). Sanctification is a cognitive phenomenon that has to do with an individual's perception that something has spiritual or sacred significance. In this case, when an individual perceives that his or her marriage has sacred significance, that perception is strongly associated with the quality of the marriage itself and is a significant predictor of relationship outcomes, even after controlling for the effects of distal religious constructs like denominational affiliation (Mahoney et al., 1999, 2001, 2003; Mahoney, 2005). Their work offers a fascinating look at the specific cognitive processes by which

an individual's religiousness influences his or her marriage and should be considered in further work on the link between religion and marriage.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

The study of how personal dispositions influence marriage poses interesting dilemmas about the practical implications of this body of work. Presumably, individuals' personal characteristics are fairly stable and resistant to change. As a result, it is questionable whether those qualities constitute logical targets for intervention. Normally, intervention strategies focus on controllable aspects of individuals' physical and social environments or they are directed at behavioral or cognitive patterns that may be susceptible to change. Is it possible (or even desirable) to design an intervention strategy with the purpose of fundamentally altering a person's basic nature? Can we (or *should* we) try to make, for example, a non-conscientious person highly-conscientious? Religiosity makes the question exponentially thornier because of the risk of personal bias coming into play (though there is some research on an increasing focus on religion/spirituality in marital therapy, as discussed in Carlson et al., 2002).

Perhaps educational strategies, rather than intervention strategies, would be useful. In that case, a family professional's goal might be to help individuals understand that low (or high) levels of a given trait may lower satisfaction, weaken stability, or expedite marital dissolution (adding, of course, the important caveat that such qualities "matter" in the aggregate and not necessarily in any

specific relationship). Thus, individuals can draw their own conclusions about whether their specific dispositional qualities put them at risk for marital trouble and, if so, what they should do about it. In short, the practical implications of this body of work raise surprisingly complex philosophical and practical questions about how this research may be of use to the public. Further discussion of these matters is of prime importance to this branch of the marital research.

## **CONCLUSION**

In sum, this dissertation builds on prior work which suggests that aspects of individuals' psychological makeup, assessed early in marriage, make a difference for the quality and stability of their relationships. An individual's personal dispositions constitute part of what he or she "brings to the table" when entering marriage, and these qualities can predict the state of the marriage more than a dozen years later. While hypotheses about the processes by which these associations occur were not generally supported by these analyses, further work may yield informative results by exploring these possibilities with stronger measures. Such work will be strongest if it involves specific assessments of the multifaceted nature of marital commitment and if it includes both the religious and secular aspects of respondents' personal dispositions. The results of that kind of approach will allow us to better understand how individuals' dispositions matter for marriage and may help professionals to use that knowledge to

strengthen interpersonal relationships among the populations with whom they work.

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## **Vita**

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