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by

April Christine Wilson

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The Dissertation Committee for April Christine Wilson certifies that
this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

**Shared Reality in Courtship:
Does it Matter for Marital Success?**

Committee:

Ted Huston, Supervisor

Marci Gleason

Timothy Loving

Lisa Neff

Anita Vangelisti

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Does it Matter for Marital Success?**

by

April Christine Wilson, B.A.; M.A.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving husband and best friend, James Landry, who has been an ongoing source of support throughout my graduate career. Thank you for always believing in me, even when my own confidence faltered. We share in this accomplishment.

This dissertation also is dedicated to my parents, William and Becky Wilson. They instilled in me a passion for learning and a strong work ethic. Their love and support throughout my educational pursuits has been a source of strength in my life.

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**Shared Reality in Courtship:
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April Christine Wilson, Ph.D.

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Supervisor: Ted Huston

This study provides evidence that individuals who share similar experiences that are grounded in the actual features of the courtship are likely to remain married over 13 years later. Using logistic regression and path analyses to examine 168 married partners, results support previous research suggesting that “enduring dynamics” best predicts the developmental pathway for couples who remain married, whereas “disillusionment” prefigures marital instability. Specifically, findings revealed that marriages are more likely to be stable when premarital partners (a) feel similar depths of love for one another, (b) move toward marriage at comparable rates over the course of the courtship, and when feelings of (c) love and (d) ambivalence reflect how frequently they experience conflict and downturns in their estimations of the likelihood of marriage. Gender differences and exceptions to this pattern are discussed.

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Introduction

Courtship can serve as a testing field for marriage, providing prospective mates with an opportunity to anchor their feelings for one another in experience and to test the viability of their relationship before they wed. If partners believe their early dating experiences together hold promise, they will likely become increasingly invested in each other and in their relationship. The intertwined feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that stir premarital partners' progression toward marriage differ from one couple to the next. Many researchers believe that "the seeds of marital distress and divorce are sown for many couples" before they wed (Clements, Stanley, & Markman, 2004, p. 621; see also Adams, 1946; Burgess & Cottrell, 1939; Burgess & Wallin, 1953; Cate, Levin, & Richmon, 2002; Holman, 2001). Despite this belief, the manner in which courtship characteristics foreshadow marital outcomes remains more a matter of speculation than the focus of a large body of empirical work.

Available research provides evidence that the courtship period is a critical time that augurs marital success (see review in Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband, 2006). For instance, research has established the importance of personality traits that come into play during courtship and shape the relationship (e.g., Booth & Edwards, 1985; Clements et al., 2004; Kirkpatrick & Hazen, 1994). Couples' marital experiences are prefigured by their feelings about each other and their relationship premaritally (e.g., love, ambivalence; Markman, 1984; Huston, 1994), and by features of the courtship itself - its length, how quickly they commit, the approval of family and friends, cohabitation, and premarital pregnancy (e.g., Booth & Johnson, 1988; Castro Martin & Bumpass, 1989;

Cate, Huston, Nesselroade, 1986; Hill & Peplau, 1998; Huston, 1994; Kurdek, 1991; Veroff, Douvan, & Hatchett, 1995; Whyte, 1990). Moreover, researchers consistently find that negative or ineffectual premarital communication portends marital distress (e.g., Clements et al., 2004; Hill & Peplau, 1998; Huston, 1994; Kelly, Huston, & Cate, 1985; Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, Ragan, & Whitton, 2010; Noller & Feeney, 1998; Smith, Vivian, O'Leary, 1990).

Although research on premarital relationships provides valuable insight into mechanisms that may affect marital outcomes, several issues continue to plague our understanding of the courtship significance for marriage. For one, only a handful of studies that examine the premarital period follow couples into marriage. Of the researchers that follow pairs past the wedding date, most only consider marital outcomes within the first few years of marriage. Moreover, few researchers attempt to understand courtship as a time-extended process of mutual selection, which typically unfolds over a prolonged time. The entire courtship is frequently reduced to a single encounter, such as when partners identify and discuss an area of disagreement. Almost no one has tracked couples' experiences as their courtships unfold or assessed how this dyadic process predicts long-term outcomes. One feature of the current study is the usage of detailed courtship narratives, generated individually by each member of the pair, that allow assessment of their perceptions of the movement toward marriage, starting when they first paired off. Participants identified when they first fell in love with their partners, when they believed their partners first fell in love with them, and the circumstances that led to progressions and or regressions in their beliefs that they will one day marry their

partners. These detailed accounts, completed separately by both partners, also provide evidence about whether this movement through the courtship is experienced similarly by both partners.

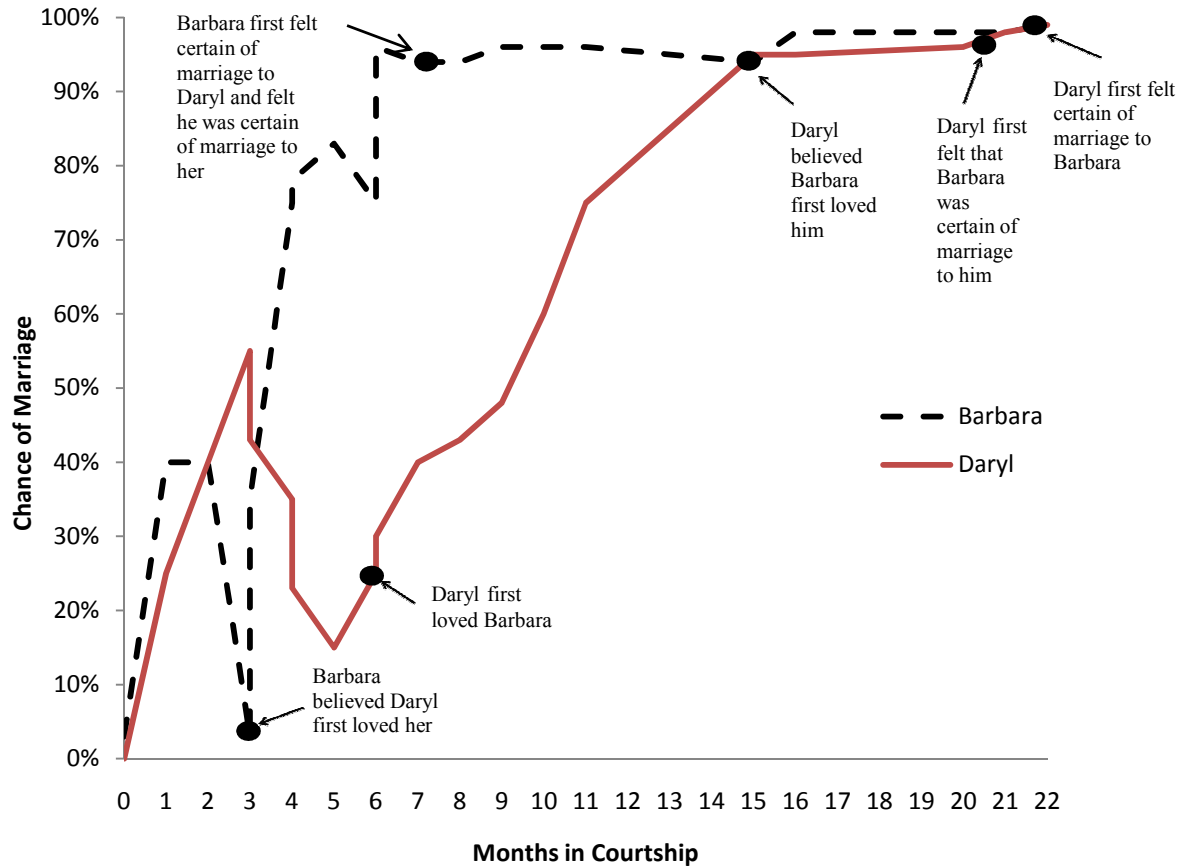
Progression in Courtship

A popular image of a “good” courtship presumes that individuals make rational assessments about their partners and relationships. Early in these ideal dating relationships, individuals feel drawn to another for sound reasons. Their desire for the other, along with their uncertainty about the likely reciprocity of their feelings, may cause partners initially to feel somewhat vulnerable, insecure, and ambivalent about their relationship. These uneasy feelings, in turn, ought to motivate them to cross-check their views with their partner. Daters may, for instance, engage in a dialogue with their partner about the desirability of moving forward in their relationship. If both partners in rationally-driven courtships do not share the same feelings, tension will occur. Individuals will then make adjustments to ensure that their experiences are similar, as neither partner wants to be too far ahead or behind the other in their investment in the relationship. Similarly, problems in the relationship would be recognized by both partners, with couples making adjustments in their hopes and expectations about their partners and relationships in response to these issues. With this inclination toward rational choices and a desire to collect accurate information about the partner and the relationship, these rationally-driven courtships should progress with both partners moving forward simultaneously. In this scenario, for instance, it is likely that as one person falls in love, so does the other. Daters’ commitment to marriage also should change mutually

as partners continually gather information about the long-term viability of their relationships.

Yet, this model courtship involving a shared reality does not always occur. In some premarital relationships, the pattern of courtship may be comprised of two different visions. The courtship of Daryl and Barbara, a couple drawn from the PAIR project, illustrates the divergent reality that characterizes the experiences of partners in some courtships. Barbara and Daryl independently reported their ups and down of their progression toward marriage during their courtship (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Progression through Courtship for Couple in PAIR Project



At the start of their 22 month courtship, Daryl and Barbara felt an instant and strong attraction toward one another. We “fit together like two pieces of a puzzle,” noted Barbara. Her initial optimism for their future grew quickly after perceiving how much they agreed on things, enjoyed the same activities, and shared the same dreams. Daryl liked that Barbara was well organized, driven, and creative. Within only a few weeks of their first date, the two were living together.

These shared perceptions did not last long. Shortly after moving in together (about 2 months after the first date), Daryl and Barbara went on an extended trip with another couple in hopes of building a cabin in the wilderness where all four would reside. This was a time of total bliss for Daryl, who felt that Barbara and he got along well and that all four of them “learned to love each other” (although he did not actually fall in love with Barbara until about 4 months later). By the end of this trip, Daryl believed that the two of them had a 55% “objective” chance of marriage, taking into account his own and his sense of Barbara’s beliefs (see Figure 1). However, Barbara did not recall this period in such a favorable manner. At the start of the trip, she estimated the likelihood of marriage as about 40%. Yet, the hardships she endured quickly resulted in a downward turn, in which Barbara came to perceive that marriage was unlikely (i.e., 3% chance). Barbara disliked how Peggy (the other female companion) and she were expected to do most of the chores, including the time-intensive task of washing all the laundry in the creek. Peggy also increasingly annoyed everyone. At one point, the two men became so irritated with Peggy that they threatened to leave her there in the wilderness. Despite Barbara’s own frustration with Peggy, she was unwilling to abandon her, and thus Daryl and Don (the other male) threatened to leave Barbara there as well. Toward the end of the trip (shortly before the 3 month-mark), Barbara even believed that Daryl was unfaithful to her after he spent an evening in the city, but she decided to trust his denial of such accusations. Daryl mentions none of the difficulties that trouble Barbara in his depiction of their courtship. Curiously, it was during this low point for Barbara that she reported first loving Daryl and inaccurately believed he first fell in love with her as well.

About 3 months into the courtship, the two couples realized that building a cabin in the wilderness was an unrealistic goal and abandoned their plans. Don and Peggy broke up. Daryl, Barbara, and Peggy had no place to live at that time, so the three of them moved in with Barbara’s mother. Both Barbara and Daryl characterize this time as being highly combative. Barbara believed that the tension was a result of Peggy’s presence, while Daryl was discontent living with Barbara’s mother. When Peggy moved out of the home that month, Barbara felt a sense of relief at Peggy’s absence, and her confidence that Daryl and she would marry quickly accelerated to above 80%. She was

happy because, as she reported, they “never really had any conflicts... he barks a lot and I listen and I might get upset and cry a little.” Barbara excused Daryl’s behavior because that was just “the type person that he is,” that he did not mean to upset her. Yet, her perception that the two would wed did drop slightly at one point (from 83% to 75%) because Daryl and her mother were arguing. During that same period, Daryl’s estimate chance of marriage sank from 55% to 15%. He even considered ending the relationship at that point, and he gave Barbara an ultimatum to move away from her mom or break up.

About 6 months into the courtship, the two moved away and lived together alone. Daryl reported that this was when he first fell in love with Barbara. Barbara also had become certain that Daryl and she would marry, but she inaccurately thought that Daryl was as certain as she that they would marry. Yet, Daryl remained apprehensive. In fact, about 6.5 months into the courtship, Barbara felt 96% confident the two would marry, while Daryl only felt 30% confident. However, neither partner showed any dramatic downturns in their perception of marriage from that point forward in the courtship. Daryl liked that Barbara “was gonna do what I wanted out of her,” although his actions indicated that serious issues of trust persisted. For example, Daryl frequently checked up on Barbara to ensure that she was where she said she would be, and he even had a paternity test done when Barbara learned that she had become pregnant. Barbara’s courtship story lacks any description of difficulties during this time. For Daryl, it was not until after the child’s birth and confirmation that he was the father, that he finally “came to trust Barbara” and felt certain the two would marry (almost 22 months into the courtship). They married shortly thereafter.

Stepping back and looking at the courtship as a whole, Barbara consistently felt emotionally bonded with Daryl and confident about their future together earlier than Daryl. She also inaccurately perceived that Daryl shared these perceptions at the same time. Furthermore, Daryl typically felt and behaved more negative premaritally than Barbara. He felt less love, less certain of marriage, more ambivalent, was less willing to make changes to improve the relationship (i.e., maintenance), and reported more conflict compared to Barbara.

The courtship period is complex, and many characteristics of Barbara and Daryl’s courtship story can be extracted to study. As previously noted, researchers have considered the lasting effects of cohabitation, premarital pregnancy, amount of negativity, and conflict resolution, for example. Yet, little is known about the importance

of concordance between partners in such matters as how quickly they fall in love, the depth of their mutual feelings of love, and how quickly each tracks the progression of the courtship as they move from where they believe marriage is possible but not likely to probable but not certain. This case study also reveals other ways in which concordance, or lack thereof, may occur. Barbara, for instance, inaccurately perceives that her courtship reality is shared by Daryl; she believes they fell in love and felt certain about marriage at the same time. Moreover, her feelings are frequently disconnected from the events in the courtship. Her “objective” assessment of the likelihood of marriage goes up steadily after the third month, even when Daryl wants a paternity test. This was likely a time of heightened conflict in the relationship, yet Barbara fails to attend to these struggles and remains optimistic about her future with Daryl. Research is needed that considers the long-term significance on marriage of the degree to which couples progress through their premarital relationship with a shared understanding of its development.

Creating a shared reality early in relationships is likely to set the foundation for the future of a couple’s marital life (Berger and Kellner; 1964; Chadiha, Veroff & Leber, 1998), and it is argued that the “negotiation of a shared perceptual reality [is] the central process organizing intimate relationships” (Sillars & Scott, 1983, p.153). Although some authors reference the need for a shared reality early in marriage, it seems evident from the courtship of Barbara and Daryl that this process should start long before the wedding date. Moreover, the development of agreement and perceptual congruence may be especially important in the early stages of relationships, such as during mate selection and the transition to marriage (e.g., Acitelli, Douvan, & Veroff, 1993; Allen & Thompson,

1984). It also makes theoretical sense that couples are likely to experience difficulties over time if they show strong divergence in their feelings and estimation of their partner's feelings. What does it say about their relationship viability, for instance, that Barbara at one point felt 83% confident that Daryl and she would marry, while Daryl was less than a fifth that certain? These partners almost seemed to be in two different relationships at times; in fact, their graphs are clearly disjointed from months 3 to 14 of the courtship (see Figure 1). Yet, Barbara views the couple to have fallen in love and felt certain of marriage at about the same time; neither Barbara nor Daryl can accurately characterize their partners' feelings and beliefs. The purposes of this study are to ascertain whether marital outcomes can be foretold based upon whether partners experience a "shared reality." Shared reality, in this paper, is defined as when husbands and wives portray experiences in their courtship similarly. Specifically, they (a) feel (e.g., love) and behave (e.g., make efforts to maintain the courtship) similarly, and they show the growth and change in their probability of marriage as following a similar progression. Moreover, having a shared reality is theorized to help establish a rationally-driven courtship, lending itself to partners being able to (b) accurately perceive each other's feelings (e.g., believing partner fell in love when partner reported loving them), and (c) demonstrate congruency between the memory of their courtship and their own feelings and behaviors (e.g., felt less love for partner when conflict was particularly high).

Importance of Concordance in Premarital Relationships

Creating a vision of shared reality is likely to benefit couples in a variety of ways. Concordance may build confidence in the choice of romantic partners (Murray, Holmes,

Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002; p. 564; see also Braiker & Kelley, 1979; Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992), encourage people to believe that they can handle (or avoid) conflicts (e.g., Barry, 1970), and provide individuals with evidence that they are understood by their partners (see Murray et al., 2002 for overview). This shared reality may even validate individuals' own feelings of self-worth (Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, Ellsworth, 1998). Thus, a shared reality may confirm individuals' beliefs about the long-term viability of relationships, and it may further enhance the positive regard they hold toward their partners.

However, research on the importance of shared reality during courtship is sketchy at best. It has been found that marital quality over the first few years is foreshadowed by whether courtship accounts were told from the couple perspective rather than an individualistic view (Veroff, Sutherland, Chadiha, & Ortega, 1993a; 1993b). Even more relevant to the issue of shared courtship experiences, partners who had difficulty agreeing on their courtship narratives were less happy 3 years into marriage than couples who agreed (Orbuch, Veroff, & Holmberg, 1993). Results from this study imply that couples who share an understanding of their courtship fair better in marriage. Yet, in this study couples created the story together; thus, the possibility exists that it was the ability of couples to collaborate that was most important for marital well-being. Nevertheless, these reports, all from the same project, are the only ones that attempt to directly consider how the mutual progression in courtship portends marital well-being.

Other studies point to the general benefits of holding concordant beliefs in relationships. For example, engaged women who agreed with their partners about

general relationship ground rules experienced more dyadic adjustment 1 year later compared to those who did not share this agreement (Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989), and premarital consensus on a variety of issues (e.g., leisure activities, finances, affection, dealing with in-laws) was significantly higher for couples who remained happily married versus those who divorced or remained in unhappy marriages (Holman, 2001).

Discrepancies in newlywed reports of value for autonomy, strength of attachment to their relationships, and motives for being in the relationship also were higher for couples who divorced compared to those who remained married (Kurdek, 1991; 1993). These patterns support the idea that holding comparable beliefs and feelings within a relationship foretells favorable long-term outcomes.

It is likely that shared reality will most readily occur when partners spend a lot of time together and converse about their relationship. Berger and Kellner (1964), who first conceptualized the importance of maintaining a shared reality, described how couples' shared definition of reality is constantly changing and can only be sustained through dialogue. In support of this theory, self-disclosure (one form of dialogue) seemingly plays a key role in the development of intimacy and love in relationships (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006; Reis & Shaver, 1988; Rubin et al., 1980). In daily diary studies conducted by Laurenceau, Feldman Barrot, and Pietromonaco (1998), for example, they showed that greater self-disclosure by self and partner was associated with a perception of greater responsiveness by that partner, which in turn was associated with a perception of higher intimacy in the interaction. Research also has linked premarital stability to frequent self-disclosure (Attridge, Berscheid, & Simpson, 1995; Fitzpatrick &

Sollie, 1999; Surra & Longstreth, 1990; Van Horn et al., 1997) and contact between partners (Attridge et al.; Felmlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990; Surra & Longstreth). Moreover, couples even benefit from “negative” discussions. Dating couples who actively talked about their relationship problems, for instance, fared better in marriage (Smith et al., 1990). Thus, even when discussing difficulties in relationships, disclosure that is reciprocated by partners and the accumulation of shared experiences should put partners on the same page (see Sillars & Vangelisti, 2006), allowing them to make assessments that are grounded in the reality of the relationship.

Yet, not all people demonstrate this shared understanding, even when engaging in dialogue and having relevant information available to them. Some studies of marital and dating partners, for instance, found weak or nonsignificant associations between the amount of information disclosed during communication and mutual understanding (Sillars, 1998; Thomas & Fletcher, 1997). Ickes (2003) contends that some are motivated by their desires and insecurities and thus will maintain inaccurate conceptions about others, even in the face of explicit information to the contrary. It seems likely that couples who fail to attend to this relevant information will struggle in the long-run as they face the realities of their situations.

Additional research links detrimental outcomes with discordant communication and interactions. For instance, demand-withdrawal behavior is consistently linked to dissatisfaction, even after controlling for negativity in relationships (e.g., Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Caughlin & Vangelisti, 1999; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993; see review in Sillars & Vangelisti, 2006). Individuals who showed pronounced discordance

in their interpretation of an interaction with their partners also were more likely to be in unhappy relationships (Gottman, Notarius, Markman, Bank, Yoppi, & Rubin, 1976; Kahn, 1970; see review in Sillars & Scott, 1983), and couples experienced more steady marital satisfaction over the first 1.5 years of marriage to the extent that they felt similar emotions during a marital interaction, even if those emotional responses were negative (e.g., contempt; Gonzaga, Campos, & Bradbury, 2007). These studies suggest that married couples benefit by taking the same meaning out of an interaction, even if the mutual interpretation is negative. Similarly, it appears that the concordance in meaning that couples attach to conflicts is tied to the future of their relationships, in that husbands and wives who both felt that conflicts are healthy and disliked avoiding disagreements were happier a few years later (Crohan, 1992). Although these studies are specific to marriage, there is no reason to believe this process is dissimilar in courtship. Daryl and Barbara, for instance, frequently interpreted situations quite differently, as first demonstrated by their opposing descriptions of their time in the wilderness. This pattern of divergent interpretations may signify that partners are not being open with one another, or they may be discounting relevant information, which may be associated with problems in their relationship over time.

Enduring Dynamics and Disillusionment Models

Two competing models codify a set of ideas about why shared reality and rational courtships are likely important for marital success. The enduring dynamics model (also known as perpetual problems model, Huston & Houts, 1998, the maintenance hypothesis, Karney & Bradbury, 1997, and the early determinism model, Surra, 1990) implies that

courting partners make largely realistic assessments of their partners and relationships. Partners are assumed to show much of themselves while dating, both in terms of who they are and how they feel. Neither of the two partners is much inclined to highlight their good qualities or exaggerate their positive feelings. Nor are partners motivated to suppress their less attractive qualities or hide their annoyance or disappointments. This openness creates a situation in which partners' feelings and behaviors are rooted in the reality of the courtship, and it allows partners to collect data and cross-check their impressions with each other to ensure accuracy. Thus, partners are likely to display high concordance in their feelings and accuracy in their perceptions of their partners' feelings because their shared reality was built rationally from their experiences. Moreover, individuals are likely to show well-grounded responses to behaviors displayed in the courtship. A courtship filled with conflict and negative affect, for example, ordinarily will result in partners feeling more ambivalent about the relationship. Thus, people have views that are rooted in the behavioral reality of their courtships: If courtships are particularly problematic and create sour feelings, couples may break them off rather than marry. Regardless of whether the content of a courtships is "sweet," "sour," or both, partners whose feelings are grounded know beforehand what their relationship is likely to hold in the future; they enter marriage with their eyes wide open to their partners' and relationships' strengths and weaknesses (e.g., Burgess & Wallin, 1944, 1953; Caughlin & Huston, 2006; Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000; Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001). The stable attributes displayed during the courtship will continue to define the marriage.

While the enduring dynamics model assumes that couples make rational decisions that are well-grounded, the disillusionment model asserts that evaluations about partners and relationships during courtship are less well-integrated in behavioral reality. According to this model, as relationships begin to develop and partners' feelings for one another deepen, people are motivated to present themselves in an attractive manner (Crosby, 1985; Caughlin & Huston, 2006; Waller, 1938). Individuals may be reluctant to show parts of themselves or their feelings that might dampen or puncture the romance. Thus, they may refrain from showing their partners their anger or expressing ambivalence; alternatively, they may oversell their enthusiasm. The fact that partners do not show their feelings likely will lead to a lack of concordance in views because neither partner has access to the information necessary to accurately understand the other. Moreover, individuals' attraction to their partners and desire for a long-term relationship may lead to idealization, which can take two forms. On the one hand, individuals may see partners in a more positive light than is deserved because they embellish the virtues or read partners' intentions more favorably than is merited. On the other hand, illusions can involve failing to attend to the shortcomings of partners or to the significance of negative events. Idealization, for example, may be reflected when peoples' high optimism about the future prospect of marriage is maintained over an extended period of time even though the partners simultaneously believe the prospect is bleak, or when people discount things that occur or information that arises that would ordinarily give a dispassionate person pause. These couples are unlikely to break apart their relationships, even if they are particularly troublesome, because they do not fully appreciate the reality

of their courtships. Barbara, for instance, had intense positive feelings about Daryl and the relationship, even while he was getting a paternity test. She also dismissed his angry outbursts toward her as unimportant and did not allow this display of negativity to lower her sense of the chance of marriage to Daryl or create more ambivalence about the relationship. According to the theory, couples such as Barbara and Daryl essentially experience a disjointed courtship, characterized by partners' misreading each other's feelings and intentions: they create a shared reality that marriage is mutually desired that lacks substantive ground. According to the disillusionment theory, once married, these couples will be unable to maintain the idealized and inaccurate views in part because of the increasing interdependence (Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Swann, DeLa Ronde, & Hixon, 1994; Waller, 1938). To the extent that their views are mismatched with the reality of their day-to-day life together, connubial disappointment and distress will eventually ensue.

Empirical support for both models

Evidence exists that at least some people hold views during courtship that are grounded in reality, and this reality continues to shape marital relationships. Courtships filled with conflict and comprised of partners with relatively weak feelings of love toward each other, for instance, were characterized by partners taking a long time to commit to marriage and then experiencing more downturns (i.e., turbulence) in the confidence of marriage. The extent to which partners were kind, helpful, and considerate of their partners (i.e., responsive) during courtship also resulted in a greater willingness to make changes to improve these premarital relationships (i.e., maintenance) among both

partners and smooth courtship progressions (i.e., fewer downturns in chance of marriage estimations) for men and faster accelerations toward marriage for women (Huston & Houts, 1998). In addition, men loved their dating partners more and engaged in more maintenance behaviors to the extent that they shared compatible leisure interests with their partners (Huston, 1994). Similarly, couples who agreed on their role preferences displayed less conflict and felt less ambivalent during their courtships (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986; Huston & Houts). Taken together, these studies suggest that courtships are frequently defined by the behavioral reality of relationships. Those relationships that are “sour” (e.g., filled with conflict and doubts about the relationships) generally show a slower progression toward marriage with more downturns in partners’ commitment than relationships that are “sweet” (e.g., comprised of partners sharing similar interests and providing support to each other and their relationships). Moreover, as already mentioned, a variety of premarital characteristics shape marital relationships. For example, premarital conflict, ambivalence, and frequent downturns in chance of marriage all prefigure marital distress (e.g., Clements et al., 2004; Huston, 1994). In sum, this research demonstrates that at least some couples marry despite an awareness of partners’ and relationships’ shortcomings, and the features displayed during courtship persist into marriage.

The fact that these associations exist, however, does not imply that all peoples’ subjective feelings are well grounded. Perceiving partners or relationships in a more favorable light than is merited (i.e., idealization) is seemingly common in courtships. People frequently ascribe positive personality characteristics to their partners that are not

based in reality, for instance, and they misread what is happening in their relationships (see Huston et al., 2001). In one study, it was found that approximately one fourth of women and one third of men idealize partners during courtship (Burgess & Wallin, 1953). Klohnen and Mendelsohn (1998) also showed that although dating individuals generally perceived their partners accurately, they nonetheless perceived their partners as more closely matching their ideal than was actually the case. The authors suggest that when needed, individuals will essentially change their perceptions so that partners match their idealized vision.

Because idealization is a presumed basis for disillusionment, it seems reasonable to assume that these inaccurate assessments will be problematic over time. Finding a kindred spirit through a false sense of consensus goes against the basic idea that intimate partners should understand each other (Gottman, 1994; Murray et al., 2002; Noller & Feeney, 1998; Reis & Shaver, 1988). This idealization may lead partners to fall in love and commit quickly, experience deep feelings of love, and marry at young ages (or after short courtships) without having tested the compatibility of their relationships (Huston & Houts, 1998; Vaughan, 1986). Conflict and ambivalence may be largely disconnected to their positive regard for their partners and relationships, and they may discount things that might undermine their idealized view of the courtship and their partners (e.g., Halford, Kelly, Markman, 1997; Huston et al., 2001; Kayser, 1993; Waller, 1938). In addition, studies demonstrate that couples with the most romantic views of their partners and relationships (i.e., those most likely to be engaging in idealization) are the ones most likely to become distressed in marriage (e.g., Burgess & Wallin, 1953, 1968; Hobart,

1954; Holmberg, Orbuch, & Veroff, 2004; Orbuch et al., 1993; Pineo, 1961). Dating couples who better understood their partners' ideal self-concepts also reported growing closer over time (Murstein, 1972). The basic idea is that people should be happiest if they have an accurate understanding of their partners' strengths and weaknesses and accept them despite their imperfections (e.g., Swann et al., 1992).

Nevertheless, holding overly positive or hopeful views may have a propulsive effect on courtships and create greater relationship harmony, at least in the short-run. Some individuals, for instance, came to view their dating partners as more in line with their ideal images for partners over a year, and these increasing illusions led to more relationship happiness and less destructive conflicts (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a). Both dating and married couples also were happier to the extent that they saw virtues in their partners that their partners did not see in themselves (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996b). Having an accurate understanding of their dating partners rarely affected concurrent satisfaction in that study, and when it did, the effects were inverse such that understanding partners' imperfections led to less concurrent happiness. Thus, findings from these studies suggest that having a fully clear-eyed view may not always be advantageous. Having a positive bias helps move relationships forward, and it may even lead to favorable outcomes in marriage, at least if the distortions are small. If the distortions in courtships are considerable, however, couples may make ill-advised decisions to wed. Fletcher and Thomas (1996) suggest that having realistic and accurate views of the relationship is imperative when important decisions, such as whether or not to marry, are being made. Positive bias, on the other hand, may be beneficial in the more

mundane day-to-day experiences. Neither Daryl nor Barbara, for instance, seemed to hold views even close to reality. They were not simply giving their partner the benefit of doubt or embellishing the positive features of their courtship. Instead, they seemed, at times, to create a fictional image of their relationship. Daryl described their time in the wilderness with great fondness for all involved, for example, while Barbara described it as a time of misery. Barbara felt quite confident the two would marry and talked about the relationship in an ideal manner, even when Daryl was asking for a paternity test. It seems unlikely that distortions this sizeable will prove beneficial over time.

Enduring Dynamics and Disillusionment Models Characterize Different Outcomes

Previous research has supported the conclusion that enduring dynamics may be best suited to explain the developmental pathways for couples who remain married whereas disillusionment may best explain the path for couples who ultimately divorce (e.g., Caughlin & Huston, 2006; Huston et al., 2001). Couples who divorced, for instance, can be differentiated from those who remain married by the steepness of the decline in the positive climate of their marriage (Huston et al.). Specifically, Huston and colleagues found that couples who divorced differed from couples who remained married by the degree to which their love and affection declined over the first two years of marriage, by a weakening conviction that their spouses were communally responsive, and by their increasing feelings of ambivalence about the marriage. Interestingly, initial newlywed feelings and behaviors did not differentiate couples who remained married and those who divorced. Instead, the timing of divorce depended largely on how promising the marriages appeared at the outset. Those marriages that appeared the most promising

at the start took longer to unravel than marriages that were less positive at the onset. Nevertheless, it was the process of disillusionment - as characterized by the loss of positive features in marriage - that foreshadowed divorce. Those who remained married, on the other hand, had marriages characterized by relatively stable patterns after the wedding date (Huston et al.; Huston, Niehuis, & Smith, 1997).

As previously noted, writings on illusions in courtship frequently focus on embellishment and discounting relatively minor things. It certainly seems reasonable that this kind of generosity in the way people frame or think about their partners and relationships may persist and make marriages stronger. On the other hand, the fact that some marriages do not look particularly promising at the outset, and then evince notably sharp losses of positive feelings early in their marriages, suggests that some newlyweds quickly reappraise their partner and their relationship. Thus, the benefits (or detriments) of illusions may depend upon the context of those distortions. Studies on marriage, for instance, demonstrate that maintaining unrealistic, positive bias works well if the relationship problems are mild and both partners are socially skilled, but in the face of more serious relationship problems, it is more beneficial to maintain a realistic view (McNulty & Karney, 2004; McNulty, O'Mara, & Karney, 2008; see review in Fletcher & Kerr, 2010). Similarly, holding a positive global view of the partner foreshadows relationship harmony, so long as those views are based on specific judgments about the partner that are accurate (Neff & Karney, 2002, 2005). It is one thing to put a positive spin on relatively minor issues and quite another to discount or fail to appreciate the diagnostic significance of the problems that surface in the relationship. In a courtship

context, couples likely need enough of an understanding of their partners and relationships to ascertain the long-term viability of the relationship. For example, partners who assume compatibility because they are on the romantic highs of dating may experience increasing difficulties over time as they come to accept the relationship realities. On the other hand, marital well-being may be enhanced by premarital partners simply interpreting negative realities in the best possible manner, so long as people do not deny their existence altogether (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996b; Taylor & Johnson, 1989). Thus, it may be the extent of idealization that is important. “Couples whose illusions are more an embellishment on fact than pure fantasy may be able to maintain some idealization, which may, in turn, promote marital quality. Spouses who enter marriage with more pronounced romantic illusions, however, may find them untenable and become disappointed” (Huston et al., 2001, p. 238). This study will consider these more pronounced distortions.

Study Questions and Hypotheses

As previously described, creating a shared reality in courtship is likely to benefit couples in a variety of ways. This shared vision, for example, may confirm individuals’ beliefs about their selection of a mate, and it may allow couples to make realistic assessments about the viability of their relationship. One signal that couples have created a shared reality is if they progress through the courtship moving simultaneously and if they hold concordant feelings (e.g., love) and behaviors (e.g., working to maintain the relationship). If individuals cross-check their views with their partners regularly, it seems

likely that these couples will participate in and characterize the development of their courtship in similar ways.

Hypothesis 1a: The odds of divorce will increase the more dissimilar partners are in how they experience their courtship; specifically, the probability of divorce will be higher the more they display discordant (a) timing of their certainty of wanting to marry, (b) rate of acceleration they show in chance of marriage, as reflected in the number of months it takes to transition from believing that marriage is possible but not likely (25% chance) to probable but not certain (75% chance), (c) number of downturns in their graph showing chance of marriage (i.e., turbulence), and (d) the timing of first feeling “in love.”

Hypothesis 1b: The odds of divorce also will increase the more dissimilar partners are in how their broad characterizations of other features of their experience in courtship, specifically, the (a) depth of their love, (b) amount of maintenance, (c) amount of ambivalence, and (d) amount of conflict.

Another sign that couples have created a shared reality is when both individuals have an accurate understanding of their partners’ feelings. The enduring dynamics model suggests that couples who openly discuss their feelings and cross-check their views with one another will be able to make relatively accurate assessments about how their partner experiences the relationship. On the other hand, if individuals refrain from showing their

true feelings, or if they fail to attend to the information that is provided, then it is likely they will hold more inaccurate views. Barbara, for instance, first felt certain she and Daryl would marry and believed that he had reached the same conclusion; yet Daryl did not actually feel certain they would marry for another 15 months. The disillusionment model suggests that this idealization and inaccuracy in courtship will lead to disappointment and distress in marriage. Using this rationale:

Hypothesis 2: Members of the pairs who divorce, when compared to those who stay married, will be less accurate in their perceptions of when their partner (a) first felt certain of marriage and (b) first felt they were in love.

It may seem reasonable to conclude that a relationship is grounded in reality if partners experience the progression of their courtship similarly, exhibit concordance in how they characterize the features of their courtship, and demonstrate an accurate understanding of the other. At the same time, if partners are making largely reasoned assessments of one another and their relationship, then their feelings of love and ambivalence also should be rooted in the objective features of their relationship. It is clear, however, that these anchored responses do not prevail in all courtships. For example, Kelly and colleagues (1985) found that feelings of love and ambivalence only showed a moderate association in the expected directions with conflict during courtship, but they became more strongly associated in marriage. It appears that some individuals are more likely to demonstrate discordance between their feelings and the objective characteristics of their courtship. Barbara, for instance, seemed to dismiss her frequent arguments with Daryl while living at her mother's home, not allowing that conflict to

negatively affect her perceptions of Daryl or her optimism for their future together. Similarly, individuals engaging in strong idealization may feel deep love for their partner, even though their courtships are filled with conflict, negative affect, and a hesitancy to commit. In sum, some couples seemingly fail to attend to the realities of their courtship. Once married, however, individuals' increasing interdependence with their partners may make it difficult to maintain these illusions, which ultimately may lead to disillusionment and divorce. Thus, compared to couples who divorce:

Hypothesis 3: Couples who remain married will show stronger positive associations between the strength of their feelings of love during courtship with their own and their partners' reports of (a) maintenance and (b) rate of acceleration in chance of marriage; they also will exhibit stronger inverse associations between the strength of their premarital love and (c) conflict/negativity and (d) number of downturns in chance of marriage during courtship.

Hypothesis 4: Couples who remain married will show stronger inverse associations between the strength of their feelings of ambivalence during courtship with their own and their partners' reports of (a) maintenance and (b) rate of acceleration in chance of marriage; they also will show stronger positive associations between the strength of their premarital ambivalence and (c) conflict/negativity and (d) number of downturns in chance of marriage during courtship.

Thus, in general, it is hypothesized that couples who display concordance and accuracy in their courtship reports and who seemingly recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their courtship (i.e., those who feel and behave the way that would be expected based upon the courtship characteristics) will be more likely to remain married.

Contributions of Study

Despite increased attention on the link between courtship and marriage, studies of premarital relationships usually gather (or analyze) data from one partner, typically providing a snapshot taken at one point in time (see review in Niehuis et al., 2006). The current investigation, in contrast, uses time-ordered data garnered from both partners capturing the entire span of their courtship. This detailed tracing of individuals' perceived experiences in courtship makes it possible to consider differences in how the courtship was experienced by both sides. Moreover, many studies that predict divorce follow couples only a few years into marriage, when only a small proportion of those who will divorce have parted ways. When predicting an event in the future, Singer and Willett (1991) recommend that at least half of those who will experience the target event have done so. The median length of time couples are married before they divorce is 8 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Because the current study spans almost 14 years, an estimated 85% of those who will divorce have already done so by the conclusion of the data collection (Huston et al., 2001). In addition, previous research has established that early signs of disillusionment in marriage augur divorce (e.g., Huston et al.), but we do not know much about the experiences in courtship that presage marital dissolution. Experiences during the courtship likely set people up for such disenchantment, and the

current study seeks to delineate why some couples, and not others, ultimately find their marriages untenable. Finally, in spite of speculation, investigation into the extent to which experiences in courtship are aligned and grounded in reality has not been a focus of research. This investigation uses multiple methods to capture the extent to which partners are on the same page and experience the courtship in a similar fashion. In sum, this study represents an entirely new direction and seeks to expand our understanding of how experiences during courtship set the stage for marital dynamics.

Method

Participants

The original sample of 168 couples was collected using marriage license records from four counties in central Pennsylvania. Of the potential respondents, 42% agreed to participate. Respondents were similar in age, education, and parental occupation status compared to those who declined participation (Robins, 1985). Spouses were typically in the first 2 months of their first marriage, spoke English, and had no intention of moving from the area within 2 years. The final sample was representative of the largely White (99%), working-class profile of the region (Huston, 2009), and the majority resided in rural areas, towns, and small cities.

Procedures

Researchers collected data beginning in 1981 when the couples were newlyweds and then conducted a follow-up study approximately 13.5 years later. The initial study consisted of face-to-face interviews, typically carried out in the respondents' homes and separately by husbands and wives. In the follow-up study, researchers ascertained the current marital status of all but 4 of the original 168 couples (three of whom were widowed). A total of 105 couples remained married over the 13-year study. The divorce status of all remaining couples ($n = 56$ couples) was obtained through court records or personal testimony.

As part of the initial interviews, each spouse independently provided a detailed account of how their chance of marriage evolved from the first date until the wedding day. The premarital development of the confidence that they would marry was depicted

graphically, as can be seen in the example of Daryl and Barbara (Figure 1). The horizontal axis represents time in 1-month increments, and the vertical axis indicates the chance of marriage. Participants were first asked to give a brief and informal description of their courtship, and then they were provided a blank sheet of graph paper. To help facilitate their memory, respondents initially marked significant events that occurred during their courtships. Next, participants were asked to estimate their chance of marriage when they first met their partner, taking into account their own ideas about marriage and those of their partners. The interviewer then asked participants to think about when they were first aware that this probability changed and to indicate the chance of marriage at that point in the relationship. Participants then drew a line connecting the two points (or guided the interviewer on how to draw this line) to best demonstrate how this change occurred (e.g., sudden, linear, or curvilinear change). Participants also explained what led to that turning point in their chance of marriage. This process was repeated until a complete trajectory was drawn up to their wedding date (see Huston, 1994 for detailed review of the graphing procedure).

Once the graphs were complete, respondents were shown a series of events that often take place during courtship (e.g., first felt love, first felt partner loved them, first felt certain of marriage, first felt partner was certain of marriage). Respondents noted whether or not these events occurred and the timing of such events during their courtship. Finally, interviewers located the middle 3-month period in which respondents identified themselves as a couple, but were not yet committed to marriage. Interviewers primed respondents to recall their feelings during this phase of their courtship by reviewing

events that occurred during those 3-months and then asked participants to indicate the amount of love, ambivalence, conflict/negativity, and maintenance behaviors exhibited at that time in the courtship. This procedure took approximately 15 to 45 minutes to complete for each respondent, depending on the length and complexity of the courtship.

Measures

Feelings toward one's partner and the relationship. Couples completed the Braiker and Kelley (1979) measure to ascertain their premarital love (i.e., feelings of belongingness, closeness, and attachment), ambivalence (i.e., feelings of confusion concerning their partner and anxiety about increasing commitment and loss of independence), conflict/negativity (i.e., anger and disagreement with partner), and maintenance behaviors (i.e., communication designed to increase satisfaction or decrease dissatisfaction) using a 9-point Likert scale (see Appendix A). The items on each scale were averaged, resulting in possible scores from 1 to 9 on each of the four constructs.

Features of courtship. Hesitancy to commit was previously calculated using the graphing procedure described (see Figure 1). This variable represents the time in months it took for individuals to move from 25% to 75% chance (or probability) of marriage. Similarly, turbulence was assessed as the number of times during the courtship that the chance of marriage declined (i.e., number of negative turning points; see Huston, 1994 for detailed review).

Results

Data Preparation

Prior to conducting analyses pertaining to the hypotheses, I addressed issues in the data that could potentially affect my analyses and interpretations of findings. For instance, I examined missing data separately for couples who remained married and couples who divorced. In the stably-married sample, one couple was missing data on over half of the courtship variables of interest. Because the married sample is comprised of more couples overall ($n=105$), a decision was made to delete this couple using listwise deletion in future analyses. Only one other couple had missing data from the married sample. In this instance, a husband was missing a report of when he perceived that his wife first fell in love with him. Because it is appropriate to use mean substitution on a variable if less than 5% of responses are missing (e.g., Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), I utilized a variation of this technique to account for all remaining missing data. Specifically, I used the mean difference for perception of when the partner fell in love for the married sample to estimate the value for the one remaining item that was missing in this sample. This procedure was repeated to address the 16 missing items in the divorced sample (i.e., nine couples had one or two items missing). For example, the mean difference for divorced couples on the amount of love was 1.25. If a husband's report was missing, and a wife's report on her amount of love was 4.5, the husband's value would be calculated as either 5.75 or 3.25 (I used the direction of the other variables for that couple to determine whether to add or subtract 1.25). This technique provides a more conservative and precise estimate on my variables of interest.

I next considered the issue of outliers and nonnormal distributions. To detect outliers, I looked for z-scores in excess of ± 3.69 for each item ($p < .001$, two-tailed). In the married sample alone, there were a total of 28 outliers meeting this conservative test. Moreover, analyses of skew and kurtosis revealed that 13 items were nonnormally distributed in the samples (i.e., $> \pm 1$ for skew and $> \pm 3$ for kurtosis). One solution to help deal with outliers and nonnormal distributions is to use transformations. Transformations help pull outliers closer to the center of the distribution thereby reducing their impact, while still keeping these outliers in the tail of the distribution. Because outliers will affect all subsequent analyses and issues of normality likely will be problematic in my path analyses, I transformed items as needed to produce skew and kurtosis values within the acceptable range. In total, I transformed 19 items. In all but one instance, the log transformation produced the best distribution (i.e., wife's report of turbulence was only slightly skewed; thus a square root transformation proved most effective). Similarly, items displayed a positive skew, with the exception of love amount. The amount of premarital love was negatively skewed, and thus the transformation reversed the item direction. The final transformed item was multiplied by -1 to maintain the association with other variables. After all transformations, every item was within acceptable skew and kurtosis range, and no significant outliers remained (although three items in the still-married sample and five items in the divorced sample remained marginal outliers).

Indices of Concordance

Despite the recognition that similarity, or lack thereof, is an important part of dyadic data analyses, the field has failed to reach a consensus about the ideal method for

capturing discrepancies between couples. For instance, some utilize profile correlations, which capture the shapes or organization of two partners' responses across multiple items; some dichotomize similarity into groups (e.g., high, medium, or low similarity); others recommend using an SEM model to capture both partners, and still others utilize absolute difference scores (see Edwards, 2001; Griffin, Murray, & Gonzalez, 1999; Kurdek, 1991; and Luo et al., 2008 for a more detailed discussion). Because the absolute difference score (ADS) still offers the most intuitive approach for measuring similarity between couples (Luo et al.), Hypothesis 1 was tested using this method. For instance, if a husband first fell in love 6 months into the courtship, and his wife first fell in love 12 months into the relationship, their ADS equaled 6. Thus, an ADS score was created for all eight constructs in Hypothesis 1: timing of premarital certainty of marriage, hesitancy to commit (i.e., rate of acceleration from 25% to 75% chance of marriage), turbulence (i.e., number of downturns in chance of marriage), amount of love, timing of first feeling of love, amount of maintenance, amount of ambivalence, and amount of conflict. Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 were tested using an adaptation of the actor-partner model to capture dyadic effects.

Perhaps the most prevalent criticism of the ADS approach is that it is difficult to determine whether the effect on the outcome is due to the similarity (or dissimilarity) between partners or to the individual scores used to compute the ADS. A proposed solution is to include both partners' scores as part of the regression equation (e.g., Griffin et al., 1999; Luo et al., 2008). Thus, I included initial scores as part of my equation in

Hypothesis 1. Moreover, for Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4, models included controls for initial levels among partners.

Descriptive Analyses

Prior to completing more sophisticated analyses of my hypotheses, I reviewed descriptive information for my variables of interest. Table 1 provides an overview of the means and standard deviations for all variables that were used in subsequent analyses. Values in this table represent nontransformed items to allow for interpretation (e.g., eight months is more easily understood than a log value of .90, which is the value after transformation). Surprisingly, the mean amount of love, maintenance, and ambivalence are similar for husbands and wives across marital outcome groups (with no significant difference in t-test comparisons). Yet, husbands who divorce engage in more conflict than their stably married counterparts, which lends credence to the idea that these husbands may not feel or behave in a way that is consistent with the amount of conflict in their relationship. Wives who remain married also report fewer downturns in their estimation of marital likelihood compared to those who divorce (marginal). In addition, experiences in the courtship seemingly take on a gender differentiated pattern. Wives who stay married frequently fall in love and feel certain of marriage sooner than their husbands; they also feel less ambivalent than their husbands. Divorced wives, however, typically take longer than their husbands to progress in their estimations of marital likelihood (marginal), and they report more downturns in this estimation, despite also feeling certain about marriage sooner than their husbands (marginal).

Table 2 provides correlations between premarital love and ambivalence with the

Table 1 Means (Standard Deviation) for Features of Courtship, Broken Down by Later Marital Status

Features of Courtship	Still Married (N=104 couples)		Divorced (N=56 couples) ¹	
	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife
Characterizations of Courtship				
Depth of Love	7.12 (.99)	7.44 (.94)	7.24 (1.05)	7.38 (1.31)
Amount of Maintenance	6.29 (1.52)	6.42 (1.01)	6.46 (1.36)	6.58 (1.59)
Amount of Ambivalence	3.74 (1.65) _a	3.05 (1.48) _b	3.46 (1.45)	3.18 (1.63)
Amount of Conflict	3.70 (1.46) _a	3.82 (1.46)	4.20 (1.40) _b	4.06 (1.61)
Experiences in Courtship				
Timing of First Love (Months)	8.67 (11.68) _a	5.68 (5.79) _b	8.55 (10.62)	7.17 (10.15)
Timing of Certainty of Marriage (Months)	15.36 (15.96) _a	11.92 (12.39) _b	16.55 (20.05) _c	13.65 (18.84) _d
Number of Downturns	1.14 (1.87)	1.34 (1.33) _c	1.24 (1.33) _a	1.70 (1.64) _{b,d}
Acceleration (Months) ³	10.68 (13.06)	9.70 (11.28)	9.33 (11.80) _c	11.98 (15.90) _d

¹ Mean length of courtship for couples who remained married was 28.21 (21.25) compared to 28.34 (24.24) for couples who divorced

² ADS is the absolute difference of the husband report minus the wife report

³ High values represent a slow acceleration

_{a,b} Variable A significantly differs from variable B (p < .05; comparisons between husband and wife in same outcome group and across same gender spouses in opposing outcome groups)

_{c,d} Variable C marginally differs from variable D (p < .10; comparisons between husband and wife in same outcome group and across same gender spouses in opposing outcome groups)

variables of interest for husbands and wives who remain married and for those who divorce. Husbands who remain stably married demonstrated significant correlations in the expected direction between their love with all their courtship features. Their love also was significantly correlated with their wives' amount of conflict, number of downturns, and months to accelerate. Love among husbands who ultimately divorced, however, was less frequently associated with the courtship variables. Their love, for example, was not tied to their conflict or number of downturns. Thus, from this table, it appears that the connection between love and conflict in particular may distinguish couples who remain married versus those who divorce. Moreover, it appears that husbands' feelings of love, compared to their wives' feelings, are more frequently connected to the features of their courtships, especially for husbands who remain stably married.

Similar patterns emerged when considering the association between premarital ambivalence with the features of the courtship. Compared to wives, husbands' ambivalence, for example, was more frequently associated with their own and their partners' features. Again, however, these correlations were particularly pronounced for husbands who remained stably married. Unlike husbands who ultimately divorced, for instance, premarital ambivalence for those who remain married was significantly associated with their own and their partner's downturns in commitment and with their wives' ambivalence and report of conflicts. In a similar manner, ambivalence for wives who remained stably married, but not those who ultimately divorced, was significantly associated with their partners' ambivalence, with their own willingness to provide maintenance (marginal) and with declines in their estimation of marriage. In one

Table 2 Correlations between Premarital Love and Ambivalence with Features of Courtship, Broken Down by Later Marital Status

	Premarital Love				Premarital Ambivalence			
	Stably Married		Divorced		Stably Married		Divorced	
	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife
Husband Features of Courtship								
Amount of Love	-	.05	-	.03	-.57**	-.14	-.65**	-.01
Amount of Maintenance	.60**	-.09	.59**	.02	-.29**	.05	-.38**	-.06
Amount of Ambivalence	-.50**	-.09	-.65**	.09	-	.20*	-	-.05
Amount of Conflict	-.29**	-.25*	-.11	-.18	.52**	.30**	.38**	.35**
Number of Downturns	-.23*	-.12	.08	-.08	.43**	.19 [†]	.12	.38**
Number of Months to Accelerate	.24*	-.16	-.31*	-.11	.26**	.07	.32*	.03
Wife Features of Courtship								
Amount of Love	.05	-	.03	-	-.09	-.51**	.09	-.44**
Amount of Maintenance	.07	.44**	.13	.67**	-.14	-.18 [†]	-.10	-.04
Amount of Ambivalence	-.14	-.51**	-.01	-.44**	.20*	-	-.05	-
Amount of Conflict	-.23*	-.22**	-.06	-.15	.45**	.49**	.22 [†]	.55**
Number of Downturns	-.34**	-.19 [†]	-.28*	-.16	.32**	.29**	.16	.21
Number of Months to Accelerate	-.30**	-.16	-.40**	-.20	.39**	.12	.44**	.20

* p < .05; ** p < .01; [†] p < .10

instance, however, divorced wives' ambivalence was significantly correlated with their number of downturns, but this association was only marginal for wives who remain married. In all other correlations in Table 2, both married and divorced individuals have comparable results, or only the married partners display a significant association.

Hypothesis 1: Similarity in Progression and Characterization of Courtship

Logistic regression was used to test the first hypothesis that the probability of divorce will increase the more dissimilar partners are in their premarital feelings, behaviors, and experiences during their courtship. Logistic regression is ideal for these analyses, in part, because it allows for a probability prediction of a discrete outcome (i.e., divorce or married). This technique also allows for nonlinear comparisons between the dependent variable (i.e., marital outcome) and the independent variable (i.e., similar experiences in and characterizations of the courtship; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). As discussed in the introduction, it is possible that a small degree of overly positive thinking is beneficial, whereas larger differences are theorized to be problematic. Thus, a linear model would obscure this distinction.

Progression through courtship. After calculating the ADS for all variables of interest, I completed two direct logistic regressions in SPSS 18.0 on marital stability as an outcome (i.e., still married vs. divorced), with each equation containing the difference score, the individual score of the husband, and the individual score of the wife. The first regression equation contained items related to how couples progressed through their courtship. Specifically, it contained the two individual scores and an ADS score for: a) the timing of their certainty of wanting to marry, b) the rate of acceleration they showed

in their chance of marriage, c) the amount of turbulence in their chance of marriage, and d) the timing of when they first fell in love. A test of the full model with all 12 predictors against a constant-only model demonstrated a marginally significant difference (i.e., $\chi^2 = 16.48$, $df = 12$, p -value = .09). Statistical significance indicates that the set of predictors reliably distinguish between couples who remain married versus those who divorce. The overall model also did a particularly good job at classifying couples who would remain married (91.3% accurate), but classification of couples who would divorce was less impressive (23.2% accurate). Classification had an overall success rate of 67.5%.

Table 3 shows regression coefficients, standard errors, Wald statistics, odds ratios, and 90% confidence intervals for odds ratios on each of the control variables and the four difference scores. According to the Wald-criterion, couples were more likely to divorce to the extent that they differed in their report of how long it took to move from a low to high probability of marriage across the courtship. The odds ratio of 1.94 also indicates a relatively strong change in the likelihood that couples will divorce (i.e., the odds of divorce increased by 94% as the difference between how long it takes partners to accelerate from 25% to 75% chance of marriage increased by one month).¹ Moreover,

¹ Had a two-tailed test of significance been conducted, the number of downturns in chance of marriage also would be significant. Because it is in the opposite direction than expected, this result cannot be interpreted using my one-tailed test. Nevertheless, it appears that the husband drives the effect of this difference score. The control variable for wife's report of downturns was a strong, positive predictor of divorce, and this control variable also displayed an inverse relationship with the difference score (-.61). Review of frequencies indicated that when stably married couples disagreed about the number of downturns (69.23% disagree), the majority of the time the husband reported fewer downturns than his wife (62.5%). For another 22.12% of stable couples, both reported zero downturns in chance of marriage. For couples who divorced, many husbands agreed with their wives' report of downturns (42.86%), and when they reported fewer downturns, it was frequently (12.5%) in situations where the wife reported a high number of downturns ($N \geq 4$). Thus, it is clearly problematic if the wife reports frequent downturns during the courtship, but marital strife also may be foreshadowed if the husband feels similar declines in his chance of

the Hosmer and Lemeshow test provides an evaluation of fit, which is indicated in this model by the nonsignificant χ^2 (16.48, df = 8, *p*-value = .27).

Table 3. *Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Predicting Likelihood of Divorce (N=56), Compared to Remaining Married (N=104), by Fourteenth Year of Marriage*

Predictors	<i>B</i>	S.E.	Wald χ^2	<i>e^B</i>	90% Confidence Interval for <i>e^B</i>	
					<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Husband Features of the Courtship						
First Fell in Love	0.23	0.68	0.11	1.26	0.41	3.87
First Felt Certain of Marriage	-0.22	0.64	0.12	0.80	0.28	2.30
Number of Downturns	0.72	0.84	0.72	2.04	0.51	8.14
Number of Months to Accelerate	-0.96 [†]	0.65	2.22	0.38	0.13	1.11
Depth of Love	0.06	0.28	0.05	1.07	0.68	1.68
Amount of Maintenance	0.01	0.17	0.00	1.01	0.77	1.32
Amount of Ambivalence	-0.40*	0.17	5.28	0.67	0.51	0.89
Amount of Conflict/Negativity	0.43*	0.17	6.79	1.54	1.17	2.02
Wife Features of the Courtship						
First Fell in Love	0.39	0.68	0.33	1.48	0.48	4.55
First Felt Certain of Marriage	-0.49	0.63	0.58	0.62	0.22	1.75
Number of Downturns	1.49*	0.59	6.41	4.43	1.69	11.67
Number of Months to Accelerate	-0.28	0.63	0.20	0.76	0.27	2.12
Depth of Love	0.51	1.43	0.13	1.66	0.16	17.51
Amount of Maintenance	0.15	0.20	0.61	1.16	0.85	1.59
Amount of Ambivalence	0.30	0.15	0.04	1.03	0.81	1.32
Amount of Conflict/Negativity	0.01	0.17	0.00	1.01	0.77	1.32
Differences in Features of the Courtship						
First Fell in Love (Months)	0.38	0.65	0.34	1.46	0.50	4.24
First Felt Certain of Marriage (Months)	-0.03	0.49	0.00	0.97	0.43	2.19
Number of Downturns	-2.76	1.01	7.55	0.06	0.01	0.33
Number of Months to Accelerate	0.66 [†]	0.51	1.67	1.94	0.83	4.52
Depth of Love	0.47*	0.24	3.93	1.61	1.08	2.38
Amount of Maintenance	0.33	1.05	0.10	0.72	0.13	4.01
Amount of Ambivalence	0.12	0.16	0.60	1.13	0.87	1.47
Amount of Conflict	0.02	0.22	0.01	1.03	0.72	1.46

e^B = exponentiated *B* (odd-ratio).

**p* < .05., [†]*p* < .10 (one-tailed)

marriage as husbands in this sample tend to experience fewer downturns than their wives. Interestingly, it does not appear to be as problematic if only husbands report frequent declines.

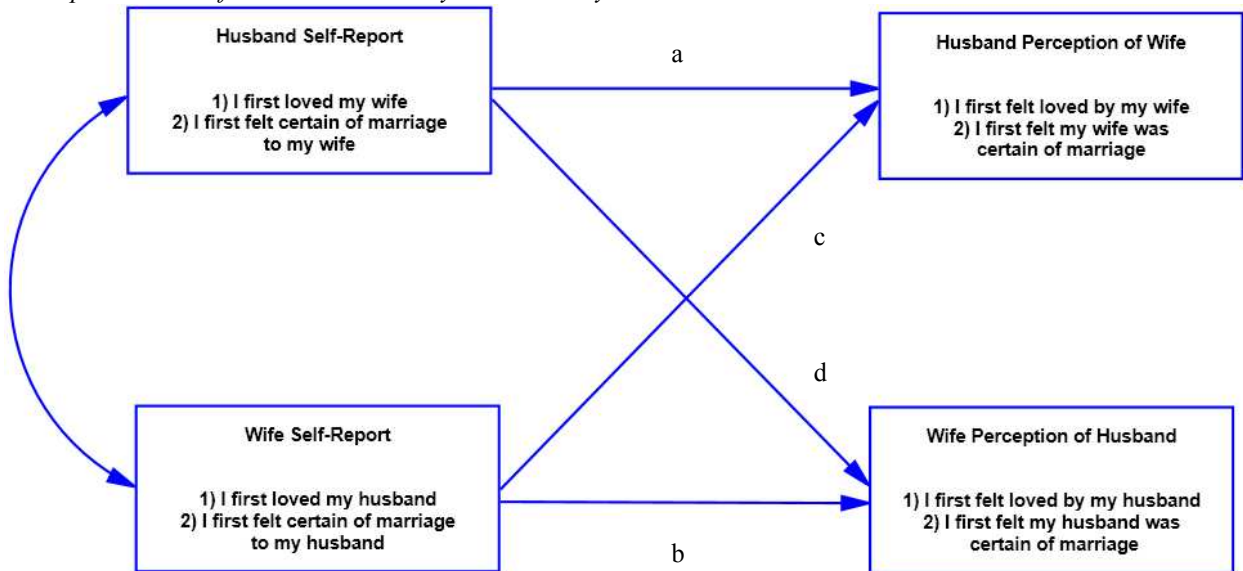
Courtship characterization. The second equation contained items related to the broad characterizations of the courtship. Specifically, it contained the two individual scores and an ADS score for: a) the depth of feelings of love, b) the amount of maintenance behaviors, c) the amount of ambivalence, and d) the amount of conflict. A test of the full model with all 12 predictors against a constant-only model again reached marginal significance (i.e., $\chi^2 = 16.53$, $df = 12$, p -value = .08) and did a better job of classifying couples who would remain married than those who would divorce (92.4% versus 28.6% accurate). Classification had an overall success rate of 70.2% (see Table 3 for overview). According to the Wald-criterion, divorce is more likely as courting partners diverge in the strength of their feelings of love (this is the only difference score that reliably predicted divorce). Moreover, the odds ratio of 1.61 for this difference score indicates a relatively strong change in the likelihood that couples will divorce (i.e., 61%) as their difference in amount of love increases by a one-unit change. The Hosmer and Lemshow test also demonstrated a good overall model fit ($\chi^2=9.74$, $df = 8$, p -value = .28).

Hypothesis 2: Accuracy and Perceived Similarity

An adapted version of the actor-partner interdependence model outlined by Kenny and Acitelli (2001; see also Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) was utilized to test whether individuals who remain married, compared to those who divorce, show greater accuracy in characterizing how their partners experience the courtship (Hypothesis 2). Figure 2 provides a representation of the model with the two sets of variables of interest in this study (i.e., timing of love and certainty of marriage). As can be seen in this figure, accuracy is defined as the correspondence between one's own

perception of how the partner experiences the courtship and the partner's report of that experience. One strength of this particular model is that it contains controls for the actual similarity between the husband and wife (i.e., the correlation between husband self-report and wife self-report), and it allows direct consideration of the role of perceived similarity (paths a & b) and accuracy (paths c & d). Although perceived similarity is not part of my hypothesis, it is an important component in understanding accuracy. It is possible, for example, that individuals who divorce will perceive greater similarity (or dissimilarity) with their partners than actually exists. The combination of perceived similarity and inaccuracy may leave some individuals vulnerable to disillusionment once married. This model also allows for an examination of the possibility that accurately characterizing the partner's experience in courtship may be more important for women, given previous literature suggesting that women tend to be better than men at making sense of what is happening in the relationship (e.g., Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989).

Figure 2
Conceptual Model of Perceived Similarity and Accuracy



ing for similarity

Timing of Love. To test this hypothesis, I first created a model containing variables related to the timing of love for both stably married and divorced individuals. Table 4 provides a summary of the standardized regression weights, standard errors, and residual variance for both outcome groups. With regard to the timing of love, husbands and wives from both marital outcomes appear comparable in their perceptions of similarity with their partners (all paths a & b are significant) and ability to accurately characterize when their partners fell in love (path c & d are significant for both groups, except that divorced husbands are only marginally accurate in their estimations of when their wives first fell in love). For those still wed, this model explains 69% of the variance (i.e., the squared multiple correlation) for husbands and 54% for wives. For those who divorce, this model accounts for 46% (husbands) and 57% (wives) of the variance.

To test for differences in the model for couples who divorce versus those who remain married, I utilized a simultaneous between-groups model. I ran an unconstrained model ($\chi^2 = 5.12$, $df = 2$, p -value = .07) and a fully constrained model ($\chi^2 = 8.36$, $df = 7$, p -value = .30) containing variables related to the timing of love. To ascertain whether the model is invariant across the two groups, I computed the chi-square difference between the model where paths are free to vary versus the model where paths are constrained to be equal. Contrary to my prediction that accuracy would be greater for those who remain married versus those who divorce, a chi-square difference test between the unconstrained and constrained models indicates that the models are invariant across stable and divorced couples ($\Delta\chi^2 = 3.24$, $df = 5$, $p > .10$).

Table 4. *Standardized Regression Weights for Accuracy and Perceived Similarity in Path Analysis (Standard Errors in Parentheses), Comparing Stably Married (N=104 couples) and Divorced (N=56 couples) Groups*

	Perception of When Spouse Fell in Love or Felt Certain of Marriage			
	Stably Married		Divorced	
	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife
Love (Timing)				
Path a & b: Perceived Similarity ¹	.72 (.06)**	.49 (.09)**	.58 (.11)**	.59 (.10)**
Path c & d: Accuracy ²	.19 (.08)**	.37(.07)**	.18 (.12) [†]	.27 (.09)**
Correlation between partners		.46 (.02)**		.47 (.03)**
Residual for Perception of when Spouse Fell in Love ³	.07 (.09)**	.09 (.00)**	.11 (.02)**	.08 (.02)**
Certainty of Marriage (Timing)				
Path a & b: Perceived Similarity ¹	.60 (.06)**	.58 (.08)**	.40 (.08)**	.52 (.09)**
Path c & d: Accuracy ²	.36 (.06)**	.28 (.08)**	.54 (.08)**	.35 (.09)**
Correlation between partners		.59 (.03)**		.50 (.04)**
Residual for Perception of When Spouse Felt Certain of Marriage ³	.06 (.01)**	.10 (.01)**	.08 (.02)**	.10 (.02)**

* p < .05 (two-tailed); ** p < .01 (two-tailed); [†] p < .10

¹ Perceived similarity represents the paths from husband's own feeling to his perception of his wife's feeling (a) and wife's own feeling to her perception of her husband's feeling (b); See Figure 2

² Accuracy represents the paths from husband's own feelings to when his wife perceived him to have that feeling (c) and wife's own feeling to when her husband perceived her to have that feeling (d); See Figure 2

³ Residual is a measure of the error variance for love or certainty of marriage

Timing of Certainty of Marriage. I repeated this procedure using the variables related to certainty of marriage. Models again appear similar for both outcome groups; and all paths are significant (see Table 4). This model explains 75% of the variance for husbands and 61% for wives who remain married; and it accounts 66% and 58% respectively for those who divorce. Once again, a chi-square difference test between the unconstrained ($\chi^2 = .48$, $df = 2$, p -value = .785) and constrained models ($\chi^2 = 7.01$, $df = 7$, p -value = .43) indicated that the models were invariant across stable and divorced couples ($\Delta\chi^2 = 6.53$, $df = 5$, $p > .10$). Thus, it appears that individuals who remain married and those who divorce are alike in their perceptions of similarity and ability to accurately characterize when their partner first fell in love and felt certain of marriage.

Hypotheses 3 and 4: Association between Features of Courtship and Feelings

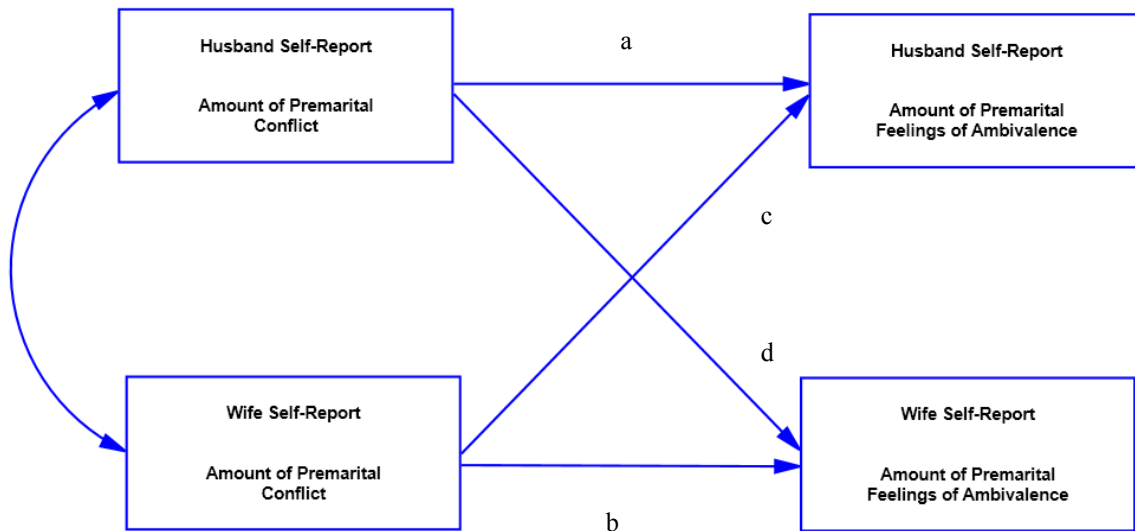
A procedure similar to that implemented in Hypothesis 2 was utilized to test whether couples who remained married, compared to those who divorced, display greater concordance between their premarital behaviors and feelings (i.e., Hypotheses 3 and 4). The primary difference in this model, compared to the model used to test the prior hypothesis, is that the variables of interest differ. Figure 3 provides an example comparing premarital conflict and feelings of ambivalence. For Hypothesis 3, models were run to test whether a) maintenance, b) rate of acceleration, c) conflict, and d) turbulence predict the amount of premarital love. Again, a simultaneous between-groups model was used to test for differences in the overall model and specific paths for couples who remained married versus those who divorced. To test Hypothesis 4, I ran a similar

series of models to ascertain whether the same variables tested in Hypothesis 3 predict the amount of ambivalence during the courtship.

Table 5 provides an overview of the standardized regression weights, standard error, and residual variance from the series of path analyses conducted to ascertain the

Figure 3

Example of Actor-Partner Model Linking the Objective Features of Courtship with Premarital Feelings



a & b = extent to which own objective feature of the courtship affects own feeling
c & d = extent to which own objective feature of the courtship affects partner feeling

association between maintenance, rate of acceleration, conflict negativity, and the number of downturns in the chance of marriage with premarital love and ambivalence.

Hypothesis 3: Features of Courtship and Premarital Love

Maintenance. Husbands’ willingness to make changes to improve the relationship (i.e., maintenance) marginally predicted how much their wives love them premaritally, but only for those who remain married. Otherwise, regression weights appear similar for both outcome groups. Thus, it is not surprising that these models demonstrated invariance across stably married and divorced couples ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1.33, df = 5,$

Table 5. Standardized Regression Weights for Premarital Love and Ambivalence with Features of Courtship in Path Analysis (Standard Errors in Parentheses), Comparing Stably Married (N=104 couples) and Divorced (N=56 couples) Groups

	Premarital Love				Premarital Ambivalence			
	Stably Married		Divorced		Stably Married		Divorced	
	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife
Maintenance								
Path a & b: Own Affects Own ¹	.60 (.05)**	.50 (.01)**	.59 (.09)**	.70 (.01)**	-.28 (.10)**	-.20 (.14)*	-.37 (.14)**	-.02 (.14)
Path c & d: Partner Affects Own ²	-.01 (.08)	-.17 (.01) [†]	.02 (.07)	-.12 (.02)	-.09 (.16)	.08 (.10)	-.03 (.12)	-.06 (.16)
Correlation between partners	.15 (.15)		.20 (.29)		.15 (.15)		.20 (.29)	
Residual for Love/Ambivalence ³	.62 (.09)**	.02 (.00)**	.70 (.13)**	.02 (.00)**	2.47 (.34)**	2.08 (.29)**	1.76 (.33)**	2.61 (.50)**
Number of Months to Accelerate								
Path a & b: Own Affects Own ¹	-.13 (.26)	-.11 (.04)	-.12 (.40)	-.21 (.07)	.09 (.42)	.12 (.41)	.09 (.54)	.28 (.55) [†]
Path c & d: Partner Affects Own ²	-.23 (.26)*	-.10 (.04)	-.33 (.33)*	.02 (.08)	.34 (.42)**	.01 (.41)	.39 (.45)*	-.14 (.66)
Correlation between partners	.49 (.02)**		.60 (.03)**		.49 (.02)**		.59 (.03)**	
Residual for Love/Ambivalence ³	.88 (.12)**	.02 (.00)**	.90 (.17)**	.04 (.01)**	2.3 (.32)**	2.14 (.30)**	1.65 (.32)**	2.50 (.47)**
Amount of Conflict/Negativity								
Path a & b: Own Affects Own ¹	-.24 (.08)*	-.10 (.01)	-.11 (.12)	-.07 (.02)	.38 (.11)**	.47 (.11)**	.37 (.16)*	.53 (.14)**
Path c & d: Partner Affects Own ²	-.09 (.08)	-.20 (-.02) [†]	.01 (.11)	-.14 (.02)	.25 (.11)*	.04 (.11)	.00 (.14)	.03 (.16)
Correlation between partners	.56 (.24)**		.59 (.35)**		.56 (.24)**		.59 (.35)**	
Residual for Love/Ambivalence ³	.89 (.12)**	.02 (.01)**	1.07 (.20)**	.04 (.01)**	1.88 (.26)**	1.65 (.23)**	1.77 (.34)**	1.82 (.35)**
Number of Downturns								
Path a & b: Own Affects Own ¹	-.14 (.35)	-.17 (.04) [†]	.23 (.60) [†]	-.16 (.06)	.37 (.56)**	.26 (.35)**	.06 (.87)	.06 (.47)
Path c & d: Partner Affects Own ²	-.31 (.23)**	-.07 (.06)	-.37 (.30)**	-.02 (.12)	.22 (.36)*	.12 (.54)	.13 (.44)	.35 (.92)**
Correlation between partners	.27 (.01)**		.40 (.02)**		.27 (.01)**		.40 (.02)**	
Residual for Love/Ambivalence ³	.84 (.12)**	.02 (.00)**	.95 (.18)**	.04 (.01)**	2.10 (.29)**	1.96 (.27)**	2.00 (.38)**	2.23 (.43)**

* p < .05 (two-tailed); ** p < .01 (two-tailed); [†] p < .10

¹ Own Affects Own represents the paths from husband's own feature of the courtship to his feelings of love or ambivalence (a) and wife's own feature of the courtship to her feelings of love or ambivalence (b); See Figure 3

² Partner Affects Own represents the paths from wife's feature of the courtship to her husband's feelings of love or ambivalence (c) and husband's features of the courtship to his wife's feelings of love or ambivalence (d); See Figure 3

³ Residual is a measure of the error variance for love or ambivalence

$p > .10$). For those who remain stably married, the model explains 36% of the variance for husbands and 24% for wives. For those who divorce, the model accounts for 35% of the variance for husbands and 46% for wives.

Months to accelerate in chance of marriage. When wives take a long time to move from where they believe marriage is possible but unlikely (25%) to where they believe it is probable but not certain (75%), husbands in both marital outcome groups feel less in love with their wives. This is the only significant path for both groups, and no significant differences exist between the models across stably married and divorced couples ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1.46$, $df = 5$, $p > .10$). For those who remain stably married, the model explains 10% of the variance for husbands and 3% for wives. For those who divorce, the model accounts for 17% of the variance for husbands and 4% for wives.

Conflict. When husbands report a lot of conflict, courting partners are less in love (marginal for wives), but only for those who remain married. Surprisingly, wives' amount of premarital conflict is unrelated to feelings of love for either outcome group. Once again, a chi-square difference test between the unconstrained and constrained models indicated that the models were invariant across the two groups ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1.28$, $df = 5$, $p > .10$). The model explains 9% of the variance for husbands and 7% for wives who remain married and only 1% and 4% respectively for spouses who divorce.

Number of downturns in chance of marriage. Interestingly, more turbulence in the estimation of marital likelihood during the courtship led to stronger feelings of love (and vice versa) for men who eventually divorce (marginal), which partially supports the hypothesis that a disconnect exists between feelings and behaviors for those who divorce.

There is a significant difference on this path between husbands who remain married versus those whose marriages unravel ($\Delta\chi^2 = 4.78$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$), but the models overall are invariant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 5.80$, $df = 5$, $p > .10$). For those who remain stably married, the model explains 14% of the variance for husbands and 4% for wives. For those who divorce, the model accounts for 12% of the variance for husbands and 3% for wives.

Hypothesis 4: Features of Courtship and Premarital Ambivalence

Maintenance. When wives who remain married make changes to improve the relationship, they feel less ambivalent. This path is not significant, however, for those who divorce. Otherwise, regression weights appear similar for both outcome groups. Overall, these models demonstrated invariance across stable and divorced couples ($\Delta\chi^2 = 3.13$, $df = 5$, $p > .10$). For those who remain stably married, the model explains 9% of the variance for husbands and 4% for wives. For those who divorce, the model accounts for 14% of the variance for husbands and none of the variance for wives.

Months to accelerate in chance of marriage. Wives who divorce, but not those who remain married, feel more ambivalent about their courtship to the extent that they take longer to increase their chance of marriage (marginal). This marginal finding is in opposition to the hypothesis that feelings of ambivalence should be more strongly tied to the features of the courtship for individuals who remain married. Nevertheless, regression weights and values of significance otherwise are similar across the two outcome groups, and no significant differences exist between the models across stable and divorced couples ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1.84$, $df = 5$, $p > .10$). The model explains 15% of the

variance for husbands and 2% for wives who remain stably married, and it accounts for 20% of the variance for husbands and 5% for wives who ultimately divorce.

Conflict. As women who remain married, but not those who divorce, experience a more conflict-prone courtship, their husbands feels more ambivalent (a marginal difference exists for the two outcome groups on this path; $\Delta\chi^2 = 2.41$, $df = 1$, $p < .10$). This distinction lends credence to the idea that individuals who ultimately find their marriages untenable are less responsive to the negative features displayed during courtship. However, regression weights otherwise are similar in both models, and the chi-square difference test between the unconstrained and constrained models indicated that the models are invariant across both outcome groups ($\Delta\chi^2 = 4.50$, $df = 5$, $p > .10$). The model explains 31% of the variance for husbands and 24% for wives who are still married versus 14% and 30% respectively for those who divorce.

Number of downturns in chance of marriage. Several interesting differences emerge when comparing regression weights for the marital outcome groups. For one, when the courtship is characterized by frequent downturns in the estimation of marital likelihood, husbands who remain married, but not those who divorce, become more ambivalent. Similarly, only wives who are stably married feel more ambivalent about their relationships to the extent that they report a turbulent courtship. However, the husband's report of frequent downturns in confidence that he will marry his partner only significantly predicted his wife's ambivalence for couples who ultimately divorce. Overall, the married and divorced samples are significantly different in this model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 9.52$, $df = 5$, $p < .05$). Thus, each path was tested individually by leaving all paths in the

model unconstrained, except the one being tested, and computing the chi-square difference for the model where one path is constrained compared to the model where all paths are unconstrained. Two paths demonstrated a significant difference between the samples: (a) the path between men's report of downturns and their own ambivalence ($\Delta\chi^2 = 3.49$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$; i.e., men who remain married were more likely than those who divorce to feel ambivalent when their courtship was turbulent), and (b) the path between a husband's downturns and his wife's ambivalence ($\Delta\chi^2 = 2.63$, $df = 1$, $p = .05$; i.e., women who divorce, compared to those still married, felt stronger ambivalence when their husband experienced frequent downturns in his estimation of marital likelihood). This model accounts for 23% of the variance for husbands and 10% for wives who remain married versus 3% and 15% for those who divorce.

Discussion

The courtship period provides couples with the opportunity to test the long-term viability of their relationship. Newlywed couples independently provided detailed accounts of their movement through courtship from the day they first met their partner until they were married, describing the feelings they developed for each other along the way. These in-depth portrayals of the premarital relationship, which were depicted graphically, allow for an investigation of whether marital success or failure can be foretold by examining the time-extended process of selecting a spouse. As discussed in the introduction, researchers often study how negative or ineffectual premarital communication portends marital distress (e.g., Clements et al., 2004; Markman et al., 2010), but most of these studies use only a single laboratory interaction during the courtship period to predict long-term outcomes. Reducing the courtship to a single encounter provides a snapshot of the premarital relationship and assumes that the thoughts and behaviors at the time in which data were collected are broadly representative. Yet, prior research has already demonstrated the importance of considering the courtship period from a more comprehensive view. For instance, previous studies utilizing the courtship graphs have yielded important information about how the process through the courtship foretells whether couples later establish durable, mutually satisfying marriages (e.g., Huston, 1994; Huston & Houts, 1998; Huston et al., 2001). Findings from this investigation further illustrate why courtship should be studied by taking into account things that occur over the course of the premarital relationship.

The present investigation reaffirms the importance of understanding the courtship period in predicting marital outcomes, and it is the first to examine courtship narratives from both partners to ascertain whether having shared beliefs and experiences that are grounded in behavioral reality presages marital stability more than 13 years later. Another unique aspect of this study is that three different approaches were used for capturing the extent to which partners are on the same page with each other and cognizant of the features of their premarital relationship. Specifically, I considered whether: couples progress through their courtship in the same fashion, hold parallel feelings and behave similarly, partners' premarital feelings of love and ambivalence are rooted in the objective features of their courtship, and individuals demonstrate an accurate understanding of when their partner first fell in love or felt certain of marriage. Attention is now turned to these areas, focusing first on hypotheses that received at least partial support (note that the discussion of accuracy is postponed until the end).

Does mutual progression through the courtship matter?

Creating a shared reality is not only likely to give individuals confidence in their choice of a partner (e.g., Murray et al., 2002), but it also may act as a proxy of clear communication within the relationship (e.g., Sillars, Weisberg, Burggraf, & Zietlow, 1990). Couples who talk about their feelings openly and honestly, and who work together to negotiate a shared reality should be better prepared to make such a weighty decision as whether or not to wed. On the other hand, the courtship story of Daryl and Barbara provides an illustration of how individuals can progress through a premarital relationship with little evident appreciation of the divergence in their understanding of

each other's experience. Barbara held Daryl and the relationship in much higher regard than he did, and she felt optimistic about marriage sooner and wavered less in her optimism compared to Daryl. The courtship of these partners would seem to ill-prepare them to make a life-long commitment to one another; and it seems likely that they would set themselves up for disappointment in marriage, as suggested by the disillusionment model. Indeed, this incongruent couple does ultimately divorce. The question remains, however, did they and couples like them divorce, at least in part, because they rarely characterized the courtship and felt the same way about one another or the relationship?

Descriptive analyses and logistic regression provide limited support for the idea that couples who progress through their courtship along the same path, hold concordant feelings, and behave similarly are more likely to create a union that can endure the test of time. As a set, variables assessing similarity between how partners move through and characterize their courtship demonstrated a trend toward distinguishing couples who remain married versus those who divorce, and the variables of interest were particularly adept at predicting which couples would remain married (91.3% and 92.4%). Moreover, the mean of the difference scores was generally in the expected direction (see Table 1), but the only variables that reached significance in the logistic regression were partners feeling similar amounts of love, taking a comparable number of months to accelerate (marginal), and reporting an analogous number of downturns (controlling for overall amount of love, time to accelerate, and the number of downturns reported).

Love is perhaps the most important factor in whether couples decide to marry in our culture (Simpson, Campbell, & Berscheid, 1986). It might be expected, therefore,

that individuals whose feelings of love for their partner premaritally was relatively low would be likely to divorce. Yet, results from this study demonstrate that the amount of premarital love does not distinguish between couples who remain stably married and those who ultimately divorce; both report comparable amounts of love.² However, it is important that partners feel similar depths of love with one another; the results show that as partners differ from one another in the intensity of their feelings of love premaritally, the likelihood they will ultimately divorce increases. Because love is a primary factor that drives couples toward marriage, it seems reasonable that a pronounced difference in how much partners love one another is a sign of a serious disconnect. This central feature of romantic relationships should be a part of the mutual dialogue during courtship. Showing the intensity of one's feeling is an emotional risk, in that the partner may not hold the other in the same regard. Nevertheless, risking rejection and demonstrating dependence on one another is essential in establishing a mutually satisfying bond (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). When couples feel differently about something as fundamental as love well into their courtship, then it seems likely that they are creating an unstable foundation for their future relationship. Alternatively, some individuals may have paid little heed to their partner's divergent feelings. A rational response when individuals sense that their partner feels considerably less love for them than they do for their partner would seemingly be to pull-back from the relationship for the sake of self-protection (see Murray et al.). Failing to acknowledge and respond to this important

² The fact that couples who remain stably married and those who divorce evince similar amounts of love on average is not to suggest that there are not within group differences. Previous research, for example, has found that couples whose love during courtship is particularly intense and those whose love is tepid are vulnerable to divorce (Huston et al., 2001.). Thus, the mean amount of love for those who divorce may represent a mid-point between these two groups who ultimately end their marriage.

information, however, may have set partners with divergent feelings of love up for disillusionment in marriage.

It also is important that partners view the courtship as having taken a comparable amount of time to progress from where they assessed the likelihood of marriage as possible but not likely (25%) to likely but not definite (75%). The significance of the discrepancy is noteworthy, in part, because it is one of the only predictors of the fate of relationships in marriage that actually considers the temporal course of the premarital relationship. As previously described, selecting a marriage partner typically progresses over a prolonged period of time. Ideally, partners are continually cross-checking their views with one another and assessing the reciprocity of feelings and ideas about where the relationship is headed. In theory at least, individuals continuously make adjustments as needed to ensure that they are on the same page as their partners. Thus, it makes sense that when both partners take this grounded approach, they portray the growth of their understanding that they will one day marry in parallel fashion. Ultimately, it is the agreement during the period of the courtship where the majority of decisions take place that perhaps best demonstrates that individuals are indeed aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their partner and their relationship. Thus, these couples may remain stably married, in part, because they enter marriage with their eyes more open, providing them with a stronger foundation to build a lasting union.

The number of downturns in the assessment of marital likelihood also treats the courtship as a time-extended process, and results on this variable again demonstrate the need to consider the span of the courtship in predicting marital outcomes. However,

unexpectedly, couples who disagreed about the number of downturns were more likely to remain married over time. Husbands seem to drive this effect, as they report less downturns overall than their wives. It may be that husbands, particularly those who remain stably married, frequently put a positive spin on situations that their wives sometimes react negatively toward. Husbands who stay married may react by taking longer to fall in love than their divorced counterparts (based on mean of when husbands first fell in love), but they may not deem these situations as serious enough to negatively assess their likelihood of marriage. Husbands who divorce, on the other hand, may be less apt to put a positive spin on situations their wives also deem as troublesome to the prospect of marrying, or it may be that when these husbands also react negatively, it is indicative of a serious problem that perhaps should, but does not generally, deter them from marriage. Another possibility is that husbands who remain married are simply less reactive overall. The pattern of means (see Table 1) suggests that husbands who remain stably married may be best characterized as on a “slow and steady” path toward marriage. Husbands who stay married take longer to fall in love and feel more ambivalent than their wives and both men and women who ultimately divorce. They also take longer than their wives or divorced husbands to accelerate to where they are 75% confident of marriage. Yet, they report less conflict and fewer downturns than any other group. A next step is for researchers to ascertain whether there are indeed benefits of a slow and steady progression toward marriage and determine whether this route for men bodes well for marital stability.

Does it matter if the relationship is grounded in own and partner experiences?

Another question was whether couples like Barbara and Daryl divorce because their feeling of love, on the one hand, and ambivalence, on the other hand, are poorly grounded in the positive and negative features that they report from their courtship. It was theorized that individuals will fare better in marriage to the extent that their courtship is grounded in reality because they enter marriage with a realistic appraisal of their partner and relationship. As suggested by the enduring dynamics model, couples who attend to the information presented during their courtship know what to expect, and the patterns displayed during the courtship should persist after marriage. The correlational values suggest that individuals (particularly husbands) who later establish stable marital unions, compared to those who ultimately divorce, may be more in touch with the behaviors and feelings of both dyad members during courtship, and these perceptive individuals seemingly have their feelings of love and ambivalence anchored in the reality of their courtship. They, for instance, feel less in love when their premarital relationship is filled with conflict and negative affect (see Table 2). In some instances, however, individuals who eventually find their marriage untenable also have their feelings of love and ambivalence rooted in the objective features of the courtship; but results from the path analyses suggest that couples who remain married differentiate themselves from those who divorce by responding more negatively overall to conflict-prone and turbulent courtships. Some gender differences also are suggested.

The amount and intensity of conflict is higher premaritally for couples who ultimately divorce, which should serve as a warning sign that the relationship may be far from ideal. At the least, considerable conflict should give a person pause about marrying.

Yet, love is only negatively affected by conflict (husband report) for spouses who remain married. Moreover, although husbands and wives in both outcome groups feel more ambivalent about their relationship to the extent they report conflict, only husbands who remain stably married respond to their wives' conflict. Once again, when findings between the groups differ, it appears that individuals who divorce are less responsive to the information presented during their courtship (or their partners are less forthright in sharing their feelings).

The link between one's own ambivalence and one's own downturns would seemingly be a given. When individuals experience a downturn in their chance of marriage, they are essentially stating that their perception of their own and partner's feelings at that time made them conclude that marriage was less likely to happen than at the previous point. Thus, it seems logical that those individuals who repeatedly experience uncertainty about getting married also should feel more ambivalent about the viability of the relationship. Yet, this link between ambivalence and having a turbulent courtship generally exists only for individuals who remain married (and these models displayed a marginal difference overall when comparing the two outcome groups). Moreover, only husbands whose marriages endure become more ambivalent as their wives' estimation of marriage fluctuates. It is possible that these men are generally more perceptive of how their wives feel about the relationship at a given point compared to men who eventually divorce, or it may be that wives who remain married express their feelings more regularly to their partners, thus allowing these men to respond as would be expected.

One exception exists to the pattern of stably married individuals being more responsive to a turbulent courtship than those who divorce; wives whose marriages end, and not those who remain married, become more ambivalent about the courtship to the extent that their husbands show downturns in his estimation of marriage. This finding provides another possible explanation for why having concordant reports in frequency of downturns foreshadow marital instability. It may be that some husbands who divorce are uncertain during courtship, but they do not appreciate the importance of this uncertainty by allowing it to negatively affect their own ambivalence (or love). Their wives, on the other hand, recognize the husbands' uncertainty and, subsequently, may feel more ambivalent and less certain about marital likelihood (i.e., lending itself to comparable reports of downturns between partners). Despite the warning signs and even some appreciation of these cues by the wife, the couple still weds.

Another interesting finding is that husbands who ultimately divorce felt more in love with their partner (marginally) the more turbulent their courtship (and this differed significantly from men who remained stably married). This unique finding not only lends credence to the hypothesized disconnect between the objective features of the courtship and premarital feelings for individuals who divorce, but it also suggests that for men who divorce, turbulent courtships actually may fuel their interest in their partners. These men may even thrive on the excitement of conflict (and making up) and the uncertainty about their partner and the relationship. In a study of the commitment process for dating partners, for instance, Surra & Hughes (1997) found that one group of "event-driven" daters were characterized by frequent downturns in their commitment to wed. In

contrast, “relationship-driven” partners generally displayed a smooth progression in the commitment to marriage with fewer and less dramatic downturns, and they reported less conflict overall than event-driven partners. Nevertheless, couples characterized by either commitment typologies were equally likely to remain together, and they felt similar depths of love for their partners. The authors theorize that “the very drama and excitement of the relationship is its own source of rewards” for partners in event-driven relationships (p. 19). Thus, one possibility is that men who ultimately divorce have courtships comparable to the event-driven typology. Once married, however, this excitement may be unsustainable, and these husbands may become disillusioned with their relationship. Nevertheless, it remains unclear why only men who divorce, and not women, responded positively to their turbulent courtship. The possibility exists that men, more so than women, need to be driven less by passion and more by the realities of their courtship in order to establish an enduring marital union. As suggested earlier, husbands who remain married may best be characterized as somewhat cautious, even-keeled and on a “slow and steady” pace to marriage, which stands in contrast to the seemingly excitement-driven courtships that may be more characteristic for some men who divorce. Thus, another direction for future research is to determine whether idealization, and eventual disillusionment, for men stems from feelings of passion or positive perceptions of certain features that are typically considered negative during courtship.

Do partners who remain married make more accurate judgments about their partner’s feelings?

It was hypothesized that couples who make decisions that are well-grounded in the realities of the relationship (i.e., consistent with the enduring dynamics model) will be more likely to remain married, although not necessarily happily so. Some couples may be comfortable with their relationship and partner, despite recognizing that their courtship is not the romantic ideal. Regardless of whether some seemingly “settle” for a less appealing relationship or whether they establish a union that is apt to bring both partners marital happiness, these couples know what to expect before they marry. Thus, they are unlikely to become disillusioned in marriage (which has been linked to divorce; Huston et al., 2001). In order to make such a rational decision, individuals must openly discuss their feelings and cross-check their views with their partner. This greater candidness should, in turn, result in individuals having a more accurate understanding of when their partners first fell in love and when they were first certain of marriage. Those who would ultimately divorce, however, were theorized to be more likely to refrain from sharing their true feelings with their partners during courtship or fail to attend to the information presented, and thus they should be more inaccurate in their perceptions of when their partners first fell in love and were certain of wanting to marry. This hypothesis, however, was not supported by the results in the present analyses.

Based on previous research and the theory of disillusionment, it would still seem beneficial for individuals to understand their partner and their premarital relationship well enough to gauge the long-term viability of marriage. One reason for the nonsignificant results in the present investigation may be that the variables used to assess accuracy simply are not the ideal choices for determining which couples go through courtship with

their eyes open to the realities of the relationship. For one, the timing of when individuals first “loved” their spouse may carry different meanings for each partner. Some individuals may believe that love is primarily passion, and thus they report falling in love when they first felt sexually attracted to (or engaged in sexual activity with) their partner. Others may deem that a specific conversation where both partners discussed their hopes and dreams served as the catalyst for falling in love. Indeed, previous research has demonstrated that men and women frequently identify different meanings for love and being in love (e.g., Fehr & Broughton, 2001; Grote & Frieze, 1994; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Meyers & Berscheid, 1997); thus, it makes sense that couples in heterosexual relationships are often dissimilar in their reports. Moreover, reports on the timing of falling in love and marital certainty both represent a single point during the courtship. Partners who remain married, compared to those who ultimately divorce, may be more accurate in gauging changes in the strength of their partner’s love and desire for marriage over the course of the courtship. Alternatively, it may be that individuals who cannot sustain their marriage are able to make similarly accurate assessments of the positive aspects of their courtship. However, they may be less accurate in their appraisal of problems in the courtship (which often provide diagnostic significance) because they may be inclined to conceal their negative feelings or ignore the adverse information presented that might dampen the romance. Similarly, it may be that when the partner first fell in love and felt certain of marriage are not central aspects of making an informed decision about the long-term viability of the relationship. Thus, a positive bias in the perception of similar timing may even benefit the relationship, as previous research has

established that some positive thinking and biases can enhance relationship well-being, at least in the short-run (e.g., Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996b; Neff & Karney, 2005). It may be more problematic, however, if dating individuals hold inaccurate views of their partner's likes and dislikes, personality, values, and future aspirations because this information is likely indicative of the relationship's lasting sustainability. An important direction in research on accuracy is to delineate which types of accuracy matter for evaluating a marriage partner.

Limitations and Future Research

The present investigation is the first to consider the long-term implications of partners having experiences that are aligned with each other and grounded in reality during their courtship. Therefore, a wide net was cast using many of the premarital variables available in the PAIR project data set. Overall, results suggest that certain aspects of the courtship are particularly important in assessing how shared reality foreshadows marital stability. Specifically, couples who are building a stable marriage versus those who are setting the stage for marital strife and instability are differentiated by: a) the correspondence between the depth of partner's love for each other, b) the rate at which partners move simultaneously through the courtship from where they believe marriage is possible to where they believe it is likely, c) the similarity in how often partners report downturns in their confidence of marriage across the courtship, and the extent to which d) premarital conflict and e) having a turbulent courtship affect individuals' feelings of love and ambivalence prior to marriage. The overall proportion

of significant results may not be high, but researchers now have an idea of notable variables to consider in future research.

Moreover, these discriminating variables emerged despite an overall lack of power in the present investigation. It is frequently recommended that a model have at least 10 cases per parameter (e.g., Bentler & Chou, 1987; Kline, 2005). Although the overall sample size in this study is a strength in many regards (e.g., it is one of the only studies that has followed this many couples for over 13 years), the number of couples who ultimately divorce is still only 56. Neither the logistic regression equations, which contained 12 parameters, nor the path models, which contained seven parameters, comprised the minimum sample size needed to lessen Type II error. This lack of power, however, gives even more confidence in the significant results obtained and suggests that other findings may emerge with a larger sample or more focused analytic techniques.

Marital outcomes, such as when couples divorce, also may need to be further differentiated in future investigations. It is possible that some couples marry despite recognizing that their courtship was problematic. Previous research has established that couples who quickly divorce, for example, appear the most unfavorable as newlyweds compared to couples who divorce late (after 7 years) and to couples who remain in unhappy or happy marriages over 13 years. These couples also frequently had longer and more troubled courtships (Huston et al., 2001). Nevertheless, they still married, perhaps because they chose to discount the faults of the relationships as the disillusionment model suggests, or perhaps they were actually aware of the relationship difficulties but chose to wed in hopes of marriage “fixing” their problems. On the other hand, those who divorce

late appeared particularly promising as newlyweds, and they also had passionate courtships whereby partners plunged into love, had sex early, and decided to marry quickly. These couples may have experienced similar progressions in commitment, for instance, but they may show a strong discontent between the negative characteristics of their relationships and their positive courtship feelings. Thus, the disillusionment pathway may be different for couples depending on when they divorce, or it may be that disillusionment represents a pathway for only some who divorce (which may explain why the logistic regression was worse at predicting which individuals would divorce).

The possibility also exists that couples who remain married, compared to at least some who divorce, generally share more similar and grounded feelings during their courtship, but those who remain happily married may be more likely to embellish the virtues that are based in reality than those in unhappy marriages. One study found that couples who sustained happy, durable marriages over a 13-year time span had more harmonious relationships from the start than their stable, but discontent, counterparts. These happy couples were more deeply in love, more expressive, and less ambivalent; they reported more partner responsiveness, and expressed less negativity as newlyweds (Huston et al., 2001). Other studies of shorter duration seem consistent with the idea that couples' initial marital quality differentiates between couples who remain happily married and those stable couples in unhappy marriages (Davila & Bradbury, 2001; Karney & Bradbury, 1997). Some researchers have suggested that couples in lasting but unhappy marriages are seemingly aware and comfortable from the start with marriages that do not hold up to romantic ideals (Huston, 2009; Huston et al., 2001). One possible

explanation for these lackluster marriages is that, compared to couples who remain happily married, these dissatisfied couples are less apt to give their partners the benefit of the doubt or to put a positive spin on relatively minor issues. Thus, a next step in the research is to consider whether individuals having too many similar experiences and being too accurate in assessing their partner foreshadow marital discontent.

Some may assert that a limitation of the current study is the use of retrospective accounts of the courtship period. Indeed, a trade-off exists when deciding whether to study courtship prospectively versus retrospectively. Concurrent studies have the benefit of capturing events as they unfold, and inaccuracies in memory should be minimized if data are collected regularly during the courtship. On the other hand, following couples prospectively through their courtship is impractical in that most dating couples do not wed (Huston, 2009). Furthermore, the present investigation would likely have been impossible using concurrent data collection. The main premise of this study is that individuals who share similar courtship experiences with their partners that also are grounded in reality are better prepared for marriage. If a researcher, however, routinely asked individuals about their feelings and perception of their partner, then dating individuals may be more likely to attend to that information. Thus, a concurrent study could actually serve as an intervention of sorts, and previous research has established that participation in studies has the potential to change beliefs about dating relationships (Surra, Curran, & Williams, 2009).

Concluding Thoughts

Researchers and practitioners seemingly acknowledge that creating a shared reality is important. Communication scholars and marital programs, for instance, are often directed at the idea of “increasing openness and reducing the number of private misconceptions” (Sillars & Scott, 1983, p. 165). Yet, research considering the importance of shared understandings and grounded experiences during courtship is still limited. The present investigation is one of the first to consider the role of shared reality, and findings should supply the impetus for the development and refinement of premarital programs to help courting partners address focal areas in which perceptual congruence and a realistic understanding of their relationship puts them en route to matrimonial stability.

APPENDIX A:

Relationship Questionnaire

The measures of love, ambivalence, conflict/negativity, and maintenance behaviors used in the present investigation are subscales from the Braiker and Kelley (1979)

Relationship Questionnaire.

The Love subscale consists of items: 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 17, 19, 21, and 23.

The Ambivalence subscale consists of items: 6, 9, 15, 18, and 20.

The Conflict/Negativity subscale consists of items: 3, 5, 12, 24, and 25.

The Maintenance subscale consists of items: 2, 8, 11, 14, and 22.

The following questions ask about your feelings about your relationship with your dating partner. Please circle the number that best describes your feelings at the present time in your relationship.

1. To what extent do you have a sense of “belonging” with your partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not								Very
at all								Much

2. To what extent do you reveal or disclose very intimate facts about yourself to your partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not								Very
at all								Much

3. How often do you and your partner argue with one another?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very infrequently								Very frequently

4. How much do you feel you “give” to the relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very Little						Very Much		

5. To what extent do you try to change things about your partner that bother you (e.g. behaviors, attitudes, etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all							Very Much	

6. How confused are you about your feelings toward your partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all								Extremely

7. To what extent do you love your partner at the present time?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all							Very Much	

8. How much time do you and your partner spend discussing and trying to work out problems between you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No time at all								A great deal of time

9. How much do you think about or worry about losing some of your independence by being involved with your partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all							Very Much	

10. To what extent do you feel that things that happen to your partner also affect or are important to you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all							Very Much	

11. How much do you and your partner talk about the quality of your relationship (e.g., how “good” it is, how satisfying, how to improve it, etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Never							Very Often	

12. How often do you feel angry or resentful toward your partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Never							Very Often	

13. To what extent do you feel that your relationship is somewhat unique compared to others you've been in?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all								Very Much

14. To what extent do you try to change your own behavior to help solve certain problems between you and your partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all								Very Much

15. How ambivalent or unsure are you about continuing in the relationship with your partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not unsure at all								Extremely unsure

16. How committed do you feel toward your partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all								Extremely

17. How close do you feel toward your partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not close at all								Extremely close

18. To what extent do you feel that your partner demands or requires too much of your time and attention?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not								Very
at all								Much

19. How much do you need your partner at this time?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not								Very
at all								Much

20. To what extent do you feel “trapped” or pressured to continue in this relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not								Very
at all								Much

21. How sexually intimate are you with your partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not								Extremely
at all								

22. How much do you tell your partner what you want or need from the relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very								Very
Little								Much

23. How attached do you feel to your partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not								Very
at all								Much

24. When you and your partner argue, how serious are the problems or arguments?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not								Very
at all								Much

25. To what extent do you communicate negative feelings toward your partner (e.g., anger, dissatisfaction, frustration, etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not								Very
at all								Much

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VITA

April Christine Wilson was born in Honolulu, Hawaii on October 13, 1977, the daughter of Rebecca Ann Wilson and William Robert Wilson. After completing her work at James Madison High School in San Antonio, Texas, in 1996, she entered The University of Texas in Austin, Texas. She received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from The University of Texas at Austin in August, 2001. Following graduation, she was employed as Vice President of Operations for Insite Group, the owning company of multiple apartment communities designed to serve individuals of low-income. In September, 2005, she entered the Human Development and Family Sciences Department at The University of Texas at Austin and received the degree of Master of Arts in that department in May 2007.

Permanent address: 4600 Mueller Blvd., Apt. 3072
Austin, TX 78723

This dissertation was typed by the author.