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**Personal History or Personality? Differences in Relationship Quality  
Between Remarriages and First Marriages**

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**Personal History or Personality? Differences in Relationship Quality  
Between Remarriages and First Marriages**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

### **Personal History or Personality? Differences in Relationship Quality Between Remarriages and First Marriages**

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The current study is the first to explore how reported reasons for divorce are associated with the emotional climate of subsequent marriages, and if the emotional climate of these relationships is significantly different from that of happy or unhappy first marriages. It also examines whether variations in the emotional climate of marriage are reducible to underlying personality characteristics. These issues were investigated using data from the Texas Baseline Survey on Marriage. Results indicate that there are two types of marriage that end in divorce: those preceded by a highly distressed marriage, and those preceded by a less distressed marriage. Regardless of emotional tenor of the marriage prior to divorce, the emotional climate of remarriages appears to be largely similar to that of happy first marriages and substantially better than that of unhappy first marriages. Although individuals with different relationship histories possess distinct

personality profiles, the differences in emotional climate persist after the effects of personality have been taken into account. Overall, these results suggest that accounting for differences among those who have divorced, as well as distinguishing between happy and unhappy first marriages, is important for understanding the affective nature of marriage.

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## **Chapter 1: Brief Introduction**

Although the majority of divorced individuals eventually remarry (Schoen & Standish, 2001), remarriages are generally more fragile than first marriages. Approximately 60% of remarriages end in divorce (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002), compared to between 40 and 50% of first marriages (Raley & Bumpass, 2003; Schoen & Standish, 2001). Moreover, remarriages tend to be of lower quality than first marriages. Subsequent marriages are often plagued by conflict, poor communication, and rapid declines in marital satisfaction over the first few years of marriage (Booth & Edwards, 1992; Deal, Hagan, & Anderson, 1992; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Peek, Bell, Waldren, & Sorell, 1988). Although divorced individuals generally have high hopes for their future relationships (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002), they may not find later marriages to be substantially better than their first one (Hetherington, 2003).

It is possible that remarriages are of lower quality because one or both partners have not recovered from a prior divorce. The emotional consequences of divorce can persist for years (Mastekaasa, 1995; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989), and many divorced individuals may enter into new relationships before fully recovering from their prior marriage. Accordingly, enduring distrust from a previous marriage may undermine the emotional climate of later partnerships. As described by Hetherington and Kelly (2002), “[the divorced] tend to be blind to the long shadow that the past casts over their new lives” (p. 11).

Divorce, however, is not a universally negative experience. Although researchers have assumed that the scars of divorce may be more pronounced among those emerging from a particularly troubled marriage, it appears that divorce may function as an escape in many such cases (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). These individuals may see the

divorce as an opportunity to find happiness elsewhere (Wang & Amato, 2000), and it is possible that many of them go on to form satisfying relationships. On the other hand, a divorce preceded by a relatively problem-free marriage may take an unexpected toll on individuals (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). These findings indicate that the emotional climate of a later marriage may partly reflect the reasons the prior marriage unraveled, suggesting the importance of considering how the reasons for divorce influence the repartnering process.

It is also possible that personality characteristics both select people into good and stable relationships or, alternatively, mitigate against the formation of high-quality relationships. Individuals who possess inexpressive personalities, for example, may behave in ways that undermine the quality of their marriage (e.g., Miller, Caughlin, & Huston, 2003; Pasch, Bradbury, & Davila, 1997), and this tendency may not be restricted to a single relationship but rather may impair solidarity in a series of intimate partnerships. Psychological characteristics influence the way individuals act and react within the dyadic environment (Huston, 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1995), and thus individuals may be predisposed to behave in certain ways due to their underlying dispositions. For instance, individuals who are high in trait anxiety generally behave more negatively toward their partners (Beach & Fincham, 1994; Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000), whereas those who are higher in trait expressiveness tend to behave more affectionately (Huston & Houts, 1998; Miller et al., 2003). In the context of remarriage, the apparent impact of divorce thus may be the result of differences in personality that bear on both the unraveling of an earlier marriage and the emotional climate of their current relationship.

The overall goal of the present research is to examine how the reasons people identify as causing their divorce are associated with the emotional climate of subsequent

marriages. Chapter 2 includes a description of the samples and measures used in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the current investigation. Phase 1 can be found in Chapter 3, and it begins with a discussion of the reasons individuals regularly cite as contributing to divorce. Then, I employ cluster analysis to determine if individuals' reasons for divorce can be grouped to describe the different types of marriages that end in divorce. Subsequently, in Phase 2 (found in Chapter 4), I discuss how different types of divorce experiences can be linked to marital outcomes. Toward this end, I examine whether individuals' explanations for why their prior marriage ended are tied to the emotional climate of their current marriage, and whether the emotional tenor of these marriages varies significantly from that of happy or unhappy first marriages. The second objective of Phase 2 was to examine if differences in the affective character of marriage are associated with individuals' personal attributes; accordingly, I review how certain personality characteristics are linked to both the emotional climate of marriage and marital stability. Then, I explore whether the individuals with different relationship histories possess different personality characteristics. The differences in emotional climate of those in first compared to later marriages could be because those who have divorced possess personality characteristics that make for unhappy marriages, because of the divorce experience itself, or both. If personality were not accounted for, any emergent differences in relationship quality could be attributed to underlying dispositions. My final series of analyses controls for personality, in order to reduce the likelihood that differences in the emotional climate of marriage are reducible to the personal attributes of the individual. Chapter 5 is devoted to a general discussion of Phases 1 and 2.

## **Chapter 2: Method**

The data for the present study were gathered as part of the Texas Baseline Survey on Marriage (TBSM), a statewide survey conducted by the Office of Survey Research at the University of Texas at Austin. A random sample of household residents was contacted by telephone, and individuals who were age 18 or older were eligible to participate. In total, 2500 individuals took part in the survey, including an oversample of 500 Hispanics. Random digit dialing phone numbers were provided by Survey Sampling International. Specifically, the response rates ranged from 12.2% to 24.3%, and the cooperation rates for the core sample ranged from 60.7% to 76.8%, depending on the method of calculation. These response rates are similar to those obtained for surveys of comparable length, and evidence suggests that non-response has little effect on the quality of the data (AAPOR, 2008; Langer, 2003). Men are significantly underrepresented in the TBSM compared to the general population of Texas (34.1% versus 49.3%, respectively; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009), and this underrepresentation may contribute to any gender differences that emerge.

### **THE INTERVIEW**

The 45-minute survey was designed to assess, among other things, respondents' relationship history, the quality of their current relationships, and their personalities. At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked if they were currently married, and if they were, they specified whether or not it was their first marriage. Married participants provided the length of their marriage and indicated whether or not they cohabited before marriage, either with their current spouse or another partner. They also reported whether they had any children and specified whether they were a product of the current marriage or a prior relationship.

A large number of the respondents were previously married, and those with divorce experience reported their number of prior marriages. For marriages that ended in divorce, respondents were asked when their marriage began, as well as when they last lived with their former spouse. Additionally, respondents were provided with a list of common reasons for divorce, and they were asked to indicate which, if any, of the reasons contributed to the dissolution of their most recent marriage.

All respondents, regardless of divorce history, were asked a variety of demographic questions, including their household income, year of birth, year of marriage, prior cohabitation experience, level of education, religious preferences, and ethnicity. They were also asked to respond to a series of questions assessing their personality characteristics.

Finally, those who were currently married were asked about the emotional climate of their relationship. Specifically, respondents reflected on both their own and their partner's behaviors in the marriage. Additionally, they provided their general thoughts about the affective nature of their union, as well as their feelings of obligation to their partner.

## **SAMPLES**

Participants who were currently married at the time of data collection were eligible for inclusion in the present study, resulting in a pool of 1499 qualified individuals (516 men and 893 women; 90 missing).<sup>1</sup> The subsample for Phase 1 consisted of individuals who were previously divorced and currently remarried, whereas Phase 2 included an additional subsample of those who were in intact first marriages. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 89 ( $M = 47.76$ ;  $SD = 14.52$ ), and their current

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<sup>1</sup> The missing data were likely a result of interviewer error. Interviewers were instructed to not ask participants for their gender, so it is possible the interviewers forgot to record the gender, or alternatively, the gender of the respondent was not easily determinable and was therefore omitted.

marriages had lasted for an average of 21.57 years ( $SD = 15.44$ ). Of those who provided information about their ethnicity, 55.2% participants were White ( $n = 827$ ), 30.6% were Hispanic ( $n = 458$ ), 3.9% were non-Hispanic Blacks ( $n = 58$ ), and 3.3% identified themselves as a different ethnicity ( $n = 49$ ). It is worth noting that 6.8% did not categorize themselves in terms of their ethnicity ( $n = 102$ ). The sample represented a wide range of educational backgrounds, with 13.0% individuals possessing a high school degree or less, 22.9% attending some college, 6.6% having technical training, 23.8% having a Bachelor's degree, and 11.9% having post-graduate education.

### **Remarried Subsample**

The first phase focused on the reasons individuals who had been divorced gave for why their marriage ended. The remarried subsample consisted of the 338 individuals who had divorced and were remarried at the time of data collection (122 men and 201 women; 15 missing). Those who were divorced more than once provided information on their most recent divorce. Because not all of the remarried individuals responded to all of the variables included in the cluster analysis (see Chapter 3), only the divorced that were sorted into clusters (270 individuals; 97 men, 169 women, 4 missing) were included in the final analysis.<sup>2</sup> Two hundred and five of these individuals were in their second marriage, 48 were in their third marriage, 14 were in their fourth marriage, and 3 were in their fifth marriage. Their most recent prior marriages had lasted an average of 6.45 years

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<sup>2</sup>The divorced individuals that were sorted into clusters and those that were not did not significantly differ in terms of gender, age, race, education, or the number of times they have been previously married ( $ps$  ranged in value from .11 to .97). They were equally likely to have divorced parents, prior cohabitation experience, and children from a prior union ( $p$ -values: .11 to .93). Additionally, those who were sorted into clusters were just as likely to have initiated their prior divorce as those who were not sorted into clusters ( $p = .60$ ). However, the clustered participants were dissimilar in several important domains from those who were not sorted into clusters. In comparison to those who were sorted into clusters, those that were not clustered were more religious,  $t(336) = 2.01$ ;  $p < .05$ , and their prior marriages lasted longer,  $t(43) = -1.83$ ;  $p = .08$ . Following their divorce, those who were not included in a cluster got remarried quicker,  $t(84) = 1.84$ ;  $p = .07$ , compared to those who were sorted into clusters. Additionally, those who were not sorted into clusters were less likely than those who were clustered to have incomes between \$75,000 and \$100,000 (8.20% and 18.41%, respectively),  $\chi^2(7, n = 338) = 15.05, p < .05$ .

( $SD = 5.94$ ), and an average of 5.39 years ( $SD = 5.95$ ) passed between the final separation from their former spouse and the initiation of their current relationship.<sup>3</sup>

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 89, and the average age of the participants was 50.22 ( $SD = 10.92$ ). The average length of the current marriage was 15.02 years ( $SD = 10.52$ ). With regard to ethnicity, 19% individuals were Hispanic, 68% were non-Hispanic Whites, 5.6% were non-Hispanic Blacks, and the remaining 7.4% of respondents identified themselves as a different ethnicity (e.g., Native American, East Asian; 72 missing).

### **First Marriage Subsample**

In order to obtain a comparable sample of individuals in their first marriages, the 270 remarried individuals that were included in the cluster analysis were then matched with individuals in their first marriages on the basis of gender and the length of their current marriage. Remarriages tend to be of shorter duration than first marriages (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007), and declines in satisfaction over the first few years of marriage are generally more pronounced for those in later marriages compared to first marriages (Deal et al., 1992; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). By using length of marriage as a criterion for matching, variations in emotional climate are more likely to be identified when the remarried population is contrasted to those in first marriages of comparable length.

In order to match the remarried subsample with individuals in their first marriages, the cases were sorted and aggregated according to gender and length of time married. Cases that did not result in any matches were excluded from further analyses. The matching technique resulted in a sample of 860 participants in their first marriages

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<sup>3</sup>This number includes 7 relationships that began before the previous marriage ended (range = 1–21 years;  $M = 8.71$ ;  $SD = 8.62$ ).



(302 men and 547 women; 11 missing). The “first marriage” sample was substantially larger than the “remarried” sample, because there were several individuals in their first marriages that perfectly matched a remarried participant. All matches were kept in order to increase power. Although the remarried subsample and the first marriage subsample were comprised of equal proportions of men and women,  $\chi^2(1, n = 1054) = .18, p = .67$ , the length of their marriages was significantly different,  $t(1056) = -1.64; p < .05$ . This was largely a function of the unequal sample sizes and the fact that, as marriage length increased, a greater number of first marriages matched the remarried subsample. In order to account for these differences, length of marriage was controlled for in all analyses.

Only the participants in their first marriages who (1) matched the clustered individuals on the basis of age and length of time married, and (2) reported their level of marital satisfaction were included in the final analysis (795 individuals: 259 men, 533 women, 3 missing).<sup>4</sup> These respondents were sorted into those that were “happily married” and “unhappily married.” Marital satisfaction was assessed using a single item, described in more detail in the following section. Considering spouses tend to overstate their level of satisfaction with their marriages (Edmonds, 1967), respondents who did not say they were “completely satisfied” with their marriage were classified as “unhappily married.” As is ordinarily the case, the respondents’ ratings of their marriages were overwhelmingly positive. There were 399 happily married individuals and 396 unhappily married individuals. The respondents classified as “unhappy” are, to be fair, a diverse

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<sup>4</sup> The participants that were matched to the divorced subsample and those that were not did not significantly differ in terms of gender, age, race, education, income, religiosity, or the length of their current marriage (*ps* ranged in value from .22 to .92). They were equally likely to have children in their household, regardless of if they were from a prior relationship or the current relationship (*p*-values: .57 to .81). They were also equally likely to have prior cohabitation experience (*p* = .57). However, the matched individuals were more likely to have experienced a parental divorce compared to those that were not matched to the divorced subsample (26.14% versus 19.52%),  $\chi^2(1, n = 1105) = 6.19, p = .01$ .

group, including those who are willing to report that they are less than fully satisfied, as well as those who are quite unhappy.

The matched individuals ranged in age from 18 to 89, and the average age of the participants was 43.84 ( $SD = 12.26$ ). The average length of the current marriage was 16.80 years ( $SD = 11.73$ ). In terms of ethnicity, 31.4% of individuals were Hispanic, 54.9% were non-Hispanic Whites, 4.3% were non-Hispanic Blacks, and the remaining 9.4% of respondents identified themselves as a different ethnicity (e.g., Native American, East Asian; 72 missing).

## **MEASURES**

### **Reasons for Divorce**

Reasons for divorce were assessed using a list of 18 factors that could potentially contribute to the dissolution of a marriage, including individual, relational, and external reasons (see Table 1). These factors included 9 issues that prior research has identified as individual reasons for divorce (e.g., “Problems with drugs or alcohol;” e.g., Cleek & Pearson, 1985), 6 reasons typically classified as relational problems (e.g., “Too much conflict and arguing;” e.g., Cupach & Metts, 1986), and 3 external factors previously cited as contributing to divorce (e.g., “Serious financial problems or financial setbacks;” e.g., Cleek & Pearson, 1985). For all 18 reasons, respondents were asked to indicate on a three-point scale whether it was “A major reason,” “A minor reason,” or “Not a reason” for their divorce. For 12 of the 18 items, participants also provided their attributions of blame (identified with an asterisk in Table 1). Specifically, they indicated whether a particular reason applied primarily to themselves, their partner, or the both of them.

Table 1. *Reasons for Divorce and Corresponding Attributions*

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External reasons for divorce

You had serious financial problems or financial setbacks.

One or both of you could not hold a steady job.\*

One or both of you had conflict with or lack of support from family or other relatives.\*

Relational reasons for divorce

There was conflict about who should do what around the house or how to handle children.

There was a lack of equality in the relationship.

There was too much conflict and arguing.

It was a poor match from the beginning.

You didn't know each other well enough before marriage.

There was violence or physical aggression in the relationship.\*

Individualistic reasons for divorce

One or both of you was too young when you got married.\*

One or both of you had an affair.\*

One or both of you fell out of love.\*

One or both of you lost sexual interest in the other.\*

One or both of you had problems with drugs or alcohol.\*

One or both of you lacked commitment to make the marriage work.\*

One or both of you had unrealistic expectations of marriage.\*

One or both of you lacked the necessary skills and knowledge for marriage.\*

One or both of you got too absorbed in their job.\*

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*Note.* For reasons denoted with an asterisk (\*), respondents were asked to provide their attributions of blame.

For the purposes of the cluster analysis, all of the attribution items were transformed into two dichotomous variables, with one variable representing their own contribution to the divorce (0 = this reason did not apply to me; 1 = this reason applied to me) and the other representing their partner's contribution (0 = this reason did not apply to my partner; 1 = this reason applied to my partner). If respondents originally indicated that a specific reason applied to both partners, both dichotomous variables would be coded as "1." The 6 items lacking attendant attributions were collapsed to create dichotomous variables as well; specifically, if a respondent indicated that a specific reason was either "A major reason" or "A minor reason" for their divorce, it was coded as simply "A reason" (where 0 = not a reason and 1 = a reason). Altogether, there were 30 dichotomous variables.

## **Relationship Quality**

The emotional climate of marriages was assessed in several ways. Specifically, participants were asked to report the extent to which they (1) have negative thoughts about their relationship, (2) display interpersonal negativity, and (3) have positive thoughts and feelings about their marriage. Additionally, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they feel structurally committed to their marriage.

### ***Negative Thoughts and Behaviors***

Due to the scope of the TBSM, a full scale assessing the negative side of marriage was not included; rather, 12 items were selected to assess participants' negative thoughts and behaviors. Six of these items were selected or modified from preexisting scales assessing conflict and negativity in intimate relationships (e.g., Braiker & Kelley, 1979; Stanley & Markman, 1992, 1997), and six of these items were unique to the TBSM (e.g., "I often wonder whether I love my [husband/wife] very much;" "I think a lot about the bad times in our relationship"). Participants responded to each statement on a 4-point scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree.

Principle components analysis with orthogonal rotations reduced the 12 variables to 2 factors (see Appendix A1 and A2 for the complete list of items included in each factor). One factor represented the negative thoughts participants had about their partners (8 items; "I think a lot about the bad times in our relationship"), whereas the other factor centered on respondents' poor communication patterns (4 items; "Little arguments escalate into ugly fights with accusations, criticisms, name calling, or bringing up past hurts"). Participants' responses to the variables comprising each factor were averaged, and higher scores were indicative of a greater degree of negativity for both measures. For the negative thoughts and behaviors measures, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .91 ( $M = 1.85$ ;  $SD = .61$ ) and .70 ( $M = 2.07$ ;  $SD = .53$ ), respectively.

### ***Positive Thoughts and Feelings***

In order to determine the extent to which respondents view their partner in a positive light, participants responded to a set of 3 items on a 4-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree; see Appendix A3). One of these variables was drawn from prior research and assessed the extent to which respondents' prioritized their current marriage: "My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life" (Stanley & Markman, 1992, 1997). The other two items were constructed by the TBSM team. Participants' responses to these items were averaged together to form a single measure with an alpha reliability coefficient of .71 ( $M = 3.26$ ;  $SD = .62$ ).

### ***Structural Commitment***

Participants' commitment to their current partner was measured using a set of 4 items, which represented the barriers to leaving their marriage (the full set of items can be found in Appendix A4). This conceptualization of commitment is similar to structural commitment, as described by Johnson (1991). One item was modified from a preexisting scale developed to assess the extent to which individuals feel external pressure to continue their relationship (Johnson et al., 1999). The other three items were created by the survey team uniquely for the TBSM, including "Even if I wanted to leave this relationship, I couldn't do so." For each of these items, participants indicated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) the extent to which they agreed with each statement. Participants' responses to the 4 variables were averaged together to create a composite commitment measure, where higher scores indicated a greater degree of structural commitment. The mean score for this measure was 2.49 ( $SD = .55$ ), and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .61.

## **Personality Characteristics**

A variety of personality dimensions were assessed, including participants' (1) trait expressiveness, (2) negative affectivity, (3) conscientiousness, and both (4) avoidant and (5) anxious attachment styles.

### ***Trait Expressiveness***

Trait expressiveness, or the tendency to behave in a kind, understanding manner, was measured using a set of 8 items (see Appendix A5). Seven of the variables were modified from a variety of preexisting scales used to assess psychological femininity (Helgeson & Fritz, 1998; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974), and included items such as "I'm very aware of other people's feelings" and "I'm very warm in relation to others." One additional item was created by the TSBM survey team: "I forgive people easily." Each item was responded to on a 4-point scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. Participants' responses were averaged together to create a single measure with a mean of 2.99 ( $SD = .32$ ). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .77.

### ***Negative Affectivity***

Participants' negative affectivity was assessed using a set of 6 variables (see Appendix A6). This scale included items that are generally associated with neuroticism or trait anxiety, and they indicate a generally disagreeable nature. Two items were modified from preexisting scales (Costa & McCrae, 1992; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991), and the TBSM team created four additional items, including, "When bad moods come over me, I often can't shake them." One item, "I remain calm in tense situations," was reverse-scored. Individuals' responded to this set of variables on a 4-point scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree. Their responses were averaged together, such that higher values represented greater negative affectivity. The mean score for this measure was 2.15 ( $SD = .36$ ), and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .65.

### ***Conscientiousness***

In order to assess conscientiousness, participants responded to a series of 10 items on a 4-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree). These variables were compiled from prior research assessing various facets of conscientiousness, such as personal responsibility, self-striving, and dependability (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Schwartz et al., 2002; Stanley & Markman, 1992; Triandis, 1995). Examples of these items include “I like to take responsibility for making decisions” and “When I make a commitment, I can always be counted on to follow through.” One item was created by the survey team specifically for the TBSM: “I’m good at solving problems on my own.” A complete list of the included variables can be found in Appendix A7. Two items were worded in a negative format (“I often feel helpless and want someone else to solve my problems” and “Sometimes I’m not as dependable as I should be”) and were reverse-coded. Participants’ responses to these items were averaged together to form a single measure ( $\alpha = .74$ ;  $M = 3.00$ ;  $SD = .30$ ).

### ***Insecure Attachment***

Participants’ affectional bonds to their current partner were assessed using 8 items selected to represent the two primary insecure attachment styles, anxious and avoidant attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Due to the scope of the TBSM, a complete scale measuring these two attachment styles was not included. The 8 items included in the survey were selected or modified from preexisting scales to assess both anxious and avoidant attachment styles (Costa & McCrae, 1992; John et al., 1991; O’Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 1996; Simpon, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). For each of these variables, participants indicated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) the extent to which they agreed with each statement.

Of these 8 variables, 6 items described an avoidant attachment style (e.g., “I have difficulty telling others that I love them”) and were averaged together to create a composite measure (the full list of items included in this measure can be found in Appendix A8). Higher scores represented a more insecure attachment style, and the mean score was 2.39 ( $SD = .40$ ;  $\alpha = .67$ ). The remaining two items represented anxious attachment and were averaged together to create a single measure ( $M = 2.30$ ;  $SD = 3.5$ ). The two variables included in this measure were, “I often worry that others don’t love me” and “Others are often reluctant to get as close emotionally as I would like.” These two items were moderately correlated ( $r = .34$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Although two-item measures are not preferable, prior research suggests that even two-item measures can serve as a functional alternative for a longer instrument (e.g., Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003).

### **Control Variables**

A number of possible confounds will be included in the current study as control variables. Considering the presence of children from previous relationships has been shown to negatively affect marital quality (e.g., Hetherington & Kelly, 2002), and having a child with one’s current partner typically increases relationship success (e.g., Wineberg, 1992), dummy variables were created to control for both conditions. I also control for the respondents’ ethnicity, age, prior cohabitation experience, and education. The length of the current marriage was strongly correlated with the participants’ age ( $r = .75$ ), so in order to include this item as a covariate, it was recoded as a categorical variable, such that 1 = married 1 year or less, 2 = married 2-5 years, 3 = married 6-10 years, and 4 = married more than 10 years (if both were included as continuous variables, the two would be mathematically conflated). Finally, the personality scales described in the previous section are included as covariates during the final assessment of the emotional climate of



marriage. By doing so, I can be certain that any differences in emotional climate are a function of their marital experience and are not a function of underlying personality characteristics.

### **Chapter 3: Identifying Types of Divorce Experiences**

There is a pervasive interest in why marriages dissolve, primarily because different reasons for divorce could result not only in unique divorce experiences, but also in different processes of disengagement (Baxter, 1984) and adjustment (Kitson & Sussman, 1982). Couples usually experience a constellation of problems in their relationship prior to divorce (Ponzetti, Zvonkovic, Cate, & Huston, 1992; Rasmussen & Ferraro, 1979). Accounts of divorce that individuals create seldom identify a single causal factor; rather, most individuals report a variety of reasons that contributed to the dissolution of their marriage.

Nevertheless, certain reasons appear to be more commonly mentioned than others. Table 2 shows the frequency with which the participants endorsed each of the reasons for divorce. Nine of the top ten reasons, each endorsed by more than 40% of the individuals, have to do with the issue of marital harmony. These concerns closely resemble the expressive complaints described by Kitson (1992), which included a lack of communication or growing apart. Indeed, high levels of conflict and loss of love were common contributing factors in the current study (cited by 60.7% and 48.9% of the participants, respectively). Other common concerns include infidelity and emotional immaturity (Amato & Previti, 2003; Hetherington, 2003), and both of these reasons were also among the top ten reasons cited for divorce. Specifically, 45.6% of individuals admitted that their ex-spouse was unfaithful, 54.15% reported their former partner lacked the necessary skills for a successful marriage, and 40.7% acknowledged that they were too young when they got married.

Pragmatic concerns, on the other hand, are named less often. Such concerns refer to a lack of consensus about childrearing, the failure to follow role expectations, and a lack of financial security. Indeed, pragmatic concerns were less commonly mentioned;

Table 2. *Proportion of Individuals Endorsing Specific Reasons for Divorce*

Reason for divorce	Endorsed as a reason ( <i>n</i> =270) <sup>a</sup>
Your partner lacked the commitment to make the marriage work.	176 (65.2%)
It was a poor match from the beginning.	173 (64.1%)
There was too much conflict and arguing.	164 (60.7%)
You didn't know each other well enough before marriage.	149 (55.2%)
Your partner lacked the necessary skills and knowledge for marriage.	146 (54.1%)
There was a lack of equality in the relationship.	145 (53.7%)
You fell out of love.	132 (48.9%)
Your partner had an affair.	123 (45.6%)
Your partner fell out of love.	120 (44.4%)
You were too young when you got married.	110 (40.7%)
Your partner had unrealistic expectations of marriage.	102 (37.8%)
Your partner was too young when you got married.	98 (36.3%)
You lacked the necessary skills and knowledge for marriage.	89 (33.0%)
Your partner was violent or physically aggressive in the relationship.	88 (32.6%)
Your partner lost sexual interest in you.	86 (31.9%)
You had unrealistic expectations of marriage.	83 (30.7%)
You had serious financial problems or financial setbacks.	82 (30.4%)
You lost sexual interest in your partner.	81 (30.0%)
Your partner had problems with drugs or alcohol.	78 (28.9%)
There was conflict about who should do what around the house or how to handle children.	78 (28.9%)
You lacked the commitment to make the marriage work.	78 (28.9%)
Your partner could not hold a steady job.	61 (22.6%)
Your partner had conflict with or lack of support from family or other relatives.	58 (21.5%)
You had conflict with or lack of support from family or other relatives.	40 (14.8%)
You got too absorbed in your job.	36 (13.3%)
Your partner got too absorbed in his or her job.	36 (13.3%)
You had an affair.	21 (7.8%)
You could not hold a steady job.	11 (4.1%)
You had problems with drugs or alcohol.	11 (4.1%)
You were violent or physically aggressive in the relationship.	10 (3.7%)

<sup>a</sup>The number individuals endorsing the reason; the proportion of individuals is given in parentheses.

for instance, only 30.4% of individuals reported that financial problems contributed to their divorce, and 28.9% identified disagreements about childrearing as a reason for divorce. Even less commonly mentioned are serious complaints (Kitson, 1992), such as physical abuse and problems with alcohol or drugs (Amato & Previti, 2003; Fletcher, 1983). Neither of these reasons was among the top ten most commonly mentioned reasons in the current study, and only a tiny percentage of respondents acknowledged

their own behavioral problems (e.g., only 3.7% confessed that their aggressive behavior contributed to their divorce).

Researchers examining reasons for divorce often utilize a free-response format, allowing respondents to fully list all the relevant causes for their divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; Cupach & Metts, 1986; Fletcher, 1983; Kitson & Sussman, 1982; Ponzetti et al., 1992; Schneller & Arditti, 2004). Each response is then coded separately and then grouped thematically, resulting in a strong characterization of the general contributing factors to divorce but a weaker understanding of the coexisting factors that cause individual marriages to deteriorate. In other words, the literature has catalogued a list of common reasons for divorce, but few researchers have attempted to determine how reasons cluster together, even though it is widely recognized that individual marriages end for a variety of reasons.

The work of Kitson and Sussman (1982) provides a notable exception to the general pattern. They collected a list of reasons for divorce and performed a factor analysis to determine if there were multiple patterns of reasons contributing to divorce. Seven unique marital complaints were identified: general discontent, conflict over children, financial or employment problems, sexual health complications, abuse, gender role conflict, and gambling or criminal activities. Although their analysis categorized the reasons for divorce that generally co-occur with their sample, it did not explore how these complaints are sorted at the level of the individual. In other words, they did not identify groups of individuals who report a similar combination of factors that led to their divorce.

The primary goal of Phase 1 is to identify the subtypes of marriages that end in divorce, based on the reasons divorcers give for the break-up of their marriage. The types might differ in the number of reasons cited, the amount of pre-divorce conflict, and the allocation of blame. Researchers have generally focused on the *quality* of marriages

that end in divorce, either examining the emotional climate of the marriage immediately preceding the divorce or changes in the affective nature of the marriage that led to its eventual dissolution (e.g., Amato & Hohmann-Marriot, 2007; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001a). Despite the fact that divorced individuals develop their own accounts of why their marriage dissolved, researchers have yet to examine how differences in the configuration of reasons can be used to characterize the different types of marriages that end in divorce.

### **RESULTS OF THE CLUSTER ANALYSIS**

The Two-Step Clustering procedure, available in SPSS 11.5 and later versions, was used to determine the appropriate cluster solution. Conceptually, the resulting number of clusters describes the number of unique divorce experiences that individuals report. In order to perform the cluster analysis, the 30 dichotomous variables described above were entered into the algorithm.

In the first step of the clustering procedure, each case is sorted into a preexisting cluster or a new cluster is created, depending on the mean and variance of the included variables. In the second step, these clusters are then compared to one another, and similar ones are merged together. In both steps, the clustering procedure relies on a log-likelihood distance measure, which represents the distance between the means of the variables included in the two clusters. Specifically, if two clusters were to be combined into a single cluster, the resulting decrease in log-likelihood represents the original distance between the two clusters. Thus, a high ratio of distance measures is desirable, because it represents conceptually distinct clusters. The Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) is also used to determine the ideal number of clusters; the lowest BIC value is indicative of the preferred cluster solution. Nevertheless, there is a degree of subjectivity

Table 3. *Information on Cluster Solutions 1-10*

Number of Clusters	Ratio of Distance Measures	BIC	BIC Change
1	—	9290.36	—
2	1.62	8856.66	-433.71
3	1.34	8653.46	-203.20
4	1.32	8544.11	-109.35
5	1.12	8501.70	-42.41
6	1.17	8481.61	-20.09
7	1.05	8488.88	7.27
8	1.13	8503.30	14.42
9	1.06	8535.62	32.32
10	1.03	8576.11	40.49

*Note.* Dashes indicate data that could not be computed. BIC = Bayesian Information Coefficient.

in the selection of the number of clusters, and occasionally the choice of a particular cluster solution is justified if it makes theoretical sense (Kachigan, 1982). Thus, I considered the ratio of distance measures, the BIC, and the theoretical argument when selecting the number of clusters.

The Two-Step Clustering procedure provides the most appropriate cluster solution automatically, but other possible solutions can be tested manually (refer to Table 3 for the complete results for cluster solutions 1 through 10). Considering the two cluster solution had the highest ratio of distance measures (1.62), was the ideal cluster solution suggested by SPSS, and made conceptual sense, the two cluster solution was used for the final analyses. Detailed descriptions of each of the two clusters can be found in Appendix B.

Chi-square tests were performed to determine if the clusters were significantly different in the number of respondents acknowledging a specific reason for divorce (see Table 4). The contrast between the two groups was striking. Twenty-eight of the 30 reasons were mentioned significantly more often by members of one group (hereafter referred to as the “high-distress group”), compared to the other (hereafter referred to as the “low-distress group”). The low-distress group ( $n = 203$ ) appeared to be characterized by very few reasons for divorce. In fact, only 2 of the 30 reasons were identified by as

Table 4. *Chi-Square Comparison of the Two Cluster Solution*

Reason for Divorce	Low-Distress Group <sup>a</sup>	High-Distress Group <sup>b</sup>	$\chi^2$
Reasons with no associated attributions			
Financial problems/setbacks	20.6%	60.9%	39.27***
Conflict about housework/children	18.6%	59.4%	41.72***
Lack of equality in relationship	44.1%	82.6%	30.79***
Too much conflict/arguing	49.0%	95.7%	47.05***
Poor match from the beginning	54.9%	91.3%	29.69***
Didn't know each other well enough before marriage	45.1%	85.5%	34.06***
Reasons with associated attributions			
Too young when married			
Respondent	31.9%	68.1%	28.01***
Partner	24.0%	73.9%	55.30***
Had an affair			
Respondent	5.9%	14.5%	5.16*
Partner	44.6%	49.3%	.45
Fell out of love			
Respondent	39.2%	78.3%	31.45***
Partner	39.7%	60.9%	9.33***
Could not hold a steady job			
Respondent	2.5%	8.7%	5.20*
Partner	15.2%	44.9%	25.97***
Lost sexual interest			
Respondent	17.2%	68.1%	63.71***
Partner	25.0%	53.6%	19.34***
Had drug/alcohol problems			
Respondent	2.00%	11.60%	11.39***
Partner	21.6%	50.7%	21.31***
Was violent or abusive			
Respondent	2.00%	10.1%	8.93**
Partner	27.9%	46.4%	7.98**
Lacked commitment			
Respondent	22.6%	49.3%	17.78***
Partner	59.8%	81.2%	10.36***
Had unrealistic expectations			
Respondent	18.6%	66.7%	55.86***
Partner	25.5%	75.4%	54.38***
Lacked skills to make marriage work			
Respondent	20.6%	71.0%	59.00***
Partner	42.2%	91.3%	50.24***
Had too much conflict with or lack of support from family			
Respondent	7.8%	34.8%	29.92***
Partner	15.2%	40.6%	19.61***
Was too absorbed in job			
Respondent	9.3%	24.6%	10.58***
Partner	11.8%	17.4%	1.426

<sup>a</sup>*n* = 203. <sup>b</sup>*n* = 67.

\**p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .01. \*\*\* *p* < .001.

many as half of the members of the group. Those in the high-distress group ( $n = 67$ ) reported a large number of reasons that contributed to their divorce. More than half of the participants agreed that 18 of the 30 problems listed contributed to the dissolution of their marriage.

For all three conflict-related reasons, a greater proportion of the high-distress group reported these factors contributed to their eventual divorce, compared to the low-distress group.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, conflict pertaining to housework or childcare was a contributing factor in 18.6% of the divorces preceded by a low-distress marriage, but was a factor in 59.4% of those preceded by a high-distress marriage. General conflict and arguing contributed to 49.0% of low-distress marriages ending in divorce and 95.7% of the highly distressed marriages that eventually dissolved. Compared to the low-distress group, the high-distress group was significantly more likely to report interpersonal violence, regardless of whether it was caused by themselves (2.0% versus 10.1%) or their partner (27.9% versus 46.4%).

### **Allocation of Blame**

For 12 of the 18 reasons, individuals were asked to provide their attributions of blame by specifying whether a reason was due to themselves, their former spouse, or the both of them. For example, if participants reported that infidelity contributed to their decision to divorce, they were asked whether they were unfaithful to their ex-spouse, if their ex-spouse was unfaithful, or if they were both unfaithful. It is important to note that, in the cases where both partners were at fault, the respondent is accepting partial

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<sup>5</sup> Considering the similarity of results, the descriptions and labels used by Amato and Hohmann-Marriott (2007) to describe their cluster solution will be used to refer to the clusters that emerged in the current study.



Table 5. *Cluster Differences in Allocations of Blame*

Reason for Divorce	Low-Distress Group	High-Distress Group	$\chi^2$
Too young when married			
Self	35.5% <sub>a</sub>	12.5% <sub>b</sub>	$\chi^2(2, n = 132) = 8.94^*$
Partner	14.5% <sub>a</sub>	19.6% <sub>a</sub>	
Both	50.0% <sub>a</sub>	67.9% <sub>a</sub>	
Fell out of love			
Self	35.5% <sub>a</sub>	34.4% <sub>a</sub>	$\chi^2(2, n = 185) = 11.51^{**}$
Partner	35.5% <sub>a</sub>	14.8% <sub>b</sub>	
Both	29.0% <sub>a</sub>	50.8% <sub>a</sub>	
Lost sexual interest			
Self	31.5% <sub>a</sub>	34.5% <sub>a</sub>	$\chi^2(2, n = 128) = 21.95^{***}$
Partner	52.1% <sub>b</sub>	16.4% <sub>b</sub>	
Both	16.4% <sub>b</sub>	49.1% <sub>b</sub>	
Lacked commitment			
Self	11.0% <sub>a</sub>	11.3% <sub>a</sub>	$\chi^2(2, n = 198) = 6.85^*$
Partner	66.2% <sub>a</sub>	48.4% <sub>a</sub>	
Both	22.8% <sub>a</sub>	40.3% <sub>a</sub>	
Had unrealistic expectations			
Self	26.8% <sub>a</sub>	15.3% <sub>a</sub>	$\chi^2(2, n = 130) = 15.53^{***}$
Partner	46.5% <sub>a</sub>	23.7% <sub>a</sub>	
Both	26.8% <sub>b</sub>	61.0% <sub>b</sub>	
Lacked skills to make marriage work			
Self	7.6% <sub>a</sub>	3.2% <sub>a</sub>	$\chi^2(2, n = 155) = 16.70^{***}$
Partner	54.3% <sub>a</sub>	25.4% <sub>b</sub>	
Both	38.0% <sub>a</sub>	71.4% <sub>b</sub>	
Had too much conflict with or lack of support from family			
Self	18.4% <sub>a</sub>	18.2% <sub>a</sub>	$\chi^2(2, n = 71) = 8.22^*$
Partner	57.9% <sub>a</sub>	27.3% <sub>a</sub>	
Both	23.7% <sub>a</sub>	54.5% <sub>a</sub>	
Was too absorbed in job			
Self	40.0% <sub>a</sub>	45.5% <sub>a</sub>	$\chi^2(2, n = 62) = 8.31^*$
Partner	52.5% <sub>a</sub>	22.7% <sub>a</sub>	
Both	7.5% <sub>a</sub>	31.8% <sub>a</sub>	

*Note.* Percentages for each reason that do not share a subscript differ significantly from the expected distribution.

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

blame. For 8 of the 12 reasons, the high-distress and low-distress groups showed different patterns of attributing blame (see Table 5). By saving the standardized residuals (reported as  $z$ -scores), I was able to identify significant deviations from the expected pattern of distribution.

In general, the high-distress group and low distress group were equally likely to blame themselves or their partner exclusively. However, for the reason, “Too young when you got married,” the high-distress group was significantly less likely to admit that they were too young when they got married ( $z = -2.0$ ), compared to the low-distress

group. Additionally, a substantially smaller proportion ( $z = -2.0$ ) of the high-distress group exclusively blamed the loss of love on their partner, in comparison to members of the low-distress group.

Compared to the low-distress group, the high-distress group was more likely to accept partial blame for the divorce (i.e., they cited that a reason applied to both themselves and their partner) for 6 of the 12 reasons for divorce. A greater proportion of the high-distress group reported that a mutual loss of sexual interest contributed to their divorce ( $z = 2.5$ ), whereas this was a problem for a significantly smaller percentage of the low-distress group ( $z = -2.2$ ). Additionally, for this particular reason, a substantially smaller proportion of the high-distress group said only their partner lost sexual interest ( $z = -2.5$ ), and the low-distress group was especially likely to say their partner alone lost sexual interest ( $z = 2.2$ ). Compared to the low-distress group, the high-distress group was more likely to admit that both their partner and themselves lacked the commitment to make the marriage work ( $z = 1.8$ ), had unrealistic expectations of marriage ( $z = 2.2$ ), lacked support from their respective families ( $z = 1.5$ ), and were too absorbed in their jobs ( $z = 1.8$ ). The high-distress group was also significantly more likely to report that both their ex-spouse and themselves lacked the necessary skills to make their marriage work ( $z$ -score = 2.2), but they were markedly less likely to place the blame exclusively on their partner ( $z = -2.1$ ), compared to the low-distress group.

#### **DISCUSSION OF CLUSTER ANALYSIS**

Results of the cluster analysis indicated that there are two unique types of marriages that end in divorce: those that were preceded by a highly distressed marriage, and those that were preceded by a low-distress marriage. These results comport nicely with the cluster solution obtained by Amato and Hohmann-Marriott (2007), who found

that approximately half of divorces are preceded by relatively satisfying marriages, and half of divorces are preceded by highly distressed marriages riddled with conflict. However, instead of examining the specific reasons contributing to divorce, they used various indices of relationship quality (e.g., the amount of conflict, relationship satisfaction, and time spent together). Thus, their results describe the different types of marriages that end in divorce, whereas the current results describe the different reasons that contribute to divorce.

The high-distress group was characterized by a larger number of causal factors contributing to divorce. These marriages tended to be tumultuous and high in conflict and were likely characterized by extremely low levels of marital satisfaction. Based on the reasons cited for divorce, it is not surprising that these marriages ended. Regardless of whether these marriages were conflicted from the start or whether the relationship eroded over time, they eventually became plagued by a wide variety of factors that led to their collapse.

Although individuals in both groups were about as likely to exclusively blame their partners or exclusively blame themselves for the reasons leading to divorce, those who were in highly-distressed marriages were more likely to accept partial blame for half of the reasons, compared to individuals who had less distressed marriages. In general, both husbands and wives tend to deny personal responsibility for the divorce, opting to blame their former spouse instead (Amato & Previti, 2003; Cupach & Metts, 1986; Kitson, 1992). When individuals self-ascribe blame, however, men are willing than women to blame themselves for the dissolution of their marriage (Amato & Previti, 2003; Fletcher, 1983; Kitson & Sussman, 1982; Schneller & Arditti, 2004). The tendency to blame one's spouse may be due to a self-serving bias, or the desire to behave in a self-protective or self-enhancing way (Bradley, 1978). Considering the vast majority of

individuals expect their marriages to last (Baker & Emery, 1993), by avoiding a self-attribution of blame, people are able to rationalize their decision to divorce.

Nevertheless, attributing blame to one's former spouse is associated with poor post-divorce adjustment (Amato & Previti, 2003; Fletcher, 1983; Peterson, 1978), and thus in order to heal from divorce, individuals may need to accept their share of the blame. Based on this premise, the high-distress group ought to show better post-divorce adjustment and relatively high levels of relationship quality in their later marriages compared to members of the low-distress group. However, it is also possible that these individuals were more blameworthy. In other words, members of the high-distress group may possess disagreeable personalities, or they may have behaved in ways that led to the dissolution of their marriage. If this is the case, then self-blame may have been accurately attributed, and their personal qualities that sundered their prior marriage may undermine subsequent unions.

The divorces that were preceded by low levels of distress, on the other hand, were less conflicted and had fewer causal factors contributing to the decision to divorce. These partners may have had extremely high expectations for their marriages, or they may have been less committed to making their marriages work (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). Indeed, the most commonly cited reason for divorce in this group was that their spouse lacked commitment. Researchers have suggested that a specific causal factor may lead to the dissolution of relatively trouble-free relationships (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). However, the current data suggest that, in the majority of cases, the participants believed they were fundamentally incompatible with their prior spouses.

Prior to divorce, the low-distress group seems to have enjoyed a generally unproblematic marriage. However, it is unclear whether or not these individuals believed

their marriages were particularly satisfying. In that regard, these individuals may differ from those who are in happy first marriages. Happily married individuals tend to find their relationships to be personally fulfilling, but for those who are slightly less happy, they have to be committed to making their marriage work (Johnson, 1991). The low-distress group may have been less committed at the start of their relationship, or commitment may have faded over time (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). Regardless, these individuals are likely to evince lower levels of commitment in their later relationships as well, and the demographic differences between the high-distress and low-distress groups provide additional support for this idea. For instance, the low-distress group had a greater number of prior marriages compared to the high-distress group,  $t(130) = 2.29, p < .05$ . It is conceivable that prior divorce experience makes it easier for individuals to arrive at the decision to divorce again (e.g., Booth & Edwards, 1992; Cherlin, 1978; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002), and their tolerance for problems in a later relationship may be much lower. In other words, it may not require as many reasons for someone with a history of multiple divorces to decide to end another marriage. The low-distress group was also more likely to have previously cohabited with a partner,  $\chi^2(1, n = 269) = 4.61, p < .05$ . Prior cohabitation experience is associated with an increased risk for divorce, possibly because ending a cohabiting relationship teaches individuals how to cope with exiting a “marriage-like” relationship. As described by Lichter and Qian (2008), “With each successive breakup, it arguably becomes easier to break up again, especially if first-hand experience provides new lessons about how to be emotionally and economically self-sufficient” (p. 863). Additionally, premarital cohabitation may be indicative of a lower commitment to marriage in general and may place individuals at a greater risk of divorce (Axinn & Barber, 1997; Teachman, 2003). Taken together, these demographic differences between the groups suggest that those

whose divorces were preceded by a low-distress marriage may be less committed to their relationships in general.

Overall, the two types of marriages ending in divorce appear to be qualitatively different, such that divorce can be preceded by a marriage that was generally troubled or relatively problem-free. Moreover, the characterizations of divorce based on the explanations that were offered may be linked to the emotional climate of future relationships. Specifically, those in the high-distress group may possess a constellation of personality characteristics that predispose them to view relationship events in a negative light or to behave in ways that will erode their later partnerships. Alternatively, their marriages may have been genuinely problematic, and divorce may have provided them with the opportunity to find a satisfying relationship. The low-distress group, on the other hand, may have unreasonably high expectations for their relationships or suffer from generally low levels of commitment, both of which could undermine their future relationships. It is also possible that these individuals may establish a relationship that meets their standards, or they may meet someone they consider worth committing to.

## **Chapter 4: Relationship Experience and its Association with Personality and the Emotional Climate of Marriage**

The divorce experience can be psychologically difficult, and the most pronounced recovery occurs after the formation of a new romantic relationship (e.g., Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Ross, 1995; Wang & Amato, 2000). Nevertheless, many divorced individuals find their new relationships undermined by many of the same problems that were present in their previous marriage. Some problems found in remarriages may arise from the trepidation and mistrust resulting from a failed marriage (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Harvey and Fine (2006) provide a compelling example of how a divorced woman's account of her ex-husband's infidelity helps explain the lack of trust in her later romantic involvements. However, remarriages may also be lower in quality due to spouses' personality traits (e.g., Kelly & Conley, 1987). In other words, it's possible that individuals, particularly those who have experienced a failed marriage, may possess personality qualities that inhibit the cultivation of a mutually satisfying relationship. The second phase of the investigation seeks to determine whether the high-distress and low-distress groups identified in Phase 1 exhibit variations in the emotional climate of their later marriages, as well as their personality characteristics, compared to those in happy and unhappy first marriages.

### **TYPES OF DIVORCE AND THE EMOTIONAL CLIMATE OF LATER MARRIAGES**

As demonstrated in Phase 1, individuals divorce for a variety of reasons, and these reasons are indicative of the different types of marriages that end in divorce. Some couples may choose to divorce because their relationships are characterized by conflict and emotional distance. Not surprisingly, individuals who no longer find their marriages to be rewarding may be particularly inclined to divorce (e.g., Bradbury, Fincham, &

Beach, 2000). Alternately, some marriages may end for reasons other than poor marital quality (e.g., Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1997). In such cases, low levels of commitment may factor into individuals' decision to divorce, rather than high levels of marital discord (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). Taken together, these findings indicate there are different paths to marital dissolution: Some marriages are troubled to begin with and some deteriorate over time; some are conflict-ridden, whereas others are relatively problem-free.

A growing number of studies indicate that the emotional climate of marriage is predictive of post-divorce adjustment. However, it appears divorce itself is not associated with declines in psychological well-being, but rather the relational context of divorce is predictive of later outcomes (e.g., Aseltine & Kessler, 1993). However, it is unclear whether divorces preceded by troubled or trouble-free marriages are more likely to experience negative consequences. Some evidence suggests that the psychological costs associated with divorce may be exacerbated if the prior marriage had relatively few problems (e.g., Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Booth & Amato, 1991; Kitson, 1992; Williams, 2003). The dissolution of a marriage characterized by long-standing problems, on the other hand, may lead to better post-divorce adjustment (Kitson, 1992), as well as improved self-esteem and greater life satisfaction (Hawkins & Booth, 2005). Alternatively, however, individuals who feel divorce is only justified in extreme circumstances may hold more traditional family values (De Graaf & Kalmijn, 2005), which may be associated with greater levels of depression following divorce (Simon & Marcussen, 1999). Additionally, individuals emerging from conflicted marriages seem to be at greater risk of developing a social phobia, depression, or an alcohol problem, even if they had no history of mental health problems (Overbeek et al., 2006).



Prior romantic experiences also may undermine the emotional climate of subsequent relationships to the extent that individuals carry unresolved problems into their later partnerships (Stets, 1993). After experiencing a divorce, men and women tend to focus on the reasons for why their marriage fell apart and the potential implications for their future relationships. They may pursue new partners and relationships that compensate for the problems that were apparent in their prior marriage (Schneller & Arditti, 2004), but such efforts are frequently in vain. Indeed, many remarriages are plagued by the same problems that caused their preceding marriage to crumble (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). If this is the case, individuals who experienced a high-distress divorce may be especially likely to find themselves in an unsatisfying marriage yet again. Thus, I propose the following hypothesis:

H1a: The emotional climate of marriage will be less positive overall for members of the high-distress group compared to individuals in the low-distress group.

Depending on the circumstances leading up to their divorce, people may be less willing or able to fully commit to a new partner. Specifically, individuals emerging from marriages with relatively few problems may not be inclined to wholly commit themselves to a relationship. Those who are willing to divorce may value the institution of marriage less than others (Adams & Jones, 1997), and this may be especially true for the low-distress group, who divorced in the absence of extreme marital problems. It is possible that these individuals may not feel as constrained by the structural or moral binds of marriage, and they may be more likely to consider divorce socially acceptable (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007), which could lead to decreased commitment in later relationships as well. These factors could be exacerbated by the fact that they have already “recovered” from a previous divorce, and thus it may be easier to arrive at the decision to divorce again (Cherlin, 1978; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

Provided that individuals emerging from a highly distressed marriage report that the emotional climate of their later marriages is relatively poor, it is possible that they will also perceive a greater number of barriers to leaving their relationship. Perceived barriers are particularly salient when a relationship becomes unrewarding (e.g., Levinger, 1976; Previti & Amato, 2003), and thus low levels of marital quality may be tied to higher levels of structural commitment. Accordingly, I propose the following hypothesis:

H1b: Individuals in the high-distress group will report higher levels of structural commitment compared their low-distress counterparts.

However, it is not enough to simply specify the emotional climate of marriage prior to divorce. This study, like most studies interested in the effects of divorce, compares remarriages to first marriages. The present study seeks to advance understanding by (1) distinguishing individuals in terms of the reasons that contributed to their divorce, and (2) comparing those who have experienced a highly distressed or less distressed marriage prior to divorce with those involved in highly successful and less successful first marriages. Additionally, this study considers how the four groups (remarriages preceded by a highly distressed marriage, remarriages preceded by a less-distressed marriage, happy first marriages, unhappy first marriages) differ in personality (see next section).

Satisfying and unsatisfying intact marriages are likely to differ from remarriages in terms of both the affective character of the marriage and commitment processes. For instance, not only do remarried individuals tend to be more negative in their interactions compared to those in first marriages, but they also are less able to solve relationship problems (Hetherington & Kelly, Peek, Bell, Waldren & Sorell, 1988). It is possible that the emotional climate of the prior marriage influences these outcomes. For instance, individuals coming from to a new marriage from highly distressed marriages may expect

a certain degree of contention in their relationships and may not have the kind of personality conducive to resolving conflicts in a healthy manner.

It is likely that remarriages and unsatisfying first marriages resemble each other more than they do satisfying first marriages. Although Hawkins and Booth (2005) found that remarried individuals report greater life satisfaction than unhappily married individuals, they included all divorced individuals in their sample and did not distinguish between those emerging from distressed marriages and those emerging from low-distress marriages. Divorce may function as an escape for those in conflict-ridden marriages, leading to increased life satisfaction (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007), but this does not necessarily mean that these individuals will be able to form satisfying relationships in the future. Individuals who emerged from a distressed marriage may still be predisposed to behave in ways that undermine their later relationships. In accordance with this idea, Waite and her colleagues (2002) have found that remarried individuals who were in previously distressed marriages had similar levels of marital satisfaction to continuously married unhappy individuals. They interpreted their findings to suggest that divorce does not lead to improvements in emotional well-being, at least in the domain of romantic relationships. Thus, I hypothesize:

H2a: The affective character of marriage will be less positive for the high-distress group compared to the low-distress group, as well as those who are in happy or unhappy first marriages.

Individuals whose prior divorce was preceded by a distressed marriage may report similar levels of commitment in their subsequent marriages compared to those in unhappy first marriages. Unhappy individuals who have kept their marriages intact typically evince high levels of structural or moral commitment (Heaton & Albrecht, 1991). Similarly, Previti and Amato (2003) suggest that individuals who are especially

cognizant of their obligations to stay married tend to be relatively unhappy with their marriages. Although they may derive little personal satisfaction from their marriage, they may feel compelled to stay for legal or financial reasons, or due to the presence of children (Johnson, 1991). Marriages characterized by a generally warm emotional climate, on the other hand, likely find their relationships to be personally satisfying, and thus the barriers to divorce may not be particularly salient (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 1997). In other words, happily married individuals are likely to be committed to their relationships, but those who are unhappily married are likely to feel “trapped” in their relationship, and thus are structurally committed (Amato, 1997). Members of the high-distress group likely had to contend with structural constraints when negotiating their prior divorce, and thus these individuals may remain aware of the barriers to divorce, especially if they report a negative emotional climate in their current marriage. Hence:

H2b: Individuals in the high-distress group and those in unhappy first marriages will report similar levels of structural commitment, and members of the high-distress group will report higher levels of structural commitment compared to the low-distress group and those in happy first marriages.

### **THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY**

Marital quality and stability may be determined in part by individuals’ personality traits, and thus the fragility of remarriages may be related to the underlying characteristics of the partners. It is possible that certain attributes predispose individuals to behave in ways that destabilize their marriages and lead to divorce. If these characteristics are carried into subsequent relationships, these partnerships may be characterized by many of the same problems present in the previous marriage. On the

other hand, some personality traits may promote affectionate or supportive behaviors, thereby contributing to relationship satisfaction and stability (e.g., Miller et al., 2003).

Personality characteristics tend to be relatively stable (Graziano, 2003), and they influence both partner selection and one's ability to maintain an established relationship (Johnson & Booth, 1998). Due to one's underlying disposition, an individual may choose to partner with similar individuals, behave in a similar manner from relationship to relationship, and confront similar problems in different relationships. Accordingly, it is difficult to determine whether remarriages are turbulent or good due to prior marital experience or because of the partners' disposition.

Traits influence the way individuals behave within the context of a relationship, and they also provide a lens through which individuals interpret their partners' behavior (e.g., Bradbury & Fincham, 1987; Burgess & Cottrell, 1939; Huston, 2000). In combination, these psychological and behavioral pathways have important implications for the emotional tenor of the relationship (Caughlin & Huston, 2006; Huston, 2000). Not surprisingly, some psychological characteristics make relationship maintenance easy, whereas others diminish satisfaction and exacerbate conflict. Specifically, trait expressiveness and conscientiousness are linked to marital satisfaction and stability, whereas negative affectivity and insecure attachment styles typically undermine the emotional climate of marriage.

## **The Influence of Specific Personality Characteristics**

### ***Trait Expressiveness***

Individuals high in trait expressiveness infuse their relationships with emotional warmth. Trait expressiveness reflects a kind, considerate, and gentle nature (Miller et al., 2003) and is associated with greater marital satisfaction (e.g., Baucom & Aiken, 1984;

Langis, Sabourin, Lussier, & Mathieu, 1994; Miller et al., 2003). Trait expressiveness not only encourages partners to behave affectionately toward one another (Huston & Houts, 1998; Miller et al., 2003) but also leads individuals to perceive their partner in a more positive light (Miller et al., 2003). Individuals who are able to create a warm emotional environment during the first few years of marriage are generally able to maintain it throughout the duration of their relationship (Huston, Niehuis, & Smith, 2001b), and these individuals may exhibit especially high levels of trait expressive (Huston et al., 2001a). Based on these findings, I predict the following:

H3: Individuals in happy first marriages will have the highest levels of trait expressiveness in comparison to (a) those in unhappy first marriages and (b) those who have remarried.

### *Negative Affectivity*

Compared to any other personality characteristic, negative affectivity and its effect on marital quality has received the most empirical attention. Negative affectivity, also referred to as neuroticism or trait anxiety, is a dispositional trait characterized by generalized anxiety, a negative self-perception, and the tendency to become emotionally upset (Watson & Clark, 1984). Negative affectivity has been linked to lower levels of marital satisfaction (e.g., Eysenck & Wakefield, 1981; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kim, Martin, & Martin, 1989; Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2004), as well as the propensity to engage in negative behaviors (Caughlin et al., 2000). Although some evidence suggests that negative affectivity is linked to marital instability (Kelly & Conley, 1987), it appears as though this characteristic is not a driving force behind fluctuations in marital satisfaction or stability (Caughlin et al., 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1997). Rather, the effects of

negative affectivity on the emotional climate of marriage are likely felt early and endure over time. Based on these findings, I propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Individuals in the high-distress group and those who are in unhappy first marriages will have the highest levels of negative affectivity. Conversely, those who are in happy first marriages and those in the low-distress group will have the lowest levels of negative affectivity.

### *Conscientiousness*

Conscientiousness is associated with a sense of responsibility, dependability, persistence, and dutifulness (McCrae, 1991). Although researchers rarely examine the relationship between conscientiousness and marital satisfaction (Bouchard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 1999), extant studies indicate that conscientiousness may be related to marital satisfaction (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997) and marital stability (e.g., Roberts & Bogg, 2004; Tucker, Friedman, Wingard, & Schwartz, 1996). Not only does conscientiousness influence whether or not a couple divorces; it also influences *when* couples divorce. Specifically, wives' conscientiousness is associated with whether or not a marriage dissolves, whereas husbands' conscientiousness is related to when a divorce takes place. Both Kurdek (1993) and Jarvis (2006) found that, if the husband was more conscientious, the marriage lasted longer before the divorce took place. Overall, conscientiousness appears to be a protective factor, indicating that highly conscientious individuals ought to have relatively stable and satisfying relationships. Accordingly, I propose the following hypothesis:

H5: Individuals in happy first marriages and those in the low-distress group will have higher levels of conscientiousness than individuals in unhappy first marriages or those in the high-distress group.

### ***Insecure Attachment***

Although the majority of research has focused on how attachment styles are related to relationship quality in dating couples, in recent years, more empirical attention has been devoted to attachment processes in marriage (Bradbury et al., 2000). Being securely attached to one's romantic partner, or feeling that you can rely on intimate partners and be relied on in return, is associated with greater marital satisfaction and better problem-solving skills in comparison to exhibiting an insecure attachment style (Kobak & Hazan, 1991).

There are two primary forms of insecure attachment. Anxious attachment is characterized by a desire to psychologically depend on others, coupled with a sense that others are unwilling to be emotionally available. Avoidant attachment, on the other hand, is associated with emotional unavailability and withdrawal (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Both insecure attachment styles are associated with greater marital distress than a secure attachment style (Lussier, Sabourin, & Turgeon, 1997). Avoidant attachment styles appear to be particularly detrimental; specifically, remarried individuals are more likely to have an avoidant attachment style as opposed to an anxious or secure attachment style (Ceglian & Gardner, 1999). Therefore, I propose the following hypotheses:

H6a: Individuals in happy first marriages and those in the low-distress group will have the lowest levels of avoidant attachment. Those who are unhappily married and members of the high-distress group will be more likely to have an avoidant attachment style.

H6b: Individuals in unhappy first marriages and those in the high-distress group will have the highest levels of anxious attachment, whereas those who are happily married or in the low-distress group will report the lowest levels of anxious attachment.



## **THE UNIQUE EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCE**

Provided that the four groups (i.e., happy first marriages, unhappy first marriages, remarriages preceded by a high-distress marriage, and remarriages preceded by a low-distress marriage) are differentiated by their personality characteristics, it is possible that these groups may vary in terms of the affective character of their marriage and reported commitment levels, after controlling for any existing personality differences. If variations in attributes are controlled for, and variations in the emotional climate of marriage are still present, these differences may be the result of one's relationship experience. Thus, if the groups are distinguishable by their personality characteristics, I will retest the Hypotheses 2a and 2b, controlling for personality.

Although the goal of the current study is to determine whether the emotional climate of marriage differs according to marital history and if these effects are spurious due to personality, prior research suggests that these effects may vary by gender. For instance, compared to their female counterparts, men tend to be more satisfied with their marriages (e.g., Rhyne, 1981), and remarried men are especially likely to find their marriages more satisfying (e.g., Verner, Coleman, Ganong, & Cooper, 1989). For exploratory purposes, all analyses will test for gender differences.

## **OVERVIEW OF PHASE 2**

The present study is the first to systematically explore whether individuals' divorce experience is associated with the emotional climate of their current marriage, and whether such variations are linked to differences in personality. Specifically, it assesses how those who emerged from a distressed marriage compare to those whose prior marriage was relatively non-distressed, as well as those in happy and unhappy first marriages. Survey data from remarried individuals was used to examine (a) whether experiencing a divorce preceded by a high- or low-distress marriage is associated with

perceptions of and behaviors in repartnered relationships, (b) whether the types of relationship experiences individuals encounter are tied to their personality characteristics, and (c) if these indices of emotional climate differ significantly from that of happy and unhappy first marriages, independent of personality characteristics.

## **PHASE 2 RESULTS**

Analyses were conducted in four steps. The first set of analyses tested whether members of the high-distress group reported a poorer emotional climate and higher levels of structural commitment compared those in the low-distress group (Hypotheses 1a and 1b). The second set of analyses explored whether or not the high-distress and low-distress groups varied significantly in emotional climate and reported commitment compared to those in happy and unhappy first marriages (Hypotheses 2a and 2b). The third set of analyses assessed the degree to which the four groups were differentiated by their personality characteristics (Hypotheses 3-6). Finally, the last set of analyses tested whether the association between group membership and the emotional climate of marriage persisted when controlling for personality.

### **Comparison of High- and Low-Distress Groups**

In this step, individuals in the high-distress group were compared to members of the low-distress group on various facets of emotional climate. To examine whether the emotional tenor of individuals' marriages differed according to whether they were members of the high-distress or low-distress group, a 2 (High-distress v. Low-distress) x 2 (Gender) MANCOVA was performed (see Table 6). Follow-up ANOVAs were performed for all significant effects (reported in text). On the whole, members of the high- and low-distress groups were more similar than different in terms of the affective nature of their marriage.

Table 6. *Emotional Climate as a Function of Divorce Experience*

Variable	High-Distress <sup>a</sup>	Low-Distress <sup>b</sup>	Effects	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$
Negative thoughts					
Women	1.85 (.56)	1.75 (.59)	<i>ns</i>		
Men	1.72 (.67)	1.75 (.54)			
Negative behavior					
Women	2.15 (.61)	2.02 (.61)	<i>ns</i>		
Men	2.00 (.49)	1.97 (.51)			
Positive thoughts					
Women	3.15 (.70)	3.28 (.67)	<i>ns</i>		
Men	3.44 (.62)	3.40 (.55)			
Structural Commitment					
Women	2.29 (.46)	2.43 (.60)	Gender <sup>†</sup>	<i>F</i> (1, 218) = 3.25	.02
Men	2.51 (.49)	2.55 (.58)			

*Note.* Analyses control for respondents' age, race, education, prior cohabitation experience, as well as the presence of children, the number of prior marriages, the length of the current marriage, and the amount of time between divorce and the start of the current marriage.

<sup>a</sup>Women: *n* = 34; men: *n* = 18. <sup>b</sup>Women: *n* = 104; men: *n* = 63

<sup>†</sup>*p* < .10

### ***Negative Thoughts and Behaviors***

Hypothesis 1a suggested that the high-distress group would be more negative in marriage compared to the low-distress group. The results did not support this hypothesis. For both negative thoughts and negative behaviors, there were no significant main effects, nor were there any interactions. Overall, it appears as though members of the high-distress and low-distress groups do not differ in the negativity of their marriage.

### ***Positive Thoughts and Feelings***

Contrary to Hypothesis 1a, the reasons reported for divorce appear to have no association with the number of positive thoughts that individuals have about their current marriages. In other words, those in the high-distress and low-distress groups tend to view

their partner and their marriage in an equally positive light. There was no main effect of gender, nor were there any significant interactions.

### ***Structural Commitment***

Hypothesis 1b suggested that members of the high-distress group would feel more obligated to remain in their marriage compared to those in the low-distress group. This prediction was not confirmed. Although there was no main effect of group membership on individuals' reported levels of structural commitment, there was a marginally significant main effect of gender,  $F(1, 218) = 3.25, p = .07, \eta^2 = .02$ . On average, men reported higher levels of structural commitment compared to women. Again, there were no significant interactions.

Taken together, these results provide no support for Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Although Hypothesis 1a suggested that the affective character of marriage would be more negative for the high-distress group than that of their low-distress counterparts, it appears as though both groups are largely similar in terms of the emotional climate of their marriage.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to Hypothesis 1b, members of the low-distress group did not report higher levels of structural commitment compared to those in the high-distress group.

### **Comparison of Divorced Individuals with Those in First Marriages**

Although Hypotheses 1a and 1b were not supported, it is possible that the high-distress and low-distress groups will exhibit variations in emotional climate compared to those in their first marriages. The second series of analyses tested Hypotheses 2a, which proposed that the high-distress group would report the most negative emotional climate compared to the low-distress group, happy first marriages, and unhappy first marriages.

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<sup>6</sup> Additional analyses indicated that the high- and low-distress groups did not differ in marital satisfaction. There was, however, a marginal main effect of gender, such that men considered their marriages to be somewhat more satisfying, compared to their female counterparts,  $F(1, 236) = 3.34, p = .07, \eta^2 = .01$ . Marital satisfaction was assessed using a single item; specifically, respondents were asked, "All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your marriage?"

This set of analyses also tested Hypothesis 2b, which suggested that the high-distress group and those in unhappy first marriages would report similar levels of structural commitment, and that the high-distress group would feel more constrained to remain in their marriages compared to their low-distress counterparts and individuals in happy first marriages. To determine whether the affective nature of marriage varied according to group membership, a 4 (Group Membership: high-distress group, low-distress group, happy first marriage, unhappy first marriage) x 2 (Gender) MANCOVA was conducted (see Table 7).<sup>7</sup> Results of the follow-up ANOVAs are reported in text. To explore the main effect of group membership, simple membership, simple contrast tests were performed.<sup>8</sup> In accordance with Hypotheses 2a and 2b, the high-distress group was chosen as the reference category. Overall, the further differentiation of the groups proved to be important, for the groups were significantly different in the emotional climate of their marriages.

### ***Negative Thoughts and Behaviors***

For the amount of spouses' negative thoughts reported about their partner and the relationship, there was a significant main effect of group membership,  $F(3, 949) = 16.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ . Simple contrast comparisons indicated that those whose divorce was

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<sup>7</sup> Fifty-four cases (5.1%) were dropped from the final analysis. Respondents that were included in the final analysis and those that were dropped through listwise deletion did not differ in terms of gender, race, prior cohabitation experience, or parental divorce experience ( $ps$  ranged in value from .28 to .38). They did vary, however, in several important domains. Those who were dropped from the analyses were likely to be older [ $t(1038) = 3.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ], more religious [ $t(54) = 1.76$ ,  $p = .08$ ], and were more likely to have children from a prior relationship [ $\chi^2(1, n = 1064) = 6.76$ ,  $p < .01$ ]. They also varied in terms of their education and income, such that those who were included in the analyses were more likely to have only graduated from high school (21.76% v. 14.81%),  $\chi^2(9, n = 1065) = 45.28$ ,  $p < .001$ . Additionally, respondents that were excluded from the analyses were more likely to not know their income or refuse to report their income, whereas those who were included were more likely to earn \$25,000 to \$50,000 (20.28% v. 11.11%) or more than \$100,000 per year (17.71% v. 9.26%),  $\chi^2(7, n = 1065) = 54.02$ ,  $p < .001$ .

<sup>8</sup> Although deviation contrasts are common, simple contrasts are preferred for these analyses. Deviation contrasts compare the mean of each category to the overall mean of the remaining groups. In simple contrasts, the mean of each category is compared to that of a single reference category (Gebotys, 2003).

Table 7. *Emotional Climate as a Function of Group Membership, Excluding Personality Covariates*

Variable	Previously Married		First Marriages		Effects	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$
	High-Distress <sup>a</sup>	Low-Distress <sup>b</sup>	Happy <sup>c</sup>	Unhappy <sup>d</sup>			
Negative Thoughts							
Women	1.86 (.59)	1.74 (.58)	1.65 (.54)	2.03 (.66)	Group***	<i>F</i> (3, 945) = 19.48	.06
Men	1.71 (.64)	1.74 (.54)	1.74 (.57)	2.04 (.58)			
Negative Behavior							
Women	2.14 (.59)	2.02 (.60)	1.96 (.47)	2.25 (.52)	Group***	<i>F</i> (3, 945) = 16.22	.05
Men	2.00 (.55)	1.97 (.50)	1.88 (.47)	2.17 (.50)			
Positive Thoughts							
Women	3.14 (.71)	3.27 (.67)	3.45 (.55)	3.03 (.62)	Group*** Gender**	<i>F</i> (3, 945) = 17.97 <i>F</i> (1, 947) = 7.77	.05 .01
Men	3.43 (.60)	3.44 (.53)	3.46 (.53)	3.19 (.58)			
Structural Commitment							
Women	2.30 (.44)	2.41 (.59)	2.45 (.50)	2.38 (.57)	Gender***	<i>F</i> (1, 947) = 22.41	.02
Men	2.51 (.50)	2.54 (.57)	2.72 (.52)	2.69 (.55)			

Note. Standard deviations are provided in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup>Women: *n* = 37; men: *n* = 21. <sup>b</sup>Women: *n* = 112; men: *n* = 66. <sup>c</sup>Women: *n* = 246; men: *n* = 121; <sup>d</sup>Women: *n* = 237; men: *n* = 108.

<sup>†</sup>*p* < .10; \*\**p* < .01; \*\*\**p* < .001.

preceded by a distressed marriage viewed their relationship in a less negative light than individuals in unhappy first marriages ( $p < .01$ ). Pairwise comparisons revealed that it was unhappily married individuals who had the most negative thoughts about their partner and relationship. As expected, they had more negative thoughts than those who are happily married ( $p < .001$ ). They also had more such thoughts than both the low-distress and the high-distress groups of previously married individuals ( $p < .001$  and  $p < .01$ , respectively). Surprisingly, the happily married individuals did not report fewer negative thoughts than either of the two previously married groups. There was no significant main effect for gender, nor were there any interactions.

There was also a significant main effect for group membership for the reported number of negative behaviors,  $F(3, 949) = 16.23, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$ . Simple contrast comparisons indicated that members of the high-distress group were marginally less negative in the way they behaved compared to those who are in unhappy first marriages ( $p = .08$ ). Post-hoc Bonferroni tests revealed that unhappily married individuals behaved more negatively toward their partner compared to the low-distress group ( $p < .05$ ) and those who are happily married ( $p < .001$ ). Contrary to expectations, the high- and low-distress groups were equally likely to engage in negative behavior in their current marriage, and remarried individuals reported a comparable amount of negativity as those in happy first marriages. Again, there were no significant gender differences, nor were there any significant interactions.

### ***Positive Thoughts and Feelings***

Analyses revealed a significant main effect of group membership on the number of reported positive thoughts about the relationship,  $F(3, 949) = 17.06, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$ . The pattern of results was similar to that of negative thoughts. Specifically, simple

contrast analyses showed that the high-distress group had more positive thoughts about their current relationship compared to those who were in unhappy first marriages ( $p < .05$ ). Additionally, post-hoc Bonferroni tests revealed that those who were happily married and those in the low-distress group ( $p < .001$ ) viewed their relationship in a more positive light compared to those who were unhappily married. Contrary to the idea that the high-distress group would have the fewest positive thoughts about their marriage, it was actually those in unhappy first marriages who had the least positive regard for their relationship. Although there were no significant interactions, a main effect of gender revealed that men viewed their relationship more positively compared to women,  $F(1, 951) = 7.59, p < .01, \eta^2 = .01$ .

Overall, Hypothesis 2a received no support. Results were not consistent with the idea that the emotional climate of marriage would be poorer for the high-distress group compared to that of their low-distress counterparts or those in first marriages. Rather, for every dimension that was assessed, the affective character of unhappy first marriages was significantly less positive compared to the other three groups. Specifically, those in unhappy first marriages engaged in more negative behaviors and reported more negative thoughts and fewer positive thoughts about their marriage in comparison to those who were previously married or those in happy first marriages.

### ***Structural Commitment***

There was no main effect of group membership on reported levels of structural commitment. Contrary to the expectation that members of the high-distress group and those in unhappy first unions would report feeling constrained to remain in their marriage, this did not appear to be the case. Simple contrast comparisons indicated that the high-distress group reported similar levels of structural commitment compared to the



low-distress group and individuals in both happy and unhappy first marriages. Accordingly, Hypothesis 2b received no support. There was, however, a significant main effect of gender,  $F(1, 949) = 22.58, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$ . On average, men felt more obligated to remain in their marriages than did women.

### **Group Differences in Personality**

The purpose of the third series of analyses was to determine if the four groups vary significantly according to their personality characteristics (Hypotheses 3-6). Specifically, a 4 (Cluster Membership) x 2 (Gender) MANCOVA was performed to determine whether the groups differed in trait expressiveness, conscientiousness, impulse control, and attachment styles (see Table 8). Follow-up ANOVAs for all significant effects are provided in text. Specific group differences were revealed using post-hoc Bonferroni tests, and when the Bonferroni tests were too stringent to detect significance, Fisher's LSD tests were used. With the exception of trait expressiveness, it appears the assessed personality dimensions differentiated the four groups in meaningful ways.

#### ***Trait Expressiveness***

Contrary to the idea that those in happy first marriages would have the most expressive personalities, there was no significant main effect of group membership. Individuals reported being generally warm and expressive, regardless of prior divorce experience or the climate of their marriage. There was, however, a significant main effect of gender,  $F(1, 955) = 14.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01$ . In comparison to men, women were significantly warmer in relation to others (men:  $M = 2.95; SD = .31$ ; women:  $M = 3.02, SD = .31$ ). There were no significant interactions.

Table 8. *Personality Dimensions as a Function of Group Membership*

Variable	Previously Married		First Marriages		Effects	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$
	High-Distress <sup>a</sup>	Low-Distress <sup>b</sup>	Happy <sup>c</sup>	Unhappy <sup>d</sup>			
Trait Expressiveness	3.03 (.35)	3.04 (.30)	2.99 (.30)	2.97 (.33)	Gender***	<i>F</i> (1, 953) = 14.28	.01
Negative Affectivity	2.24 (.35)	2.12 (.40)	2.11 (.37)	2.18 (.34)	Group <sup>†</sup>	<i>F</i> (3, 951) = 2.15	.01
Conscientiousness	2.95 (.29)	3.01 (.31)	3.03 (.31)	2.98 (.29)	Group <sup>†</sup>	<i>F</i> (3, 951) = 2.51	.01
Avoidant Attachment	2.41 (.39)	2.35 (.40)	2.32 (.38)	2.46 (.40)	Group*** Gender***	<i>F</i> (3, 951) = 5.71 <i>F</i> (1, 953) = 11.79	.02 .01
Anxious Attachment	2.24 (.53)	2.10 (.51)	2.09 (.49)	2.22 (.46)	Group**	<i>F</i> (3, 951) = 5.48	.02

*Note.* Standard deviations are provided in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup>Women: *n* = 38; men: *n* = 21. <sup>b</sup>Women: *n* = 112; men: *n* = 69. <sup>c</sup>Women: *n* = 246; men: *n* = 121; <sup>d</sup>Women: *n* = 237; men: *n* = 110.

<sup>†</sup>*p* < .10; \*\**p* < .01; \*\*\**p* < .001.

### *Negative Affectivity*

The notion that individuals in the high-distress group or unhappy first marriages would be higher in negative affectivity, compared to those in the low-distress group or happy first marriages, was partially supported. There was a marginally significant main effect of group membership on reported levels of negative affectivity,  $F(3, 953) = 2.18, p = .09, \eta^2 = .01$ . Follow-up Fisher's LSD tests showed that members of the high-distress group had marginally greater negative affectivity compared to their low-distress counterparts ( $p = .07$ ), but not those in happy first marriages. Likewise, individuals in unhappy first marriages were more marginally neurotic than those in happy first marriages ( $p = .08$ ), but not those who divorced after experiencing relatively little distress. Post-hoc Bonferroni tests, however, indicated that the groups were not significantly different from one another ( $p$ -values ranged from .43 to 1.00). Although results revealed the expected pattern of group differences in negative affectivity, these variations were not statistically significant. There were no gender differences, nor were there any significant interactions.

### *Conscientiousness*

The fifth hypothesis suggested that those in the low-distress group and those in happy first marriages would report higher levels of conscientiousness compared to the high-distress group and those in unhappy first marriages. This hypothesis received partial support. The four groups appear to be marginally differentiated by individuals' reported levels of conscientiousness,  $F(3, 953) = 2.53, p = .06, \eta^2 = .01$ . Post-hoc Fisher's LSD tests indicated that happily married individuals were more conscientious than their unhappily-married counterparts and those in the high-distress group ( $p < .05$ ). Bonferroni follow-up tests, however, revealed no significant differences between the

clusters ( $p$ s ranged in value from .19 to 1.00). Thus, the pattern of results suggested in Hypothesis 5 was observed for those in happy first unions but not for those in the low-distress group. There were no significant main effects for gender, nor were there any significant interactions.

### ***Insecure Attachment***

The results provided limited support for the sixth hypothesis, which suggested that those in the high-distress group and individuals in unhappy first marriages would be more insecurely attached compared to those who are either in happy first marriages or who divorced after experiencing relatively little distress. Analyses revealed a significant main effect of group membership for avoidant attachment,  $F(3, 953) = 5.80, p = .001, \eta^2 = .02$ . Bonferroni pairwise comparisons revealed that, as expected, individuals in unhappy first marriages and members of the high-distress group were similar in avoidant attachment. Unhappily married individuals were higher in avoidant attachment compared to those who were happily married ( $p = .001$ ) and compared to those in the low-distress group ( $p < .05$ ). Surprisingly, members of the high-distress group were not significantly higher in avoidant attachment compared to both those in happy first marriages and those in the low-distress group. There was also a significant main effect of gender,  $F(1, 955) = 11.69, p = .001, \eta^2 = .01$ . On average, men were higher in avoidant attachment than women (men:  $M = 2.46, SD = .38$ ; women:  $M = 2.35, SD = .41$ ). There were no significant interactions.

An identical pattern of results emerged for anxious attachment. There was a significant main effect of group membership for anxious attachment,  $F(3, 953) = 4.97, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$ . Results of post-hoc Bonferroni tests confirmed that anxious attachment was especially high among unhappily married individuals, compared to those who were

happily married or those in the low-distress group ( $p = .05$  and  $p < .01$ , respectively). There were no significant differences between unhappily married individuals and the high-distress group. Additionally, there were no gender differences between the clusters, nor were there any significant interactions.

### **The Addition of Personality Covariates**

Overall, the two groups that previously divorced did not differ from one another in the emotional climate of their marriages, nor did they differ from those in happy first marriages. The unhappy first marriages, on the other hand, were characterized by greater negativity, and they reported having more negative thoughts and fewer positive thoughts about their marriages, compared to the other three groups. However, those who were previously divorced and those in happy or unhappy first marriages possessed different personality profiles. It is possible that the pattern of group differences in emotional climate were masked by the uneven probability of people with different personality characteristics selecting themselves into different marital outcomes. Thus, the goal of the final series of analyses was to determine whether controlling for personality would accentuate (or attenuate, in the case of unhappy first marriages) group differences in the emotional climate of marriage and reported levels of structural commitment. Toward this end, a 4 (Group Membership) x 2 (Gender) MANCOVA and follow-up contrast analysis was performed. Considering there was at least a marginal main effect for all of the personality variables, all personality measures were included as covariates in the final analysis.

Table 9. *Comparison of Effects, With and Without Personality Covariates*

Variable	Without Personality Covariates			Including Personality Covariates		
	Effects	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$	Effects	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$
Negative Thoughts	Group***	$F(3, 945) = 19.48$	.06	Group***	$F(3, 943) = 13.97$	.04
Negative Behavior	Group***	$F(3, 945) = 16.22$	.05	Group***	$F(3, 943) = 11.93$	.04
				Gender*	$F(1, 945) = 4.16$	.004
Positive Thoughts	Group***	$F(3, 945) = 17.97$	.05	Group***	$F(3, 943) = 13.39$	.04
	Gender**	$F(1, 947) = 7.77$	.01	Gender***	$F(1, 945) = 12.96$	.01
Structural Commitment	Gender***	$F(1, 947) = 22.41$	.02	Gender***	$F(1, 945) = 27.27$	.03

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

The main effects of group membership were practically identical to those obtained when personality covariates were not included. It appears as though the addition of personality covariates weakened the effect of group membership for every indicator of the affective nature of marriage, but it did not reduce its significance, nor did it change the pattern of group differences (refer to Table 9 to compare main effects with and without personality covariates). The inclusion of the personality covariates brought the main effect of gender to statistical significance, such that, in comparison to men, women were more likely to evince a greater number of negative behaviors. Results of the follow-up ANOVAs confirmed this result,  $F(1, 949) = 3.98$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .004$ . The addition of personality covariates also strengthened the main effect for gender for the reported number of positive thoughts,  $F(1, 949) = 12.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ . Contrary to expectations, these results suggest that, although previously divorced individuals and those in happy and unhappy first marriages possess different personality characteristics, controlling for these differences did not reveal additional variations in the emotional climate of marriage between the groups.

## **Chapter 5: General Discussion**

The current study examines how experiencing different types of divorces or being in a happy or unhappy first marriage is associated with the emotional climate of marriage, and explores whether these group differences persist above and beyond the effect of personality. Few researchers have explored how the quality of marriage prior to divorce is associated with post-divorce adjustment, such as the repartnering process. Of those that have, none have considered the differential outcomes for the quality of first marriages and prior marriages simultaneously. The present study increases our understanding of the differences between first marriages and later marriages by (a) comparing happy and unhappy first unions to remarriages preceded by a troubled or trouble-free marriage, (b) assessing if these groups differ in terms of the emotional climate of their marriages and their personality profiles, and (c) determining whether variations in emotional climate are masked by differences in personality. The findings clearly suggest that, when group differences in emotional climate emerge, those in unhappy first marriages report the most negative emotional climate. On average, those that cite myriad reasons for divorce and those that report fewer reasons do not differ in their relationship outcomes.

### **COMPARISON OF THE HIGH-DISTRESS AND LOW-DISTRESS GROUPS**

Interestingly, the quality of prior marriages, as evidenced by the reasons people cite for their divorce, appears to be unrelated to later marital functioning. Compared to those in the high-distress group, individuals whose divorce was preceded by a relatively trouble-free marriage reported similar levels of negativity, and they were just as likely to view their partner in a positive or negative light. Such findings were surprising, considering members of the high-distress group were expected to report that the

emotional climate of their marriages was poorer compared to that of members of the low-distress group.

As suggested earlier, individuals in the high-distress group may have been more willing to accept partial blame for the divorce because they were, in fact, more blameworthy. In such a scenario, their marital difficulties may be largely due to a difficult temperament or an inexpressive personality. Thus, problems that arose in prior relationships may reappear in later relationships. Based on the current findings, however, this does not appear to be the case. A more plausible explanation is that healing from divorce may be a function of the willingness to accept part of the blame for the marriage ending. Accepting their share of the blame may have helped those in the high-distress recover from their divorce, or alternatively, they may have been able to recognize the role they played in the dissolution of their marriage because they were further along in the recovery process. Considering the marriages of the high-distress and low-distress groups had comparable emotional climates, it seems as though individuals who suffered through a tumultuous marriage were able to recover and establish generally rewarding relationships.

Although these individuals are capable of forming healthy relationships down the line, the post-divorce adjustment period is not to be underestimated. Despite the fact that many quickly repartner following divorce (Anderson et al., 2004), it is possible that a period of time is necessary for individuals to regain their psychological balance. Such a “waiting period” may be especially necessary for individuals emerging from a tumultuous marriage. The psychological effects of divorce may be particularly salient in the months immediately following divorce, and these effects likely dissipate over time (Amato, 2000). Although a comparable amount of time passed before members of the high-distress group and low-distress group decided to remarry, it is unclear how long



each group waited before starting to date again. It is possible that the relationships formed shortly after the high-distress group divorced were haunted by the ghosts of their previous marriage. Put differently, the similarity in emotional climate between these two groups may partly be a function of the amount of time that passed before they decided to get married, thus allowing both groups to recover from their prior divorce.

Indeed, research suggests that people who remarry are further along in the adjustment process, compared to divorced individuals who remain single. Not only are the psychologically healthy selected into remarriage, but the emotional climate of their marriages is closely tied to their subjective well-being as well, such that those who are better-adjusted form more satisfying unions (Spanier & Furstenberg, 1982). Thus, the quality of marriage prior to divorce may not bear on the emotional climate of later marriages, provided those who remarry have recovered from their prior divorce.

Finally, it is also possible that the individuals who were sorted into the high-distress and low-distress groups are not representative of all individuals that go through a divorce (see footnote 2). For instance, those that were not clustered remarried more quickly and their prior marriages lasted longer. Generally, adjusting to single life is more difficult following a longer marriage, regardless of how satisfying the marriage was prior to divorce (Wang & Amato, 2000). Considering people tend to have the most difficulty adjusting in the few years following their divorce (e.g., Hetherington, 2003; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002), those who were not clustered may still be processing the dissolution of their prior marriage, which may undermine the emotional climate of their current unions. Additionally, those who were included in the final analyses differed in several important ways from those who weren't, and these differences may affect the generalizability of the findings (see footnote 7). For example, participants that were included in the final analyses were less likely to have children from a prior relationship, and this may have

contributed to the generally positive character of their remarriages. Children from a previous marriage can introduce a significant amount of conflict into a new marriage (e.g., Cherlin, 1978; Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002), and thus the affective nature of remarriage may be inaccurately represented in the current study.

Also contrary to expectations, the two groups of remarried individuals did not differ in their reported levels of structural commitment. Although it was expected that previously experiencing a distressed marriage would predispose individuals to attend to the obligations of marriage, this does not appear to be the case. Johnson (1991) suggests that spouses may not feel the confines of structural commitment, provided they find the relationship to be personally satisfying. Indeed, the affective nature of marriage was generally positive for both the high-distress and low-distress groups, and thus neither of these groups may have felt particularly compelled to fixate on the barriers to leaving their marriage. The costs of divorce are particularly salient when people are considering ending their marriages (Previti & Amato, 2003). Since neither of these groups seemed “trapped” by their present circumstances, they may not have been cognizant of their obligations to remain married (cf. Johnson et al., 1999).

#### **COMPARISON OF THOSE IN FIRST MARRIAGES AND LATER MARRIAGES**

Unexpectedly, both the high-distress and low-distress groups seemed to be largely similar to happy first marriages in terms of the emotional climate of their marriages. All three groups reported a comparable number of negative thoughts and positive thoughts about their relationship, and they were equally likely to behave negatively toward their partner. Deal and colleagues (1992) also found that the emotional climate of first marriages and remarriages is largely similar in most regards.

It is possible that these results are a function of the length of the current marriage. Individuals in first marriages and later marriages had, on average, been married for more than 15 years. Divorced individuals who found themselves in unsatisfying remarriages may have already decided to divorce yet again, and thus they would not be included in the remarried sample (Spanier & Furstenberg, 1982; Sweeney, 2010). Accordingly, successful remarriages are likely overrepresented in the current study, contributing to the similarity between happy first marriages and later marriages. If the average length of marriage were significantly shorter, it is possible the emotional climate of marriage would be substantively different for those who were previously divorced and those in satisfying first marriages.

Although the emotional climate of happy first marriages and remarriages was generally positive, the affective nature of unhappy first marriages was remarkably poor. Individuals in unhappy first marriages reported that, for every dimension assessed, the emotional climate of their marriages was significantly poorer compared to those in happy first marriages or later marriages. Specifically, those in unhappy first marriages reported engaging in more negative behaviors and having more negative thoughts and fewer positive thoughts about their relationship, compared to their happily married counterparts and those in later marriages, regardless of the quality of their prior marriage. These results are not particularly surprising, considering it is well established that being in an unhappy marriage is associated with a host of negative outcomes. For instance, unhappily married individuals have lower levels of subjective well-being (Dush & Amato, 2005; see Glenn, 1990, for a review), and poorer health, on average, compared to those in happy unions (e.g., Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1987; Umberson, Williams, Powers, Liu, & Needham, 2006). Indeed, Renne (1970) suggests, “[an] unhappy marriage is a disability, analogous to minority race, economic deprivation or physical illness” (p. 54).

Similarly, Hawkins and Booth (2005) found that unhappily married individuals tend to be less happy, overall, compared to those who are remarried.

All individuals, regardless of prior divorce experience or the emotional climate of their current marriage, reported comparable levels of structural commitment in their current marriage. This is surprising, considering those in unhappy first marriages ought to be especially aware of the costs of marital dissolution. Levinger (1976) suggested that, when individuals are personally attracted to one another, their personal satisfaction removes any sense of obligation to remain married. In the context of an unhappy marriage, however, such barriers become much more salient. It is possible that, even though the unhappily married individuals did not derive much satisfaction from their marriage, they were not considering divorce, and thus the barriers to divorce were not particularly salient. It is quite possible, however, that these unhappily married individuals may divorce in the future; in fact, Renne (1971) argues that, of those who are unhappily married, the healthier ones actually choose to divorce.

#### **GROUP DIFFERENCES IN PERSONALITY**

Although none of the hypotheses pertaining to personality were fully supported, the majority received partial support. As expected, individuals in unhappy first marriages had more disagreeable personalities than their happy counterparts. Surprisingly, those with divorce experience, regardless of the emotional climate of their prior marriage, had largely similar personality profiles. What's more, remarried individuals and those in happy first marriages possessed characteristics that were more alike than different.

The one characteristic that did not vary according to divorce history or marital quality, however, was trait expressiveness. This finding is particularly surprising, considering communal expressiveness promotes marital satisfaction by fostering

affectionate behaviors and encouraging favorable interpretations of spousal behavior (Miller et al., 2003). The lack of group differences may indicate that the scale used in the current study does not adequately capture the construct of trait expressiveness. It is also possible that the effect size of trait expressiveness may be much smaller than previously suggested. Trait expressiveness may very well cultivate marital satisfaction and affection, but it may not differentiate the groups in any meaningful way. Finally, it is conceivable that the lack of variation between the groups reflects individuals' tendency to self-ascribe positive characteristics in a survey situation (e.g., Edwards, 1953; Smith, Smith, & Seymour, 1993). In other words, people are inclined to describe themselves positively, and they may consider themselves to be high in trait expressiveness, even if they actually less expressive in comparison to others. Indeed, the standard deviation for the scale was relatively small ( $SD = .32$ ).

In terms of negative affectivity, those whose divorce was preceded by a distressed marriage generally scored higher on this dimension compared to those whose prior marriage was less distressed. Individuals in unhappy first marriages were also higher in negative affectivity in comparison to their happy counterparts. The greater negative affectivity of the high-distress group may have contributed to the troubled nature of their previous marriage. Similarly, the negative affectivity of those in unhappy first unions may have fostered the generally poor emotional climate of their marriages. Such disagreeable personalities may predispose people to engage in conflict or to behave antagonistically toward their partners (Caughlin et al., 2000; Donnellan, Conger, & Bryant, 2004; McNulty, 2008). Consistent with these findings, members of the high-distress group reported high levels of conflict as a reason for their divorce, whereas only half of the low-distress group reported that conflict factored into their decision to divorce. Additionally, individuals high in neuroticism tend to make negative attributions for their

partners' behavior (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Karney & Bradbury, 2000; Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2004), which may have contributed to the formation of a negative divorce account.

Individuals in happy first marriages were more conscientious, on average, than members of the high-distress group and those in unhappy first marriages. Conscientiousness generally functions as a protective factor, such that conscientious individuals form relationships that are more satisfying and stable in general (Botwin et al., 1997; Roberts & Bogg, 2004; Tucker et al., 1996). Accordingly, the higher levels of conscientiousness reported by happily married individuals might have contributed to the generally positive nature of their marriages. Those in unhappy first marriages, on the other hand, had lower levels of conscientiousness, which may have undermined the emotional climate of their marriages. Individuals whose divorce was preceded by a distressed marriage also reported lower levels of conscientiousness, which may have contributed to the generally conflicted nature of their prior union. It was also predicted that the low-distress group would exhibit higher levels of conscientiousness, compared to their high-distress counterparts and unhappy first marriages; however, this did not appear to be the case. Although the low-distress group may have been conscientiousness enough to avoid a significant amount of distress in their previous marriage (or, at least, to avoid a negative interpretation of their prior divorce), they were not able to prevent the dissolution of their marriage.

Additionally, unhappily married individuals were more likely to be insecurely attached compared to their happily married counterparts and those whose previous marriage was less distressed. This is not surprising, considering insecure attachment styles have a detrimental effect on the emotional climate of marriage (e.g., Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Lussier et al., 1997). Contrary to expectations, however, members of the

high-distress group were no more likely to be insecurely attached compared to the low-distress group or those in happy first marriages. There is some evidence to suggest that attachment styles can change over time, and healthy, satisfying relationships help to foster secure attachments (e.g., Pearson, Cohn, Cowan, & Cowan, 1994). It is possible that the high-distress group, as a result of their current marriage, became more securely attached. In other words, these results may reflect respondents' attachment concerning their current relationship and may not be descriptive of their relationship history as a whole.

### **PERSONAL HISTORY OR PERSONALITY?**

For decades, scholars have debated whether underlying personality characteristics or the divorce experience accounts for differences in relationship quality between first marriages and later marriages (e.g., Booth & Edwards, 1992; Cherlin, 1978; Johnson & Booth, 1998). The current study indicates that the effects of specific relationship experiences persist above and beyond the effects of personality; in fact, the inclusion of personality covariates had little effect on the findings. On the whole, it seems that variations in personality were not masking group differences in the emotional climate of marriage. Furthermore, the differences in emotional climate between unhappy first marriages and those in happy first marriages or later marriages were also not reducible to their distinct personality profiles.

These results indicate that the emotional climate of marriage cannot be accounted for by the personality characteristics of a single spouse. Relationships are inherently dyadic, and the personality characteristics of the respondents alone cannot account for variations in the affective nature of their marriages. In other words, it is possible that the personalities of the spouses were contributing to group differences in the emotional

climate of marriage. What's more, personality may help shape relationships early on, but as marriages progress, individuals' perceptions of their partner and their relationship are reinforced to create a generally stable emotional climate (Huston & Houts, 1998; Johnson & Booth, 1998). Although trait theorists suggest that personality qualities are relatively stable (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1995), it is possible that long-term involvement in an unhappy marriage could alter one's personality over time (e.g., Rutter, 1986). Thus, what begins as situational antagonism may consistently provoke a negative response from one's spouse, which could reinforce a dispositional tendency to behave in particular manner. Although individuals in happy or unhappy first marriages and those who went through a high-distress or low-distress divorce possessed different personality profiles, it is possible that these differences emerged as a result of their current relationship and did not serve to select them into specific relationship trajectories.

#### **LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Despite its contributions, the current study has several limitations. Some of these limitations are a function of the data; for instance, men were significantly underrepresented compared to the general population, calling into question the validity of the main effects of gender. It is possible that men and women do not differ in terms of negativity or insecure attachment (Feeney, 2002), and the current results are merely a function of poor sampling. However, many of the gender differences that emerged are consistent with prior research. For example, women are consistently found to be more expressive than men (e.g., Gill, Stockard, Johnson, & Williams, 1987),

Although the study included some of the most commonly cited reasons for divorce, the list was not comprehensive. It is possible that important contributing factors to divorce may have been overlooked. A free-response format was beyond the scope of



the investigation; nevertheless, future studies should gather individuals' qualitative explanations for why their marriage ended and see if similar results emerge when using such a technique. Additionally, it is necessary to get at the emotional content of each reason to determine the extent to which it is still distressing. Someone who is still upset about his or her divorce may report the same reason as someone who is further along in the adjustment process, but the emotional salience of reasons is likely to be more pronounced for those who are still recovering, compared to those who have recovered more fully. Thus, the reason itself may not matter, but rather the emotional content of the reason could influence the emotional climate of later relationships.

On the whole, the relationship between group membership and the emotional climate of marriage did not seem to be reducible to differences in personality. However, it is quite possible that personality characteristics, other than the ones assessed in the current research, predispose individuals to form high- or low-quality relationships. For example, self-esteem appears to be linked to marital satisfaction (e.g., Fincham & Bradbury, 1993), and thus it would be useful to see if self-esteem is associated with the emotional climate of marriage to a greater extent than the characteristics considered in the present study. Similarly, it is possible that one's relationship history is related to other indicators of emotional climate, such as affectionate behaviors, conflict, or other forms of commitment (i.e., personal or moral). Researchers should explore these possibilities in future studies.

Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, it is unclear whether individuals' personalities predisposed them to experience certain relationship trajectories, or whether certain relationship experiences shaped their personalities. More than likely, both are true (e.g., Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2002). By following individuals through the divorce and repartnering process and assessing personality characteristics at multiple time-points,

future studies can better determine whether personality predisposes individuals to certain relationship outcomes, as well as the extent to which first marriages influence the affective nature of later marriages.

Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that different types of relationships can form after a divorce. More and more often, divorced individuals are choosing to cohabit rather than remarry (Coleman et al., 2000). It is possible that only the best post-divorce relationships culminate in marriage, which would help explain why the emotional climate of remarriages and happy first marriages was similar. It is also conceivable that the amount of time between the divorce and the formation of a new romantic relationship influences the emotional climate of the relationship or, alternately, the reasons cited for divorce. Later research should address such possibilities.

#### **STRENGTHS OF THE CURRENT INVESTIGATION**

Despite these limitations, the present research makes four major contributions to the field. First, the findings provide additional insight into how prior divorce experience is associated with the emotional climate of later relationships. On the whole, going through a divorce does not seem to prevent people from forming satisfying relationships in the future. To date, there have been relatively few studies examining the affective nature of repartnered relationships. The literature largely focuses on the effect of divorce and remarriage on children. Considering the formation of a new romantic relationship promotes post-divorce adjustment (Garvin, Kalter, & Hansell, 1993; Marks & Lambert, 1998; Ross, 1995), the repartnering process merits additional empirical attention.

Second, the findings indicate that characterizations of divorce are not associated with the emotional climate of later relationships, but perceptions of a current relationship seem to be closely tied to its emotional climate. Specifically, those whose divorce was

preceded by a distressed marriage reported that the emotional climate of their current marriages was similar to that of the low-distress group. Additionally, the emotional climate of unhappy first marriages was significantly poorer than that of happy first marriages. Considering the emotional climate of remarriages and happy first marriages was comparable, these findings suggest that people have a unique understanding that is specific to each relationship, and prior relationships may have little influence on later relationships. As described by Johnson and Booth (1998), “stability occurs within but not between marriages” (p. 893).

Although the high- and low-distress groups did not differ in the emotional climate of their current marriages, it is possible that this is a result of sampling error. If remarriages of a shorter duration were included in the present study, it is quite possible that the emotional climate of their marriages would be significantly different than that of first marriages. Thus, future studies should address this possibility. Nevertheless, identifying the types of marriages that dissolve, based on the reasons cited as contributing to divorce, was a novel technique. The cluster solution closely resembled that of Amato and Hohmann-Marriott (2007), providing additional support for the notion that some divorces are preceded by distressed marriages, whereas others are preceded by relatively trouble-free marriages, and that the two are qualitatively different. Additionally, when comparing first marriages to later marriages, researchers need to distinguish between happy and unhappy first marriages. Indeed, the current study indicates that unhappy first marriages were qualitatively different from both happy first marriages and remarriages, regardless of the quality of the marriage prior to divorce.

Finally, the current study addressed whether personality accounts for group differences in the emotional climate of marriage. Overall, it appears as though personality is not tied to the emotional climate of marriage, further indicating that

individuals may not be destined to repeat their relationship history in later relationships. Additionally, the present research incorporated a variety of personality characteristics, including conscientiousness, which is frequently overlooked (e.g., Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000).

## **CONCLUSION**

Taken at face value, remarried individuals appear to be remarkably well-adjusted and seem to have healed from their prior divorce. Perhaps more importantly, the reasons people cite as contributing to their prior divorce do not seem to be associated with the emotional climate of their later marriages. Accordingly, the emotional climate of marriage appears to be a function of the relationship itself and not a function of personality or divorce experience. Considering remarriages and happy first marriages are relatively similar in their affective nature, it appears as though individuals can enter into a new relationship unburdened by the problems present in their prior relationship. On the other hand, unhappy first marriages are significantly less fulfilling than happy first marriages or remarriages, and this may be the result of the generalized perceptions they have formed about their relationship. Consistent with prior research (Johnson & Booth, 1998), the emotional climate of any given relationship appears to be determined by the dyadic environment. Most people prioritize forming a satisfying romantic relationship (Roberts & Robins, 2000), and the current findings suggest that, regardless of personality or divorce experience, such a goal may prove to be attainable.

## **Appendix A: Personality Scales**

### **SCALE A1: NEGATIVE THOUGHTS ( $\alpha = .91$ )**

1. This relationship brings out the worst in me.\*
2. I want more from this relationship than my partner is willing to give.\*
3. I often wonder whether I love my partner very much.\*
4. I think a lot about the bad times in our relationship.\*
5. Someday I will likely leave this relationship.
6. I often think there may be someone better for me out there.\*
7. I often wonder whether my partner loves me very much.\*
8. I often feel helpless in dealing with problems that come up in my relationship.

### **SCALE A2: NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS ( $\alpha = .70$ )**

1. When we have an argument, it usually takes me a long time to get over it.
2. When we argue, one of us withdraws – that is, doesn't want to talk about it anymore or leaves the scene.
3. Little arguments escalate into ugly fights with accusations, criticisms, name calling, or bringing up past hurts.
4. We almost never have good conversations where we just talk as good friends.

### **SCALE A3: POSITIVE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ( $\alpha=.71$ )**

1. My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life.
2. I find it hard to imagine finding a partner better than this one.\*
3. This relationship brings out the best in me.

**SCALE A4: STRUCTURAL COMMITMENT ( $\alpha=.61$ )**

1. I could never leave this relationship because I would let my child(ren) down.\*
2. Even if I wanted to leave this relationship, I couldn't do so.\*
3. I could never leave my partner because I would feel guilty about letting him/her down.
4. I am willing to accept disappointments in order to keep this relationship together.\*

**SCALE A5: TRAIT EXPRESSIVENESS ( $\alpha=.77$ )**

1. I'm very gentle.
2. I'm very helpful and unselfish with others
3. I'm very kind.
4. I'm very aware of other people's feelings.
5. I'm very understanding of others.
6. I'm very warm in relation to others.
7. I almost always place the needs of others above my own.
8. I forgive people easily.\*

**SCALE A6: NEGATIVE AFFECTIVITY ( $\alpha=.65$ )**

1. I remain calm in tense situations.<sup>a</sup>
2. When bad moods come over me, I often can't shake them.\*
3. I have trouble making myself do what I should.
4. I often say things I later regret.\*
5. I have problems controlling my anger.\*
6. I get jealous more easily than most people.\*

**SCALE A7: CONSCIENTIOUSNESS ( $\alpha=.74$ )**

1. I like to take responsibility for making decisions.
2. I'm good at solving problems on my own.\*
3. When I succeed, it is usually because of my abilities.
4. I often feel helpless and want someone else to solve my problems.\*\*
5. When I make a commitment, I can always be counted on to follow through.
6. Once I start a project, I almost always finish it.
7. Sometimes I'm not as dependable as I should be.\*\*
8. I always check out all the options before making a decision.
9. I never settle for second best.
10. Whenever I'm faced with a choice, I try to imagine what all the other possibilities are, even ones that aren't present at the moment.

**SCALE A8: AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT ( $\alpha=.67$ )**

1. I have difficulty telling others that I love them.
  2. I don't like to show my emotions to other people.
  3. I'm not very comfortable having to depend on other people.
  4. I'm somewhat uncomfortable being too close to others.
  5. I find it difficult to trust others completely.
  6. Others often want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.
- 

*Note.* For respondents who did not have children, the structural commitment scale was created by averaging together the remaining three items.

<sup>a</sup>Reverse-coded.

\*Item created by the survey team uniquely for the TBSM

## **Appendix B: Similarities and Differences Between the Clusters**

In general, the two clusters were similar on most demographic characteristics ( $ps$  ranged in value from .12 to .97). Each cluster was predominantly female, with just over a third of the membership in each being male (34.3% of the high-distress divorcees were male, compared to 37.2% of the low-distress divorcees). The clusters also did not vary in terms of race, with 67.2% of the high-distress group being White, and 72.9% of the low-distress group were White. The clusters attained comparable levels of education, with most members having attended some college (28.6% and 35.8% of the low- and high-distress groups, respectively). Both were considerably wealthy, with 20.9% of the high-distress group and 22.2% of their low-distress counterparts reporting a family income of over \$100,000 per year. Additionally, the majority of members in both clusters never experienced a parental divorce (75.8% of the high-distress group and 65.3% of the low-distress group). Participants' prior marriage lasted approximately six years, and about five years passed between their divorce and the entrance into their current marriage. The majority of both clusters reported that they were the ones who initiated their prior divorce (58.2% of the high-distress group and 56.9% of the low-distress group claiming sole responsibility). Both were likely to have children from a prior relationship (80.6% of the high-distress group had children, in comparison to 72.4% of their low-distress counterparts), and most participants considered themselves to be somewhat religious.

The two clusters differed significantly on several key dimensions. Individuals whose divorce was preceded by a relatively trouble-free marriage were more likely to be older [ $t(259) = 2.96; p < .01$ ], have a greater number of previous marriages [ $t(130) = 2.24, p < .05$ ], and have prior cohabitation experience [ $\chi^2(1, n = 269) = 4.61, p < .05$ ], compared to those whose prior marriage was distressed. Any existing variations in



emotional climate may be the result of these underlying differences between the groups, and thus these characteristics will be controlled for in later analyses.

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