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Newlywed Women's Marital Expectations: Lifelong Monogamy?

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Abstract

Over time, perceptions of marriage in the United States have shifted from a social obligation to a decision based on personal fulfillment. This shift has been most pronounced for women who no longer rely upon marriage for financial security. Marriages based on personal fulfillment are more fragile so when love declines and constraints do not exist, infidelity and divorce are considered viable options. This study investigated newlywed women's marital expectations along with their experiences of infidelity and expectations of divorce. Newlywed women (N=197) married 2 years or less completed an online survey. As expected, these women primarily conceptualized marriage in terms of love and personal fulfillment. They reported a variety of extramarital thoughts and behaviors, and 74% indicated some expectation of divorce.

INDEX WORDS: Newlyweds, Marriage, Marital Expectations, Infidelity, Divorce

Newlywed Women's Marital Expectations: Lifelong Monogamy?

Over time, marital practices in the United States have changed (Cherlin, 2010). Whereas in the past, marriage was typically conceptualized in terms of lifelong monogamy, today, divorce and infidelity are relatively common (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001; Whisman & Snyder, 2007). Marital practices began changing around the early 1900s, but the most rapid changes took place in the 1960s (Popenoe, 1993). Prior to the 1960s, sex, cohabitation, and childbearing were restricted to marital relationships, but today, individuals commonly engage in such practices without marriage (Bachrach, Hindin, & Thomson, 2002; Ingoldsby, 2002). Additionally, approximately half of first marriages today end in divorce, which is more than double the divorce rate of 1960 (Celebrezze & Terry, 1964; Amato, 2010). The nature of marriage has changed most dramatically for women, who prior to the 1960s, did not have as much power in intimate relationships as they do today (Amato, 2007).

Women's shifting power stems in part from advancements in birth control, workforce participation, and changes in divorce laws (Popenoe, 1993; Teachman, Polonko, & Scanzoni, 1999). Prior to the advent of contraceptive pills, unmarried sex was more risky for women who would experience prejudice and discrimination from out-of-wedlock births. With the ability to control and time pregnancy, women became more free to participate in unmarried sex and pursue a career without the risk of pregnancy. The participation of women in the workforce made them less reliant on marriage for economic survival, and enabled them to marry for personal reasons (e.g., love, satisfaction), rather than necessity (Rogers, 2004). Additionally, no-fault divorce laws, which were implemented in the 1970s, allowed spouses to cite "irreconcilable differences" as a reason for marital termination and increased women's options for leaving their relationships (Glick, 1975). These laws made divorce easier to attain, less culturally stigmatizing, and less

psychologically distressing (Pinsof, 2002). Taken together, these changes have contributed to the present state in which women can elect not to marry, or divorce when their marriage is no longer satisfying.

Aside from divorce, an additional outcome associated with women's greater economic and social power is infidelity. Estimates indicate that 21% of women participate in extramarital sex at some point in marriage (Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007). One reason for the relatively high rate of infidelity is employment status. In the past, men were significantly more likely than women to be employed, but today, both sexes work outside the home. Being employed increases the likelihood of infidelity because individuals are exposed to more people, may engage in more travel, and have more disposable income (South, Trent, & Shen, 2001). Other recent trends such as online communications, social networking sites, and globalization, have served to broaden access to extramarital partners (Subotnik, 2007). With greater access to partners and culturally accepting views of divorce, the risks of engaging in extramarital sex are not as high as they were in the past, particularly for women. For example, if a husband discovers his wife has had an affair and seeks divorce, the woman is less likely now, compared to the past, to experience devastating financial and social setbacks.

Although recent social changes have made infidelity and divorce more possible, the likelihood of experiencing these outcomes varies based on intra and interpersonal factors. In terms of personality traits, emotionally unstable (i.e., neurotic) individuals are more likely to engage in extramarital sex and experience divorce (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Individuals who are less agreeable and less conscientious are more likely to engage in extramarital sex (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Schmitt, 2004). In general, spouses with similar personalities and/or who report being highly religious are less likely to

experience infidelity or divorce (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Orzeck & Lung, 2005), although they are not necessarily more satisfied in their marriages. Extensive research has identified low marital satisfaction, dysfunctional communication, and high conflict as contributors to infidelity and divorce (e.g., Atwood & Seifer, 1997; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). One nationally representative survey found that the most commonly cited reason for divorce was infidelity, followed by incompatible personalities, substance abuse, growing apart, and communication problems (Amato & Previtti, 2003). The presence or absence of these intra and interpersonal factors help explain why some individuals experience marital instability, whereas others might not. In the current study, we will examine women's experiences of infidelity and expectations of divorce, and whether these vary based on intra- and interpersonal characteristics.

Johnson's (1999) commitment framework can be used to describe the changing nature of marriage for women. Johnson proposed that individuals commit to relationships for three distinct reasons: personal, structural, and moral reasons. Individuals who are *personally* committed remain involved because they *want* to be in the relationship and find it rewarding. Those who are committed for *structural* reasons remain with a partner because they feel they *have* to for financial, social, or other constraining factors that make them unable to leave a relationship. Individuals who are *morally* committed feel they *ought* to persist in a relationship because of promises made to themselves, their partner, or God. Today, a majority of marriages are based on personal commitment, meaning that individuals remain married as long as they *want* to be in the relationship (Coontz, 2005; Ingoldsby, 2002). Although marriages based on personal commitment are potentially more satisfying, they are also more unstable than marriages based on structural or moral reasons because when love and satisfaction decline, there is a greater risk of infidelity and divorce. Thus, because women do not have to get or stay married, they are more

likely to commit to a relationship for *personal* reasons. Based on this premise, one goal of the present study will be to investigate women's reasons for getting married, as well as their beliefs about marriage.

Method

Participants

One hundred and ninety seven women completed an online survey. Participants had a mean age of 27.33 years ($SD = 4.505$ years; range = 20-47 years), and a majority were European/Caucasian (85%), heterosexual (95%), Christian (53%), educated (75% had earned a Bachelor's degree or higher), and employed (90%). Twelve percent considered themselves to be very religious, 28% were fairly religious, 32% were slightly religious, and 28% were not religious at all. Their average age at the time of marriage was 26.46 years ($SD = 4.67$ years; range = 18 to 45 years) and, on average, they had been married for .86 years ($SD = .68$ years). Participants dated their husbands for an average of 39.64 months ($SD = 31.26$ months) or approximately 3.3 years prior to marriage.

Measures

Reasons for marriage. Participants were asked the following open-ended question that was written by the researchers: "As you think back to before you married, what were your reason(s) for getting married? Be specific." After responding to this question, they were presented with a list of possible reasons for marriage and asked to rank order their reasons by assigning "1" to the most influential and "7" to the least influential. Participants could assign a "0" to items that did not factor into their reasons for marriage. The list of items included: financial reasons, religious reasons, legal benefits, to have children, love and satisfaction, long-term stability, and social pressure to marry (from family, friends, church, society, etc.).

Beliefs about marriage. Participants were asked the following open-ended question that was written by the researchers: “In this study, beliefs are defined as your own personal views. Using this definition, please identify your core beliefs about marriage.”

Personality. Saucier’s (1994) Mini-Markers scale (MM) was used to assess personality. Participants were asked to read a list of 40 adjectives (8 items for each personality trait) and indicate whether the adjective was descriptive of their personality using a 9-point Likert scale (1 = extremely inaccurate; 9 = extremely accurate). The scale has demonstrated a robust factor structure, good internal consistency, criterion validity (i.e., concurrent and predictive), and external validity (Dwight, Cummings, & Glenar, 1998; Saucier, 1994). In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were .86 for extroversion, .81 for conscientiousness and emotional stability, .80 for agreeableness, and .73 for openness.

Quality of alternatives. Participants completed the quality of alternatives subscale of the Investment Model Scale (IMS) (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). The IMS has demonstrated good construct (i.e., convergent and discriminant), predictive, and external validity, and has been tested with thousands of participants in different regions of the world (Arriaga & Agnew; 2001; Rusbult et al., 1998). The quality of alternatives subscale consists of 10-items designed to assess the desirability of relationship options (e.g., “The alternatives to my relationship, such as dating another, spending time with friends or on my own, are close to ideal) using a 9-point scale (0 = don’t agree at all; 8 = agree completely). Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the scale was .81.

Commitment. Participants completed a set of questions developed by Johnson, Caughlin, and Huston (1999) to assess personal commitment (15 items), structural commitment (19 items; questions pertaining to children were omitted), and moral commitment (13 items). For personal commitment, participants used a 7-point Likert scale to respond to questions about love,

couple identity, and relationship fulfillment. For structural commitment, participants used a 9-point Likert scale to indicate their agreement with statements about alternatives, social pressure to stay together, difficult termination procedures, and relationship investment. For moral commitment, participants used a 9-point Likert scale to indicate their attitudes about divorce, partner commitment obligations, and constancy values. Johnson et al.'s psychometric assessment of the Commitment Framework indicated three distinct components of commitment via factor analysis and a causal indicators model, as well as good construct validity. In the present study, alpha coefficients were .92 for personal commitment, .86 for moral commitment, and .87 for structural commitment. Inter-item correlations within each subscale were statistically significant. It is important to note that although alternatives are assessed as a component of structural commitment in this measure, the items are distinct from Rusbult et al.'s (1998) quality of alternatives measure, with structural commitment focusing on relationship benefits that would be missed upon termination (e.g., current residence, help with housework) and the latter focusing on finding a suitable alternative partner.

Infidelity. A measure developed by Drigotas, Safstrom, and Gentilia (1999) was used to assess infidelity. The scale consists of 10 items that address a broad range of extramarital behaviors. Participants were asked to think of a person, other than their spouse, to whom they felt attracted since getting married, and respond to questions about flirting, emotional and physical intimacy, and doing "couple" activities with this person (see Table 1). Participants recorded responses using a 9-point Likert scale (0 = not at all, never; 8 = extremely, very often). Drigotas et al. demonstrated good construct and predictive validity. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .94 in the current study.

Divorce expectations. Two questions were used to assess divorce expectations that were

written by the researchers: “Considering everything (the way you are, the way your partner is, the way the world is), what do you think are the chances that you and your spouse could divorce at some point?” This question was open-ended and participants recorded their responses using a scale from 0 to 100%. The second question was also written by the researchers and asked whether participants expected to remain married to their current spouse for life, and response options were “yes” or “no.”

Demographics and relationship characteristics. Participants’ age, ethnicity, education level, religion, and employment status were assessed. Information was also collected about participants’ length of marriage, age at the time of marriage, length of time dating their spouse prior to marriage, whether they cohabited prior to marriage, and whether their parents were divorced.

Procedure

The study was limited to women in their first marriage because the goal was to assess reasons for marriage among women who had not already experienced divorce. Additionally, participants had to have been married for two years or less. Two years was selected as the preferred time frame because marital satisfaction typically declines during the first two years of marriage (Huston & Houts, 1998) Two years also allowed enough time for women to have considered infidelity or divorce if their needs were not being met by their spouse. Due to potential confounding effects, the sample was limited to individuals who did not have children. Children can serve to keep a marriage together, such as when couples stay together for the sake of the children, or promote divorce, such as when parents believe children should not be exposed to ongoing conflict (White, 1990).

Participants were recruited through listserv announcements, web site postings, and

newlywed web sites (e.g., www.thenest.com). The announcements described the study, outlined participant criteria, and provided a link to the online consent form and survey. Participants were asked *not* to complete the survey with the help of their spouse because sensitive topics were addressed (e.g., infidelity) and the researchers believed participants would be most honest if they did not consult their partners. They were informed that participation was voluntary and that all responses would be kept confidential. Upon completing the survey, they could enter a draw for a \$100 gift card.

Description of Qualitative Analyses

Two of the variables in this study (i.e., reasons for marriage, beliefs about marriage) were assessed using open-ended questions in which participants could type lengthy responses. Information collected from these questions was analyzed using the constant comparative method with Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software program. The constant comparative method involves reading through the data and inductively identifying conceptual categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Rather than coding the data word-for-word, the researchers looked for *themes* in participants' responses. The first author read through and openly coded the data several times before deciding on the final codes. As themes continued to emerge, they were compared to previous themes to examine whether they could be collapsed into an existing category or stand on their own. A method known as "axial coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was then used to compare themes across participants and identify relationships among the themes. In this phase, the researcher examined all codes and grouped them into broad conceptual categories. The conceptual categories are reported in the qualitative results below and examples from each category are provided to highlight the most common themes. In order to assess confirmability (e.g., objectivity, neutrality; Tobin & Begley, 2003) of the results, random segments of the data

were assigned to the second author who used the first author's codebook to independently code the data. After comparing codes with those of the first author, the second author determined that the initial codes accurately reflected participants' responses. Inter-rater agreement was 100%.

Results

What Reasons Do Women Identify for Getting Married?

This research question was assessed in two parts. The first part asked participants to think back to before they were married and identify reasons for getting married. Participants reported a total of 1245 reasons, with several participants describing multiple reasons for marriage. The 1245 responses were classified into 68 codes, and these codes were further collapsed into 12 broad categories. The largest category, with 25.5% of responses was labeled *characteristics about the relationship* because participants described something about their relationship as a reason for getting married. Within this category, the most commonly identified characteristics were: companionship, sharing of core values, and having a trusting relationship. The next biggest category was *personal fulfillment* (15.5% of responses), which included reasons such as love and happiness. *Long-term stability* (12%) was reported by a number of participants and referred to marrying for lifelong commitment and security. Several participants (9.5%) described *partner characteristics* such as having a desirable partner, being attracted to their spouse, and feeling as though their spouse was their soul mate. Others (9%) identified *needing a partner*, which included fears about being alone, feelings of being better with a partner, and not being able to imagine life without a partner. *Timing* (8%) referred to reasons such as having been with a partner for a lengthy period of time, feeling that marriage was a natural next step, or deciding that it was simply "the right time" to get married. In the less frequent categories, some reported getting married because they wanted *to start a family* (5%), had *legal reasons* (4%) such as

financial or immigration benefits, felt *socially obligated* (3.5%) by family or society, wanted *public recognition* of their relationship (3.5%), for *religious reasons* (3.5%), and a few participants (1%) cited *impractical* reasons (e.g., to change their partner's character, they were given an ultimatum, they were unsure why they married).

The second question that was used to identify reasons for marriage had participants rank, in order of importance, factors that influenced their decision to marry. If one or more factors played no part in their decision to marry, they could assign a "0". Eighty-one percent indicated their *primary* reason for marriage was love, 13% indicated long-term stability, 5% identified religious reasons, 3% said to have children, 2% indicated social pressure, 2% identified legal reasons, and 1% said for financial reasons.

What are Women's Beliefs about Marriage?

To answer this question, participants were asked to describe their core beliefs about marriage. The researchers identified a total of 1265 responses, which were classified into 80 codes. These codes were further grouped into five broad categories: 84% of responses described beliefs that were related to *characteristics of the relationship*. For example, they stated that marriage should be a loving, supportive relationship, and that marriage takes hard work, and should be based on honesty and trust. Others (9%) described characteristics that were related to *cultural views* of marriage including that society is better because of marriage, marriage should only be between a man and woman, and people divorce too easily. The less frequently mentioned beliefs included *personal benefits* (3%) (e.g., marriage should make you happy, the costs of marriage should not outweigh the benefits), *spousal characteristics* (2%) (e.g., it is important to find the right person to marry, if a spouse cheats or is abusive, divorce should be considered), and *family centered beliefs* (2%) (e.g., marriage is a first step toward creating a new family,

marriage involves having children).

Given that most of the marital beliefs were classified as *characteristics of the relationship* (84%), it was important to examine sub-categories within this group. There were six sub-categories identified. Participants described marital beliefs related to *friendship characteristics* (32.5%) such as marriage should be based on a deep friendship, partners need to support each other emotionally, and it is necessary to have good communication in marriage. Several (21%) described beliefs relating to *commitment and a long-term outlook* including marriage is about a life-long commitment, marriage is meant to last forever, and spouses should share a view of the future. Some (17%) described the *effort* involved in marriage such as marriage is hard work, marriage is about compromise and getting through the good times and bad, marriage is about teamwork and taking care of each other. A number (15.5%) identified characteristics that applied only to *lovers* such as marriage is about sex, passion, and intimacy, and a person's spouse should be their top priority, above all else. Some (13.5%) described *values about marriage* including marriage is based on fidelity and loyalty, marriage is about a promise made to God/in front of God, and marriage should be an equal partnership between two people. Finally, a few participants (.5%) described *financial beliefs* such as marriage allows people to obtain financial benefits they otherwise could not attain, marriage is a business partnership, and marriage provides financial security.

What are Women's Experiences of Infidelity and Do these Experiences Vary Based on Intra and Interpersonal Characteristics?

Infidelity experiences were assessed by computing the means and standard deviations for items on the infidelity assessment. In general, participants reported a range of extramarital thoughts or behaviors, with the most common being flirting, feeling arousal, and thinking about

the alternative partner. Complete results are shown in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

A composite score for infidelity was used as the dependent variable in a regression analysis to examine intra- and interpersonal variations in experiences of infidelity. Rather than control for the influence of specific variables, all intra- and interpersonal characteristics were used as predictors in the model. Although researchers have identified a variety of infidelity predictors in previous studies, associations have not been examined among newlywed women so we decided not to control for predictors. Categorical variables were dummy coded into two groups. The regression model was significant ($R^2 = .234$, adjusted $R^2 = .125$; $p = .010$). Individuals were more likely to have engaged in infidelity if they had an open personality type ($\beta = .240$, $p < .01$), had been involved with their partners for an extensive period of time ($\beta = .195$, $p < .05$), and/or perceived of high quality alternatives ($\beta = .214$, $p < .05$). They were less likely to have engaged in infidelity if they were very or fairly religious ($\beta = -.229$, $p < .05$). A summary of the complete results is shown in Table 2.

[Table 2 about here]

What are Women's Expectations of Divorce and Do these Expectations Vary Based on Intra and Interpersonal Characteristics?

Participants were asked to estimate the percentage chance of experiencing divorce. On average, they perceived there to be 13.20% chance ($SD=19.46\%$; Range = 0-100%). They were also asked if they expected to remain married to their current spouse for life. Ninety-seven percent selected "yes" and 3% selected "no".

Percentage chance of divorce was used as a dependent variable in a multiple regression analysis to examine whether divorce expectations varied based on intra- and interpersonal

characteristics. The regression model was significant ($R^2 = .746$, adjusted $R^2 = .557$; $p = .000$). Individuals were more likely to expect divorce if they were employed ($\beta = .133$, $p < .05$), had disagreeable personalities ($\beta = -.158$, $p < .05$), if they were had been involved with their partners for less time ($\beta = -.157$, $p < .05$), and if they reported low levels of personal commitment ($\beta = -.546$, $p < .01$). A summary of these results is shown in Table 3.

[Table 3 about here]

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to examine newlywed women's marital expectations, including perceived likelihood of infidelity and divorce. In the United States, marriage has traditionally been conceptualized as a lifelong, monogamous partnership, but today's high rates of infidelity and divorce question this definition. The nature of marriage is changing, particularly for women (Bachrach et al., 2002; Cherlin, 2004). Today, more than ever, marriage is based on love and personal fulfillment, rather than constraining factors, which makes it more satisfying, but at the same time less stable (Coontz, 2005). According to Johnson's Commitment Framework, this represents a shift from *structural* to *personal* commitment. In other words, women's marital commitment is predicted more by their relationship satisfaction than by factors such as social pressure or economic barriers. There is a greater risk of infidelity and divorce in marriages based on personal commitment because when love and satisfaction decline, individuals look for need fulfillment elsewhere.

Reasons for Marriage

Women identified a variety of motivations to marry. The most commonly mentioned were love, the strong friendship they had with their spouse, happiness, and lifelong commitment. Overall, these results support observations made by historians that people today marry primarily

for love and personal fulfillment (Coontz, 2005). This represents a shift from the past, when individuals, particularly women, tended to marry more for social, economic, or political reasons. This study's findings also fit with western values of individualism and gender egalitarianism (e.g., friendship based marriage) (Pinsof, 2002). Cherlin (2004) has commented on the paradoxical nature of marriage in the United States stating that Americans value marriage and marry at higher rates than individuals in other westernized nations, but focus so much on self-fulfillment and personal freedom that divorce rates approximate 50%. In order to succeed in lifelong marriage, individuals need to adopt a "we" rather than "me" centered perspective. Although few women in their first two years of marriage expected divorce from the outset, many of their primary motivations for and beliefs about marriage focused on subjective qualities, such as love and satisfaction, which tend to decline over time.

Beliefs about Marriage

Participants inductively identified their core beliefs about marriage. Similar to their *reasons* for marriage, a majority (84%) of responses pertained to relationship characteristics. The most commonly mentioned belief was that marriage should be based on love. The themes of friendship, being best friends with one's spouse, and lifelong commitment emerged repeatedly from the data. These descriptions had also been reported as *reasons* for marriage. Clearly, the themes of love, friendship, and lifelong commitment are central to women's marital conceptualizations, and are likely influenced by cultural definitions of marriage. That is, in American society, marriage is romanticized through the media and spouses are expected to be a friend, lover, and lifelong partner (Putnam, 2000). These demanding expectations on the marital relationship are difficult to fulfill and often lead to dissatisfaction (McNulty & Karney, 2004). Romantic views of marriage, combined with an increasingly individualistic culture, and an over-

reliance on one's spouse for need fulfillment heighten the risk of infidelity and divorce (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Roger, 2003; Houston & Houts, 1998).

Other relationship-oriented beliefs were that marriage is hard work and takes effort from both partners to succeed. Participants indicated that spouses should be a top priority for each other, even more so than eventual children. Marriage was also thought of in terms of intimacy, sex, and passion. Related to this, the concepts of monogamy and trust were reported as indispensable in marriage. Many indicated that infidelity and broken trust would be reason to seek counseling or divorce. Participants described religious values as well, indicating that marriage is about a promise made to or in front of God. Finally, only a few participants described the practical, financial benefits of marriage. They thought partners should share finances and that marriage allows people to obtain financial security they otherwise could not attain. In summary, a majority of women's reasons for and beliefs about marriage centered on love, which may put them at greater risk for infidelity and divorce when love and satisfaction decline.

Infidelity Experiences

Many newlywed women had engaged in some form of extramarital thought or behavior. Most admitted feeling attracted to another person and had spent time thinking about and flirting with this person. Fewer individuals reported being emotionally and/or physically intimate, but many were tempted to do so. It is important to note that responses about infidelity are influenced by social desirable response bias (Allen, et al., 2005), and reports in this study were likely conservative due to underreporting.

Infidelity experiences varied based on intra- and interpersonal characteristics. Individuals were more likely to have engaged in infidelity if they had an open personality type, had been involved with their partners for an extensive period of time, and perceived of high quality

alternatives. A number of researchers have identified neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness as infidelity predictors, whereas one researcher reported an association between openness and infidelity, and this finding held for men only (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Open people tend to be proactive, creative, interested in new ideas, and generally do not suppress feelings. It is possible that the greater equality of sexes today, compared to the past, enables women, who may have previously suppressed their feelings, to explore extramarital relationships with greater liberty. Indeed, people who believe their needs are not being met by their spouse are more likely to engage in extramarital sex (Prins, Buunk, & VanYperen, 1993). Relationship length was positively associated with infidelity, suggesting that as time goes on, factors such as relational boredom, dissatisfaction, and exposure to alternative partners increase the likelihood of engaging in extramarital relations. Exposure to and perception of alternative partners have been identified as strong predictors of infidelity in previous research (Allen et al., 2005; South et al., 2001). Women in this study were less likely to have engaged in infidelity if they identified themselves as religious, which is similar to prior work that identifies religion as a protective factor against extramarital sex (Atkins et al., 2001).

Divorce Expectations

Participants in the current study have been raised in a culture of divorce. It was important to examine whether this social trend has impacted how they think about divorce as they enter marriage. Seventy-five percent of women reported some expectation of divorce and on average, they perceived there to be 13% chance of divorcing. When asked if they expected to remain married to their spouse for life, 3% indicated they did not. These results support the notion that newlyweds enter marriage with at least some expectation of divorce.

Participants were more likely to expect divorce if they were employed, had disagreeable

personalities, had been involved with their partner for less time, and/or reported low levels of personal commitment. The finding of divorce expectations being higher for those with disagreeable personalities is new. Previous research has found this characteristic to predict infidelity, but not divorce (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Schmitt, 2004). It is possible that newlywed women who are less agreeable expect divorce, and that this pessimistic attitude combined with an unfriendly personality leads to marital dissatisfaction (for both partners) and subsequent divorce. It is worthy of mention that length of time together was positively associated with infidelity, but negatively associated with divorce expectations. Length of time together may contribute to relational boredom and dissatisfaction, which leads to infidelity, but it serves as a protective mechanism against divorce because individuals risk losing irretrievable investments that have been put into the relationship (e.g., time, finances, emotional disclosures). As predicted, women were more likely to expect divorce if they were employed and if they reported low levels of personal commitment. This fits with Johnson's commitment framework in that women today marry primarily for personal, rather than structural (e.g., financial) reasons, and that when personal commitment declines, divorce is considered a viable option.

Strengths and Limitations

The data for this study were collected online, which is both a strength and limitation. Internet data collection has the advantages of being anonymous, cost effective, and geographically wide ranging (Whitley, 2002). In this study, participants were disclosing personal information about sensitive topics so anonymity was important. This method additionally enabled the researchers to recruit a large sample from regions across the U.S., and allowed participants to write responses in their own words and complete the survey at a time they found convenient. The disadvantages included a loss of detail that would have been available through

other methods such as interviewing. The researchers could not ask participants to elaborate on points, use follow-up questions, or adjust questions once the study had begun. An additional concern was that the researchers had little control over the environment in which participants completed the survey. They were instructed to complete the survey without help from their spouse, but may have ignored this instruction and/or elicited the help of additional people. They may have also been distracted by telephone calls, television programs, or other environmental disruptions. Additionally, the sample reflected a somewhat homogenous group in that a majority was Caucasian, educated, and employed. Studies on the meaning of marriage have been conducted for more diverse groups (e.g., Curran, Utley, & Muraco, 2010), although to our knowledge, information about infidelity and divorce expectations has not previously been reported.

Conclusions

This study provided an examination of newlywed women's marital conceptualizations, including their experiences of infidelity and expectations of divorce. An overwhelming majority of newlyweds conceptualized marriage in terms of love and personal fulfillment, which is consistent with previous research (Coontz, 2005; Pinsof, 2002) and helps explain the relatively high incidence of infidelity and divorce. Infidelity experiences and divorce expectations varied based on intra and interpersonal characteristics, reinforcing the fact that not all women experience these outcomes. Practitioners and family life educators can use these findings to develop programs for young adults that teach skills for maintaining healthy, satisfying relationships and making careful, deliberate choices about marriage. Programs such as these will improve the quality of intimate relationships and at the same time help lower the incidence of infidelity and divorce. An eventual goal from this research will be to foster a variety of socially

acceptable life paths including permanent singlehood, serial monogamy, and marriage. When socially acceptable alternatives exist, individuals will not marry simply because “it is the next step” or “the right thing to do”. They will make choices that best suit their needs, which will ideally result in a more honest, happier society with lower rates of infidelity and divorce.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Newlywed Women's Experiences of Infidelity

<u>Question</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Felt attraction toward person	6.24	2.02
Attraction they had for you	6.32	2.16
Felt arousal in their presence	4.81	2.56
Time spent thinking of them	4.23	2.41
Time spent flirting with them	4.46	2.61
Did couple things together	2.94	2.55
How tempted to be emotionally intimate	3.48	2.65
How emotionally intimate were you	3.11	2.62
How tempted to be physically intimate	3.42	2.92
How physically intimate were you	2.39	2.67
Composite infidelity score	4.16	2.04

Table 2

*Multiple Regression Results Predicting Infidelity Experiences from Intra and Interpersonal**Characteristics*

<u>Independent variable</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>β</u>
European/Caucasian	-.268	.591	-.040
Age at time of marriage	.020	.047	.039
High religiosity	-1.027	.497	-.229*
Employed	.990	.627	.139
Personality			
Openness	.075	.029	.240**
Conscientiousness	-.004	.025	-.014
Extroversion	.001	.021	.002
Agreeableness	-.044	.032	-.136
Emotional Stability	.013	.023	-.054
Parental divorce	-.779	.472	-.152
Cohabited before marriage	.367	.518	.075
Length of time involved with spouse	.015	.007	.195*
Personal commitment	-.017	.015	-.117
Structural commitment	-.004	.008	-.052
Moral commitment	.025	.014	.204
Quality of alternatives	.059	.026	.214*

* $p < .05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 3

*Multiple Regression Results Predicting Divorce Expectations from Intra and Interpersonal**Characteristics*

<u>Independent variable</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>β</u>
European/Caucasian	-.492	3.495	-.009
Age at time of marriage	-.114	.278	-.028
High religiosity	-2.129	3.010	-.059
Employed	7.651	3.815	.133*
Personality			
Openness	.120	.175	.048
Conscientiousness	-.010	.147	-.004
Extroversion	.068	.124	.037
Agreeableness	-.411	.191	-.158*
Emotional Stability	-.105	.137	-.056
Parental divorce	3.933	2.781	.096
Cohabited before marriage	2.079	3.076	.053
Length of time involved with spouse	-.097	.041	-.157*
Personal commitment	-.635	.088	-.546**
Structural commitment	-.033	.048	-.049
Moral commitment	-.046	.083	-.048
Quality of alternatives	.219	.155	.098

* $p < .05$. ** $p < 0.01$.