Value congruence, goal congruence, and conflict as predictors of early marital disruption

by

Richard Steven Dell'Isola

B.A., Providence College, 2011
M.MFT, Lipscomb University, 2018

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Couple and Family Therapy
College of Health and Human Services

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

Divorce has been associated with many challenges and negative outcomes for divorcees, offspring, and community life. Despite an apparent drop in overall divorce rates in America, the rates remain high; thus, the need for prevention-related research remains paramount. Risk factors and predictors of divorce have been well-documented, but little has been done to analyze the degree to which couples' value congruence, goal congruence, and conflict levels affect the risk of marital dissolution. Through the lens of Interdependence theory, this study utilized a 5-year longitudinal sample of 709 couples to (a) classify couple types according to their value congruence, goal congruence, and conflict via a latent profile analysis, and (b) assess each of these couple type's risk of divorce using a logistic regression analysis. The latent profile analysis revealed three classes (Class 1, *moderate congruence-non-institutional*, 17% of couples; Class 2, *moderate congruence-moderate conflict*, 20% of couples; Class 3, *high congruence-low conflict*, 63% of couples). A logistic regression found significantly higher probabilities of marital disruption for *moderate congruence-non-institutional* couples (5.8 times higher) and *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples (4.3 times higher), relative to *high congruence-low conflict* couples. Based on these results, clinical implications for pre- and early-marital couple therapists for each of the three couple profiles are explored.

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Dedication

Christa, Luca, and Grace—I love you.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

What makes a marriage work? This question matters because the institution of marriage is important. Marriage serves a valuable role for spouses, children, and the broader community: strong, intact marriages have been associated with a host of positive outcomes, whereas marital dissolution has been linked with many challenges for divorcees and their offspring (e.g., Benson & James, 2018; Mikucka, 2016; Amato, 2000). The extant literature has identified factors common to both intact and dissolved marriages, but interestingly, little has been done to analyze how couples' shared values and goals affect marital quality and dissolution. Marriage is an interdependent relationship—a wedding transforms two partners into a single unit—and thus, each partner's hopes and dreams become to a great extent dependent on the *couple*'s ability to promote and pursue those dreams in unison. In this study, I explore the possibility that when spouses' values and goals are aligned, they are less likely to experience conflict and are at lower risk for divorce.

Despite evidence that the divorce rate is declining—most likely due to a drop in overall marriage rates— we are still faced with the reality that the divorce rate remains staggeringly high. Approximately 50% of all first marriages end in divorce (Raley & Bumpass, 2003), and the risk of divorce for second and higher-order marriages is even higher (Amato, 2010). In 2018, 15.7 per 1,000 married American women (Allred, 2019)—and approximately 934,000 men and 1,042,000 women in all— reported a divorce during the calendar year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The risk remains high even for newly married couples: in the first five years of marriage, the rate of divorce is around 20% (Bramlett & Mosher, 2001).

Long-lasting marriages are advantageous for spouses, children, and communities, so it is not surprising that dissolved marriages are often associated with poorer outcomes at these three

levels. For divorcees, divorce has been linked with higher risk for financial struggles (Fagan & Rector, 2000), lower self-esteem and perceived competence (Van de Velde, Colman, & Bracke, 2014), and even higher rates of depression and suicide (Stack & Scourfield, 2015). Parents' divorce puts their children at risk as well. Children whose parents divorce are more likely to experience substance abuse issues (Doherty & Needle, 1991), poor academic outcomes (Amato, 2001), conduct issues (Amato, 2001), mental health difficulties (Strohschein, 2005) and dissolution of their own marriages (Amato, 1996). These effects may not be limited to children. In one intergenerational examination, grandparents' divorce was found to significantly predict higher rates of marital discord and divorce and lower rates of educational attainment for their grandchildren (Amato & Cheadle, 2005). From a systemic perspective, it is clear that these outcomes for spouses and children of divorce—financial struggles, mental health concerns, etc.—can have far-ranging effects at the community level. An additional concern may be the "transmissible" nature of divorce. People with divorced friends were more likely to divorce, suggesting that when divorce is modeled within one's own social network, divorce can spread within social groups (McDermott, Fowler, & Christakis, 2013).

When partners decide to marry, the majority of them does so with the expressed intention of staying married for life—"till death do us part." Why, then, do so many marriages end in divorce? In one study, the top five reasons couples cite for divorce include: infidelity (21.6% of respondents), incompatibility (19.2%), substance abuse (10.6%), growing apart (9.6%), and personality problems (9.1%; Amato & Previti, 2003). In another study couples reported lack of commitment (75%), infidelity (59.6%), conflict/arguing (57.7%), getting married too young (45.1%), and financial problems (36.7%) as their top five reasons for divorce (Scott, Rhoades,

Stanley, Allen, & Markman, 2013). A third study found that growing apart (55.1%) was the most frequently cited causal factor for divorce (Hawkins, Willoughby, & Doherty, 2012).

Reasons for divorce are many, which can complicate our ability to understand the nature of marital dissolution. Could it be, though, that couples' reasons for divorce—whether they be related to a waning of relationship satisfaction (i.e., growing apart, incompatibility, lack of commitment) or "final straws" (i.e., infidelity, domestic abuse, substance abuse; Scott, Rhoades, Stanley, Allen, & Markman, 2013)—often have a common etiology? We cannot perfectly qualify all divorces—there is no one theory of marriage and divorce that can sufficiently explain all marital outcomes—but in general, are some couples at greater risk of divorce from day one of their marriages? If so, what are those risks?

Partner- and couple-level factors such as age at marriage, substance abuse, parental divorce, and prior divorce have been consistently linked with higher divorce rates (e.g., Amato, 2010; Glenn, Uecker, & Love, 2010). Beyond the effects of these variables, however, I contend that couples put themselves at significantly higher risk for divorce when their core values and goals are at odds. In a recent nationwide poll, only 48% of adults reported that having the same moral and religious beliefs "was/would be very important to them in choosing a partner" (Wang & Parker, 2014). Marriage is a partnership, and if partners find themselves disagreeing about vital aspects of their core selves—for example, views on faith, spirituality, life aspirations, spousal roles, and even the marital contract itself—they may feel that their partnership is the very thing that is holding them back from self-actualization. This, in turn, would likely lead to higher levels of conflict, and potentially make it easier to consider breaking the marital contract either directly (divorce) or indirectly (infidelity).

Prior research has explored how couples' goals and/or value similarity (e.g., Carroll, Dean, Call, & Busby, 2011) and levels of conflict (see Fincham, 2003) are associated with marital outcomes. Generally, the literature suggests that goal congruence, value congruence, and lower levels of conflict are associated with higher levels of marital quality and stability (e.g., (Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009). More commonly, existing research that has assessed value congruence did so by computing composite variables at the individual and/or couple level—a single calculation of how much spouses agree or disagree. This approach has provided valuable associations but does not tell us much about (a) the types of couples that exist in the population according to value congruence and goal congruence, (b) how value and goal congruence are associated with conflict level and conflict frequency within each class, or (c) whether or not membership in one or more of these classes is associated with higher risk of marital disruption. Gaining these novel intra-couple and between-couple insights regarding *specific* value, goal, and conflict combinations has the potential to significantly and positively inform clinicians and marriage educators who work with premarital and early marital couples.

The purpose of this study was thus to clarify this relationship by classifying couples according to value congruence, goal congruence, and conflict, and then to test these couple classifications to identify their unique associations with marital quality and the odds of divorce in early marriage. This was tested through the lens of Interdependence Theory (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003), which posits that relationship dynamics and outcomes are highly dependent on the extent to which couples' goals are aligned. The effect of goal and value congruence on marital outcomes was analyzed longitudinally across five years of early marriage using three waves of data from the Marriage Matters project in Louisiana (Nock, Sanchez, & Wright, 2012). First, a latent profile analysis was run to classify couples by value congruence, goal congruence, and

conflict during the first year of marriage. Next, using the results from the latent class analysis, the odds of marital dissolution by year 5 (Wave 3) based on class membership was assessed via a logistic regression. By identifying couple profiles according to congruence and conflict, we can gain a more profound understanding of the interdependent nature of marriage, and in turn, a more nuanced understanding of divorce risk factors.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Theoretical Framework – Interdependence Theory

The focus of this study is on the effect of couple congruence—or lack thereof—on marital outcomes. Interdependence theory (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003) posits that value and goal incongruence can negatively affect relationship quality, and thus lends important insights into the present study. When partners come together to make a decision, each partner brings his or her unique values and ways-of-being into the equation. This is especially helpful when considering the process of motivation and decision-making; whereas most goal-focused theories are actor-based, interdependence theory is focused on *couple*-level processes and *between*-person dynamics (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). In the current study, the effect of goal congruence, value congruence, and conflict on marital outcomes is explored; because married partners' actions—which are based on their beliefs—invariably affect each other— a theory acknowledging this recursive and bidirectional pattern is key to our understanding of marriage.

Each interaction—the thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and resulting outcomes—between two partners can be described by the following "SABI" model: $I = f(S,A,B)$ (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). The outcome of each interaction (*I*) is a function (*f*) of the unique interaction of person #1 (*A*), person #2 (*B*), and the specific situation (*S*); when two people (*A* and *B*) encounter a unique situation (*S*), each person experiences thoughts, feelings, and motives based largely upon the extent to which their interests converge and the degree to which they are dependent upon each other. With regard to value and goal congruence (i.e., covariation of interests) the theory suggests that there are three kinds of situations: (a) zero-sum, (b) perfect alignment, and (c) partial alignment. In a zero-sum situation, each partner's interests are completely negatively correlated; we might think of this as "$r = -1.0$." When perfect alignment exists there is no

discrepancy whatsoever between the partners' interests; $r = 1.0$. Because partners—even highly congruent partners—rarely experience complete misalignment or alignment, the third type—partial alignment—is the most common. Here, partners' interests are somewhat, but not completely, aligned; $-1.0 < r < 1.0$. When partners' interests are partially aligned, they must implicitly or explicitly navigate the situation in an attempt to maximize the extent to which each partner feels satisfied with the outcome.

When couples say "I do," they very often commit to each other "till death do us part." Decision-making for married couples thus carries extra weight. Most (if not all) of their choices affect both partners—often times disproportionately—and the individual and dyadic ramifications of these decisions can be lasting. To illustrate this process, consider the following case study: Mark and Paula Jones are married with three teenage children. Their family motto can be described as, "Faith, family, and fun;" they are active in their local church, cherish their time at home together, and spend their remaining free time at the kids' sports games, at the movies, and on family vacations. Mark and Paula both endorse this motto—indeed, they agree that these things were important to each of them—but each of "faith," "family," and "fun" are unequally weighted. A recent disagreement highlighted this dynamic: their daughter, Erica, had a travel basketball game scheduled for Sunday. Paula stated, "I know basketball is important to Erica, but it is Sunday. Sunday is for church—we should not skip church for a sports game." Mark replied, "Paula, it is the semifinals—how are we supposed to tell Erica that she can't go to the game? The team needs her; she loves basketball and she will be devastated if she can't go. Besides, it's only one church service that we will miss—we can pray together in the car on the way to the game!" After a long back-and-forth, the couple decides to skip church and attend the basketball game.

Interdependence theory can shed light on the goal- and value-specific dynamics of Mark and Paula's interaction. Mark and Paula both value faith, but their views on their faith practice are divergent. It appears that Paula values in-person church attendance as a non-negotiable part of their faith practice, whereas Mark does not. Why were Mark and Paula so emotionally invested in this decision? According to Interdependence Theory, it is because each partner's position represented vital aspects of each of their core values and goals; partners' decisions yield both concrete and symbolic outcomes (Murray & Holmes, 2011; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). For Paula, skipping church was not like skipping a PTA meeting; rather, she viewed Sunday church attendance as an obligation, and by skipping church she felt that she was willfully sinning. In willfully sinning, her actions were not congruent with the faith-focused values. Thus, their couple-level decision led to dissonance for her as this choice ran counter to her core values (i.e., her ideal self). Mark, on the other hand, was raised to believe that church attendance was important, but not obligatory. In other words, if there was an important commitment to others (e.g., an important sporting event, such as Erica's game), those commitments should be honored. In fact, he found the idea of mandatory church attendance to be too legalistic, and he especially did not want the other parents from the basketball team—some of them close friends—thinking that they were too rigid in their faith. For Mark, honoring the commitment to the team was a way of honoring God. Ultimately, the concrete outcome of this decision (the family attended Erica's game) was less important than the symbolic outcome: attending the game clearly represented a crucial divergence between Mark's and Paula's values and goals.

Further, when core values and goals differ, mutually beneficial decisions are difficult (if not impossible) to attain. If they attended church, Mark might feel that he is living out Paula's view of faith, and if they attended the game, Paula might feel as if she is living out Mark's lack

of faith. If Paula went to church and Mark and Erica went to the game, they would each be acting congruent to self, but not in accord as a couple. All three of these outcomes involve a level of sacrifice that can negatively affect individual and couple well-being, and indeed, the literature supports this idea. When partners appreciate and affirm each other's values and aspirations they are more likely to promote and support each other's growth, which is associated with positive outcomes at both the individual and couple level (Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009).

The present study is thus framed through the lens of Interdependence Theory. Like Mark and Paula, couples are consistently tasked with navigating decision-making in a way that fosters individual wellbeing and couple unity. Interdependence theory posits that when partners' goal congruence is high, they are more likely to have consistently positive interactions, and lower levels of conflict because the interactions reinforce their sense of oneness. Higher levels of congruence and lower levels of conflict, in turn, would predict positive relationship outcomes such as higher relationship satisfaction and marital longevity. In this study, interdependence theory frames the exploration of how couples' value congruence, goal congruence, and conflict levels affect marital stability.

Literature Review

In this study, value congruence, goal congruence, and conflict are expected to predict marital outcomes. *Prima facie*, we would expect a person's values to influence his or her goals; the interaction of a person's goals and values with his or her spouse's values and goals then has the potential to unite the couple or produce conflict, and in turn affect marital outcomes. To my knowledge, couple profiles along these variables have not been explored, but the extant literature does indeed point to an important interplay between couple congruence, conflict, and marital outcomes.

Value Congruence and Marital Outcomes

The extant literature on the connection between value congruence and marital disruption is fairly dated—and few examine the relationship between these two variables directly—but evidence nonetheless exists for its importance in couple and marital relationships. For example, in a sample of dating couples, Coombs (1966) found couple value congruence significantly predicted relationship satisfaction and ease of intra-couple communication. In another study, dating and married couples were asked to report on how important things such as "having similar beliefs, such as about religion and politics" "feeling certain that the relationship will last" "trusting each other" were to a successful marriage. Results from this study revealed that couple value similarity was strongly associated with relationship satisfaction, even while controlling for socially desirable marriage stereotypes (Acitelli, Kenny, & Weiner, 2001). Further, in a sample of 587 Chinese married couples, researchers utilized an actor-partner independence model to examine this relationship, and found a significant association between couple similarity on moral identity and spirituality and spousal life satisfaction (Wu, Liu, Guo, Cai, & Zhou, 2020). This is important, as life satisfaction has been linked with marital outcomes (e.g., Be, Whisman, & Uebelacker, 2013).

Several studies have measured value congruence by comparing between-partner differences of partners' self-reported values, whereas others have measured congruence by utilizing partners' *perceptions* of between-partner value congruence. This dimension is important to consider, as, "…independently of spouses' actual conduct, the image of the partner appears to be a major determinant of marital satisfaction" (Skaldeman & Montgomery, 1999, p. 346). For example, a sample of older, married couples reported "having different values and philosophies of life" and "lack of mutual interests" were the most troublesome aspects of their current

marriages (Stinnett, Carter, and Montgomery, 1972), whereas older, married couples with higher levels of perceived congruence on important values reported having experienced fewer marital difficulties (Sporakowski & Hughston, 1978). Additionally, in a qualitative examination, perceived congruence on marital expectations, faith, and other values were among the factors common to couples in lasting marriages (Robinson & Blanton, 1993).

Perceived differences could also put married couples at greater risk for divorce. In a sample of 125 married or previously-married participants, divorcees were significantly more likely to report higher levels of perceived value disagreement (Skaldeman & Montgomery, 1999). Interestingly, when testing the interaction of initial values and value development over time, those authors found that partners' perception of *changes* in value discrepancies over time was also associated with higher rates of divorce. Of these results, the authors suggested that when a partner believes that the marriage itself is a barrier to his or her wellbeing, divorce may become more of a possibility. In other words, if an individual sees his or her partner's values as conflicting with his or her desire to self-actualize or attain an important personal goal, then the partner may view a breach of the marital contract as a permissible act of self-interest.

Goal Congruence and Marital Outcomes

Values directly inform goals (e.g., Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), and thus goal congruence appears to play an important role in marital outcomes. Whereas few studies have examined the specific relationship between goal congruence and *marital* outcomes, goal incongruence in dating relationships provides some clues. In a sample of married and dating couples, higher levels of couple goal congruence was significantly associated with partners' reports of feelings of closeness, affective well-being, and enjoyment of dyadic activities (Gere, Shimmack, Pinkus, & Lockwood, 2011). When couples' goals are in conflict, they are also more likely to report

lower dyadic relationship quality and lower subjective wellbeing. Additionally, one person's report of goal conflict was also associated with lower relationship quality and subjective well-being for his or her partner (Gere & Schimmack, 2011). The authors explained the detrimental individual and dyadic effects of goal conflict: "When partners run into conflict as they attempt to pursue their important long-term goals, it may be particularly damaging, especially when a simple solution cannot be found due to high incongruence between the goals of the partners" (Gere & Schimmack, 2011, p. 45). It is possible that goal-related disagreements symbolize a deep-rooted sense of incompatibility that is difficult to reconcile.

If partners' goals are misaligned, should they attempt to adjust their values to accommodate their partners' goals? Empirical evidence suggests "no." In one study of newly developing relationships, when partners tried to adjust or devalue personal goals that conflicted with their partners' goals, relationship satisfaction suffered (Gere & Impett, 2018). Further, in a sample of young Dutch couples, partners who reported having different interests than their partners reported higher levels of negative mood and stress. Interestingly, participants who attempted to empathize with their partners' divergent interests reported elevated levels of stress and negative mood (Righetti, Gere, Hofmann, Visserman, & Van Lange, 2016). Whereas empathy is typically associated with positive relationship outcomes (e.g., O'Brien, DeLongis, Pomaki, Puterman, & Zwicker, 2009), this study suggested that it may be more difficult for partners to empathize with something they view as a threat to their compatibility and relational wellbeing. Overall, from an interdependence lens, goal incongruence may be detrimental because (a) committed partners are highly interdependent, and (b) goal incongruence in the context of interdependent relationships magnifies couples' differences, which threatens their individual and collective futures.

Goal Congruence, Value Congruence, and Conflict

The relationship between goal congruence, value congruence, and conflict has been studied specifically through the lens on interdependence theory. For example, couples who were more highly interdependent—more goal-aligned and relationship-invested—were more likely to engage in effective conflict resolution behaviors such as accommodation (Finkel & Campbell, 2001). When a partner is accommodating, he or she does not return "fire with fire;" in other words, when one partner acts harshly, the other partner responds with tolerance and empathy, rather than by being quick to blame. Thus, this study suggests that couples who are more aligned—who have a stronger sense of togetherness and common purpose—are less likely to engage in detrimental conflict styles, perhaps because they are less likely to interpret partner missteps as affronts against their goals, values, or their relationships.

Conflict patterns also appear to be affected by couple congruence. For example, couples with asymmetrical conflict profiles (e.g., engage/distance) were more likely to report lower levels of marital adjustment relative to couples with congruent conflict patterns (Ridley, Wilhelm, & Surra, 2001). The authors interpreted these results through the lens of interdependence theory, stating that couples enter into conflicts seeking to reduce perceived incompatibility, and when their incompatibility becomes especially salient to the partners, one partner is likely to withdraw, or distance, in an attempt to minimize intra- or interpersonal tension. Although this study does not directly examine the link between goal/value congruence and conflict, it lends insight into the *processes* that may underlie non-congruence and conflict.

These dynamics have been recognized as important components in our understanding of marital conflict. In a review of marital conflict dynamics, Fincham, Stanley, and Beach (2007) identified *dedication* and *sacrifice* as important factors that are often overlooked in the

discussion on conflict. Partners are more likely to be dedicated and sacrificial when relationship commitment is high, and commitment tends to be higher when couples believe in their togetherness—that they are moving toward the same goal: "…dedication reflects the development of an identity of *us with a future* that is reinforced even as it reinforces relationship quality through such processes as accommodation and sacrifice" (p. 280). Further, the authors noted that when couples have a sanctified view of marriage—that is, marriage as a holy, God-ordained union—they are less likely to experience high levels of conflict (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007).

For example, one study (Mahoney et al., 1999) surveyed spouses on their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors regarding the sanctity of marriage. Although their aim was not to investigate couple congruence, their results point to an important role of faith-related value congruence and conflict. First, partners' attitudes toward faith and marriage were highly correlated; second, as couples' views of marriage as sacred increased, reported conflict decreased; and third, as couple joint participation in faith-related activities increased, conflict levels decreased. This study thus points to an important relationship between value congruence—specifically, faith congruence—and conflict levels.

Conflict and Marital Disruption

When married couples report high levels of marital conflict, they are less likely to be satisfied with their relationships. This connection has a wealth of empirical support. For example, for a national probability sample of 977 married individuals, higher levels of conflict was negatively associated with marital satisfaction (Leggett, Roberts-Pittman, Byczek, & Morse, 2012). Another study (Russell-Chapin, Chapin, & Sattler, 2001) assessed the relationship between specific types of conflict styles and martial satisfaction and found that higher levels of

all types of conflict were associated with lower marital satisfaction. One type specifically may be most prescient to the current review: conventionalism. The study found that conventionalism—defined as the minimizing or denying that problems exist (Snyder, 1981)—had a strong, negative association with marital satisfaction; that is, couples who were reluctant to admit to marital concerns were less likely to report being happy in their marriages. Analyzing a different set of conflict management styles, Greeff and de Bruyne (2000) found that couples who engaged in a competitive conflict management style were more likely to report lower levels of marital satisfaction. From an interdependence theory lens, (a) denying that issues exist or (b) competing against a spouse when interests are opposed may be interpreted as attempts to lessen awareness of incompatibility or maladaptive attempts to repair incompatibility—perhaps symptomatic of value and/or goal incongruence. Indeed, an engage-withdraw conflict pattern has been associated with negative marital outcomes (Ridley, Wilhelm, & Surra, 2001). Perhaps it is the etiology of most conflicts—value and/or goal incongruence—and not the specific type of conflict that is most important in understanding marital outcomes.

It follows, then, that spouses who report high levels of conflict also appear more likely to experience divorce. In laboratory settings, researchers were able to predict whether married couples would experience future divorce simply by observing and scoring their conflict (Gottman & Silver, 2015; Carrere & Gottman, 1999). The conflict-divorce relationship has also been demonstrated longitudinally: in a 16-year study of marital conflict and divorce, approximately 46% of couples were divorced by year 16. In this same sample, higher levels of destructive conflict behaviors at year one of marriage significantly predicted higher divorce rates at year 16 (Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, & McIlvane, 2010). This was found while controlling for

sociodemographic and life-course factors such as education, income, premarital cohabitation, and more.

The Present Study

Previous studies have examined the effect of congruence on religiosity, materialism, and beliefs about marriage on marital outcomes (Gurrentz, 2017; Carroll, Dean, Call, & Busby, 2011; Wilcox & Dew, 2010). Little has been done, however, to classify couples according to value congruence, goal congruence and conflict. The extant literature has found significant associations between these variables, but much is still unknown about (a) couple-level congruence across multiple values, and (b) how congruence on specific values and goals are associated with conflict and marital outcomes. To fill this gap, the present study tested the following research questions using latent profile analysis and logistic regression:

RQ1: What are the latent profiles of couples' value congruence, goal congruence, and conflict behaviors?

RQ2: Is membership in these latent profiles differentially associated with the odds of divorce?

Through the lens of interdependence theory, I hypothesize that couples classified into latent profiles with higher levels of value congruence and goal congruence will also report lower levels of conflict, higher marital quality, and will predict lower odds of divorce.

Chapter 3 - Method

Sample

The research questions were tested using data from the Marriage Matters Panel Survey of Newlywed Couples, 1998-2004 (Marriage Matters; Nock, Sanchez, & Wright, 2012). In 1997, the state of Louisiana enacted a covenant marriage law in an attempt to strengthen marriages and decrease the likelihood of divorce. The Marriage Matters project was undertaken in an attempt to assess the effect of covenant marriage on married couples in Louisiana. The law created a "covenant marriage" designation option that couples could opt into, which required (a) more premarital preparation, and (b) additional discernment guidelines before being able to obtain a divorce.

Couples were selected for participation through random sampling of Louisiana parishes; of 70 total parishes in the state, 17 parishes were represented. Within these parishes, participants were identified via random sampling of public marriage licenses. Of the two types of Louisiana marriage licenses—standard and covenant—standard licenses were oversampled, as the researchers expected a higher participation rate from couples in covenant marriages (Nock, Sanchez, & Wright, 2012). Of 1,714 licenses that were sampled, 1,310 couples confirmed participation, and 709 couples (1,271 men and women; 297 covenant marriages, 382 standard marriages) completed all three waves of surveys. Wave 1 was administered one to six months into marriage, Wave 2 at approximately 2.5 years into marriage, and Wave 3 at approximately five years into marriage. The general risk for divorce during the first five years of marriage has been shown to be approximately 20% (Bramlett & Mosher, 2001), making this a crucial timeframe to explore.

Survey participation was conducted via mail. Participants' demographic information was obtained at Wave 1. For each wave, both spouses from each couple were asked to answer items related to marital satisfaction, marital dynamics, personal and marital values, and more, which yielded dyadic data at each time point. Spouses were asked to refrain from consulting with their partners about any of the survey items, and each spouse received $10 for their participation at each time point.

For couples to be included in the present study, dyadic data on all variables of interest at all three time points was required. This yielded an operative sample of 709 couples (N = 1,271 men and women). Participants were majority White (80%; N=1,017) and African American (15%; N = 187), Protestant (61%; N = 771) and Catholic (20%; N = 117) with an average age of 31 years and average income of approximately $50,000. Approximately 60% of couples reported being in their first marriages. By the end of the study, approximately 14% (N = 97) of participants were separated or divorced. See Table 1 for sample descriptives.

Table 1. ***Descriptive Statistics and Sample Characteristics (N = 709)***

Variable/Characteristic	*M/%*	*SD*	Range	α
Income (dollars)	49,995.36	27,411.78	0 – 130,000	-
Race	1.61	.65	0 – 2	-
White	60.8%	-	0 – 1	-
African American	9.9%	-	0 – 1	-
Interracial/other	9.2%	-	0 – 1	-
Premarital children[a]	38.5%	-	0 – 1	-
Covenant marriage[b]	41.9%	-	0 – 1	-
Education (years)	27.84	4.04	18 – 40	-
Substance abuse problem[c]	6.2%	-	0 – 1	-
Prior divorce[d]	38.5%	-	0 – 1	-
Premarital infidelity[e]	14.8%	.39	0 – 1	-
W1 Religiosity	4.23	.88	1 – 5	-
W1 wives' marriage covenant	4.34	.96	1 – 5	-
W1 husbands' marriage covenant	4.17	1.10	1 – 5	-
W1 wives' marriage for life	4.43	.89	1 – 5	-
W1 husbands' marriage for life	4.46	.85	1 – 5	-
W1 wives' marriage importance	3.34	1.22	1 – 5	-
W1 husbands' marriage importance	3.49	1.22	1 – 5	-
W1 wives' marriage for love	2.40	1.23	1 – 5	-
W1 husbands' marriage for love	2.48	1.22	1 – 5	-
W1 wives' spousal roles	5.27	2.13	2 – 10	.77
W1 husbands' spousal roles	5.52	1.99	2 – 10	.75
W1 wives' spousal roles: wife at home	2.73	1.14	1 – 5	-
W1 husbands' spousal roles: wife at home	2.85	1.07	1 – 5	-
W1 wives' spousal roles: husband breadwinner	2.54	1.23	1 – 5	-
W1 husbands' spousal roles: husband breadwinner	2.67	1.15	1 – 5	-
W1 wives' religious matters	4.15	.94	0 – 5	-
W1 husbands' religious matters	4.16	.87	0 – 5	-
W1 wives' goals	8.41	1.33	0 – 10	.70
W1 husbands' goals	8.16	1.51	0 – 10	.74
W1 wives' goals: philosophy of life	4.08	.80	0 – 5	-
W1 husbands' goals: philosophy of life	3.95	.89	0 – 5	-
W1 wives' goals: aims and goals	4.33	.71	0 – 5	-
W1 husbands' goals: aims and goals	4.21	.80	0 – 5	-
W1 conflict hostility	1.50	.44	1 – 3	.86
W1 conflict frequency	1.69	.86	0 – 5	-
W3 marital status				
Married	86.3%	-	-	-
Separated	7.3%	-	-	-
Divorced	6.3%	-	-	-

[a]Premarital children: 0 = *neither*, 1 = *one or both*. [b]Marriage type: 0 = *non-covenant*, 1 = *covenant*. [c]Substance abuse: 0 = *neither*, 1 = *one or both.* [d]Prior divorce: 0 = *neither*, 1 = *one or both.* [e]Premarital infidelity: 0 = *neither*, 1 = *one or both.*

Measures

The following predictor, outcome, and control variables were included in the analysis. Each of these scales/measures were asked of both husbands and wives.

Marital covenant (Wave 1). Each spouse's view on the covenantal nature of marriage was measured using their responses at Wave 1 to the following item: "Marriage is an unbreakable covenant with God, not just a contract recognized by the law." The item was scaled from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Marriage for life (Wave 1). The extent to which each spouse viewed marriage as a lifelong commitment was assessed at Wave 1 by a single item: "Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended except under extreme circumstances." The item was scaled from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Although this question appears similar to the marital covenant item, it was considered a unique construct in that it does not address a God-based covenantal view of marriage; whereas participants' responses to the marital covenant and marriage for life items were significantly correlated (r = .41 for wives, r = .44 for husbands), it is possible that participants could view marriage as a lifelong pact apart from a religious perspective, and thus it was important to keep these constructs separate.

Marriage importance (Wave 1). Each spouse's view on the importance of marriage in their lives was measured using their responses at Wave 1 to the following item: "Being married is one of the most important things in life." The item was scaled from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Marriage for love (Wave 1). To assess the degree to which each spouse believed this to be a valid reason for divorce was measured at Wave 1 by the following item: "When married people realize that they no longer love each other, they should get a divorce." The item was

scaled from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*); higher scores on this item reflect a more love-centric view of marriage as opposed to a more institutional view of marriage (e.g., Wilcox & Dew, 2010).

Traditional gender roles (Wave 1). Each spouse's views of spousal roles was measured by two items: "All in all, family life suffers when the wife has a full-time job," and, "A husband's job is to earn money, a wife's job is to look after the home and family." The items were scaled from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Reliability for both wives' and husbands' views on traditional gender roles was acceptable, $\alpha = .77$ and $\alpha = .75$, respectively.

Raising children (Wave 1). Each spouse's *perception of* congruence on raising children in their current marriage was assessed by a single item that asked, "Please indicate the extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for…How to raise children." The item was scaled from 0 (*always disagree*) to 5 (*always agree*). Higher scores on this variable reflect a greater degree of perceived congruence.

Religious matters (Wave 1). Each spouse's *perception of* congruence on religious matters in their current marriage was assessed by a single item that asked, "Please indicate the extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for…Religious matters." The item was scaled from 0 (*always disagree*) to 5 (*always agree*). Higher scores on this variable reflect a greater degree of perceived congruence.

Goals (Wave 1). Each spouse's *perception of* goal congruence in their current marriage was assessed by two items. Each spouse was asked to rate his or her extent of agreement for "Our aims and goals and things believed important," and "Philosophy of life;" responses were scaled from 0 (*always disagree*) to 5 (*always agree*). Reliability for both wives' and husbands' perceived goal congruence was acceptable, $\alpha = .70$ and $\alpha = .74$, respectively.

Conflict hostility (Wave 1). The conflict hostility variable was measured by five items that included "When disagreements and conflicts come up...", and "I get sarcastic (I say things intended to hurt my partner)." Items were scaled from 1 (*not true at all*) to 3 (*very true*). The final couple-level measure was derived by calculating the mean of each spouse's responses across the five items, followed by calculating the mean of the husband's and wive's scores. Reliability for wives', husbands', and couples' (all items for wives and husbands) measures of conflict hostility was strong, α = .81, α = .77, and α = .86, respectively. Higher scores on this measure reflect a higher degree of couple conflict hostility.

Conflict frequency (Wave 1). Couples' conflict frequency was assessed by a single item: "About how often do you personally…quarrel [with your spouse]?" The item was scaled from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*all the time*). To obtain a couple-level measure of conflict frequency, the mean of both spouse's scores was calculated. Higher scores on this measure reflect more frequent couple conflict.

Marital disruption (Wave 2 and Wave 3). In this study, marital disruption is defined as a separation or divorce by Wave 3 (five years into marriage). At the beginning of the Wave 2 and Wave 3 surveys, wives and husbands were asked whether or not they had experienced a separation or divorce since the previous Wave. As stated, approximately 14% (N = 97) of couples reported having been separated or divorced by the end of the study. Marital disruption was coded dichotomously (0 = *not divorced*, 1 = *divorced*).

Control Variables

Income (Wave 1). On the survey, there was no single item asking partners to report total household income; rather, partners were each asked to report their own income and the income of their partners, and they had to choose options such as "less than $5,000, "$5,000 to $9,999,"

and “$20,000 to $29,999,” and “$60,000 or more.” This made it difficult to calculate a precise household income. To derive an approximate household income for each couple, the midpoint of each partner’s self-reported Wave 1 income bracket response option was calculated, and then those midpoints were summed for the total household income of the couple. For example, if partner A’s self-reported income was $20,000 to $29,999, and partner B’s self-reported income was $60,000 or more, their household income was calculated as $90,000 ($25,000 + $65,000). Although imperfect, this calculation is able to give a general sense of the couple’s income, and more importantly to account for variability within our sample of high- and low-income couples in the prediction of marital disruption.

Race (Wave 1). Race was controlled for at the couple level (see Table 1 for descriptives). Couples were initially grouped into four categories: White, Black, interracial, or other. The “interracial” and “other” groups were combined, however, as there were only two couples (one Asian, one Hispanic) that identified outside of the other three groups. Thus, the three final groups were: White, Black, and Interracial/other. Race was dummy-coded in the final analysis where White couples served as the reference group.

Months dated (**Wave 1)**. On the survey, each partner was asked to report the number of months and years that they had dated their partner prior to their wedding day. For ease of analysis, wives’ reports were utilized, and all time lengths were converted to total months.

Marriage type (Wave 1). Approximately 42% of couples reported being in a covenant marriage. Thus, marriage type was controlled for to account for potential unique characteristics of couples who opt (or do not opt) into covenant marriages. Marriage type was a dichotomous variable (0 = *not a covenant marriage*, 1 = *covenant marriage*). For this measure, wives’ report of marriage type was used.

Education (Wave 1). Education was controlled for at the couple level. Each partner was asked to respond to the question, "What is the highest grade in school that you finished and got credit for or the highest degree you have earned?" in an open response format. Each participant's response was translated into total years of education by the Marriage Matters data managers. Participants who reported an educational attainment of eight years or less were coded as eight; all other participants were coded directly according to their educational level. For example, if a participant reported completing kindergarten through fifth grade (approximately six years of education), they would be coded as eight; if a participant reported completion of a Master's degree (approximately 19 years of school), he or she would be coded as 19. Thus, due to the way the data were organized, it was not possible to discern some participants' exact level of educational attainment. However, this does provide a fairly accurate representation of participants' educational attainment. To obtain a couple-level measure of education, both spouses' years of education were summed to produce the dyad's total years of education. Using the previous example, if a husband reported a sixth-grade education and his wife reported completion of a Master's degree, they would receive an education value of 27 (8 + 19).

Substance abuse (Wave 1). Substance abuse was controlled for at the couple level. Each spouse was asked to report whether or not he or she had "a drinking or drug problem" prior to their current marriage. If neither spouse reported having had a substance abuse problem before marriage, the couple was coded as 0 - *no substance use*; if one of both spouses reported having had a substance abuse problem before marriage, the couple was coded as 1 - *substance abuse problem*.

Prior divorce (Wave 1). Prior divorce was controlled for at the couple level. Each spouse was asked to report whether or not he or she had experienced a divorce prior to their

current marriage. If neither spouse reported a previous divorce, the couple was coded as 0 - *no prior divorce*; if one of both spouses reported at least one previous divorce, marriage, the couple was coded as 1 - *prior divorce*.

Infidelity (Wave 1). Infidelity was controlled for at the couple level. Spouses were asked to report whether or not they had been "romantically or sexually involved with someone else" during the time they were dating their spouse. Possible responses were "0: No, not at all," "1: Yes, but only once," and "2: Yes, more than once." If neither spouse reported romantic or sexual involvement with someone else, the couple was coded as 0 - *no infidelity;* if one of both spouses reported at least one instance of romantic or sexual involvement with someone else, the couple was coded as 1 – *infidelity*.

Religiosity (Wave 1). Religiosity was controlled for at the couple level. It was measured by taking the mean of both partners' response to a single item, "How important is religious faith in your life?" The item was scaled from 1 (*not important at all*) to 5 (*extremely important*).

Premarital children (Wave 1). Presence of premarital children was controlled for at the couple level. If either one or both spouses reported having one or more children from a previous relationship, the couple was coded as with a child (0 = *no premarital children*, 1 = *presence of premarital children*).

Analysis Plan

The research questions to assess latent profiles of goal and value congruence to predict the odds of divorce were tested in the following manner. In SPSS Version 25, variables were computed and recoded (where necessary), descriptive statistics were calculated, and all variables were checked for normality and missingness. To test research question #1, a latent profile analysis was run in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2015) to assess couple types according to value

congruence, goal congruence, and conflict levels. A latent profile analysis is the appropriate analysis for this question because the research design included continuous predictor variables. Models of 1 to 5 classes were tested iteratively using recommended indicators of good model fit: lower values for Akaike's information criterion (AIC), Bayesian information criterion (BIC), adjusted BIC (ABIC), and significant values for the bootstrap likelihood ratio test (BLRT) and the Lo-Mendell-Rubin likelihood ratio test (LMR-RT; Nylund, Asparouhov, & Muthén, 2007). Models of two, three, four, and five class were tested to assess changes in the model fit. The results of these tests, and the extent to which the classes are parsimonious and theoretically differentiated, will determine final class selection (Nylund-Gibson & Choi, 2018). Next, the couples' classes derived from the latent class analysis were used to test research question #2: the ability of class membership to predict the odds of divorce across the first five years of marriage with a logistic regression. For research question #2, the effect of class membership predicting odds of divorce was assessed while controlling for income, race, months dated, marriage type, education, substance abuse, prior divorce, infidelity, religiosity, and premarital children.

Chapter 4 - Results

Estimator

To select an appropriate estimator, data patterns were assessed in SPSS. Missing data percentages for variables ranged from 0% (months dated; previous divorce; conflict hostility) to 24% (household income); based on recommended indicators of < 2 skewness and < 7 kurtosis, the data was considered moderately non-normal (Finney & DiStefano, 2006). Given the degree of missingness and non-normality in the data, maximum likelihood with robust errors (MLR; Muthen & Muthen, 2010) was determined to be the appropriate test. MLR utilizes all available data to produce estimates for missing cases, thus minimizing the number of dropped cases and maximizing the number of observed cases.

Latent Profiles

First, models of one to five profiles in succession were analyzed in MPlus. For each model, LL, AIC, BIC, ABIC, LMR-RT, BLRT, entropy, parsimony, and theoretical alignment were observed to assess model fit. Models of two, three, and four classes demonstrated adequate fit, and it was determined that the 3-class model demonstrated the best overall fit. Compared to the 2-class model, the 3-class model had significantly lower LL, AIC, and BIC values, higher entropy, and a significant BLRT. Compared to the 4-class model, the 3-class model had a lower LMR-RT *p* value, slightly higher entropy, and higher class parsimony/theoretical alignment. See Table 4 for model statistics and class distributions.

Table 2. ***Control Variables and Marital Disruption: Correlations (N* = 709)**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Income (dollars)	–												
2. Race (White)	.09*	–											
3. Race (Afr. Amer.)	-.06	–	–										
4. Race (Inter./other)	-.07	–	–	–									
5. Months dated	-.01	-.11**	.14**	.00	–								
6. Premarital children	.17**	-.14**	.18**	.01	-.14**	–							
7. Covenant marriage	-.09*	.07	-.07	-.03	-.00	-.15**	–						
8. Education (years)	.40**	.08*	-.11**	.00	.08	-.23**	.13**	–					
9. Substance abuse	-.06	-.03	.02	.01	-.02	.10*	-.13**	-.11*	–				
10. Prior divorce	.28**	-.01	.02	-.00	-.17**	.69**	-.10**	-.10*	.01	–			
11. Premarital infidelity	-.08	-.10*	.15**	-.02	.27**	.06	-.11*	-.10*	.19**	-.05	–		
12. W1 Religiosity	-.13**	-.11*	.14**	-.01	-.03	-.05	.41**	-.01	-.18**	-.04	-.10*	–	
13. W3 Sep/Div	-.10*	-.12**	.10*	.06	-.09*	.14**	-.08*	-.18**	.14**	.08*	.06	-.08*	–

*p < .05. **p < .01 (two-tailed). W1 = Wave 1; W3 = Wave 3; Afr. Amer. = African American; Inter = Interracial; Sep/Div = Separation/Divorce

Table 3. ***Predictor Variables and Marital Disruption: Correlations (N* = 709)**

Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
1.	W1 W mar cov	–																				
2.	W1 H mar cov	.49**	–																			
3.	W1 W mar life	.41**	.28**	–																		
4.	W1 H mar life	.35**	.44**	.37**	–																	
5.	W1 W mar imp	.22**	.18**	.20**	.11*	–																
6.	W1 H mar imp	.18**	.28**	.18**	.24**	.18**	–															
7.	W1 w mar love	-.32**	-.28**	-.27**	-.21**	-.01	-.03	–														
8.	W1 H mar love	-.31**	-.37**	-.25**	-.34**	-.11**	-.06	.43**	–													
9.	W1 W wf hme	.21**	.16**	.17**	.12**	.12**	.10*	-.14**	-.20**	–												
10.	W1 H wf hme	.14**	.19**	.11**	.16**	.05	.13**	-.18**	-.13**	.42**	–											
11.	W1 W breadwin	.25**	.20**	.16**	.09*	.17**	.13**	-.10**	-.16**	.62**	.36**	–										
12.	W1 H breadwin	.18**	.22**	.09*	.13**	.04	.10*	-.13**	-.09*	.37**	.60**	.43**	–									
13.	W1 W rel mat	.21**	.23**	.17**	.13**	.12**	.10*	-.20**	-.19**	.10*	.09*	.11**	.06	–								
14.	W1 H rel mat	.21**	.18**	.12**	.14**	.12**	.05	-.20**	-.26**	.12**	.03	.15**	.04	.53**	–							
15.	W1 W ph life	.13**	.11**	.13**	.08	.12**	.07	-.18**	-.13**	-.02	-.04	-.02	-.01	.42**	.26**	–						
16.	W1 H Ph life	.05	.08*	.09*	.11**	.06	.05	-.14**	-.12**	.05	.02	.07	.02	.27**	.40**	.39**	–					
17.	W1 W goals	.14**	.04	.10**	.05	.07	.04	-.18**	-.11*	-.05	-.02	-.06	-.03	.35**	.22**	.54**	.24**	–				
18.	W1 H goals	.06	.11*	.08	.11**	.07	.09*	-.04	-.09	.00	-.04	-.01	-.04	.22**	.38**	.28**	.59**	.25**	–			
19.	W1 con hostile	-.02	.03	-.07	-.06	-.01	-.05	.14**	.04	.05	.03	.03	.09*	-.18**	-.21**	-.22**	-.21**	-.27**	-.21**	–		
20.	W1 con freq	-.01	.03	-.06	-.02	-.06	-.10*	.03	-.02	-.00	.01	-.03	.04	-.20**	-.23**	-.30**	-.24**	-.28**	-.30**	.60**	–	
21.	W3 Sep/Div	-.09*	-.06	-.11**	-.05	-.05	-.04	.12**	.12**	-.02	.04	.01	.02	-.07	-.11**	-.13**	-.11**	-.03	-.11*	.16**	.17**	–

*p < .05. ** p < .01. W = Wives; H = Husbands; W1 = Wave 1; W3 = Wave 3; mar cov = marital covenant; mar life = marriage for life; mar imp = marriage importance; mar love = marriage for love; wf hme = All in all, family life suffers when the wife has a full-time job; breadwin = a husband's job is to earn money, a wife's job is to look after the home and family; rel mat = religious matters; ph life = philosophy of life; goals = aims/goals; con hostile = conflict hostility; con freq = conflict frequency; sep/div = separation/divorce

Three Profiles

Three highly distinguishable profiles (entropy = .85) of couples were identified according to value congruence, goal congruence, and conflict. Overall, *moderate congruence-non institutional* couples (*N* = 121) demonstrated a moderate-to-high degree of congruence and low levels of conflict. With regard to congruence, their self-reported values were moderately aligned and their perceptions of congruence were moderately high—higher than *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples but lower than *high-congruence-low conflict* couples. Relative to the other classes, *moderate congruence-non institutional* couples were more likely to view "love" as the preeminent reason for marriage and less likely to endorse more institutional perspectives (e.g., marriage is for life; marriage is a covenant with God). Additionally, these couples were least likely to endorse traditional gender roles and least likely to affirm marriage as highly important ("Being married is one of the most important things in life"). These couples reported extremely low levels of conflict hostility and conflict frequency—levels nearly identical to *high congruence-low conflict* couples. *Moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples (*N* = 144), demonstrated a moderate degree of similarity in self-reported views on marriage and gender roles; however, relative to other classes, *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples reported lower perceived agreement on religious matters, child-raising, and life goals, and higher levels of conflict hostility and conflict frequency. Class 3, *high congruence-low conflict* couples (*N* = 444), demonstrated a high degree of congruence across all value/goal categories, and reported low levels of conflict hostility and frequency. One distinguishing factor for *high congruence-low conflict* couples was that they did not endorse "marriage is for love" in the ways that *moderate congruence-non institutional* and *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples did. *High congruence-low conflict* couples may be described as having a congruent

institutional/traditional view of marriage and a high degree of agreement on life goals and personal values. See Figure 1 for class characteristics.

Table 4. ***Descriptive Statistics of Indicators for Latent Profile Analysis (N = 709)***

Classes	Con	LL	AIC	BIC	ABIC	LMR-RT	BLRT	Ent	C1%	C2%	C3%	C4%	C5%
1	Y	-15321.10	30714.20	30878.50	30764.19	-	-	1.00	1.00	-	-	-	-
2	Y	-14797.75	29705.50	29956.51	29781.87	1038.38	-15321.10	.81	.30	.70	-	-	-
3	**Y**	**-14524.39**	**29196.77**	**29534.50**	**29299.53**	**542.38**	**-14797.75*** **	**.85**	**.17**	**.20**	**.63**	**-**	**-**
4	Y	-14367.58	28921.15	29345.59	29050.29	311.13	-14524.39***	.84	.15	.02	.52	.30	-
5	Y	-14260.74	28745.47	29256.62	28901.00	215.31	-14369.26***	.86	.08	.27	.12	.51	.02

p < .001***; Con = convergence; LL = log likelihood; AIC = Akaike's information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; ABIC = sample-size adjusted BIC; LMR-RT = Lo-Mendell-Rubin adjusted likelihood ratio test; BLRT = Bootstrapped likelihood ratio test; Ent = entropy; C1% = percentage of couples in Profile 1.

Bold values indicate that 3-class profile was selected based on criteria.

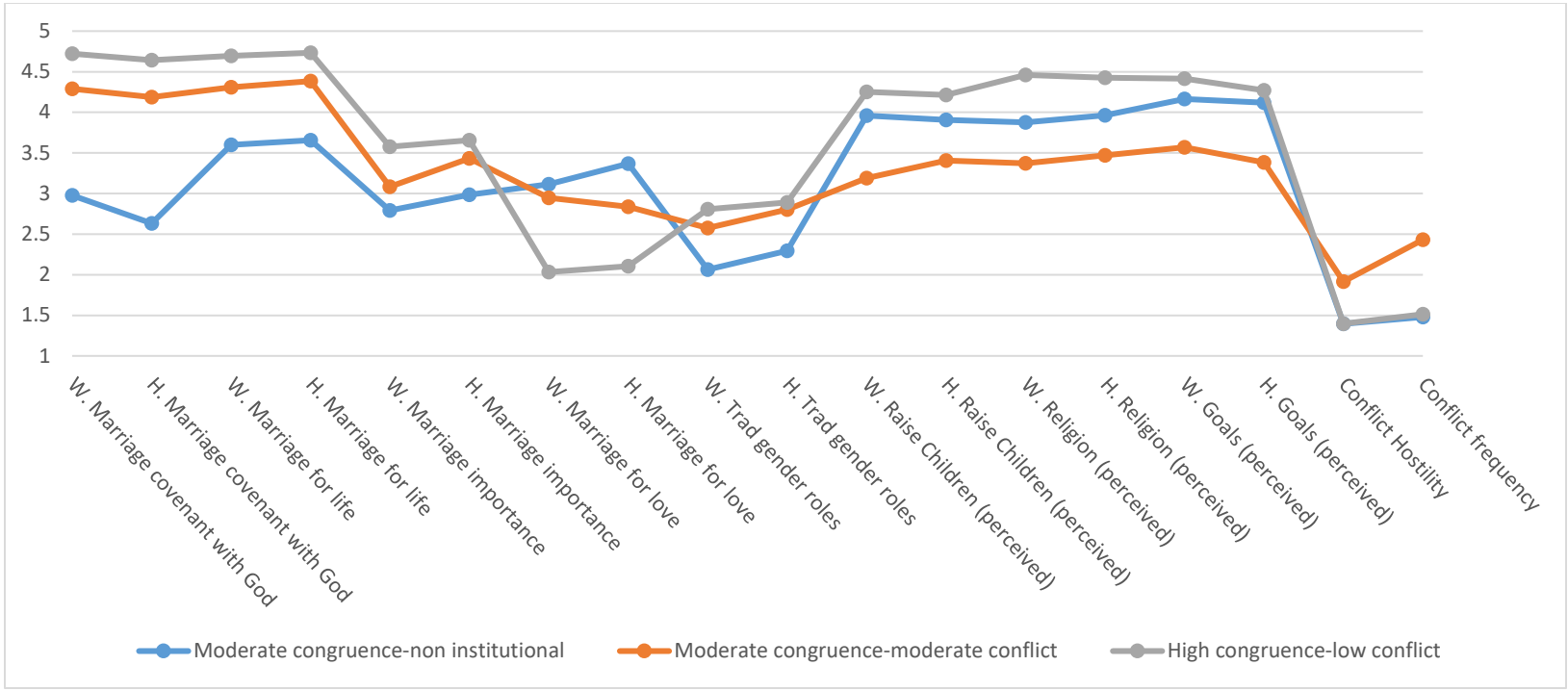

Figure 1. ***Profiles of Couples According to Value Congruence, Goal congruence, and Conflict.***

Marital covenant with God, *Marriage for life*, *Marriage importance*, *Marriage for love*, and *Traditional gender roles* were scaled from 1 to 5; *Raise Children*, *Religion*, *Goals*, and *Conflict frequency* were scored from 0 to 5; *Conflict hostility* was scored from 1 to 3.

Table 5. ***Descriptive Statistics for Profile Groups***

Variable	*Class 1: moderate congruence-non institutional (N = 121, 17.07%) M (SD) or N* (% of class)	*Class 2: moderate congruence-moderate conflict (N = 144, 20.31%) M (SD) or N* (% of class)	Class 3: *high congruence-low conflict* (*N* = 444, 62.62%) *M* (*SD*) or *N* (% of class)
Income (dollars)	60485.44 (31723.49)	46417.53 (25847.38)	47831.86 (25703.50)
Race			
White	83 (68.60%)	66 (45.83%)	282 (63.51%)
African American	12 (9.92%)	20 (13.89%)	38 (8.56%)
Interracial/other	10 (8.26%)	16 (11.11%)	39 (8.78%)
Months dated	30.40 (31.50)	26.12 (22.41)	29.07 (27.09)
Education (years)	28.74 (4.58)	27.23 (4.32)	27.75 (3.75)
Religiosity	3.31 (.98)	4.11 (.79)	4.52 (.67)
Premarital children			
No	45 (37.19%)	55 (38.19%)	240 (54.05%)
Yes	68 (56.20%)	63 (43.75%)	142 (31.98%)
Marriage type			
Standard	99 (81.82%)	91 (63.19%)	192 (43.24%)
Covenant	16 (13.22%)	41 (28.47%)	240 (54.05%)
Substance abuse			
No	96 (79.34%)	86 (59.72%)	338 (76.13%)
Yes	9 (7.44%)	16 (11.11%)	19 (4.28%)
Previous divorce			
No	47 (38.84%)	97 (67.36%)	292 (65.77%)
Yes	74 (61.16%)	47 (32.64%)	152 (34.23%)
Premarital infidelity			
No	88 (72.73%)	71 (49.31%)	317 (71.40%)
Yes	17 (14.05%)	39 (27.08%)	49 (11.04%)
W1 wives' marriage covenant	2.94 (1.12)	4.33 (.75)	4.71 (.53)
W1 husbands' marriage covenant	2.58 (1.03)	4.21 (.90)	4.65 (.60)
W1 wives' marriage for life	3.57 (1.22)	4.29 (.90)	4.70 (.59)
W1 husbands' marriage for life	3.67 (1.12)	4.38 (.80)	4.73 (.57)
W1 wives' marriage importance	2.72 (1.14)	3.07 (1.15)	3.59 (1.19)
W1 husbands' marriage importance	2.97 (1.14)	3.42 (1.28)	3.66 (1.18)
W1 wives' marriage for love	3.12 (1.10)	2.93 (1.24)	2.04 (1.12)
W1 husbands' marriage for love	3.38 (1.00)	2.83 (1.16)	2.11 (1.13)
W1 wives' spousal roles	2.04 (.81)	2.57 (1.06)	2.81 (1.07)
W1 husbands' spousal roles	2.28 (.78)	2.82 (1.07)	2.89 (.99)
W1 wives' raising children	3.98 (.76)	3.15 (1.07)	4.26 (.67)
W1 husbands' raising children	3.91 (.76)	3.42 (1.10)	4.21 (.76)
W1 wives' religious matters	3.88 (1.01)	3.34 (1.07)	4.47 (.66)
W1 husbands' religious matters	3.96 (.95)	3.47 (1.04)	4.42 (.63)
W1 wives' goals	4.17 (.52)	3.55 (.75)	4.42 (.52)
W1 husbands' goals	4.14 (.61)	3.36 (.96)	4.27 (.59)
W1 conflict hostility	1.40 (.39)	1.93 (.44)	1.39 (.36)
W1 conflict frequency	1.48 (.71)	2.44 (1.01)	1.51 (.69)
W3 marital status			
Married	92 (76.03%)	105 (72.92%)	394 (88.74%)
Separated/Divorced	23 (19.01%)	32 (22.22%)	42 (9.46%)

[a]Premarital children: 0 = *neither*, 1 = *one or both*. [b]Marriage type: 0 = *non-covenant*, 1 = *covenant*. [c]Substance abuse: 0 = *neither*, 1 = *one or both.* [d]Prior divorce: 0 = *neither*, 1 = *one or both.* [e]Premarital infidelity: 0 = *neither*, 1 = *one or both.*

Marital Disruption by Five Years into Marriage

Next, a logistic regression was run in SPSS to test the probability of divorce for each of the three classes. Out of the 709 total couples, 513 couples were included in the final analysis due to missing values on one or more variables. The *high congruence-low conflict* group was utilized as the control because *high congruence-low conflict* couples reported highest levels of congruence, low levels of conflict, and agreement on marriage as a lifelong commitment. To assess model fit, a Hosmer and Lemeshow test was conducted; results on this test indicated adequate model fit (χ^2 [8] = 5.43, $p > .05$). Examination of descriptive statistics indicated a high degree of variance for the income variable; therefore, the log base 2 of each couple's income was calculated and utilized in the regression. While controlling for income, race, months dated, marriage type, education, substance abuse, prior divorce, infidelity, religiosity, and premarital children, the probability of marital disruption for *moderate congruence-non institutional* couples compared to *high congruence-low conflict* couples increased by 5.8 times ($b = 1.76$, $p < .001$, $OR = 5.84$, $CI = 2.39, 14.23$) and the probability of marital disruption for *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples compared to *high congruence-low conflict* couples increased by 4.3 times ($b = 1.462$, $p < .001$, $OR = 4.32$, $CI = 1.99, 9.37$). Additionally, higher income ($b = -.31$, $p < .05$, $OR = .73$, $CI = .54, .99$) and more years of education ($b = -.10$, $p < .05$, $OR = .91$, CI = .83, .99) were significantly associated with a lower probability of marital disruption. See Table 5 for complete results.

Marital Disruption by Two and Half Years into Marriage

To assess the robustness of these results, I assessed the effect of class membership on marital disruption at 2.5 years of marriage via logistic regression. If a couple reported a divorce or separation by 913 days (2.5 years) into marriage, they were coded as *1 – separated or*

divorced; if a couple did not separated or divorced by this point, they were coded as *0 – not separated or divorced*. A Hosmer and Lemeshow test indicated adequate model fit (χ^2 [8] = 8.85, $p > .05$). While controlling for the same control variables, the probability of marital disruption at 2.5 years for *moderate congruence-non institutional* couples compared to *high congruence-low conflict* couples increased by 5.0 times (*b* = 1.61, *p* <.05, *OR* = 4.98, *CI* = 1.28, 19.31), and the probability of marital disruption for *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples compared to *high congruence-low conflict* couples increased by 9.4 times (*b* = 2.24, *p* < .001, *OR* = 9.39, *CI* = 3.25, 27.11). None of the control variables were significantly associated with increased risk of marital disruption.

Table 6. ***Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Marital Disruption by Year 5 of Marriage (N = 513)***

Predictor	*b*	*SE*	*OR*	*95% CI*
Class	-	-	-	-
Class 1: moderate congruence-non institutional	1.76***	.46	5.84	2.39, 14.23
Class 2: moderate congruence-moderate conflict	1.46***	.40	4.32	1.99, 9.37
Race	-	-	-	-
African American	.25	.47	1.29	.52, 3.22
Interracial/Other	.58	.41	1.79	.80, 4.00
Income	-.31*	.15	.73	.54, .99
Months dated	-.01	.01	.99	.98, 1.00
Premarital children	.12	.41	1.12	.50, 2.52
Marriage type	.04	.35	1.04	.53, 2.06
Education	-.10*	.23	.91	.83, .99
Substance abuse	.82	.48	2.27	.88, 5.87
Previous divorce	.29	.42	1.34	.56, 3.07
Premarital infidelity	-.12	.42	.89	.39, 2.00
Religiosity	.27	.21	1.31	.86, 1.98

Reference for race is White couples; reference for Class is the *high congruence-low conflict* group.
$p < .05$ *, $p < .001$ ***

Chapter 5 - Discussion

Previous studies have found an important link between value congruence, goal congruence, and conflict: when couples agree on core values and goals, they tend to experience less conflict and more positive relationship outcomes. To my knowledge, however, an in-depth examination of couple profiles according to these variables has yet to be studied. The present study adds depth to the literature by analyzing how couple profiles of value congruence, goal congruence, and conflict were linked with marital disruption after five years of marriage. The interdependent nature of the marital relationship points to the need for analyses that provide intra-couple and inter-couple insights. Latent profile analysis, a type of mixture/cluster modeling, enables researchers to identify important subgroups—or "hidden groups" (Nylund-Gibson & Choi, 2018)—of couples that exist within the larger population and to assess if these groups predict important outcomes such as marital disruption. From a sample of 709 couples from the Marriage Matters project (Nock, Sanchez, & Wright, 2012), a latent profile analysis with logistic regression generated several important findings. Three distinguishable couple profiles emerged, and profiles characterized by lower levels of agreement and/or higher levels of conflict were associated with significantly higher probabilities of divorce or separation. These results provide important insights into marital behaviors and outcomes that can inform future clinical work and research.

The current study examined two primary hypotheses: (a) a latent profile analysis would reveal three couple profiles (high-congruent-low conflict, moderate congruence-moderate conflict, low congruence-high conflict), and (b) membership in moderate congruence and low congruence classes would be associated with significantly higher probabilities of marital disruption by the fifth year of marriage. Results from the latent profile analysis and logistic

regression generally supported these hypotheses. Regarding the first hypothesis, the latent profile analysis indeed revealed three classes; however, two out of three profiles differed slightly from the hypothesized associations. The second hypothesis was supported in that Class 3 membership (*high congruence-low conflict*) was associated with the lowest probability of marital disruption, whereas membership in Class 1 (*moderate congruence-non institutional*) and Class 2 (*moderate congruence-moderate conflict*) was associated with significantly higher probability of marital disruption.

Class 3, *high-congruence-low conflict*, was characterized by the hypothesized high degree of agreement and low levels of conflict. This group was the largest of the three profiles (N = 444, 63% of couples), which makes sense given that the study examined the first five years of marriage; research has consistently linked the early marital years with higher levels of marital satisfaction (e.g., VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001; Lavner & Bradbury, 2010). The latent profile analysis revealed that these couples largely endorsed marriage as a lifelong, unbreakable covenant with God (items "Marriage is an unbreakable covenant with God, not just a contract recognized by the law" and "Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended except under extreme circumstances") and were significantly less likely to endorse a love-centric view of marriage ("When married people realize that they no longer love each other, they should get a divorce"). Further, they reported high levels of *perceived* agreement on raising children, religious matters, and life goals. These couples were the least likely to report marital disruption at year five. This aligns with previous findings: for example, higher levels of intra-couple religious similarity has been associated with higher levels of marital adjustment (Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & Lee, 2012), and couples who reported high congruence on life goals and values were more likely to report higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Skaldeman

& Montgomery, 1999). With regard to *high-congruence-low conflict* couples' institutional view of marriage, a study that utilized the same Marriage Matters sample (Wilcox & Dew, 2010) found that couples who endorsed a more institutional view of marriage (i.e., endorsed marital permanency and gender specialization) to report higher marital stability by year five of marriage. Mutual understanding of marriage as a "till death do us part" commitment might insulate couples from giving divorce serious consideration, especially during the first five years of marriage. Further, greater mutual endorsement of traditional gender roles—relative to *moderate congruence-non institutional* couples and *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples—could provide a clearer understanding of the "division of labor" in the home and thus could shelter couples from higher levels of conflict hostility and frequency.

Relative to *high-congruence-low conflict* couples, *moderate congruence-non institutional* couples (N = 121, 17% of couples) were characterized by lower levels of self-reported value agreement, significantly less endorsement of marriage as a lifelong, unbreakable covenant with God (items "Marriage is an unbreakable covenant with God, not just a contract recognized by the law" and "Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended except under extreme circumstances"), and significantly higher endorsement of the love-centric view of marriage ("When married people realize that they no longer love each other, they should get a divorce"). Interestingly, *moderate congruence-non institutional* couples reported higher levels of perceived agreement on raising children, religious matters, and life goals than *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples, and nearly identical levels to *high-congruence-low conflict* couples of reported conflict. Relative to *high-congruence-low conflict* couples, *moderate congruence-non institutional* couples had a 5.8 times higher probability of divorce or separation by year five of marriage. Why might couples with low levels of conflict and moderate-to-high levels of

agreement demonstrate the highest risk of marital disruption among the three classes? One explanation might be their *type* of agreement: *moderate congruence-non institutional* couples' mean scores on "Marriage is an unbreakable covenant with God, not just a contract recognized by the law" and "Marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended except under extreme circumstances" were significantly lower than both *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* and *high-congruence-low conflict* couples. When spouses agree that their marriages are dissolvable, love-dependent unions, they are perhaps more likely to endorse the idea that divorce is an acceptable outcome, and thus they may be more likely to experience prolonged, serious divorce ideation. Whereas divorce ideation is not always predictive of divorce (Hawkins et al., 2017), perhaps divorce ideation for these couples is more common and/or serious relative to other classes. Additionally, a qualitative analysis on the role of religion and spirituality found that faith plays a significant role in the divorce discernment process: spouses' faith can prevent—or at least prolong the discernment process of—divorce (Bell, Harris, Crabtree, Allen, & Roberts, 2015). *Moderate congruence-non institutional* couples reported the lowest levels of religiosity, and thus, faith might not have had the inhibitive effect that it would have on couples with higher reported religiosity.

Class 2, *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* (*N* = 144, 20% of couples), was characterized by moderate levels of congruence across self-reported values and moderate levels of conflict. Interestingly, *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples reported significantly lower levels of perceived agreement on raising children, religiosity, and life goals and higher levels of conflict than *moderate congruence-non institutional* couples and *high-congruence-low conflict* couples. On all other variables, they fell in between *moderate congruence-non institutional* and *high-congruence-low conflict* groups: they were moderately traditional, or

institutional, in their views on the institution of marriage and marital gender roles. Membership in the *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* class was significantly associated with a higher probability of marital disruption: 4.3 times more likely than *high-congruence-low conflict* couples. The reason for this increased risk might be *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples' lower *perceived* agreement on raising children, religious matters, and life goals. Whereas the *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples' between-spouse self-reported values were fairly congruent, the extent to which each spouse *perceived* agreement was significantly lower relative to *moderate congruence-non institutional* and *high-congruence-low conflict* couples. This aligns with previous findings that perceived congruence is a strong predictor of relationship outcomes (Skaldeman & Montgomery, 1999). To examine the difference between self-reported value congruence and perceived value congruence, consider the following example: A husband and wife each state that religion is "5 - extremely important," and thus their self-reported value agreement appears to be 100%. However, this does not mean that the spouses *believe,* or *perceive,* that their agreement is complete. In the case of Greg and Paula (see case study in Theory section), they both endorsed religion as extremely important, but their practice of faith differed in ways that caused marital conflict—Greg believed that Church attendance was not mandatory every Sunday, whereas Paula viewed Sunday Church attendance as a non-negotiable part of her faith. If surveyed about their perceived agreement on religious matters, it is likely that Greg and Paula might rate themselves as being in "moderate agreement," in that they endorsed Christianity, but not each other's specific practices. This distinction between self-reported values and perceived congruence is important and might partially account for *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples' significantly higher levels of reported conflict hostility, conflict frequency, and probability of divorce. For example, perceived

between-spouse incongruence on religious beliefs and behaviors (e.g., denominational membership, church attendance), parenting styles, and shared goals have been associated with higher levels of conflict (Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Tavassolie, Dudding, Madigan, Thorvardarson, & Winsler, 2016) and marital satisfaction (Kaplan & Maddux, 2002), and value differences and high conflict levels have been associated with relationship duration, satisfaction, and divorce (e.g., Acitelli, Kenny, & Weiner, 2001; Leggett, Roberts-Pittman, Byczek, & Morse, 2012). "Actor effects" (Skaldeman & Montgomery, 1999)—one spouse's behaviors which the other spouse perceives and being incongruent with his or her own values and goals—may indeed be a stronger indicator of marital outcomes than comparisons of spouses' self-reported values.

Clinical Implications

The results from this study provide some important and consequential considerations for couple therapists, especially for premarital counseling and/or early marital interventions. The results of this study suggest that the *types* of values that spouses endorse and the degree of *perceived* value congruence can affect marital outcomes. During the assessment phase of treatment, clinicians should assess (a) values endorsed by each spouse (e.g., marital beliefs, raising children, religious matters, life goals, etc.), and (b) the degree of between-spouse perceived agreement on these values. Clinicians can compare the couple's scores to see if they align with one of the three couple profiles which can provide insight into the couples risk for marital disruption.

The results from the assessment can also help differentiate and inform treatment for individual couples. *Moderate congruence-non institutional* couples were less likely to endorse marriage as a lifelong commitment, more likely to endorse a love-centered marriage perspective, and were 5.8 times more likely to experience marital disruption. Thus, for these couples,

clinicians should consider providing psychoeducation on "soulmate" versus institutional marriage perspectives (e.g., Wilcox & Dew, 2010) and perhaps assess further for each spouses' expectations for marriage. "Love" can be an abstract idea and its meaning can be vastly different between people; thus, clinicians should consider asking questions such as, "Love seems to be an important part of marriage to you. What does it mean to be in love?" "How do you know that you love your spouse?" "How will you know when there isn't enough love?" "Is there a threshold of love that must exist in order to stay married, and if so, how will you know that the threshold has been crossed?" These questions can highlight potential issues with the "love-centered" or "soulmate" perspective of marriage and help the couple move from abstract to more concrete thinking about marriage. There exists a number of high-quality premarital and marital counseling programs and modalities that help premarital couples wrestle with these ideas. Premarital programs such as PREPARE/ENRICH (e.g., Olson, 2019), SYMBIS (e.g., Parrott III & Parrott, 2003), and FOCCUS (e.g., Williams & Jurich, 1995) include comprehensive assessments that can help clinicians identify higher-risk areas or points of disagreement between spouses; the Attachment-Differentiation Premarital Model (Dell'Isola, Durtschi, Topham, & Gimarc, 2020) includes a phase that specifically aims to identify between-spouse differences in marital expectations.

Moderate congruence-moderate conflict couples reported lower perceived agreement on raising children, religious matters, and life goals, higher levels of conflict, and were 4.3 times more likely to report marital disruption. Thus, for *moderate congruence-moderate conflict* couples, clinicians should consider exploring the spouses' differences in these areas to see where room might exist for more agreement, or at the very least, some additional understanding or empathy. To enhance levels between-spouse empathy, it may be beneficial to conduct a family

genogram for each of the spouses early in the treatment process. This process can help each individual to understand the other's family-of-origin experience, including family dynamics, trauma histories, and implicit and explicit family rules that contribute to their current understanding of marriage. Thus, genograms have the ability to "diffuse their strong emotions, cultivate empathy" and to help spouses "become more aware of attitudes that lend themselves to a satisfying picture of marriage and family life" (Duba, Graham, Britzman, & Minatrea, 2009, p. 17-18). Because these couples reported higher levels of conflict, it may also be important to provide communication/conflict management psychoeducation; perhaps the four horsemen (Gottman, 2008), negative attribution-making (Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000), or other negative dyadic dynamics are preventing the couple from uncovering areas of agreement and/or empathy. "I" statements (Therapist Aid, 2017), and speaker/listener activities (e.g., Wood, 2010) may be used at the therapist's discretion to improve communication styles and enhance between-spouse empathy. The therapist might also consider use of solution-focused scaling questions (e.g., De Shazer & Dolan, 2012; Murray & Murray, Jr., 2004) to track progress in areas of conflict hostility and understanding to highlight progress and strengths. The Attachment-Differentiation Premarital Model (Dell'Isola, Durtschi, Topham, & Gimarc, 2020) suggests the use of some of these methods and thus may be helpful to reference when conducting this phase of treatment.

High-congruence-low conflict couples were more congruent and more likely to endorse institutional views of marriage, and reported low levels of conflict. These couples are the least likely to enter into marital therapy/counseling, but are likely to engage in premarital settings. In premarital settings, it may be important to probe for social desirability; for example, are the spouses reporting congruence to avoid conflict and appear happy? Additionally, relationship

maintenance psychoeducation (e.g., Ogolsky, Monk, Rice, Theisen, & Maniotes, 2017) would be helpful to demonstrate the importance of actively working to maintain high levels of marital quality and stability. Framing questions in a future tense may be a good way of encouraging high-functioning couples to engage well in the process. For example, question such as, “Can you identify some factors that might one day challenge your marital satisfaction or quality?” and, “If these challenges arise, how might you address them in a healthy way?” could reinforce the idea that marital satisfaction must be maintained rather than taken for granted.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

The results of this study should be viewed in light of its strengths and limitations. One important strength of this study was the sample: the large, dyadic, longitudinal data sample was a strong fit for the research questions and provided unique insights into marital couples’ behaviors and outcomes over time. Another strength was the analytic strategy. The latent profile analysis allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the couple types; beyond individual composite variables, the LPA provided a detailed picture of couple behaviors and attributes according to specific values, goals, and conflict types, thus yielding helpful data for researchers and clinicians. Additionally, the majority of the sample was religious. Whereas this could be viewed as a potential limitation, utilizing a highly religious sample offered a unique opportunity to advance our understanding of marital disruption for people whose faith typically discourages divorce. This is important, as more religious, conservative American states have been found to have higher rates of divorce than lesser-religious states (Glass & Levchak, 2014).

Some aspects of the sample should also be viewed as limitations. The entire sample was derived from a single state (Louisiana) and was fairly racially homogenous; relative to national percentages, White couples were overrepresented and all other groups (African American,

Hispanic, interracial, etc.) were underrepresented. Thus, the generalizability of the results might be somewhat limited. Additionally, household income—a factor associated with marital outcomes (e.g., Bramlett & Mosher, 2002)—was difficult to calculate due to the way it was reported on the couple surveys. Thus, the household income variable had to be estimated and may not fully reflect couples' financial status. Further, it should be noted that another factor that has been associated with marital disruption—age at marriage (e.g., Teachman, 2002)—was not included in this analysis. Participants' ages were omitted from the data set to help protect confidentiality, and thus, I was unable to include age at marriage as a control variable. Finally, it should be noted that the correlational nature of this study prevents us from making conclusive determinations about the observed results.

This study's findings provide some intriguing implications for future study. First, it may be important to assess how couples' values change over time—perhaps if their class membership remains consistent—and to extend the timeframe beyond five years. Previous studies have found a significant association between value changes and relationship outcomes over time (e.g., Skaldeman & Montgomery, 1999), but it is not known how changes in class membership and/or specific values over time might affect marriages. Relatedly, the connection between socioeconomic status, education, age at marriage, and value congruence over time would be important to assess. Higher household income, years of education, and older age at marriage has been associated with lower risk of divorce (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Teachman, 2002), and perhaps this is connected to spouses being advanced not only in years, education, and income but also in understanding of self, values, and priorities for marriage. The authors of one study (Aughinbaugh, Robles, & Sun, 2013)—which found that rates of divorce increased as age at marriage decreased—stated, "college graduates marry at older ages than do people with less

education…[and] some of the same personal or socioeconomic characteristics that help in the completing of a college degree may also help in maintaining a marriage" (p. 17). Interestingly, other research has suggested that the recent decline in divorce rates is related to the increase in *wives'* age at marriage, specifically (Rotz, 2016). In this vein, it may be important to incorporate the life course perspective (e.g., Bengston & Allen, 2009) into the theoretical framework of future studies to assess how life stages—and events specific to certain life stages and genders—affect marital outcomes.

Finally, it would be interesting to observe the between-state differences in couple typologies and marital outcomes. For instance, consider Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. As bordering Southern states, they share many similarities: a recent Pew Research Survey found that Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Arkansas ranked as the eighth, fourth, and third-most religious states in America, respectively (Pew Research Center, 2015). This is in stark contrast to their reported divorce rates: Over the last decade, Louisiana's divorce rates have been reported at or just below the national average, whereas Oklahoma ranked second-highest and Arkansas ranked first-highest (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Conducting similar analyses—with an added emphasis on socioeconomic, age, and gender-related factors—may provide important insights into the mechanisms that underlie these differential outcomes.

Conclusion

According to Interdependence theory, couples with low value and goal congruence are more likely to experience conflict and negative relationship outcomes. Previous research has linked value congruence and goal congruence with relationship outcomes, but to date, a nuanced approach via latent profile analysis had not been conducted. The latent profile analysis found three classes (Class 1, *moderate congruence-non-institutional*, 17% of couples; Class 2,

moderate congruence-non-institutional, 20% of couples; Class 3, *high-congruence-low conflict*, 63% of couples), and logistic regression suggested that couples with non-institutional marital perspectives and couples with lower levels of perceived congruence and higher levels of conflict were significantly more likely to experience marital disruption by year 5 of marriage. For pre- and early-marital couple clinicians, these findings point to the importance of values and goals-based assessments and interventions tailored to the couples' values and degree of congruence.

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