(Eventual) Stability and Change Across Partnerships

Matthew D. Johnsona

University of Alberta

Franz J. Neyerb

Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena

aDepartment of Human Ecology, 302 Human Ecology Building, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB T6G 2N1, Canada (matt.johnson@ualberta.ca).

bDepartment of Psychology, Humboldstraße 11, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, 07743 Jena, Germany (franz.neyer@uni-jena.de).

Acknowledgement: This research was funded by Insight Grant 435-2018-0004 from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). This paper uses data from the German Family Panel (pairfam), which is funded as a long-term project by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and coordinated by Josef Brüderl, Karsten Hank, Johannes Huinink, Bernhard Nauck, Franz Neyer, and Sabine Walper.

© 2019, American Psychological Association. This paper is not the copy of record and may not exactly replicate the final, authoritative version of the article. Please do not copy or cite without authors' permission. The final article will be available, upon publication, via its DOI: 10.1037/fam0000523

Abstract

Does a new partnership differ from its preceding one? This study investigates whether relationship dynamics change as people transition from one partnership to another and examines a number of predictors that might explain variation in change trajectories. We draw on data gathered from 554 focal participants in the German Family Panel (pairfam) study surveyed at four time points spanning two intimate unions to answer these questions. Latent change score modeling results showed eventual stability in five of seven constructs under investigation. When looking at overall change from Time 1 in partnership 1 to Time 2 of partnership 2, there were no mean-level changes in relationship and sexual satisfaction, perceptions of relational instability, and frequency of conflictual and intimate exchanges. Sexual frequency and partner admiration improved across partnerships. Further analyses showed much change unfolded in the interim; all constructs showed significant deterioration as the first partnership drew to a close, marked improvements as individuals moved from the end of the first partnership into their next union, and worsened across the first year of the second partnership. Neuroticism and relationship length were the most consistent predictors of change across partnerships: those in shorter first partnerships and with higher neuroticism typically experienced decreases in functioning across partnerships. These findings provide support for an eventual stability conceptualization of relationship development across partnerships.

Keywords: breakup; couples; intimate relationships; relationship development; relationship initiation

(Eventual) Stability and Change Across Partnerships

Recent decades have borne witness to decreasing marriage rates, a steadily increasing age at first marriage, and persistently high rates of divorce around the world (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2016). Such trends have resulted in considerable portions of the adult life span spent outside of marital unions (Sassler, 2010) and have contributed to the increasing likelihood for individuals to form, dissolve, and re-form numerous dating, cohabiting, and marital relationships over the course of their lives (Cherlin, 2009). As people seek lasting love amidst a relational landscape littered with the remains of prior unions, we ask a simple question: does a new relationship differ from its preceding one? Surprisingly, scant empirical inquiry of relationship dynamics in more than one partnership has been conducted, as was stressed in a recent review of the literature on partnering across the life span (Sassler, 2010).

The present study adds insight into this issue by examining a number of constructs reflecting couple interactions (sexual frequency, conflict, self-disclosure, admiration) and relationship perceptions (satisfaction and perceived instability) as people transition from one partnership to the next. Our focus on couple interactions and perceptions, two key domains featured prominently in models of relationship functioning (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1995) and couple research (e.g., Johnson, Horne, Hardy, & Anderson, 2018), assessed on four occasions in subsequent partnerships promises to shed insight into specific areas of continuity and change across relationships. We make an additional important contribution by exploring a number of predictors that might explain change from one relationship to the next: sex, age, duration and type (marital, cohabiting, or non-coresidential union) of the first partnership, number of prior unions, and personality traits (neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness). Four waves of survey data gathered from a national sample of individuals from the German Family Panel (pairfam) study (n = 554) are used to answer our research questions.

**Background**

**Theoretical Perspectives on Intimate Relationship Development Across Partnerships**

Theoretical approaches to understanding intimate relations provide potentially competing expectations for stability versus change in relationship dynamics from one partnership to the next. A stability-focused perspective contends that dynamics in one partnership are recreated in the next, as individuals may develop habitual patterns of thought and behavior with their lovers that are transferred from partner to partner. Attachment theory is perhaps the leading example under this umbrella, as one of its key premises is that individuals develop internal working models, or mental representations, of close relationships that guide social interactions and account for consistency in dynamics across social relationships (Bowlby, 1973; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Bowlby proposed the relationship between infant and caregivers provided the template for what to expect in all relationships throughout life, setting the stage for individuals to develop prototypical patterns of relational thought, emotion, and behavior. Indeed, a number of long-term longitudinal studies have demonstrated continuity in relations between individuals and their parents, friends, and intimate partners across decades (e.g., Roisman, Collins, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2005; Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007). Attachment theory also acknowledges the possibility for change in relationships across one’s life, as Bowlby noted that one’s attachment orientation may be responsive to contextual influences and personal experiences, but the perspective anticipates more continuity than change.

Change-focused models, on the other hand, posit that intimate relations must be negotiated with each partner and the formation of a new partnership would lead to the establishment of new relationship dynamics. Social learning theory, for example, conceptualizes relationship development as an ever-unfolding process whereby couples learn about the quality of their relationship on the basis of their positive or negative interactions and experiences from prior unions are carried forward and inform relations with a new partner (Bandura, 1977). Ecological models draw attention to context; positing that changing contextual influences are anticipated to prompt subsequent changes within the couple union and vice versa (e.g., Lerner, Agans, DeSouza, & Gasca, 2013). These perspectives focus on a different mechanism (couple interactions versus contextual influences), but are united in the assumption that relationship development is a dynamic process that unfolds across time. Insofar as a new lover contributes uniquely to couple interactions and introduces different contextual influences on the partnership, such perspectives anticipate different relationship dynamics to emerge in each new partnership.

**Empirical Investigation of Relationship Dynamics Across Partnerships**

A number of studies have examined how prior relationship experiences influence subsequent partnerships. Most of this research considers how the number or type (e.g., cohabiting or marital) of prior relationships predict current partnership dynamics (Stets, 1993; Teachman, 2003), generally finding those with more extensive relationship histories experience lower quality and heightened instability in the current union. Another relevant body of literature explored the intimate relations of remarried couples; recent studies found no differences between those in first and remarriages on measures of marital happiness, conflict, time spent together, and marital problems (Bulanda & Brown, 2007; Whitton, Stanley, Markman, & Johnson, 2013), despite the fact that remarriages are less stable than first marriages (Sweeney, 2010).

A key limitation of these studies is the use of between-person (or couple) comparisons rather than examining within-person change across unions. Between-person differences may arise due to selection among those prone to form more partnerships or remarry (Sassler, 2010; Sweeney, 2010) and cannot explain within-person development across partnerships, although such explanations are commonly offered. For example, Stets (1993) concluded some people are either “predisposed to problems in relationships (and they carry these problems into subsequent relationships), or people who have broken off relationships carry the negative effects of failed relationships into later relationships” (p. 236). The latter statement assumes changes in future unions resulting from past relational experiences, but the only way to draw such conclusions is from observation of the same individuals in multiple partnerships. Such studies are rare.

The most extensive study to follow individuals across partnerships interviewed a representative sample of 712 New Zealand residents in the 1972/1973 birth cohort about their intimate relations at ages 21 and 26 years (Robins, Caspi, & Moffit, 2002). Across this five year span, 70% of the sample changed partners and those with a new partner experienced more substantial mean level increases in relationship quality and decreases in conflict frequency compared to those who remained in the same relationship, but no cross-partner differences in perpetration of intimate partner violence (IPV). Nevertheless, these variables exhibited considerable rank-order stability across partnerships, leading the authors to conclude that “people tend to be generally satisfied or dissatisfied across relationships” (Robins et al., 2002, p. 960). A second relevant study examined infidelity in subsequent intimate partnerships and found that those who cheated in a past relationship were three times more likely to cheat again in their next relationship (Knopp, Scott, Ritchie, Rhoades, Markman, & Stanley, 2017).

Although attachment theory predicts stability across partnerships, this idea has rarely been tested. The studies to examine continuity in attachment across relationships have primarily focused on different types of relationships, such as with parents, friends, and partners (e.g., Roisman et al., 2005; Simpson et al., 2007). The most notable exception can be found in the recent work of Furman and Collibee (2018) who found that adolescent attachment orientation with parents, friends, and intimate partners at baseline predicted attachment orientation to a new intimate partner over seven years later. Collectively, these few studies examining change across partnerships in the same people provide evidence that at least some relationship dynamics remain stable, even as partners come and go. Yet, we could locate no studies with more than one observation within each partnership, limiting the ability of prior research to examine the developmental process across unions.

**Conceptualizing Relationship Development Across Partnerships**

We draw from the relevant theoretical and empirical literature to conceptualize how relationships might develop across partnerships. In line with attachment theory coupled with the evidence documenting relationship stability across intimate unions (Furman & Collibee, 2018; Knopp et al., 2017; Robins et al., 2002), we anticipate eventual stability in relationship dynamics as individuals move through subsequent partnerships, but anticipate this overall stability is interrupted by periods of change as one partnership draws to a close and the next begins, consistent with social learning and contextual theories. It is worth noting such a perspective aligns with set-point and adaptation theories (Lucas, 2007) of adjustment to life events, which contend life events are disruptive and may lead to temporary fluctuations in well-being before people adapt to the event and return to their pre-transition level.

We first expect relationship stability to give way to a period of deterioration prior to the termination of a union. Models of relationship dissolution have long emphasized declines in relationship functioning as a precursor to breaking up (e.g., Duck, 1982) and empirical evidence supports this contention. Some studies have shown relationship deterioration among newlyweds who go on to divorce may begin shortly after marriage, with a high proportion of couples who ultimately divorce evincing steep decreases in post-marital satisfaction (Lavner & Bradbury, 2010), love, affection, and increasing ambivalence (Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001). Perhaps the most direct evidence in support of a “stability then decline” process preceding relationship dissolution comes from a recent longitudinal study of divorced women that found happiness and communication followed a quadratic pattern with stability in the early years (furthest from when divorce occurred) before exhibiting an accelerating decline as divorce approached (conflict remained stable; James, 2015). In the present study, we anticipate deterioration preceding the breakup of the first partnership (we have two time points of data in each partnership, precluding our ability to test curvilinear trajectories).

We also predict a subsequent partnership will begin with better-than-typical intimate relations that will give way to stability as the relationship progresses, consistent with the oft-referenced “honeymoon effect” in relationship science. For example, the disillusionment model suggests that relationship initiation is characterized by elevated partner idealization and impression-management strategies to present one’s self in the best possible light (e.g., being especially responsive to one’s partner; Huston et al., 2001). Eventually, disillusionment sets in as partners face the reality of daily life and gain awareness of each other’s flaws, and the intoxicating high of new love subsides into more persistent patterns characteristic of enduring unions. Most recent longitudinal work finds limited support for the honeymoon effect (Proulx, Ermer, & Kanter, 2017), but methodology might provide an explanation. The majority of longitudinal couple research draws from either newlyweds or those in longer-term unions. With marriage occurring later and the increasing likelihood of cohabitation preceding marriage (Sassler, 2010), newlywed couples may already have a lengthy relationship biography and relational disillusionment could have occurred years prior. The data at hand were gathered annually, allowing for examination of dynamics in recently formed partnerships, and may be better-suited to detecting disillusionment that occurs relatively quickly in a partnership.

**Explaining Diversity in Change Across Partnerships**

Underlying the average pattern proposed, there may also be diversity in trajectories of relational characteristics as participants move from one partnership to the next. We explore sex and age as two potentially important demographic predictors. Robins and colleagues (2002) found men exhibited more stability in relationship quality and perpetration of IPV from one relationship to the next compared to women, but no sex differences in cross-relationship conflict frequency. Age may also be important in determining the amount of change across partnerships. Half of the sample in the current study were drawn from the adolescent birth cohort at baseline (mean age at the first time point in this study is 18 years). Intimate partnerships during adolescence are distinct from unions later in the life course, characterized by high levels of volatility and instability (Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 2012). Thus, younger participants might experience more change across partnerships. Those in the adolescent age cohort also likely have less experience navigating couple relations compared to the older participants (young adults and those nearing midlife), so number of prior partnerships was included as a covariate. Applying social learning theory, those with few prior relationships are anticipated to exhibit the most change across unions due to limited experience. On the other hand, attachment theory would contend that one’s internal working model would lead to stable patterns with lovers on the basis of prior relational experiences with parents and friends.

Characteristics of the first partnership are also potentially important for explaining change across unions. Pairfam data allow us to examine the last year of the first partnership, but this union may have been initiated years prior. Given that average relationship quality declines as unions progress (e.g., Proulx et al., 2017), we expect those partnered longer to have worse initial adjustment. We also include relationship status of the first partnership (married or cohabiting with dating unions as the reference category) as a predictor. Given that marriage or living together increases the difficulty of ending a partnership (Stanley, Rhoades, & Whitton, 2010), we anticipate being married or cohabiting to predict worse adjustment prior to breaking up due to the higher threshold to exit the union. The added complexity of ending a marriage or cohabiting union compared to dating may prompt individuals to be selective prior to entering a new partnership, ultimately yielding improved couple relations across partnerships. Alternatively, the greater deterioration at the end of a marriage or cohabiting partnership may result in more pronounced gains due to starting lower and having more potential for improvement.

Finally, we included three personality traits shown to influence relationship quality and stability. While neuroticism, an indicator of emotional stability, has repeatedly emerged as a strong predictor of poorer intimate relations (Karney, & Bradbury, 1997), recent studies found evidence for a protective role of conscientiousness and agreeableness in relationship adjustment (Dyrenforth, Kashy, & Donnellan, 2010). Robins and colleagues’ (2002) explored personality factors as predictors of change across partnerships. They found negative emotionality predicted reductions in quality and increased conflict and physical IPV with a new partner, whereas positive emotionality and constraint predicted increased quality across partnerships. Robins et al. noted that the tendency to be satisfied or dissatisfied across unions is partly due to individual differences in personality, underscoring the need to examine personality in our analyses.

**The Present Study**

Given the relative lack of empirical literature devoted to the development of intimate relations across partnerships, and the complete absence of studies with multiple waves of data in subsequent partnerships, we seek to understand whether subsequent intimate partnerships differ from one another. We anticipate eventual stability in relational characteristics across unions, interrupted by periods of deterioration as one partnership approaches termination and idealization and disillusionment during the start of the next relationship. We also explore a number of predictors that might account for variation in trajectories across partnerships.

**Method**

**Procedures**

This research draws on four waves of data culled from the first eight waves of the German Family Panel (pairfam) study (Brüderl et al., 2017). Funded by the German Research Foundation, pairfam is a longitudinal study that launched in 2008 and is scheduled to conclude with 14 total waves of annual survey data in 2022. Pairfam initially recruited a representative sample 12,402 anchor, or focal, participants from three birth cohorts: adolescents aged 15 to 17 years old, young adults aged 25 to 27 years old, and adults nearing midlife aged 35 to 37 years. Pairfam is an omnibus study, gathering a wide variety of data with four focal areas: intimate partnerships, fertility, parent-child relationships, and intergenerational ties. Survey data are gathered through personal interviews that averaged 55 minutes across Waves 1 through 8 (ranges from 52 to 64 minutes). Anchors are provided a €10 honorarium in exchange for completing the survey each year. Additional details about pairfam can be found in the study’s concept paper (Huinink et al., 2011) and website: http://www.pairfam.de/en/study.html. Ethics approval for the current study was granted by the University of Alberta research ethics board (protocol number 00060173, Family Relations in the German Pairfam Study).

The focus of this study is to understand changes across sequential intimate partnerships, so we first filtered the total sample of 12,402 anchor participants to select those who reported being in more than one intimate partnership across the eight waves of available data (n = 1,949). We then selected participants who were in two intimate partnerships with at least two waves of data in each partnership as our final analytic sample (n = 554), allowing for the examination of change within each partnership to determine the extent to which relationship deterioration and disillusionment processes are evident, if they exist. Comparisons between the 554 anchors selected for the study and the 11,848 who were filtered revealed those in the study were more likely to be female (χ2(1) = 24.027, *p <* .001), younger (effect size *d*  = .44), had less education (*d*  = .18), reported slightly less agreeableness (*d*  =.11) and higher neuroticism (*d*  =.13), but did not differ on household income (*d*  = .05) or conscientiousness (effect size *d*  =.04). These analyses align with those in prior studies demonstrating those who form more partnerships are a selective group (Sassler, 2010; Sweeney, 2010), underscoring the need for within-person examination of changes across unions rather than between-person comparisons of those with more versus fewer prior unions.

Once we selected our sample for analysis, we restructured time to correspond to intimate partnerships (e.g., Partnership 1, Time 1) rather than the wave of data collection (Wave 1). Since participants began and ended unions at various times across the eight waves of available data, this procedure provided a consistent time metric for all cases to facilitate data analysis. Specifically, we recoded time as follows: Partnership 1, Time 1 (P1T1); Partnership 1, Time Last (P1TLast); Partnership 2, Time 1 (P2T1); Partnership 2, Time 2 (P2T2). Thus, we analyzed data at four time points to answer our research questions.

**Sample**

The sample for the current study was comprised of 62% women and 51% of participants were from the adolescent age cohort (age at P1T1: *M* = 17.59 years; *SD* = 1.44), 32% were young adults (age at P1T1: *M* = 27.00 years; *SD* = 1.51), and the remaining 17% were nearing midlife (age at P1T1: *M* = 37.44 years; *SD* = 1.63). For the first partnership, individuals tended to be in non-cohabiting intimate partnerships, such as a dating relationship (63%), but 22% were cohabiting with and 15% were married to this partner. Participants had been in the first unions for 3.15 years at Time 1, on average (*SD* = 3.97 years), and, upon dissolving this union, spent an average of 1.98 years (*SD* = 1.00) before initiating a new partnership that lasted at least one year. Over one third of the sample had no intimate partnerships (36%) prior to the first relationship in the study, 26% had one previous union, and 38% had two or more past partnerships. Participants reported a net median monthly household income of €2,500 (*M* = €2,780; *SD* = €1,766).

**Measures**

Descriptive statistics for study variables are presented in Table 1 and the supplemental material contains correlations among the focal constructs (Supplemental Table 1) and the full correlations for each construct at all time points (Supplemental Table 2).

**Relationship satisfaction.** One item adapted from the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998) was used to assess relationship satisfaction in all waves: “All in all, how satisfied are you with your relationship?” Response options ranged from 0 = *very dissatisfied* to 10 = *very satisfied*. Autocorrelations at both time points within each partnership were *r* = .42 for relationship one and *r* = .45 for relationship two. Across partnerships, autocorrelations ranged from *r* = .15 to *r* = .20.

**Sexual satisfaction.** One item assessed sexual satisfaction in each wave: “How satisfied are you with your sex life?” Responses range from 0 = *very dissatisfied* to 10 = *very satisfied*. Autocorrelations within each partnership were *r* = .53 for union one and *r* = .39 for union two and ranged from *r* = .06 to *r* = .21 across partnerships.

**Sexual frequency.** Starting in Wave 2, one item asked about sexual frequency with the current partner: “How often have you had sexual intercourse, on average, during the past three months with your partner?” Response options were 0 = *I have never had sex,* 1 = n*ot in the past 3 months,* 2 = *once per month or less,* 3 = *2-3 times per month,* 4 = *once per week,* 5 = *2-3 times per week,* 6 = *more than 3 times per week,* and 7 = *daily.* Responses for those who never had sex (12 participants at Time 1 and decreased to 2 participants by the final time point) were recoded as missing and an auxiliary variable signifying whether the participant had ever had sex was included to aid in missing data estimation. Autocorrelations within each partnership were *r* = .60 for union one and *r* = .46 for union two and ranged from *r* = .12 to *r* = .24 across partnerships.

**Perceived instability.** Three items adapted from the Marital Instability Index (Booth, Johnson, & Edwards, 1983) assessed perceptions about the partnership being in trouble and suggestions to dissolve the union. Those in newly formed relationships answered each item “Since the start of your union,” and those in continuing partnerships responded “Since the previous wave.” The items were: “have you ever thought that your relationship or marriage was in trouble?” “have you seriously considered a separation or a divorce?” and “have you seriously suggested to your partner a separation or divorce or has your partner suggested it to you?” Response options were 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes* and a total score was computed by summing the items. Alpha reliability ranged from .82 to .84. This construct was assessed in all waves, but participants in the adolescent cohort were first given this scale in Wave 2. Autocorrelations within each partnership were *r* = .36 for relationship one and *r* = .42 for relationship two and ranged from *r* = .10 to *r* = .16 across partnerships.

**Conflict, self-disclosure, and admiration.** Two items adapted from the conflict, intimacy, and admiration subscales of the Network of Relationships Inventory (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) assessed the frequency of conflictual exchanges and self-disclosures and how often the partner expressed admiration of the anchor respondent. Each construct was assessed in every wave. Conflict items were: “How often do you and your partner disagree and quarrel?" and “How often are you and your partner annoyed or angry with each other?" Self-disclosure items were: “How often do you tell your partner what you’re thinking?” and “How often do you share your secrets and private feelings with your partner?” Admiration items were: “How often does your partner express admiration for what you have done?” and “How often does your partner show that he or she appreciates you?” Responses were 1 = *never*, 2 = *seldom,* 3 = *sometimes,* 4 = *often,* and 5 = *always* and mean scores were computed. Spearman-Brown internal reliability coefficients ranged from .78 to .84 for conflict, .70 to .79 for self-disclosure, and was .72 to .79 for admiration. For conflict, autocorrelations within each partnership were *r* = .50 for partnership one and *r* = .53 for partnership two and ranged from *r* = .04 to *r* = .16 across unions. For self-disclosure, correlations for partnership one was *r* = .51 and *r* = .53 for partnership two and ranged from *r* = .26 to *r* = .31 across partnerships. For admiration, correlations within each partnership were *r* = .45 for relationship one and *r* = .53 for relationship two and ranged from *r* = .10 to *r* = .25 across unions.

**Predictors.** Participant sex, age, and relationship duration of the first partnership (in years) were included as predictors. Length of time between the end of the first partnership and initiation of the second was explored as a potential predictor, but it was not associated with the development of any constructs. Dummy coded variables corresponding to whether the first partnership was a marital or cohabiting union (0 = *no,* 1 = *yes*) prior to its dissolution were also controlled, as was the total number of prior intimate partnerships, assessed by asking the participant how many “important” relationships they had since age 14. Four-item scales from the short version of the Big Five Inventory (BFI-K, Rammstedt & John, 2005) assessed neuroticism, conscientiousness, and agreeableness in Wave 2. Respondents indicated “To what extent do the following statements apply to you?” Neuroticism items were: “I easily become depressed or discouraged,” “I am relaxed and don’t let myself be worried by stress (reversed),” “I worry a lot,” and “I easily become nervous and insecure.” Conscientiousness items were: “I complete my tasks thoroughly,” “I make things comfortable for myself and tend to be lazy (reversed),” “I am proficient and work quickly,” and “I make plans and carry them out.” Agreeableness items were: “I tend to criticize others (reversed),” “I trust others easily and believe that people are inherently good,” “I can be cold and distanced in my behavior (reversed),” and “I can be gruff and dismissive with others (reversed).” Responses ranged from 1 = *absolutely incorrect* to 5 = *absolutely correct* and mean scores were computed. Internal consistencies (i.e. Alpha) for neuroticism was .67, was .63 for conscientiousness, and was .54 for agreeableness. Given the brevity of the four-item scales and high retest-reliabilities (*r*s > .85) reported in the validation study by Rammstedt and John (2005), we accept internal consistencies as sufficient. In addition, Rammstedt and John (2005) reported convergence of self-reports with partner ratings and with other Big Five inventories thus supporting the validity of BFI-K scores. Neuroticism was negatively associated with conscientiousness (*r* = -.24) and agreeableness (*r* = -.18) and conscientiousness and agreeableness positively covaried (*r* = .14).

**Analytic Plan**

We computed a series of latent change score (LCS) models (McArdle, 2009) to answer our research questions (see Figure 1). LCS Model A in Figure 1 partitions variance into between person levels at P1T1 and intraindividual changes across the subsequent time points (P1TLast, P2T1, and P2T2), captured in the three latent change score variables (denoted with Δ). This analytic approach provides descriptive information on the trajectory of each construct across partnerships, allowing for the evaluation of our proposed conceptual model of relationship development as individuals move from one union to the next. We allow the change scores to covary with one another in this analysis because available theory does not provide guidance as to how changes in relationship characteristics in one partnership (ΔP1) would influence the amount of change between partnerships (ΔP1TLast-P2T1) or the future trajectory of a new union (ΔP2). LCS Model B in Figure 1 partitions variance into between person levels at P1T1 and the total amount of intraindividual change that occurs from P1T1 to P2T2. Given that our conceptual model posits relational dynamics might be consistent across partnerships, save periods of deterioration and disillusionment, Model B allows us to directly determine whether a future union differs from a previous partnership. After computing initial LCS models, we then added the predictors to the LCS models to identify factors that might explain diversity in change trajectories across partnerships. Although our primary interest is in understanding how these variables might explain within-person change across partnerships, we also model them as predictors of initial levels at P1T1. This approach will allow us to determine whether these variables yield more insight into between-person differences versus within-person change.

Analyses were computed in Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998 – 2017) and all models in this study were saturated, so global fit statistics were not generated. We inspected residuals for each analysis to ensure there were no localized areas of misfit. Missing data in the present study tended to be low, with the exception of two variables assessed at P1T1 (see Table 1), and were estimated through the use of the full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) method, which uses all available data in the variance/covariance matrix to produce parameter estimates with less bias compared to deletion or similar methods (Enders, 2010). Higher missing data for sexual frequency at the first time point in our study is because this variable was first assessed in Wave 2 of the pairfam study and the perceived instability items were not presented to those in the adolescent cohort until Wave 2. For partnerships where Wave 1 corresponded to P1T1, participants would not have been asked these questions. These data are missing completely at random (missingness is due to study design) and can be handled with FIML.

**Results**

**Univariate Change Score Models**

We first computed the univariate change score models in Figure 1 for each of the focal variables of interest to determine how relational and individual characteristics change across partnerships. Table 2 contains the LCS model parameters: initial levels of each construct at Time 1 in the first partnership, change across partnership 1 (ΔP1), change between the end of partnership 1 and Time 1 of partnership 2 (ΔP1TLast-P2T1), change in partnership 2 (ΔP2) and an overall estimate of change between Time 1 of partnership 1 and Time 2 of partnership 2 (ΔP1T1-P2T2). Overall, the constructs exhibited changes in accordance with our proposed conceptualization of relationship development across partnerships.

For all constructs, there was significant deterioration as the first partnership drew to a close (ΔP1). Specifically, relationship and sexual satisfaction, frequency of sex, self-disclosure and admiration all decreased, while perceptions of instability and frequency of conflict increased (deterioration ranged from .23 to .48 standard deviations). Likewise, all constructs exhibited marked improvements as individuals moved from the end of the first partnership into their next union (ΔP1TLast-P2T1; ranging from .56 to 1.16 standard deviations) and worsened across the first year of the second partnership (ΔP2; from .11 to .42 standard deviations), suggesting a honeymoon period and possible disillusionment. The change score estimates spanning P1T1 to P2T2 showed that for five of the seven constructs under investigation, there was no significant change from the first time point of partnership 1 to the second time point of partnership 2 (from .04 to .11 standard deviations). Sexual frequency (ΔP1T1-P2T2 = .41 corresponding to .31 standard deviations) and partner expressions of admiration (ΔP1T1-P2T2 = .09 corresponding to .11 standard deviations) increased significantly across partnerships. There was also significant variance in the initial level at P1T1 and the latent change scores for each construct, supporting exploration of factors that might explain the diversity in these trajectories.

A limitation of our study is that the data at hand allowed us to examine the final year of partnership 1 that had already lasted slightly more than three years at Time 1 and the first year of partnership 2, but these are different developmental periods in the life of a partnership and do not allow for a true apples to apples comparison of relationship dynamics across unions. We conducted two follow-up analyses to address this limitation (full results are available in the supplemental material). First, we recomputed these analyses and controlled for relationship duration of the first partnership (supplemental Table 3). All results were replicated in this analysis. Second, we filtered our sample to include only those whose relationship duration at P1T1 corresponded to the relationship length of P2T2 (between one and two years) and recomputed these analyses (supplemental Table 4). Among this subset of participants (*n* = 124), the overall change pattern across unions replicated in this analysis (deterioration within P1 and P2 and improvement across P1 to P2). The change score estimates from P1T1 to P2T2 revealed no significant change across partnerships for six constructs (sexual frequency and admiration exhibited no change in these models). The only difference across partnerships in this subsample was that sexual satisfaction was lower one year into the second union (ΔP1T1-P2T2 = -.62 corresponding to .26 standard deviations). These results provide additional support among this subset of participants who tended to be younger (69% were in the adolescent age cohort) and in less committed first partnerships (1% were married) compared to the full sample (51% in the adolescent cohort and 15% married) for eventual stability across unions.

**Final Change Score Models with Predictors**

We next added predictors to the latent change score models and computed our final analyses. Given the large number of predictors under consideration (ten in total), we removed variables from a model if they exhibited no significant association with any model parameters to produce the most parsimonious set of results. Full estimates are shown in Table 3.

Overall, these variables were more consistent predictors of initial between-person differences than within-person changes across partnerships. Two variables emerged as consistent predictors of within-person change across partnerships: neuroticism and relationship length. For four out of seven constructs neuroticism foretold a more rapid rate of deterioration in the first partnership (see ΔP1 results in Table 3) and an overall worsening across the first and second partnerships (see Model B results), but higher neuroticism actually predicted a more rapid decrease in perceptions of instability across unions. Interestingly, neuroticism was not associated with change as participants moved from one partnership into the next or across partnership 2 for any construct. Neuroticism also predicted worse initial adjustment (P1T1) on all constructs except self-disclosure. Being in a longer first partnership predicted worse initial adjustment in sexual satisfaction, perceptions of instability, and conflict frequency, but more pronounced within-person improvements in these constructs as participants moved from one partnership to the next. In three models, participant sex also accounted for within-person variation in construct trajectories: being female predicted a more rapid decrease in sexual satisfaction in partnership 1, a steeper increase in self-disclosure across partnership 1 and 2, and a more rapid deterioration in partner expressions of admiration in the second partnership.

Age and relationship status were consistently associated with between-person differences. Older participants reported worse initial adjustment on six of the seven constructs. When age emerged as a significant covariate of a change score, being older was associated with a more rapid worsening of the construct. Being in a marital or cohabiting first partnership was associated with worse initial adjustment on five constructs compared to those dating or living apart together in the first union, with a few exceptions. Being married was associated with fewer initial perceptions of instability, but an overall intraindividual increase in perceived instability and admiration across partnerships. Findings for the remaining predictors were less consistent. Higher levels of agreeableness were associated with higher initial sexual satisfaction and self-disclosure and a more gradual increase in conflict across the first partnership. Conscientiousness predicted a more gradual increase in perceptions of instability as the first partnership was drawing to a close. Having more prior partnerships predicted more frequent sex at P1T1.

**Discussion**

Guided by a conceptualization of intimate relationship development across partnerships drawing from stability- (e.g., attachment theory) and change-focused (e.g., social learning and contextual models) perspectives, this study sought to understand whether a new relationship differs from the one that preceded it. Based on longitudinal analysis of seven constructs, the answer to that question seems to be “mostly no.” One year into a new partnership (P2T2) our sample was no different from one year prior to the breakup of their previous union (P1T1) on relationship and sexual satisfaction, perceptions of relational instability, and the frequency of conflictual and intimate exchanges. While sexual frequency and perceived admiration did improve across unions in the full sample, there was no change for either in our follow-up analysis with the subgroup of participants where relationship duration at P1T1 corresponded to P2T2. Given stability in the majority of constructs examined in this study, why does it seem as though a new partnership is different from those in the past?

Sandwiched between these points of stability are periods of change and upheaval: one partnership deteriorates and draws to a close and the bliss of new love is discovered before disillusionment pulls individuals back to old patterns. The deterioration prior to termination may be especially salient in perpetuating the belief that new unions are different. The oft-replicated peak-end rule has established that the end of an experience carries an outsized influence on the memory of an event (Kahneman, Fredrickson, Schreiber, & Redelmeier, 1993). The uncharacteristically negative ending in a dissolving partnership may cast a long shadow over the memory of that union. Indeed, memories of intimate unions are distorted to fit individuals preferred narratives about the relationship (Karney & Frye, 2002); when one’s most salient memory is the prevailing negativity of a partnership in its final days, it is likely the narrative about the dissolved union will be crafted to emphasize the weaknesses of the relationship. Such a strategy may be adaptive in propelling individuals to form new unions that may prove more enduring, but this distorted memory, in conjunction with one’s enduring attachment orientation, may contribute to the recreation of similar patterns in the next relationship.

But some things may change in a new partnership. Sexual frequency and expressions of admiration from one’s partner increased across partnerships, but they exhibited no change in follow-up analyses that restricted the sample only to those where relationship length at P1T1 corresponded to P2T2. These findings must be treated with caution and need replication in future research. Why might sexual frequency and admiration improve? These constructs necessarily depend on the behavior of the partner, whereas most variables that did not change were intrapersonal evaluations (e.g., relationship and sexual satisfaction, perceived instability) or assessed the participants’ own behavior (self-disclosures). These differences imply that aspects of a partnership most likely to change across unions are the interpersonal dynamics that are directly shaped by the behavior of one’s partner, consistent with social learning and contextual theory. This was not always the case, as frequency of conflict was also consistent across partnerships. It is also quite interesting that even though sexual interactions were more frequent and the new partner expressed more appreciation, participants were no more satisfied with their relationship or sex life compared to the first union (and potentially even less sexually satisfied in the second union, based on the follow-up analysis). The words of Robins and colleagues seem apt: “it not only matters who people are with, but who they are” (2002, p. 960). Although some dynamics may improve in a new relationship, perceptions of the partnership do not.

A key direction for future research will be to explore the mechanisms responsible for setting such stability in motion. One’s enduring attachment orientation certainly represents one possibility, but recent research suggests people form unions with partners who are similar to previous partners on observable characteristics, such as attractiveness, and factors driven by demographic stratification, such as education and intelligence (Eastwick, Harden, Shukusky, Morgan, & Joel, 2017). Perhaps the interplay of one’s stable relational disposition in conjunction with the selection of partners who are similar to those from the past may be responsible for the recreation of relationship dynamics across partnerships.

Do these findings imply there is no hope for change in a new partnership? Certainly not. Underlying the average pattern was considerable diversity in trajectories across partnerships. Even the autocorrelations reported in the measures section hinted at this diversity, where correlations in constructs across partnerships tended to be small in magnitude. Our investigation shed light into some factors that predict who is likely to experience the most marked changes in a new union, although the predictors were more consistently associated with between-person differences than within-person changes. Across our analyses, neuroticism and, to a lesser extent, relationship length emerged as consistent predictors of change across partnerships.

As expected, neuroticism was by far the strongest predictor of detrimental relationship functioning, while conscientiousness and agreeableness were less consistently linked with better outcomes. Not only were higher levels of neuroticism associated with lower initial levels of relationship functioning, higher neuroticism generally predicted unfavorable declines in these characteristics within the first and across both partnerships. Associations with perceived instability were an exception, which, surprisingly, decreased across partnerships. This counter-intuitive finding might be because neuroticism initially heightened perceived instability so much in the first relationship that there was farther to fall in the subsequent one. Nevertheless, the overarching pattern replicates what has been widely reported before: those high in neuroticism tend to select themselves into rather unsatisfying and unstable relationships filled with conflict and frustration (e.g., Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Karney, & Bradbury, 1997).

A certainly novel insight into the sustainable impact of neuroticism comes from the observation that this trait was not associated with change as participants moved from one partnership into the next or across the second partnership. This might imply that neuroticism rears its head when things start to sour in the first partnership without affecting the transition to the next one; rather, it is the general negative patterns of perceiving, construing, and feeling about social reality that are characteristic of neuroticism that predicts how relationships work in the long run. This may also point toward a sensitive window of time during the start of a new relationship where positive changes are possible. For example, it was shown recently that positive changes in biased relationship cognitions after the onset of a new relationship can set in motion decreases of neuroticism and its detrimental effects (Finn, Mitte, & Neyer, 2015).

Relationship length was also an important predictor of changes across unions. Those who ended a longer-term first partnership had worse initial adjustment on sexual satisfaction, perceptions of instability, and conflict in the first partnership, but pronounced improvements in these dimensions across the second union. Insofar as those in longer duration first partnerships were more likely to have been older (which also predicted worse initial adjustment) and in more committed (marital or cohabiting) first unions compared to the participants in shorter-term relationships, ending their partnership would have been more difficult (Stanley et al., 2010). As such, a significant reduction in relational and individual functioning may have been necessary to prompt a breakup that would be very complicated. Perhaps the increased difficulty of ending these more committed unions paved the way for improvements in the next partnership.

**Limitations**

Our findings must be considered in light of some limitations. Constructs were measured through self-reports of shortened scales or single items. Pairfam is a large-scale longitudinal study that gathers data in a wide variety of domains. As such, shortened scales are a necessity to minimize participant fatigue and limit attrition, but abbreviated measures necessarily have a restricted range of possible responses compared to full length measures and, thus, may not fully detect changes that may have occurred. Future research could provide additional insight into consistency and change across partnerships through the use of observational methods in addition to full length self-report measures. Additionally, this study explored potential changes in seven relational constructs, but there are certainly additional variables that may exhibit more pronounced growth across partnerships, such as commitment or sacrifice. Unfortunately, we did not have access to these and other interesting variables, such as attachment style, in the current investigation. Although having access to data from four annual assessments spanning two relationships is a crucial strength of this research, we are unable to fully understand development across partnerships with data at only two time points in each union. In fact, we were only able to plot linear trajectories within and across each partnership. Four or more observations within each partnership are necessary to capture curvilinear patterns of development that likely characterize periods of stability and change across partnerships. Future longitudinal studies of couple development with more frequent assessments across multiple unions would certainly be valuable.

**Conclusion**

This study sought to answer a simple question: do subsequent partnerships differ from one another? We found impressive support for eventual stability across partnerships. On most constructs studied, a future partnership was eventually no different from the one it preceded, but much change unfolded during the interim. A partnership deteriorates as a breakup approaches. New love starts with boundless potential before reality draws us back down to earth. And we may eventually end up not so far from where we once were. This does not necessarily mean we are doomed to repeat the same patterns of prior unions; changes did occur for some people, but despite the presence of a new partner, change is not inevitable. But continuity may actually be positive. A given partnership may not be viable for the long-term and, in some cases, ending the union is the best outcome. People bring their personal identity, stable orientation toward relationships, and prior experiences into new unions, for better and worse, so recreating familiar patterns is to be expected. Future research might seek to uncover the optimal threshold between stability and change across partnerships that is most adaptive for achieving lasting love.

References

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Booth, A., Johnson, D. R., & Edwards, J. N. (1983). Measuring marital instability. *Journal of   
 Marriage and the Family, 45*, 387-394. doi: 10.2307/351516

Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 2, separation.* New York: Basic Books.

Brüderl, J., Hank, K., Huinink, J., Nauck, B., Neyer, F. J., Walper, S., . . . Wilhelm, B. (2017).

*The German Family Panel (pairfam)* (ZA5678 data file version 8.0.0). Cologne,

Germany: GESIS Data Archive. doi: 10.4232/pairfam.5678.8.0.0

Bulanda, J. R., & Brown, S. L. (2007). Race-ethnic differences in marital quality and divorce.

*Social Science Research, 36,* 945-967. doi: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2006.04.001

Cherlin, A. J. (2009). *The marriage-go-round: The state of marriage and the family in America*

*today.* New York: Vintage Books.

Duck, S. W. (1982). A topography of relationship disengagement and dissolution. In S. W. Duck

(Ed.), *Personal relationship: Vol. 4 dissolving personal relationships* (pp. 1-30). London,

UK: Academic Press.

Dyrenforth, P.S., Kashy, D.A., Donnellan, M B., & Lucas, R E. (2010). Predicting relationship and life satisfaction from personality in nationally representative samples from three countries: The relative importance of actor, partner, and similarity effects. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 99, 690–702. doi: 10.1037/a0020385

Eastwick, P. W., Harden, K. P., Shukusky, J. A., Morgan, T. A., & Joel, S. (2017). Consistency and inconsistency among romantic partners over time. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 112,* 838-859. doi: 10.1037/pspi0000087

Enders, C. K. (2010). *Applied missing data analysis*. New York: Guilford Press.

Finn, C., Mitte, K. & Neyer, F. J. (2015). Recent decreases in specific interpretation biases

predict decreases in neuroticism: Evidence from a longitudinal study with young adult

couples, Journal of Personality, 83, 274-286. doi: [10.1111/jopy.12102](http://www.dx.doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12102)

Fraley, R. C., & Shaver, P. R. (2000). Adult romantic attachment: Theoretical developments,

emerging controversies, and unanswered questions. *Review of General Psychology, 4,*

132-154. doi: 10.1037/1089-2680.4.2.132

Furman, W., & Buhrmester, D. (1985). Children's perceptions of the personal relationships in   
their social networks. *Developmental Psychology, 21*, 1016-1024. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.21.6.1016

Furman, W., & Collibee, C. (2018). The past is present: Representations of parents, friends, and romantic partners predict subsequent romantic representations. *Child Development, 89,* 188-204. doi: 10.1111/cdev.12712

Hendrick, S. S., Dicke, A., & Hendrick, C. (1998). The relationship assessment scale. *Journal of   
 Social and Personal Relationships, 15,* 137-142. doi:10.1177/0265407598151009

Huinink, J., Brüderl, J., Nauck, B., Walper, S., Castiglioni, L., & Feldhaus, M. (2011). Panel

Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics (pairfam): Conceptual

framework and design. *Journal of Family Research, 23,* 77-101.

Huston, T. L., Caughlin, J. P., Houts, R. M., Smith, S. E., & George, L. J. (2001). The connubial

crucible: Newlywed years as predictors of marital delight, distress, and divorce. *Journal*

*of Personality and Social Psychology, 80,* 237-252. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.80.2.237

James, S. L. (2015). Variation in marital quality in a national sample of divorced women.

*Journal of Family Psychology, 29,* 479-489. doi: 10.1037/fam0000082

Johnson, M. D., Horne, R. M., Hardy, N. R., & Anderson, J. R. (2018). Temporality of couple

conflict and relationship perceptions. *Journal of Family Psychology, 32,* 445-455. doi:

10.1037/fam0000398

Kahneman, D., Fredrickson, B. L., Schreiber, C. A., & Redelmeier, D. A. (1993). When more

pain is preferred to less: Adding a better end. *Psychological Science, 6,* 401-405. doi:

10.1111/j.1467-9280.1993.tb00589.x

Karney, B.R., & Bradbury, T.N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability:

A review of theory, method, and research. *Psychological Bulletin, 118,* 3-34. doi:

10.1037/0033-2909.118.1.3

Karney, B.R., & Bradbury, T.N. (1997). Neuroticism, marital interaction, and the trajectory of marital satisfaction. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *72*, 1075–1092.

Karney, B. R., & Frye, N. E. (2002). “But we’ve been getting better lately”: Comparing prospective and retrospective views of relationship development. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82,* 222-238. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.82.2.222

Knopp, K., Scott, S., Ritchie, L., Rhoades, G. K., Markman, H. J., & Stanley, S. M. (2017). Once

a cheater, always a cheater? Serial infidelity across subsequent relationships. *Archives of*

*Sexual Behavior, 46,* 2301-2311. doi: 10.1007/s10508-017-1018-1

Lavner, J. A., & Bradbury, T. N. (2010). Patterns of change in marital satisfaction over the

newlywed years. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 72,* 1171-1187. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-

3737.2010.00757.x

Lerner, R. M., Agans, J. P., DeSouza, L. M., & Gasca, S. (2013). Describing, explaining, and   
 optimizing within-individual change across the life span: A relational developmental   
 systems perspective. *Review of General Psychology*, *17*, 179-183. doi:10.1037/a0032931

Lucas, R. E. (2007). Adaptation and the set-point model of subjective well-being: Does

happiness change after major life events? *Current Directions in Psychological Science,*

*16,* 75-79. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8721.2007.00479.x

McArdle, J. J. (2009). Latent variable modeling of differences and changes with longitudinal data. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *60*,577-605. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163612

Muthén, L. K., & Muthén, B. O. (1998–2017). *Mplus user's guide* (8th ed.). Los Angeles: Muthén & Muthén.

Proulx, C. M., Ermer, A. E., Kanter, J. B. (2017). Group-based trajectory modeling of marital

quality: A critical review. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 9,* 307-327. doi:

10.1111/jftr.12201

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2016). OECD family database:

Marriage and divorce rate. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm

Rammstedt, B., & John, O. P. (2005). Short version of the Big Five inventory (BFI-K):

Development and validation of an economic inventory for assessment of the five factors

of personality. *Diagnostica, 51,* 195-206. doi: 10.1026/0012-1924.51.4.195

Robins, R. W., Caspi, A., & Moffitt, T. E. (2002). It’s not just who you’re with, it’s who you are:

Personality and relationship experiences across multiple relationships. *Journal of*

*Personality, 70,* 925-964. doi: 10.1111/1467-6494.05028

Roisman, G. I., Collins, W. A., Sroufe, L. A., & Egeland, B. (2005). Predictors of young adults’

representations of and behavior in their current romantic relationship: Prospective tests of the prototype hypothesis. *Attachment & Human Development, 7,* 105-121. doi:

10.1080/14616730500134928

Sassler, S. (2010). Partnering across the life course: Sex, Relationships, and Mate Selection.

*Journal of Marriage and Family, 72,* 557-575. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00718.x

Seiffge-Krenke, I., & Shulman, S. (2012). Transformations in heterosexual romantic

relationships across the transition into adolescence. In B. Laursen & W. A. Collins (Eds.),

*Relationship pathways: From adolescence to young adulthood* (pp. 157-189).Thousand

Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Simpson, J. A., Collins, W. A., Tran, S., & Haydon, K. C. (2007). Attachment and the

experience and expression of emotions in romantic relationships: A developmental

perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92,* 355-367. doi:

10.1037/0022-3514.92.2.355

Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Whitton, S. W. (2010). Commitment: Functions, formation,

and the securing of romantic attachment. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 2,* 243-

257. doi: 10.1111/j.1756-2589.2010.00060.x

Stets, J. E. (1993). The link between past and present intimate relationships. *Journal of Family*

*Issues, 14,* 236-260. doi: 10.1177/019251393014002005

Sweeney, M. M. (2010). Remarriage and stepfamilies: Strategic sites for family scholarship in

the 21st century. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 72,* 667-684. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-

3737.2010.00724.x

Teachman, J. (2003). Premarital sex, premarital cohabitation, and the risk of subsequent marital

dissolution among women. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 65,* 444-455. doi:

10.1111/j.1741-3737.2003.00444.x

Whitton, S. W., Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J., & Johnson, C. A. (2013). Attitudes toward

divorce, commitment, and divorce proneness in first marriages and remarriages. *Journal*

*of Marriage and Family, 75,* 276-287. doi: 10.1111/jomf.12008

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (n = 554)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Variable* | Range | P1T1 | P1TLast | P2T1 | P2T2 |
| Relationship Satisfaction | 0 – 10 |  |  |  |  |
| *Mean (SD)* |  | 7.99 (2.00) | 6.90 (2.36) | 8.24 (2.11) | 7.82 (2.09) |
| *% Missing* |  | .9 | 3.4 | 1.3 | .2 |
| Sexual Satisfaction | 0 – 10 |  |  |  |  |
| *Mean (SD)* |  | 7.21 (2.49) | 6.35 (2.68) | 7.93 (2.34) | 7.27 (2.35) |
| *% Missing* |  | 6.0 | 6.0 | 2.9 | 3.2 |
| Sexual Frequency | 1 – 7 |  |  |  |  |
| *Mean (SD)* |  | 4.10 (1.57) | 3.76 (1.48) | 5.03 (1.35) | 4.53 (1.32) |
| *% Missing* |  | 41.5 | 11.0 | 5.8 | 6.0 |
| Perceived Instability | 0 – 3 |  |  |  |  |
| *Mean (SD)* |  | .84 (1.15) | 1.47 (1.28) | .46 (.87) | .72 (1.10) |
| *% Missing* |  | 25.5 | 14.3 | 1.8 | .5 |
| Conflict | 1 – 5 |  |  |  |  |
| *Mean (SD)* |  | 2.60 (.81) | 2.88 (.80) | 2.20 (.82) | 2.50 (.74) |
| *% Missing* |  | .4 | 2.0 | 1.1 | .2 |
| Self-Disclosure | 1 – 5 |  |  |  |  |
| *Mean (SD)* |  | 4.06 (.83) | 3.93 (.82) | 4.23 (.68) | 4.18 (.74) |
| *% Missing* |  | .2 | 1.8 | .7 | 0.0 |
| Admiration | 1 – 5 |  |  |  |  |
| *Mean (SD)* |  | 3.80 (.83) | 3.64 (.87) | 4.13 (.73) | 3.94 (.79) |
| *% Missing* |  | .2 | 2.2 | .9 | .2 |

*Note:* P1T1 = Partnership 1, Time 1; P1TLast = Partnership 1, Time Last; P2T1 = Partnership 2, Time 2; P2T2 = Partnership 2, Time 2.

Table 2

*Unstandardized Latent Change Score Model Results for Relational Characteristics Across Partnerships (n = 554)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Model A | | | |  | Model B |
| *Variable* | Range | Level P1T1 | ΔP1 | ΔP1TLast-P2T1 | ΔP2 |  | ΔP1T1-P2T2 |
| Relationship Satisfaction | 0 – 10 | 7.99 | -1.06\* | 1.32\* | -.45\* |  | -.17 |
| Sexual Satisfaction | 0 – 10 | 7.22 | -.92\* | 1.65\* | -.67\* |  | .09 |
| Sexual Frequency | 1 – 7 | 4.08 | -.34\* | 1.30\* | -.52\* |  | .41\* |
| Perceived Instability | 0 – 3 | .85 | .62\* | -1.01\* | .27\* |  | -.12 |
| Conflict | 1 – 5 | 2.62 | .26\* | -.65\* | .31\* |  | -.08 |
| Self-Disclosure | 1 – 5 | 3.96 | -.24\* | .38\* | -.08\* |  | .07 |
| Admiration | 1 – 5 | 3.89 | -.22\* | .53\* | -.22\* |  | .09\* |

*Note:* Δ = Change; P1 = Partnership 1; P2 = Partnership 2; TLast = Time Last; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2. These univariate latent change score models are saturated, so no model fit indices are provided. Significance testing on the latent change score variables corresponds to whether the latent mean differs from zero. Models A and B are depicted in Figure 1.

\* *p* < .05 (two-tailed).

Table 3

*Standardized Latent Change Score Modeling Results for Covariates Predicting Trajectories Across Partnerships (n = 554)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Model A | | | |  | Model B |
| *Variable* | Level P1T1 | ΔP1 | ΔP1TLast-P2T1 | ΔP2 |  | ΔP1T1-P2T2 |
| **Relationship Satisfaction** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Age | -.35\* | -.18\* | .02 | -.03 |  | -.07\* |
| Neuroticism | -.19\* | -.16\* | .05 | -.04 |  | -.04 |
| **Sexual Satisfaction** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Female | -.01 | -.11\* | -.06 | .03 |  | -.03 |
| Age | -.21\* | -.19\* | -.11\* | .05 |  | -.14\* |
| P1 Relationship Length | -.14\* | .06 | .04 | .12 |  | .19\* |
| P1 Marital Uniona | -.11 | -.13\* | -.01 | .06 |  | -.02 |
| P1 Cohabiting Uniona | -.11\* | -.06 | .00 | .03 |  | .03 |
| Agreeableness | .10\* | .05 | .03 | .04 |  | .03 |
| Neuroticism | -.09\* | -.08 | -.04 | -.07 |  | -.10\* |
| **Sexual Frequency** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Age | -.19\* | -.14\* | -.02 | -.02 |  | -.05 |
| # Prior Partnerships | .17\* | -.06 | -.03 | -.02 |  | -.04 |
| P1 Marital Uniona | -.16\* | -.05 | .00 | .03 |  | .02 |
| P1 Cohabiting Uniona | -.12\* | .03 | .08\* | -.10 |  | -.01 |
| Neuroticism | -.13\* | -.05 | -.05 | -.05 |  | -.08\* |
| **Perceived Instability** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Age | .15\* | .05 | -.03 | .03 |  | -.11 |
| P1 Relationship Length | .17\* | -.08 | -.04 | .00 |  | -.18\* |
| P1 Marital Unionb | -.18\* | .07 | .03 | -.06 |  | .13\* |
| Conscientiousness | -.02 | -.09\* | -.01 | -.03 |  | -.05 |
| Neuroticism | .24\* | .06 | .03 | -.03 |  | -.13\* |
| **Conflict** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| P1 Relationship Length | .21\* | -.03 | -.06 | -.06 |  | -.07\* |
| Agreeableness | -.03 | -.09\* | .02 | -.07\* |  | -.04 |
| Neuroticism | .19\* | .16\* | .02 | .09\* |  | .09\* |
| **Self-Disclosure** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Female | .05 | .06 | .04 | .04 |  | .11\* |
| Age | -.13\* | -.20\* | .08 | -.06 |  | -.05 |
| P1 Marital Uniona | -.15\* | -.05 | .02 | .02 |  | .02 |
| P1 Cohabiting Uniona | -.14\* | .02 | -.02 | .02 |  | .00 |
| Agreeableness | .09\* | .03 | .01 | -.06 |  | -.02 |
| Neuroticism | -.07 | -.12\* | .03 | .07 |  | .03 |
| **Admiration** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Female | .01 | -.04 | .04 | -.14\* |  | -.07 |
| Age | -.19\* | -.12\* | .04 | -.03 |  | -.03 |
| P1 Marital Uniona | -.20\* | -.06 | .06 | .09 |  | .12\* |
| P1 Cohabiting Uniona | -.13\* | -.05 | .04 | .03 |  | .06 |
| Neuroticism | -.14\* | -.11\* | .04 | .03 |  | .01 |

*Note:* Standardized β estimates. Δ = Change; P1 = Partnership 1; P2 = Partnership 2; TLast = Time Last; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; aReference category is dating couples; bReference categories are dating and cohabiting couples. The models are saturated, so no model fit indices are generated. Models A and B are depicted in Figure 1. \* *p* < .05 (two-tailed).

Figure 1

*Latent Change Score Models of Change in Relational and Individual Constructs Across Partnerships*

ΔP1

**Partnership 1**

**Time 1**

**Partnership 1**

**Time Last**

**Partnership 2**

**Time 1**

**Partnership 2**

**Time 2**

ΔP1TLast-P2T1

ΔP2

Construct

Construct

Construct

Construct

1

1

1

1

1

1

ΔP1T1-P2T2

Construct

Construct

1

1

**A**

**B**

*Note:* Δ = Change; P1 = Partnership 1; P2 = Partnership 2; TLast = Time Last; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2. Mean relationship duration at P1T1 was 3.15 years (*SD* = 3.97 years) and time lag between time points within each partnership was one year. Mean time between P1TLast and P2T1 was 1.98 years (*SD* = 1.00 years).

Supplementary Table 1

*Correlations Among Focal Study Variables at Each Wave of Measurement (n = 554)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Relationship 1, Time 1 | | | | | | |  | Relationship 1, Time Last | | | | | | |
| *Variable* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1. Relationship Satisfaction | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Sexual Satisfaction | .47\* | - |  |  |  |  |  |  | .58\* | - |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3. Sexual Frequency | .31\* | .61\* | - |  |  |  |  |  | .39\* | .61\* | - |  |  |  |  |
| 4. Perceived Instability | -.43\* | -.29\* | -.27\* | - |  |  |  |  | -.53\* | -.35\* | -.22\* | - |  |  |  |
| 5. Conflict | -.42\* | -.19\* | -.09 | .39\* | - |  |  |  | -.50\* | -.28\* | -.06 | .47\* | - |  |  |
| 6. Self-Disclosure | .45\* | .36\* | .25\* | -.20\* | -.18\* | - |  |  | .56\* | .44\* | .32\* | -.31\* | -.36\* | - |  |
| 7. Admiration | .56\* | .46\* | .32\* | -.29\* | -.37\* | .49\* | - |  | .53\* | .43\* | .33\* | -.31\* | -.35\* | .52\* | - |

Supplementary Table 1

*Continued*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Relationship 2, Time 1 | | | | | | |  | Relationship 2, Time 2 | | | | | | |
| *Variable* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1. Relationship Satisfaction | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Sexual Satisfaction | .44\* | - |  |  |  |  |  |  | .54\* | - |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3. Sexual Frequency | .12\* | .40\* | - |  |  |  |  |  | .17\* | .47\* | - |  |  |  |  |
| 4. Perceived Instability | -.32\* | -.08 | -.03 | - |  |  |  |  | -.41\* | -.23\* | -.11\* | - |  |  |  |
| 5. Conflict | -.25\* | -.10\* | -.08 | .39\* | - |  |  |  | -.41\* | -.24\* | -.13 | .42\* | - |  |  |
| 6. Self-Disclosure | .32\* | .14\* | .14\* | -.24\* | -.22\* | - |  |  | .44\* | .22\* | .10\* | -.28\* | -.27\* | - |  |
| 7. Admiration | .30\* | .16\* | .12\* | -.29\* | -.38\* | .50\* | - |  | .43\* | .25\* | .16\* | -.30\* | -.43\* | .46\* | - |

\**p* < .05 (two-tailed).

Supplementary Table 2

*Correlations Among Focal Study Variables Across Each Wave of Measurement (n = 554)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Variable* | *Time* | P1T1 | P1TLast | P2T1 | P2T2 |
| Relationship Satisfaction | P1T1 | - |  |  |  |
|  | P1TLast | .42\* | - |  |  |
|  | P2T1 | .17\* | .15\* | - |  |
|  | P2T2 | .20\* | .15\* | .45\* | - |
| Sexual Satisfaction | P1T1 | - |  |  |  |
|  | P1TLast | .53\* | - |  |  |
|  | P2T1 | .06 | .10\* | - |  |
|  | P2T2 | .17\* | .21\* | .39\* | - |
| Sexual Frequency | P1T1 | - |  |  |  |
|  | P1TLast | .60\* | - |  |  |
|  | P2T1 | .12\* | .24\* | - |  |
|  | P2T2 | .15\* | .22\* | .46\* | - |
| Perceived Instability | P1T1 | - |  |  |  |
|  | P1TLast | .36\* | - |  |  |
|  | P2T1 | .16\* | .16\* | - |  |
|  | P2T2 | .13\* | .10\* | .42\* | - |
| Conflict | P1T1 | - |  |  |  |
|  | P1TLast | .50\* | - |  |  |
|  | P2T1 | .07 | .05 | - |  |
|  | P2T2 | .04 | .16\* | .53\* | - |

Supplementary Table 2

*Continued*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Variable* | *Time* | P1T1 | P1TLast | P2T1 | P2T2 |
| Self-Disclosure | P1T1 | - |  |  |  |
|  | P1TLast | .51\* | - |  |  |
|  | P2T1 | .28\* | .27\* | - |  |
|  | P2T2 | .31\* | .26\* | .53\* | - |
| Admiration | P1T1 | - |  |  |  |
|  | P1TLast | .45\* | - |  |  |
|  | P2T1 | .21\* | .10\* | - |  |
|  | P2T2 | .25\* | .18\* | .53\* | - |

*Note:* P1 = Partnership 1; P2 = Partnership 2; TLast = Time Last; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2.

\**p* < .05 (two-tailed).

Supplementary Table 3

*Unstandardized Latent Change Score Model Results for Relational Characteristics Across Partnerships Controlling for Relationship Duration of the First Partnership (n = 554)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Model A | | | |  | Model B |
| *Variable* | Range | Level P1T1 | ΔP1 | ΔP1TLast-P2T1 | ΔP2 |  | ΔP1T1-P2T2 |
| Relationship Satisfaction | 0 – 10 | 7.98 | -1.07\* | 1.35\* | -.44\* |  | -.17 |
| Sexual Satisfaction | 0 – 10 | 7.23 | -.92\* | 1.61\* | -.65\* |  | .06 |
| Sexual Frequency | 1 – 7 | 4.08 | -.34\* | 1.30\* | -.52 |  | .41\* |
| Perceived Instability | 0 – 3 | .82 | .64\* | -1.00\* | .27\* |  | -.09 |
| Conflict | 1 – 5 | 2.62 | .26\* | -.65\* | .32\* |  | -.12 |
| Self-Disclosure | 1 – 5 | 3.96 | -.24\* | .38\* | -.08\* |  | .07 |
| Admiration | 1 – 5 | 4.20 | -.21\* | .53\* | -.22\* |  | .09\* |

*Note:* Δ = Change; P1 = Partnership 1; P2 = Partnership 2; TLast = Time Last; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2. These univariate latent change score models are saturated, so no model fit indices are provided. Significance testing on the latent change score variables corresponds to whether the latent mean differs from zero. Models A and B are depicted in Figure 1.

\* *p* < .05 (two-tailed).

Supplementary Table 4

*Unstandardized Latent Change Score Model Results for Relational Characteristics Across Partnerships Among a Subset of Participants in which the Relationship Duration at P1T1 Corresponds to P2T2 (n = 124)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Model A | | | |  | Model B |
| *Variable* | Range | Level P1T1 | ΔP1 | ΔP1TLast-P2T1 | ΔP2 |  | ΔP1T1-P2T2 |
| Relationship Satisfaction | 0 – 10 | 8.16 | -1.01\* | 1.12\* | -.37\* |  | -.20 |
| Sexual Satisfaction | 0 – 10 | 7.96 | -1.02\* | 1.30\* | -.89\* |  | -.62\* |
| Sexual Frequency | 1 – 7 | 4.75 | -.50\* | .84\* | -.46\* |  | -.16 |
| Perceived Instability | 0 – 3 | 1.02 | .48\* | -.99\* | .30\* |  | -.15 |
| Conflict | 1 – 5 | 2.64 | .19\* | -.51\* | .20\* |  | -.12 |
| Self-Disclosure | 1 – 5 | 4.10 | -.24\* | .28\* | -.15\* |  | -.11 |
| Admiration | 1 – 5 | 4.07 | -.31\* | .44\* | -.25\* |  | -.11 |

*Note:* Δ = Change; P1 = Partnership 1; P2 = Partnership 2; TLast = Time Last; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2. These univariate latent change score models are saturated, so no model fit indices are provided. Significance testing on the latent change score variables corresponds to whether the latent mean differs from zero. Models A and B are depicted in Figure 1.

\* *p* < .05 (two-tailed).