Differences between partners from Black and White heterosexual dating couples in a path model of relationship commitment

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ABSTRACT
Both partners from Black and White dating heterosexual couples (Ns = 111 and 535, respectively) were compared on mean levels of eight variables from a model of relationship commitment as well as on the strength of the links posited by the model. Although mean differences by race were found for seven of the variables, all effects were small in size. Direct, indirect, and cross-partner links were generally stronger for females than for males for the total sample but did not differ by race for either males or females. Findings support the view that despite slight racial differences in mean levels of relationship-oriented variables, the variables linked to relationship functioning are similar for Black and White partners from dating couples.

KEY WORDS: commitment • dating couples • race

Census data indicate that Black and White individuals experience marriage differently. Relative to White persons, fewer Black persons are married by age 20–24, fewer Black persons are ever married, and more Black persons are divorced (Kreider & Fields, 2002). National data also indicate that Black individuals are less likely than White individuals to feel that their

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marriages are harmonious (Adelmann, Chadwick, & Baerger, 1996; Broman, 1993). These findings are of note because they suggest that Black individuals may not fully enjoy the social, economic, physical, and psychological benefits associated with marriage (Waite, 1995).

The most frequently mentioned reason for the racial differences in marriage just described is the lack of available mates for Black females due to relatively high rates of incarceration, mortality, and inadequate economic opportunities for Black men (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). A less frequently studied reason is that Black and White individuals vary with regard to the values and norms regarding the importance of marriage because they are socialized in different social, cultural, and historical contexts that influence how marriage and family life are viewed (Allen, 1978; Orbuch & Brown, 2006). This developmental perspective leads one to expect premarital differences between Black and White youth on issues related to marriage. Indeed, Black adolescents and young adults expect to marry at a later age than White adolescents and young adults do (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1987; Trent, 1994), and Black adolescents are less likely than White adolescents to be in a serious romantic relationship (Crissey, 2005).

The present study extends work on racial differences in premarital functioning on two fronts. First, unlike previous studies, this study involved data from both members of heterosexual Black and White dating couples, enabling an examination of differences between male and female partners from an intra-couple perspective. Second, the variables of interest were derived from a model of relationship commitment based on previous work by Huston (2000), Karney and Bradbury (1995), and Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998). Although the variables in this model have been studied separately, the model is novel in its attempt to integrate the plausible joint influences of these variables.

As shown in Figure 1, there are eight variables in the model that represent five components. The end-point component references relationship commitment, the intention to persist in the relationship. The other four components represent links to commitment that can be ordered along a distal-proximal continuum. The most distal link to commitment is represented by the psychological predispositions component which includes personality traits that exist before the relationship started and affect how partners behave in any relationship (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The two particular traits of interest were Neuroticism – the tendency to experience psychological distress – and Agreeableness, the inclination toward interpersonal trust. Of the traits within the Big Five model of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992), high levels of Neuroticism tend to be linked to low levels of commitment, and high levels of Agreeableness tend to be linked to high levels of commitment (Kurdek, 1997; Miller, Caughlin, & Huston, 2003).

The second and more proximal link to commitment is represented by the support for the relationship component which underscores the view that intimate relationships coexist with and are affected by other personal relationships, particularly those involving family members and friends (Huston, 2000; Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). Although level of support
for a specific relationship is to some extent dependent on particular aspects of that relationship, it is also affected by the personal history that relationship partners have with their support providers before the relationship began (Sarason, Sarason, & Shearin, 1986). High levels of perceived support for one’s relationship by members of one’s social support network have been linked to strong commitment to that relationship (Cox, Wexler, Rusbult, & Gaines, 1997; Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004).

The third and even more proximal link to commitment is represented by the ineffective arguing component. Unlike the previous two components which represent some influences that precede the relationship, this component addresses only interactions between partners in the specific relationship that reflect a dysfunctional way of resolving conflict. The expectation that a pattern of frequent ineffective arguing would be linked to low commitment is supported by evidence that the tendency to react destructively to a partner’s transgressions is linked to low commitment to the relationship (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991) and that increases in ineffective arguing predict relationship dissolution (Kurdek, 1994b).

The fourth and most proximal link to commitment is represented by the dependence on the relationship component. This component is the most proximal link to commitment in that it directly indexes the extent to which partners rely on the specific relationship to fulfill important needs. Three specific sources of dependence were drawn from Rusbult et al.’s (1998) investment model and included level of satisfaction with the relationship, the quality of alternatives to the relationship, and the size of invested resources associated with the relationship. Each of these sources of dependence has been found to account for unique variance in commitment (Le & Agnew, 2003).
The first purpose of this study was to explore mean differences between Black and White partners on the eight variables included in the model. There is surprisingly little previous research on racial differences in dating couples. Based on Crissey’s (2005) findings that Black adolescents are less likely than White adolescents to participate in serious romantic relationships, relative to White partners, Black partners were expected to report less dependence on the relationship (i.e., less satisfaction, more attractive alternatives to the relationship, and less investment) as well as less commitment. Because no previous relevant study seems to have included data from both partners from the same couple, no predictions were advanced on whether gender would moderate any differences between Black and White partners.

The second purpose of this study was to assess the plausibility of links between the adjacent variables depicted in Figure 1 and to see whether these links varied by race. Because this model has not previously been empirically tested, the first task was to assess the fit of the overall model for the entire sample. As shown in Figure 2, this model used the couple as the unit of analysis. Thus, there are eight variables for the male partner of the couple and eight variables for the female partner of the couple. As shown by the single-headed arrows, going from left to right, distal variables are assumed to influence only the next most proximal variable(s). As shown by the double-headed curved arrows at the left of the figure, consistent with evidence that Neuroticism and Agreeableness covary within persons (Costa & McCrae, 1992), the two personality traits were assumed to be reciprocally linked to each other within each partner. Consistent with evidence that partners are similar to each other on personality traits as a form of assortative mating (Luo & Klohnen, 2005), each trait was assumed to reciprocally linked between partners within the couple.

The directional links between adjacent ordered variables are shown in Figure 2 as letters a through i for male partners and as letters a’ through i’ for female partners. With controls for Agreeableness, high levels of Neuroticism were expected to be linked to low levels of perceived support for the relationship (links a and a’). In addition, with controls for Neuroticism, high levels of Agreeableness were expected to be linked to high levels of perceived support for the relationship (links b and b’). These predictions were based on evidence that Neuroticism is negatively linked to the adequacy of perceived social support and that Agreeableness is positively linked to the adequacy of perceived social support (Roos & Cohen, 1987), as well as findings that neurotic individuals act so as to decrease the likelihood of offered support, whereas agreeable individuals act so as to promote the likelihood of offered support (Sarason et al., 1986).

High levels of perceived support for the relationship, in turn, were expected to be linked to low levels of ineffective arguing experienced in the relationship (links c and c’). The rationale for this prediction comes from evidence that problems with family and friends are frequent areas of conflict and that ratings of the frequency of conflict in these areas are negatively linked to measures of satisfaction that include frequency of arguing (Kurdek, 1994a; Sanford, 2003; Storaasli & Markman, 1990).
Low levels of ineffective arguing, in turn, were expected to be linked to high dependence on the relationship (that is, high satisfaction [links d and d'], low quality of alternatives [links e and e'], and high investment [links f and f']). Support for these predictions comes from findings that low levels of ineffective arguing are linked to high satisfaction with the relationship (Kurdek, 1994b), and that infrequent destructive reactions to a partners’ transgressions are linked to high satisfaction, low attraction to alternatives to the relationship, and high investment in the relationship (Rusbult et al., 1991).

Finally, consistent with Rusbult et al.’s (1998) investment model, each of the three sources of dependence on the relationship were expected to account for unique variance in commitment. This is the best documented prediction from the model, given meta-analytic evidence that high satisfaction (links g and g’), low quality of alternatives (links h and h’), and high investment (links i and i’) are linked to high levels of commitment and that...
each source of dependence accounts for unique variance in commitment (Le & Agnew, 2003).

Although not shown in Figure 2 for purposes of simplicity, the model also included correlated errors both within partners and across partners for the six outcome scores to account for the nonindependent nature of these scores (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Further, although the links between adjacent variables were advanced with confidence, the fit of the overall model was likely to be improved by adding both effects involving nonadjacent variables (Miller et al., 2003) and cross-partner effects (Kurdek, 2005). Thus, both sets of effects were explored to see if adding them improved the fit of the overall model.

With regard to racial differences in the adjacent links of interest, Sandersson and Kurdek (1993) reported that the predictors of commitment which included personality traits, social support, conflict resolution styles, and dependence on the relationship did not differ for either Black and White male dating partners or Black and White female dating partners. This finding is consistent with a larger body of evidence that indicates no racial differences in the predictors of marital quality (McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000) and led to the expectation that the adjacent links in the model would be robust, that is, that they would not vary by race for either male partners or for and female partners.

Method

Participants
Participants were both partners from 111 Black dating heterosexual couples and 535 White dating heterosexual couples. At least one of the partners was a student in an Introductory Psychology course at a Midwestern University who received course credit for his or her own participation as well as for that of his or her partner. For Black couples, the mean age for male partners was 20.33 years and for female partners was 19.32 years; the modal level of education completed was some college courses for both male and female partners (52 and 67%, respectively); the modal level of annual personal income was less than $5000 for both male and female partners (66 and 78%, respectively); partners had been dating a mean of 16.58 months; and 7% of the couples were cohabiting. For White couples, the mean age for male partners was 19.61 years and for female partners was 18.58 years; the modal level of education completed was some college courses for both male and female partners (53 and 60%, respectively); the modal level of annual personal income was less than $5000 for both male and female partners (41 and 55%, respectively); partners had been dating a mean of 16.10 months; and 7% of the couples were cohabiting.

Measures of demographic variables

Age. Participants reported their age in years.
Race. Participants described their race as White, Black, Asian, Mexican American, Native American, Puerto Rican, or Other. Only couples in which both partners were White or both partners were Black were retained.

Education. Participants indicated the highest level of formal education they had completed, 1 = less than 7th grade, 8 = graduate degree.

Income. Participants reported their own total annual income before taxes as falling into one of 24 categories: 1 = less than $5000, 24 = more than $115,000.

Months dating. Participants reported how many months they had been dating. The correlation between both partners’ report was .99, p < .01.

Cohabitation. Participants reported whether lived together, 0 = no, 1 = yes. The correlation between both partners’ report was .83, p < .01.

Measures of variables from the relationship commitment model

Psychological predispositions. Neuroticism and Agreeableness were each measured by 12 items from the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992) using a 5-point response scale, 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. A sample item for Neuroticism is “I often feel inferior to others,” and a sample item for Agreeableness is “I try to be courteous to everyone I meet.” Cronbach’s alphas for the composite score for Neuroticism and Agreeableness were .78 and .75, respectively, for male partners and .80 and .74 for female partners, respectively.

Support for the relationship. Perceived support for the relationship was measured by 4 items from Sprecher and Felmlee’s (1992) measure of social reactions. Participants used a 9-point scale, 1 = not at all, 9 = quite a lot, to rate perceptions of support for their relationship from each of four sources: Members of their own family, members of their partner’s family, their own friends, and their partner’s friends. A sample item is “To what degree does your family approve and support your relationship?” (αs = .86 for both male and female partners).

Ineffective arguing. Ineffective arguing was assessed by 8 items from Kurdek’s (1994b) Ineffective Arguing Inventory which used a 5-point response format, 1 = disagree strongly, 5 = agree strongly. A sample item is “Our arguments are left hanging and unresolved” (αs = .86 for male partners and .87 for female partners).

Dependence on the relationship. Satisfaction, quality of alternatives, and investment size were each assessed by four of the global items from Rusbult et al.’s (1998) Investment Model Scale which uses a 9-point response format, 0 = do not agree at all, 8 = agree completely. A sample item for satisfaction
is “I feel satisfied with my relationship;” a sample item for quality of alterna-
tives is “The options to this relationship (dating someone else, spending
time alone or with friends, etc.) are attractive;” and a sample item for
investment size is “I feel involved in this relationship, and feel that I have
put a great deal into it” (αs = .86, .83, and .90, respectively, for male partners
and .90, .83, and .89, respectively, for female partners).

Commitment. Commitment was assessed by 8 items from Sternberg’s (1988)
measure of commitment which used a 9-point response format, 1 = not at
all true, 9 = extremely true. A sample item is “I am committed to maintain-
ing my relationship with my partner” (αs = .94 for both male and female
partners).

Results

Racial differences in means for demographic variables
In order to ensure that Black and White partners were equivalent to each
other on demographic variables, a 2 (Gender) × 2 (Race) multivariate
analysis of variance was run on each of the three personal demographic
variables (age, level of education, and personal annual income). Because
the couple was the unit of analysis, gender was a within-subjects variable.

Given that the sample size was fairly large, comparisons that were statisti-
cally significant could nonetheless account for very little variance. Conse-
quently, the $F$ values derived from the analyses of variance were converted
to Pearson correlations ($r$) so that the strength of the obtained effects
could be determined. Based on Rosenthal (1994),

$$ r = \sqrt{F/(F + df)} $$

As with any correlation coefficient, the square of the effect-size correlation can be
interpreted as the percent of variance accounted for by the effect of interest.
Following Cohen (1988), cut-off values for small, medium, and large effects
were represented by $rs$ of .10 (1% of explained variance), .30 (9% of
explained variance), and .50 (25% of explained variance), respectively. The
race effect was significant for only age, $F(1, 644) = 14.67, r = .15$ (small) and
was not qualified by a Gender × Race interaction. Black partners were
older than White partners. In addition, a one-way (race) analysis of variance
indicated that Black and White couples did not differ in the number of
months dating. Finally, a chi-square analysis indicated that Black and White
couples did not differ in the frequency of cohabitation. Consequently, only
age was used as a covariate in relevant analyses.

Racial differences in means for variables from the model
The means (adjusted for age) and standard deviations for the eight vari-
ables from the model are presented in Table 1 by gender and race. A
2 (Gender) × 2 (Race) multivariate analysis of covariance (age) performed
for all eight variables simultaneously yielded significant effects for gender,
$F(8, 637) = 22.97, p < .01$; race, $F(8, 636) = 9.90, p < .01$; and the Gender ×
Race interaction, $F(8, 636) = 2.51, p < .01$. A summary of the $F$ ratios and
### TABLE 1
Means (age-adjusted), standard deviations, \(F\) ratios, and effect-size \(r\)s for model variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender (\times) Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>(F(1,644)) (r)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological predispositions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>17.64** .16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>77.56** .33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support for the relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>7.23</td>
<td>7.55</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>7.71</td>
<td>2.57 .06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective arguing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>4.61* .08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dependence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>10.08** .12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of alternatives</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0.59 .03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investment size</td>
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<tr>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>6.51</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>0.56 .03</td>
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<tr>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>6.74</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>13.64** .14</td>
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<tr>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>535</td>
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</table>

\(p < .05; **p < .01.\)
corresponding effect-size $r$s derived from subsequent 2 (Gender) $\times$ 2 (Race) multivariate analysis of covariance (age) for each variable is presented to the right of the means in Table 1, although only effects attributable to race and the Gender $\times$ Race interaction are of interest. As can be seen from this table, race effects were found for 7 of the 8 variables, and Gender $\times$ Race effects were found for 3 of the 8 variables.

Race effects that were not qualified by gender were obtained for Agreeableness, support for the relationship, ineffective arguing, and quality of alternatives. All effects were small in size. As can be derived from the means in Table 1, relative to White partners, Black partners reported lower Agreeableness, less support, more ineffective arguing, and higher quality of alternatives. Partner gender interacted with race for Neuroticism, satisfaction, and commitment. Tests of simple effects indicated that for Neuroticism, whereas the race effect was not significant for male partners, Black female partners reported lower Neuroticism than White female partners did, $F(1, 643) = 12.42, p < .01, r = .13$ (small). For satisfaction, for both male partners and female partners, Black partners reported lower satisfaction than White partners did, but the effect was stronger for female partners, $F(1, 643) = 27.56, p < .01, r = .20$ (small), than it was for male partners, $F(1, 643) = 6.85, p < .01, r = .10$ (small). Finally, for commitment, whereas the race effect was not significant for male partners, Black female partners reported lower commitment than White female partners did, $F(1, 643) = 14.83, p < .01, r = .15$ (small).

**Fit of the model for the total sample**

For descriptive purposes, correlations involving both partners’ variables are presented in Table 2 for the total sample. In support of the selection of the variables in the model, the links to commitment occurred as expected for each predictor, with the exception that Neuroticism was not linked to commitment for female partners. Based on Hu and Bentler’s (1999) recommendations, acceptable fit for a model is obtained with a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) value of at least .95, a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value less than or equal to .06, and a Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value less than or equal to .08. The initial model provided a marginal fit to the data, $\chi^2(78, N = 646) = 459.13, p < .01; \text{CFI} = .92; \text{RMSEA} = .08; \text{and SRMR} = .14$.

An inspection of modification indices indicated that the fit of the model would be improved by adding five links between nonadjacent variables for each partner and two cross-partner effects for each partner. The revised model including these links is shown in Figure 3. Each link involving nonadjacent variables involved one of the personality traits: (a) From Neuroticism to arguing (see links $j$ and $j'$ in Figure 3), (b) from Agreeableness to arguing (links $k$ and $k'$), (c) from Agreeableness to satisfaction (links $l$ and $l'$), (d) from Agreeableness to alternatives (links $m$ and $m'$), and (e) from Agreeableness to investment (links $n$ and $n'$). The cross-partner effects were (a) from one’s own Agreeableness to one’s partner’s support (links $o$ and $o'$) and (b) from one’s own investment to one’s partner’s satisfaction.
TABLE 2
Correlations among variables for male (M) and female (F) partners for the total sample (N = 646)

<table>
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<th>15</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. M Neuroticism</td>
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<td>2. M Agreeableness</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
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<td>3. M Support</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.26</td>
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<td>4. M Arguing</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. M Satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. M Alternatives</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>-0.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. M Investment</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. M Commitment</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
<td>0.58</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. F Neuroticism</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. F Agreeableness</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. F Support</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. F Arguing</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>-0.51</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. F Satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>-0.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. F Alternatives</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>-0.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. F Investment</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. F Commitment</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>-0.65</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. rs > .07, p < .05; rs > .10, p < .01.
Although these effects were added in a posthoc manner, their reliability is enhanced by the fact that parallel effects emerged for each partner. The revised model accounted for a significant improvement in fit to the data over the initial model, \( \Delta \chi^2(14, N = 646) = 279.59, p < .01 \), and fit the data well, \( \chi^2(64, N = 646) = 179.54, p < .01, \text{CFI} = .98, \text{RMSEA} = .05, \text{and SRMR} = .08 \). Regarding specific links, the correlation between Neuroticism and Agreeableness was significant for male partners and for female partners, \( r = -.30 \) and \( -.34 \), respectively, \( p < .01 \). The inter-partner correlation was significant for both Neuroticism and Agreeableness, \( r = .14 \) and \( .16 \), respectively, \( p < .01 \). All but one of the correlated errors (involving male satisfaction and female satisfaction) was significant, \( p < .01 \). Standardized estimates for the regression links are presented by partner in Table 3.
estimates are described first for links between adjacent variables, then for links between nonadjacent variables, and finally for cross-partner links.

Links between adjacent variables. For male partners, two of the nine expected links between adjacent variables were not obtained. Although Neuroticism was bivariately linked to support in the expected negative direction (link a, see correlation in Table 2), it lost predictive power when Agreeableness and partner’s Agreeableness were also considered. Although arguing was bivariately linked to investment in the expected negative direction (link f, see correlation in Table 2), it lost predictive power when Agreeableness was also considered. The remaining seven links occurred as expected. Thus, Agreeableness was positively linked to support even with controls for Neuroticism and partner Agreeableness (link b). In turn, support was negatively related to arguing, even with controls for Neuroticism and Agreeableness (link c). Arguing, in turn, was negatively related to satisfaction (link d), even with controls for Agreeableness and partner investment and positively related to alternatives (link e), even with controls for Agreeableness. Finally, satisfaction, alternatives, and investment, in turn, uniquely accounted for variance in commitment with positive, negative, and positive weights, respectively (links g, h, and i, respectively).

For female partners, all nine expected links between adjacent variables were obtained. Neuroticism was negatively linked to support (link a’) with controls for Agreeableness and partner Agreeableness, and Agreeableness was positively linked to support (link b’) with controls for Neuroticism and partner Agreeableness. In turn, support was negatively related to arguing

\[ \text{Table 3} \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression link</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male versus female difference $\chi^2(1, N = 646)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a: Neuroticism $\rightarrow$ Support</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.17**</td>
<td>11.29**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b: Agreeableness $\rightarrow$ Support</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c: Support $\rightarrow$ Arguing</td>
<td>-.35**</td>
<td>-.42**</td>
<td>4.52*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d: Arguing $\rightarrow$ Satisfaction</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>-.40**</td>
<td>10.58**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e: Arguing $\rightarrow$ Alternatives</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f: Arguing $\rightarrow$ Investment</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.09*</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g: Satisfaction $\rightarrow$ Commitment</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h: Alternatives $\rightarrow$ Commitment</td>
<td>-.25**</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i: Investment $\rightarrow$ Commitment</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>5.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j: Neuroticism $\rightarrow$ Arguing</td>
<td>.09**</td>
<td>.11**</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k: Agreeableness $\rightarrow$ Arguing</td>
<td>-.20**</td>
<td>-.16**</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l: Agreeableness $\rightarrow$ Satisfaction</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m: Agreeableness $\rightarrow$ Alternatives</td>
<td>-.14**</td>
<td>-.18**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n: Agreeableness $\rightarrow$ Investment</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>5.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o: Own Agreeableness $\rightarrow$ Partner Support</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p: Own investment $\rightarrow$ Partner Satisfaction</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01.
(link c') even with controls for Neuroticism and Agreeableness. Arguing, in turn, was negatively related to satisfaction (link d'), even with controls for Agreeableness and partner investment; positively related to alternatives (link e'), even with controls for Agreeableness; and negatively related to investment (link f'), even with controls for Agreeableness. Finally, satisfaction, alternatives, and investment, in turn, uniquely accounted for variance in commitment with positive, negative, and positive weights, respectively (links g', h', and i', respectively).

Links between nonadjacent variables. For both male and female partners, Neuroticism and especially Agreeableness accounted for variation in non-adjacent variables even with controls for intervening variables. That is, partial and not full mediation was evident. Specifically, Neuroticism was positively linked to arguing even with controls for support and Agreeableness (links j and j'). Agreeableness was negatively linked to arguing even with controls for Neuroticism and support (links k and k'); positively linked to satisfaction (links l and l') even with controls for arguing and partner investment; negatively linked to alternatives (links m and m') even with controls for arguing; and positively linked to investment (links n and n') even with controls for arguing. All Sobel tests were significant, indicating that the link between the personality trait and the relevant outcomes was significantly reduced when controls for intervening variables were added.

Cross-partner links. For both partners, one’s own Agreeableness was positively linked to one’s partner support even with controls for one’s partner’s Neuroticism and Agreeableness (links o and o'). Also, for both partners, one’s own investment was positively linked to one’s partner’s satisfaction even with controls for one’s own Agreeableness and arguing (links p and p').

Racial differences in regression links from the model
Before racial differences in the regression links were examined, differences in the regression links between male and female partners for the total sample were examined to see if the model could be simplified by pooling estimates over partner. The model with regression links constrained to be equal for male and female partners, however, provided a poorer fit to the data than did the model with separate estimates for each partner, \( \Delta \chi^2(16, N = 646) = 55.52, p < .01 \), indicating significant gender differences. To identify the specific links on which partners differed, each of the 16 links was tested separately for partner differences. The resulting tests in which the fit for models with links constrained to be equal for male and female partners was compared to the fit for models with separate links for male and female partners are shown in the last column of Table 3. Five differences were found. Whereas the link from Neuroticism to support (link a) was not significant for male partners, it was significant for female partners. For the remaining four links (from support to arguing [link c], from arguing to satisfaction [link d], from investment to commitment [link i], and from Agreeableness to investment [link n]), the link was significant for each
partner but was stronger for female partners than for male partners. Given these differences, the test for racial differences was conducted with separate estimates for male and female partners.

Following procedures described by Arbuckle (2006), the test for differences in the regression links between Black and White male partners and between Black and White female partners was conducted by first fitting the revised model to both racial groups and then comparing the fit of this model to one in which the 16 regression links shown in Table 3 were constrained to be equal for Black and White male partners and for Black and White female partners. The fit of the model for both racial groups was acceptable, $\chi^2(128, N = 646) = 264.89, p < .01$; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .04 and SRMR = .08. Because the fit of this unconstrained model did not differ from the fit of the constrained model, $\Delta \chi^2(32, N = 646) = 37.02, p > .05$, racial differences were not significant.

**Discussion**

**Racial differences on means for variables from the model**

The first purpose of this study was to examine differences between Black and White partners from heterosexual dating couples on mean levels of eight variables derived from a path model of relationship commitment. This model integrates influences from psychological predispositions, support for the relationship, ineffective arguing, and dependence on the relationship already known to be important for relationship functioning (Huston, 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Rusbult et al., 1998). Differences due to race were found for seven of the variables, and race interacted with gender for three of the variables. All differences, however, were small in size.

Based on previous evidence of racial differences in dating partners (Crissey, 2005), Black partners were expected to show less dependence on their relationships than White partners did. This prediction was supported in that, relative to White partners, Black partners reported more attractive alternatives to their relationship and less satisfaction with their relationship. Consistent with evidence from married partners that Black couples are less harmonious than White couples (Adelmann et al., 1996; Broman, 1993), relative to White partners, Black partners also reported more ineffective arguing. In light of the view that one aspect of the unique resiliency of Black spouses is their strong ties to grandparents and their reliance on church members and friends for support (Orbuch & Brown, 2006), it is of note that, relative to White partners, Black partners also reported less support for their relationships. Interaction effects indicated that racial differences in overall relationship quality were more prominent for female partners than for male partners in that Black women were more likely than White women to report lower satisfaction and less commitment to their relationships.

Taken together, these findings indicate that racial differences previously found for marital functioning (Kreider & Fields, 2002) are also pertinent for premarital functioning and provide additional support for the view that
Black and White individuals are socialized in different social, cultural, and historical contexts that influence how marriage and family life are viewed (Allen, 1978; Orbuch & Brown, 2006). These findings provide the basis for future work in at least four areas. First, future studies might explore what specific social, cultural, or historical variables account for the differences between Black and White partners. Despite speculation that racial differences in marital attitudes can be attributed to differences in educational attainment (South, 1993), educational level can be ruled out as an explanation for the racial differences found in the current study because Black and White partners were equivalent on this variable.

Second, future studies might adopt a longitudinal perspective in which dating couples are followed through the early years of marriage when racial differences consistent with those found in the present study have been reported (Orbuch & Brown, 2006) to see what effects are stable across the transition from dating to marriage. Such studies also would be useful in determining whether structural explanations for racial differences in marriage are developmentally robust or become particularly important at only select points in the relationship career (Orbuch, Veroff, Hassan, & Horrocks, 2002).

Third, in light of evidence from the current study that some racial differences were stronger for female partners than they were for male partners, future work that involves collecting data from both partners of Black couples might examine whether change in relationship functioning over time and relationship stability are better accounted for by information provided by female partners than by information provided by male partners (Kurdek, 2005).

Finally, although racial differences in personality traits were not expected, Black partners were lower in Agreeableness than White partners were. Also, for only female partners, Black partners were lower in Neuroticism than White partners were. Because high Agreeableness and low Neuroticism are generally viewed as aspects of psychological resiliency (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), future work could examine the developmental antecedents of these traits as well as the protective role they may play in dealing with relationship distress.

**Links between adjacent variables, nonadjacent variables, and cross-partner variables within the model**

Given the likelihood that variability in each outcome score in the model was multiply determined, it was not surprising that the fit of the model that contained only links between adjacent variables was improved by adding links between nonadjacent variables as well as links representing cross-partner effects. Because these two sets of effects were added in a posthoc manner, future work with the model will require an a priori specification of these paths. The revised model provided a good fit to the data, and two findings attest to the robustness of this model. First, with the exception of only one link (from Neuroticism to support), links were obtained for both male and female partners from the total sample. Four links (from support
to arguing, from arguing to satisfaction, from investment to commitment, and from Agreeableness to investment) were stronger for female partners than male partners, but nonetheless occurred for both partners. In their test of a fairly complex couple-level model of marital satisfaction, Miller et al. (2003) also found that what few gender differences existed revealed stronger associations for wives than for husbands.

Second, within each partner, links did not vary by race. This finding is consistent with previous work that documents few or no racial differences in the predictors of relationship quality for both dating couples (Sanderson & Kurdek, 1993) and married couples (McLoyd et al., 2000). Thus, although null findings need to be interpreted cautiously, despite mean differences by race for some of the variables in the model, the links involving these variables were similar for both Black and White male partners and for Black and White female partners.

The finding that racial differences occurred in mean levels of variables from the model but not in links involving these variables suggests that growth curve analyses might be useful in investigating why Black partners are less likely than White partners to continue in their relationships (Kreider & Fields, 2002). Within a growth curve context, the trajectory for a variable can be described in terms of both its initial level (intercept) and its change over time (slope) (e.g., Kurdek, 2005). If Black and White partners differ in mean levels of variables from the model and not in links among these variables, then the initial level of variables might be more predictive of later relationship functioning for Black couples than for White couples. Additionally, the amount of change from initial levels might be more prominent for distressed Black couples than for distressed White couples.

Turning to findings from the total sample, consistent with earlier evidence, the four sets of predicted links between adjacent variables were obtained. Specifically, both low Neuroticism (only for female partners and with controls for Agreeableness) and high Agreeableness (with controls for Neuroticism) were linked to high perceived support for the relationship (Roos & Cohen, 1987). High levels of perceived support for the relationship, in turn, were linked to low levels of ineffective arguing experienced in the relationship (Kurdek, 1994b; Sanford, 2003; Storaasli & Markman, 1990). Low levels of ineffective arguing, in turn, were linked to high dependence on the relationship as operationalized by high satisfaction, low quality of alternatives, and high investment (Rusbult et al., 1998). Finally, in turn, high satisfaction, low quality of alternatives, and high investment (each with controls for the other two dependence variables) were linked to high levels of commitment (Le & Agnew, 2003).

The effects involving the nonadjacent variables occurred for the personality traits, and 4 of these 5 effects involved Agreeableness. High levels of Neuroticism and low levels of Agreeableness were linked to high levels of ineffective arguing, independent of the effect of support for the relationship. And, high levels of Agreeableness were linked to each dimension of high dependence on the relationship (high satisfaction, low attractiveness of alternatives, and high investment), independent of ineffective arguing. These
findings support Karney and Bradbury’s (1995) view that the personality traits that partners bring to their relationships act as enduring influences on the adaptive processes required for resolving the inevitable tensions within any close relationship. These findings also provide a basis for examining different ways in which Neuroticism and Agreeableness might affect commitment to a relationship. In the current study, with controls for more proximal influences, Neuroticism had no direct effect on any of the three sources for dependence on the relationship for either partner. In contrast, Agreeableness had direct effects on each of the three sources of dependence on the relationship for each partner even with controls for more proximal influences. This pattern of findings underscores Miller et al.’s (2003) view that prorelational dispositions represented by Agreeableness are especially important in motivating partners to strive for and to achieve positive relational goals.

Although only two cross-partner effects were identified, they highlight the advantages to obtaining data from both partners of a couple (Kenny et al., 2006). Adding further credence to the overall importance of personality traits, for both partners, one’s own Agreeableness accounted for unique variance in the perceptions that one’s partner had for the level of support for the relationship. This finding is consistent with evidence that agreeable individuals act so as to promote the likelihood of offered support (Sarason et al., 1986). With regard to the second cross-partner effect, for each partner, one’s own investment accounted for unique variance in one’s partner satisfaction with the relationship. Although tests of Rusult et al.’s (1998) investment model have usually focused only on intra-partner links (Le & Agnew, 2003), the current finding indicates that future work with couple-level data could address the mechanisms by which one’s own dependence on the relationship potentiates that of one’s partner.

Limitations and Conclusion

This study had several limitations. First, most male and female dating partners from both Black and White couples had some college courses, making it unclear whether the findings would apply to dating partners with relatively low levels of education. Second, because participants recruited their partners, it is possible that only partners from well-functioning couples agreed to be recruited. Third, although Black and White partners were equivalent in levels of personal income, no information was available on levels of family income that might capture differential access to personal and relational resources. Fourth, all data were obtained by self-report measures with their attending biases, and no direct observations of relationship-related behaviors were obtained. Fifth, because the data were correlational in nature, results could only highlight the plausibility of the causal influences implied within the model. Sixth, the time-ordered links were tested with data collected at the same time rather than at time-staggered points. Finally, other variables could have been selected to represent components of the
model and might have led to different findings. Despite these limitations, the findings from this study document small differences between Black and White partners in mean levels of each component of the model but no differences between Black and White partners of either gender on links posited by the model. Thus, despite slight differences in mean levels of relationship-oriented variables, the variables linked to relationship functioning are similar for Black and White partners from dating heterosexual couples.

REFERENCES


