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Dating in Midlife: A Dyadic Approach Examining Partner Perceptions on Relationship Quality

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DATING IN MIDLIFE: A DYADIC APPROACH TO EXAMINING THE
INFLUENCE OF LIFE COURSE FACTORS
ON PARTNER PERCEPTIONS

by

Rachel Sheffield

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Rachel Sheffield in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citation, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

DATING IN MIDLIFE: A DYADIC APPROACH TO EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF LIFE COURSE FACTORS ON PARTNER PERCEPTIONS

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Master of Science

Using a matched-partner dataset of 660 midlife couples, this study examined dating relationships at midlife from the perspective of both male and female partners. It also explored ways various life course factors such as marital history, children, cohabitation, relationship length, and social approval related to partners' perceptions of one another and to subsequent relationship quality. Findings indicated heterogeneity in midlife dating experiences. Actor and partner effects of enhancement were most often linked with greater satisfaction and fewer problems for never-married couples, yet enhancement was not related to relationship stability for them. For couples where only one partner had been previously married, partner enhancement was linked to stability but not to other relationship outcomes. Life course factors played an important role in midlife dating relationships. Further research is needed to examine longitudinal trends.

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Introduction

Research suggests that midlife may be the busiest and consequently most stressful stage of life (Antonucci, Akiyama, & Merline, 2001). This is due to the many potential roles middle-aged individuals occupy, such as spouse, parent, employee, a caretaker for aging parents, and so forth. For some adults, this stage of life may consist of dating, an activity often thought of as pertaining mainly to younger adulthood. However, dating in adulthood is not confined to only the college years and those years shortly thereafter. Rather, research attests to the large population of single adults in midlife who are available to form new romantic relationships (see Marks, Bumpass, & Jun, 2004). This is often due to divorce, the death of a spouse, or simply because one has remained single. Furthermore, others suggest that this population of midlife singles will only continue to grow (Cooney & Dunne, 2001).

Although the literature on midlife dating is sparse, there is some research that provides insight into dating relationships of middle-aged adults. In an exploratory study of midlife daters Montenegro (2003) indicated that the majority of single men and women do date, whether exclusively or non-exclusively. She further reported that those who date tend to be more affluent and independent, and that the majority date for companionship, versus to find a marriage partner. Other research indicates that there are likely differences between those who have been previously married and those who have remained single, in that continuously-single women are more interested in getting married—perhaps because they feel more social pressure to wed than those who have been divorced or widowed (Lewis & Moon, 1997). On the other hand, continuously-single men may have selected themselves out of the marriage market, and thus are less prone to want to marry than their female counterparts (Whithead & Popenoe, 2004). Furthermore, men who are involved with non-resident children

from a previous relationship tend to re-partner more quickly than both men and women with and without children (Stewart, Manning, & Smock, 2003). These studies, along with a recent unpublished study by Yorgason, Sheffield, and Busby, suggest that dating in midlife not only differs from dating in young adulthood, but also differs based on marital history. Considering the importance researchers have placed on trying to understand the premarital factors that contribute to later marital success or failure for young daters, it seems necessary to study such factors for midlife daters. Although many findings from studies that sample younger daters may apply to those in other stages of life, the tasks specific to middle adulthood may make dating at this stage unique. Furthermore, because children are often an element of midlife relationships, it can perhaps be argued that understanding the dating relationships of these adults is even more important in preventing children from experiencing another parental divorce.

Due to the heterogeneous population of midlife daters it is especially important to take into account the experiences of each partner when studying relationships at this life stage. For example, relationships will likely differ if partners have remained single throughout their lives, or if they have been divorced or widowed. In studying dating relationships, as well as other dyadic relationships, researchers have often failed to include both partners in their sample (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). This is likely due to the difficulty of obtaining data from two partners, as well as the greater complexity involved with conducting studies that are dyadic in nature. However, failing to study both partners makes it difficult to understand how the views and experiences of each companion contribute to relationship quality (see Kenny et al.). Furthermore, in order to understand the unique contributions of gender, it is necessary to study the dyad versus the individual.

Dyadic components may be even more crucial when examining midlife dating, as it is likely that relationships consist of a blend of relationship histories. For example, the relationship of a previously married woman with children and a widowed man will likely differ from that of a man and a woman who have never been previously married. Important implications include step parenting vs. not step parenting, dealing with a former spouse vs. not, and so forth. Likely such relationship factors will influence the way dating companions view their partners and subsequently how happy and stable they are in their relationships.

Due to the dearth of research on dating in middle adulthood, the purpose of the current study is to gain a picture of what dating looks like during middle adulthood, as well as to explore how the experiences of both men and women relate to their perceptions of one another and to subsequent relationship wellbeing. A greater knowledge in this area will help these midlife couples achieve successful marriages or remarriages and thus help their children to avoid the repercussions of parental divorce.

Theory and Review of Literature

Three theoretical frameworks or models will be utilized to explore dating in middle adulthood. First, symbolic interaction theory will be used to explain ways that experiences and perceptions of both partners in a relationship contribute to its outcomes. Second, the courtship model of Niehuis, Huston, and Rosenband (2006) provides an understanding of both proximal and distal elements that contribute to relationship quality. Finally, the life course theory of Elder (1994; 1995) is employed to shape this courtship model into one that can be better suited to fit daters at midlife.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

First, symbolic interaction theory suggests that humans create their own worlds through perceptions, and that such perceptions influence how individuals behave and interact with one another. In romantic relationships, expectations and “shared meaning” influence couple processes, such as communication, and the subsequent relationship outcomes (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Thus, this theory would suggest that interactions in romantic relationships are very much influenced by how people perceive one another and, correspondingly, that partner perceptions are influenced by couple interactions. Accordingly, LaRossa and Reitzes suggest that intimate partners may have a more ‘significant’ effect on how a person thinks and feels about him or herself. Thus, how partners perceive each other in these relationships will contribute to relationship processes and wellbeing, reiterating the importance of studying the couple instead of only the individual. Furthermore, the unique experiences of partners in midlife dating relationships will likely contribute to how each views the other and thus how the relationship fares.

Courtship Model

Next, Niehuis et al. (2006) provide a model that explains the factors of relationships that may contribute to how partners perceive one another and subsequently, to the success of the relationship. Factors in the model include: the personal attributes of each partner; how these personal attributes contribute to couple compatibility; how they contribute to relationship processes, cognitions about and evaluations of the relationship, and how they influence the progression of relationship commitment. These elements are suggested to lead to marital success or failure. Surrounding the couple are social and cultural factors, such as the support from the social network (i.e., parents, friends, etc.) and the level to which one is

socially embedded; as well as the cultural factors. For example, societal trends such as the acceptance of premarital pregnancy and childbirth, as well as the growing rate of cohabitation may influence dating experiences. In the current study, the perceptions of each partner's personal characteristics will be utilized to predict relationship outcomes. Factors including social support and cohabitation will also be used to understand their association with relationship wellbeing.

Life Course Theory

While Neihuis et al.'s (2006) courtship model establishes the basic framework for understanding the factors that contribute to relationship development and outcomes, Elder's life course theory (1994; 1995) provides concepts that help to shape this model to the experiences of midlife daters. Elder (1994) proposes three ideas that potentially influence midlife dating relationships: social timing, historical context, and linked lives. First, in regards to social timing, it is during young adulthood that the rules of dating are likely best understood, as dating is a common experience within the peer group. Dating standards may not be quite as clear thereafter, making dating for this age group more stressful. Such stresses may come from individuals in the midlife adult's social network who are eager for their never-married child or friend to marry and thus put pressure on the couple to wed. Also, research suggests that some men are not the "marrying type" (Whitehead & Popenoe, 2004). Thus, women who are dating men who have never been married at midlife may be choosing from some potential partners who are not interested in a committed relationship. Depending on if these women are hoping to form a marital relationship, their views of these men may be more negative. Thus, the potentially "off-time" nature of midlife dating may carry with it

some factors that influence the way partners view each other, and subsequently influence the quality of their relationships.

Second, the historical context of dating has changed over the years, likely leading to generational differences in dating rituals and partner expectations. For example, dating in the traditional sense has become rarer, with the formation of romantic relationships more often occurring within group settings (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001). Also, partner preferences have shifted over the generations, with greater importance now being placed on physical appearance, financial resources, and mutual attraction (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001).

One especially salient social trend in the mating process is that of cohabitation. This trend is linked with (a) the length of the premarital relationship, (b) the age at first marriage, and (c) the acceptance of premarital pregnancy and birth (Smock, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Given these social trends, some consider matrimony unnecessary, as they can receive companionship without the commitment of marriage. However, research suggests fundamental differences between men who choose to marry and those who say they do not plan to marry (see Whitehead & Popenoe, 2004). Examining this trend of cohabitation, research generally suggests its connection with poorer relationship quality followed by lower marital stability (Brown, 2003; Dush, Cohan, & Amato, 2003). However, some research suggests differing effects depending on age of the cohabiting couple. For example, King and Scott (2005) found that younger adults (20-30 years of age) and older middle-aged adults (50 years plus) were happier cohabiting than were those in their forties. Furthermore, these authors suggested that those who used cohabitation as a replacement for marriage (usually older middle-aged adults) were more satisfied than those who used it as a trial for marriage.

Thus, it is important to consider life course stage when examining the association of cohabitation with relationship outcomes.

Finally, the concept of linked lives refers to individuals' social networks. Young adults' networks most likely consist of parents, siblings, and friends. However, middle-aged adults' networks may also consist of one or more previous spouses, as well as children from a past relationship. Furthermore, middle adulthood is sometimes referred to as the "sandwich generation," meaning that these adults are caring for both children and aging parents simultaneously. While this is not necessarily a common phenomenon, some middle-aged adults do experience this (Spitze & Logan, 1990). Research suggests that these 'linked lives' are influential in union formation and relationship wellbeing, considering that some divorced women report lingering attachment to their previous husband (McDaniel & Coleman, 2003), and 43% of divorced women and roughly 30% of divorced men are hesitant to remarry for fear of another marital dissolution (Montenegro, 2004). Also, many divorced men are often at least somewhat financially responsible for their children, if not also for a former wife, potentially making it more difficult for them to remarry (see Stewart, Manning, & Smock, 2003). Furthermore, research suggests that single women with children are less likely to re-partner than are women without children, while men who are involved with non-resident children are far more likely to re-partner than are single men or men who are not involved with their children (Stewart et al.). Thus, partner perceptions and relationship happiness and stability may be impacted by the presence or lack of certain relationships in the social network.

Partner Perceptions

As suggested by symbolic interaction theory, perceptions play a powerful role in influencing the processes and outcomes of relationships (see LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993 and Fletcher & Fincham, 1991). For example, past research indicates that holding somewhat idealistic views of one's romantic partner is associated with more positive outcomes (Busby & Holman, 2006; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2003; for one exception to this finding see Swann, Hixon, & de la Rond, 1992). Furthermore, Murray and colleagues (1996) found that couples were happiest when each partner viewed their companion as better than the self—or rather, when partners “enhanced” one another (see Busby & Holman). While partner perceptions have been measured in various ways, it is this concept of enhancement—that takes the difference between an individual's perception of him or herself and an individual's perception of his or her partner—that best predicts relationship outcomes (Busby & Holman; Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001; Murray & Holmes, 1999; Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002; Murray et al., 2003). Furthermore, relationships tend to be happiest when both partners enhance the other, and likewise are poorest when both partners see the other as lower than the self (Busby & Holman).

Enhancement may produce these positive relationship outcomes as partners pick up on perceptions of one another through “empathy or sympathetic introspection,” as well as through verbal interactions and gestures (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). These interactions likely produce a relationship climate in which faults are more often overlooked and strengths are emphasized (Busby & Holman, 2006; Murray, & Holmes, 1999; Murray et al., 2002; Murray et al., 2003). Furthermore, findings suggest that as people project their concept of their ideal partner onto their current dating companion, their partners ‘rise to the occasion’, or at least

their views about themselves rise to the level of their partners' views (Murray et al., 2003). Thus, partner perceptions appear to be linked to broader relationship perceptions, as LaRossa and Reitzes suggest.

Although research indicates the benefits of enhancement (Miller, Niehuis, & Huston, 2006), most of the extant research with premarital or married individuals has been conducted with fairly young samples (Miller et al.; Murray et al., 1996). However, in a recent unpublished study, Yorgason et al. found that midlife daters, as compared to their younger and older counterparts, were most unique in how they viewed their dating companions and thus in how their views influenced relationship quality. These researchers hypothesized that such a finding could be due to the unique experiences of single adults in midlife. For example, if a never-married man is dating a previously married woman with children, he may hesitate to commit to the relationship, as it implies greater responsibility and financial commitments to dependents. On the other hand, a single mother who is dating a man who is willing to take on the responsibilities of fatherhood may view her partner very highly. Thus, the current study will add to the research by examining how life experiences of each partner influence partner perceptions and subsequent relationship quality.

Although research indicates the influence of enhancement on relationship quality, Yorgason et al. found that this association was partially mediated by a construct termed "self regulation." Self regulation is essentially defined as an individual's ability to assess how one's own characteristics influence relationship wellbeing (Busby & Holman, 2006; Halford, Moore, Wilson, Farrugia, & Judge, 2006). Furthermore, it is defined as an individual's willingness to identify and carry out self-change to improve the relationship (Halford et al.; Wilson, Charker, Lizzio, Halford, & Siobhan, 2005). Therefore, enhancement can be thought

of as the way a partner views his or her dating companion generally, while self regulation may be thought of as the way partners see each other specifically during conflict. Busby and Holman suggest that for self-enhancing couples (couples in which both partners see themselves as better than their partner) it is the lack of self regulation that may contribute to poorer relationship outcomes. Self-enhancing individuals may fail to see weaknesses in themselves that would influence them to take responsibility for making personal changes to improve the relationship. Instead, they expect their partner to change (Busby & Holman).

Thus, the primary aim of this study is to understand how the unique aspects of midlife are related to partner perceptions for those in dating relationships at this stage of life, as well as how the unique life course factors of middle adulthood directly connect to relationship wellbeing. This study will specifically focus on partner enhancement and its links to relationship quality, using self regulation as a mediator.

Research Questions

First, this study will examine how partner enhancement relates to relationship quality for midlife daters, including the mediating role of self regulation. Based on previous research, it is expected that enhancement will be linked with higher quality relationships for both genders, and that self regulation will mediate these links. However, it is expected that actor effects (one's enhancement and self regulation predicting own reports of relationship outcomes) will differ from partner effects (partner reports of enhancement and self regulation predicting self reports of relationship outcomes).

Second, this study will answer how life course variables are linked with partners' perceptions of each other as well as to relationship outcomes. It is likely that gender differences will occur, as well as differences between marital history groups, considering that

divorced men tend to re-partner more quickly than women (Montenegro, 2004) and having children appears to increase men's chances of marriage—and remarriage—in some cases (Stewart et al., 2003).

Methods

Sample

The original data set consisted of 21,294 couples who completed the RELATE questionnaire between 2001 and 2006. RELATE is an online relationship enrichment tool couples can use to assess a variety of aspects of their relationship, such as compatibility of personality characteristics, family background, and relationship interactions. The sample included couples from across the United States, as well as some from outside of the U.S. (Busby et al., 2001.) One benefit of this dataset is that it provides reports from both partners. For this study, a sub-sample was selected consisting of those who were between the ages of 40 and 60 (see Lachman & Bertrand, 2001)—or who were dating someone between the ages of 40 and 60—reported they were in a serious or steady dating relationship (not married or engaged), and did not have any missing data for the study variables. Thus, the final sample for this study consisted of 660 dating couples. The group that consisted of those in which neither partner had been previously married—the “never-married” group—consisted of 168 couples; the second group—in which only one partner had been previously married, titled the “mixed” group—contained 212 couples; and the third group—in which both partners had experienced at least one previous marriage, or the “both-divorced” group—was comprised of 280 couples.

Measures

Enhancement. Based on the big five personality constructs (Biesanz, & West, 2000; Costa, & McCrae, 1988) found in the RELATE measures (Draper, & Holman, 2005), I re-created the *affability* measure used by Busby and Holman (2006). The affability measure combines items from the agreeableness and openness scales found in RELATE. Items from the agreeableness and openness scales were selected due to the fact that studies generally suggest that these personality characteristics are associated with higher marital quality (Kelly & Conley, 1987; Kosek, 1996; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000). While other researchers have utilized a variety of personality characteristics for comparing partner perceptions, similar to Busby and Holman I chose to use the affability measure, as it provides a general picture of an individual's positive personality traits. This measure consisted of eight items wherein participants were asked to first rate qualities of themselves and then to rate these same qualities for their partner on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = *never*, 5 = *very often*). For example, individuals were asked to score how considerate, kind, friendly, open minded, flexible, adaptable, etc. they viewed themselves as well as their dating partners. Enhancement scores were then calculated by subtracting an individual's rating of the self from an individual's rating of his or her partner (see Busby and Holman). The enhancement score was coded such that positive scores indicated enhancement of a partner, and negative scores indicated self enhancement (males: $M = -1.02$; $SD = 4.45$; $Range = -15 - 10$; females; $M = -1.39$, $SD = 4.85$; $Range = -19 - 12$). Means and standard deviations for the three marital history groups can be found in Table 1.

Self regulation. The self regulation measure consisted of three items. The first item measured a partner's expectations for change ("There are many things about my partner I

would like to change”). The other two items measured criticism and fault-finding when in the face of relationship conflict (“I have no respect for my partner when we are discussing an issue” and “When I get upset I can see glaring faults in my partner’s personality”). Scales were created for both males and females ($\alpha = .76$; $M = 12.30$, $SD = 2.08$; $Range = 7 - 15$; and $\alpha = .70$, $M = 11.79$, $SD = 2.17$; $Range = 5 - 15$, respectively). Responses ranged from 1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*. The purpose of this measure was to understand how much blame an individual attributes to the self or to the partner for relationship problems.

Relationship quality. Relationship quality was measured with three scales, each created separately for males and females: *relationship satisfaction* ($\alpha = .82$; $M = 27.03$; $SD = 4.72$; $Range = 10 - 35$; and $\alpha = .86$; $M = 27.13$; $SD = 5.55$; $Range = 7 - 35$, respectively), *relationship stability* ($\alpha = .84$; $M = 11.55$; $SD = 2.56$; $Range = 3 - 15$; and $\alpha = .88$; $M = 11.42$; $SD = 2.95$; $Range = 3 - 15$, respectively), and *relationship problems* ($\alpha = .77$; $M = 20.19$; $SD = 5.88$; $Range = 11 - 38$; and $\alpha = .79$; $M = 20.35$; $SD = 6.33$; $Range = 11 - 39$, respectively). The *relationship satisfaction* scale consisted of seven questions that asked individuals to rate how satisfied they were with various aspects of their relationship, such as the amount of love they experience, how conflicts are resolved, and the overall relationship with their partner (responses ranged from 1 = *very dissatisfied* to 5 = *very satisfied*).

Relationship stability was a three-item scale, consisting of questions that asked how often a person had thought the relationship might be in trouble, how often a person and his or her partner had talked about ending their relationship, and how often they had broken up and gotten back together (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). The *relationship problems* measure contained a list of eleven potential problem areas, such as financial matters, communication, or intimacy/sexuality, and asked individuals to rate how often such issues created problems

in their relationships. Higher scores for this variable represented greater frequency of relationship problems (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*).

Demographic and personal variables. Respondents were asked to report on a number of demographic characteristics including age, gender (1 = *male* and 2 = *female*), education level (1 = *less than high school* to 9 = *graduate or professional degree*; $M = 7.13$; $SD = 1.87$ for males; and $M = 6.84$; $SD = 1.98$ for females), and annual income (1 = *none* to 10 = *over \$100,000*; $M = 7.03$; $SD = 1.80$ for males; $M = 5.80$; $SD = 2.03$ for females). Age ranged from 22 through 68 years for men and from 20 through 63 years for women. Although the intent of this study was to focus on dating individuals in midlife, participants were included in the study if only one partner was middle-aged. Therefore, age was included as a control variable in the models ($M = 45.62$; $SD = 6.87$, and $M = 40.17$; $SD = 7.63$, for males and females respectively). For males, 9.7% were either younger than 40 or older than 60 years of age; for women, 48.5% were either younger than 40 or older than 60. However, only 20% were younger than age 35. As far as the racial breakdown of the sample, 91% of the males and 89% of the females were Caucasian, 3% of the females and 1.2% of the males were African American, and the rest were either, Asian, Latino, Biracial, or of another racial background.

Life course variables. Life course variables included, current cohabitation status (0 = *not cohabiting*, 1 = *cohabiting*), as well as marital history for both the males and females (0 = *no previous divorce(s)*, 1 = *one or more divorces*). Overall, only nine percent of the sample reported they were cohabiting: 17% (24 couples) of never-married couples, 4% (8 couples) of mixed couples—or couples in which only one partner had been previously married, and 11% (28 couples) of both-divorced couples. The low percentage of cohabitators in this sample may

be due to the fact that there was an overrepresentation of conservative religious couples (approximately 25%). However, while some research suggests differences between the relationships of these couples (at least in the case of marriage) and those of couples in the general population (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993), other research indicates that their relationships (at least marriages) are quite similar (Carroll, Linford, Holman, & Busby, 2000; Heaton, Goodwin, & Holman, 1994).

It should be noted that for couples in the mixed group, there were no never-married men cohabiting with previously married women. Thus, it was not unexpected to find that in the overall sample, men more often reported that they had been previously married (63% vs. 54%, men and women respectively), which was also the case in the mixed group (where only one partner reported being previously married): 36% of the women and 64% of the men reported a history of divorce. Furthermore, in the overall sample 53% of men and 58% of women reported that their relationship currently included children from a prior relationship. For the never-married group these percentages were 5% and 7% for men and women, respectively; in the mixed group, 55% and 62%, respectively; and in the both-divorced group, 81% and 86% respectively.

Respondents also were asked to report the *length* of their current dating relationship (1 = 0 – 3 months to 6 = 6 years or more; males: $M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.52$; females: $M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.54$): Bonferroni post-hoc analyses based on ANOVA revealed that the three marital history groups were significantly different in their relationship length, with the never-married couples dating for the longest time and both-divorced couples reporting the shortest length.

Reports of social approval indicated that males had an overall higher average level of friend approval than females ($M = 3.37$, $SD = .74$ for males; $M = 3.25$, $SD = .84$ for females).

Furthermore, within each of the marital history groups males reported higher social approval than females, and social approval was greatest for both men and women in the both-divorced group. While a means comparison test using ANOVA indicated no significant differences between men in the three groups, $F(2, 657) = .72, p = .49$, or between women in the three groups, $F(2, 657) = .27, p = .77$, t tests revealed significant differences between men and women in each group ($p < .001$).

Analysis and Results

Research Question 1: How does enhancement and self regulation relate to relationship quality for midlife daters? What are the actor and partner effects of enhancement and self regulation on relationship quality?

To answer this question, as well as the third research question, three structural equation models were created in AMOS 7.0 (Arbuckle, 2006; see Figure 1). A separate model was created for each of the outcome variables: male and female relationship satisfaction, male and female relationship problems, and male and female relationship stability. Multiple group analyses were conducted within each of the three models to compare differences between never-married couples, couples in which only one partner had been previously married, and couples in which both partners had been divorced. All demographic and life course variables were included in the models, as well as both male and female enhancement and male and female self regulation (utilized as a mediating variable). Modification indices were used to guide the exclusion of certain paths from covariates to other model variables. Fit indices indicated acceptable fit for each model (see Tables 2, 3, & 4). Unstandardized path coefficients, standard errors, and p values for each model can be found in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

While results revealed that, as expected, enhancement and self regulation generally predicted greater relationship quality, group differences and gender differences were found. Results for actor and partner effects of enhancement for men and women in the never-married group indicated that while enhancement was linked with greater relationship quality (greater satisfaction and fewer problems), whether it was one's own enhancement or a partner's enhancement, it was never significantly linked to greater stability. Furthermore, the relationships between enhancement and satisfaction and between enhancement and relationship problems were stronger for this group. For example, while a one unit increase in female enhancement was linked with sixty percent of a standard deviation decrease in female problems as well as male problems, these relationships were not significant for the other two couple groups. However, unexpectedly, women in this group reported more problems in the relationship when their partners reported higher enhancement. Furthermore, these same women reported lower enhancement when partners reported higher levels of self regulation. Despite these unexpected trends, self regulation was generally linked with higher relationship quality and stability, as well as with greater enhancement for both partners.

Different from their never-married counterparts, for couples in which only one partner had been divorced enhancement was most often linked with stability. In only one instance was enhancement significantly linked to satisfaction, and it never predicted relationship problems for these men and women. Thus, although enhancement did not predict higher quality relationships, in regards to satisfaction or relationship problems, these couples were still more likely to report that the relationship was more stable when they reported higher partner enhancement. However, self regulation was linked with all of the outcomes and, as expected, enhancement and self regulation were positively linked. An interesting

trend, however, was that only men's own self regulation predicted their own relationship outcomes, while a woman's relationship quality was related to both her own and her partner's self regulation.

For the couples in which both partners had previous marital experience, the link between enhancement and relationship quality differed by gender. Actor effects from women's enhancement to stability were positive, but men's actor effects of enhancement to stability were negative. In contrast, female partner effects of enhancement to male reports of stability were positive, and male partner effects of enhancement to female reports of relationship quality but not stability were also positive.

Self regulation appeared to be a most salient variable for these couples, more so than for the other two groups, as all but one path significantly predicted greater relationship quality. Furthermore, both self and partner self regulation were linked with enhancement for both men and women. Follow-up analyses with Sobel's test confirmed that self regulation most often mediated the paths between enhancement and relationship quality for this both-divorced group (results available upon request). In fact, self regulation significantly mediated all paths between male and female enhancement and the male and female relationship outcome variables in both the satisfaction and relationship problems models.

In summary, while both actor and partner effects of enhancement were generally linked with better relationship outcomes, such outcomes varied based on partners' marital history. Furthermore, enhancement was unexpectedly linked with poorer relationship quality in two cases. Finally, self regulation's effect was most influential for couples in which both partners had been previously married.

Research Question 2: The third research question examined the relationship between life course factors and enhancement, self regulation, and the relationship quality variables. Such life course factors included cohabitation, having children from a previous relationship, length of the relationship, and male and female social approval.

First, it was expected that cohabitation would be related to lower satisfaction, to a higher frequency of relationship problems, and to greater relationship stability. However, the findings differed among the groups, as well as between men and women. In the never-married group, the link between cohabitation and relationship outcomes was as expected: cohabitation predicted poorer relationship quality and higher stability—although only women reported higher stability. Furthermore, both cohabiting men and women reported lower enhancement and men reported lower self regulation. The association between cohabitation and relationship outcomes was very different for the mixed-couples and the divorced couples. Men and women in mixed couples were not only more stable (although the link between cohabitation and stability was only trending towards significance for women), they also reported greater satisfaction and women reported higher mean levels of enhancement. Cohabitation was negatively linked with self regulation for both genders. Similarly, the men and women in the both-divorced group were more stable and more satisfied when they were living together. Opposite of the couples in which only one partner had been previously married, men in the both-divorced group reported higher partner enhancement when they were cohabiting, although they also reported lower mean levels of self regulation.

The relationship between children and relationship quality also indicated group differences. In the never-married group, women with children were more stable and reported greater partner enhancement, although they reported lower self regulation and more

problems. Men in this group reported lower perceptions of their partners when children from a previous relationship were present. However, having children from a previous relationship was linked to higher self regulation and relationship satisfaction among these same men, which was contrary to what was expected. Next, for both the mixed couples and the both-divorced couples, having children did not seem as important for the outcome of dating relationships.

For all three couple groups, relationship length was generally related to lower enhancement, self regulation, and relationship quality and stability. In no case was it related to higher quality or partner perceptions. However, relationship length was not strongly related to relationship wellbeing and perceptions overall, although it was somewhat strongly related to poorer self regulation for both men and women in the both-divorced group and men in the mixed couple group.

Finally, considering the link between male and female reports of social approval and enhancement and relationship wellbeing, results generally suggested that higher social support was linked with higher partner perceptions and better relationship outcomes. In all marital history groups, women's reports of friend approval were most strongly linked to their own reports of stability. Comparing the three groups, social approval was least often linked with relationship stability for men and women in the never-married group, and was most often linked with stability for those in the both-divorced group. Furthermore, for both the never-married and both-divorced couples, social approval was more frequently linked with enhancement than it was for those in the mixed couple groups. Unexpectedly, men in the never-married group reported lower satisfaction when women reported higher social approval. Furthermore, an examination of the interaction between male and female social

support indicated that men in the never-married group were most satisfied when social approval was low from both the male and female side (see Figure 2).

Another unexpected finding from the interactions between male and female social approval indicated that both men and women in the both-divorced group were more stable when social approval was low from both their own friends and their partners' friends (see Figures 3 & 4).

Discussion

Using a matched-partner dataset, this study used descriptive statistics and structural equation models to examine dating relationships in midlife, specifically looking at how partners' perceptions of one another were related to relationship quality. Life course and relationship factors such as marital history, having children from a previous relationship, cohabitation status, relationship length, and social approval were taken into account to examine the connection between enhancement and three relationship quality variables: satisfaction, problems, and stability. Self regulation was utilized as a mediating variable. The influence of marital history was studied by breaking couples into three groups: 1) those in which both partners had never been married, 2) those in which only one partner had been previously married, and 3) those in which both partners had previous marital experience.

Findings indicated differences, based on marital history, as to how partner perceptions related to relationship outcomes. Specifically, for those who had remained single having high perceptions of one's partner was generally linked with greater relationship satisfaction and fewer problems, but was not related to stability. To the contrary, for those couples in which either one or both partners had been divorced, enhancement was more frequently linked with stability than any other outcome. Furthermore, for the never-married

couples, the effect of enhancement on relationship satisfaction and problems were generally stronger than for the other two couple groups. While self regulation was connected with enhancement and the relationship quality variables for all groups of couples, it most often mediated the relationship between enhancement and relationship outcomes for couples wherein both had been divorced. Finally, the various life course and relationship factors such as cohabitation, having children from a previous relationship, and social approval predicted differences in partner perceptions and relationship quality based upon marital history.

Actor and Partner Effects in Dating Relationships

Although enhancement and self regulation generally predicted better relationship outcomes as expected (Murray et al., 1996), their association with relationship quality differed based upon men and women's marital history. Actor and partner effects of enhancement were frequently linked with greater satisfaction and fewer problems for the never-married couples, yet enhancement was never significantly related to relationship stability for them. These couples also reported the lowest mean levels of stability. These findings may corroborate with the research of Whitehead and Popenoe (2004) that suggests some men are not the "marrying type." Remaining single into midlife, at least for men, may indicate that one is simply not interested in the family lifestyle and hence does not see relationships as long-term, even if he is happy with his partner. This may also be supported by the findings that this couple group reported the longest time in their dating relationships and were more likely to cohabit than those couples in which one or both partners had been previously married. Although continuously-single women tend to be more interested in finding a marriage partner than previously married women, (Lewis & Moon, 1997), this may not be possible if their male companions are not interested in a long-term relationship.

Furthermore, many singles in midlife value their independence and see dating as an opportunity for companionship, versus an opportunity to find a marriage partner (Montenegro, 2003). The actor effects of self regulation on stability were quite strong—for example, a one unit increase in female self regulation was associated with forty percent of a standard deviation increase in stability for women, whereas a one unit increase in male self regulation was related to an increase in male stability by seventy percent of a standard deviation. Thus, it may be that when never-married partners are willing to take responsibility for the wellbeing of a relationship, it is because they see a future in it.

Unexpectedly, the partner effect of male enhancement predicted lower self regulation and higher relationship problems for women. While female enhancement was linked with sixty percent of a standard deviation decline in relationship problems for men, male enhancement predicted an increase of eighty percent of a standard deviation in relationship problems for women. These findings, as well as the finding that never-married women only reported higher relationship quality when they themselves reported partner enhancement may suggest that men in this group are indeed less “marriageable” (Whitehead & Popenoe, 2004). Thus, women’s perceptions of their partners in this group may merely be an accurate description of their dating companions. Furthermore, women in this group rated themselves higher on average than they rated their partners, providing further support to the idea that never-married women may generally see themselves more highly than they see their companions.

In contrast, for couples in which only one partner had been divorced, enhancement was essentially only predictive of relationship stability. Thus, whereas dating may be seen as a mechanism to enjoy companionship and have fun for those who have never married at

midlife, those who have married may be more interested in finding a long-term partner. Although Lewis and Moon (1997) suggest that previously married women are less likely to want to marry (or remarry) than ever-single women, considering that most of these couples consisted of a previously married man and a never-married woman, this finding may go along with the research of Stewart et al. (2003) who found that single men with children are more likely to re-partner than are single men without children (as well as more likely to re-partner than women with and without children). These previously married men may be looking for a companion to help with parenting and or domestic responsibilities. Thus, unlike their never-married counterparts these men may be very much the “marrying” type. Thus, although Montenegro (2003) reported that most single midlife adults see dating as an opportunity for short-term companionship, it may be necessary to consider differences in the backgrounds of midlife daters to better understand their motivations for dating.

For those couples in which both partners had been previously married, enhancement was linked with better relationship quality, although it was both the actor and partner effect of female enhancement that predicted stability for both men and women, while male’s enhancement of a partner was unexpectedly linked with lower stability. In other words, a one unit increase in women’s partner enhancement was linked with fifty percent of a standard deviation increase in stability for males, yet, a one unit increase in male’s enhancement of a partner was actually associated with a twenty percent of a standard deviation decrease in stability for these men. For these couples, it appears that the woman may be the one to determine whether the relationship will continue forward. Montenegro (2004) suggests that more previously married women (43%) than previously married men (30%) are hesitant to remarry, for fear of having another bad relationship. Furthermore, Lewis and Moon (1997)

found that previously married women are more satisfied with remaining single and report that they feel somewhat envied by others. Thus, these women may enjoy the independence that comes from being single as Montenegro (2003) suggests. For previously married women, finding a partner who they perceive highly may be even more important in predicting the stability of a relationship.

The finding that self regulation was a very salient factor for these couples may indicate the great importance previously divorced men and women place on taking responsibility for the relationship. Because they have experienced failed marriages, they may be extra cautious about how conflict is managed in their relationships. Furthermore, because these couples are required to combine the complexities of both of their family lives into the dating relationship, conflict may be more common and thus self regulation may prove more necessary for the maintenance of high quality relationships.

Although consistent with previous research that suggests the courtship stage is shorter prior to remarriage than to a first marriage (O'Flaherty & Eells, 1988), it is interesting that couples in which both partners had been previously divorced dated for the shortest period of time. This is intriguing if women in this group are less likely to want to marry (see Lewis & Moon, 1997). This may suggest that if couples in this group are dating to marry they do it quickly, or it may also indicate that if they are not going to marry they break off their relationships earlier. On the other hand, because the data for this sample was collected from an enrichment tool, this finding may simply suggest that couples in which both partners have been divorced seek to evaluate their relationship at an earlier period.

Life Course Factors

Cohabitation seemed to be a very different experience depending on marital history. For never-married couples, the effects of cohabitation on relationship quality were in line with findings from previous studies: it was linked to lower relationship quality, as well as to higher stability for women (Brown, 2003; see Stanley, Kline, & Markman, 2005). Partners also reported lower enhancement if they were cohabiting. Examining gender differences in the association between cohabitation and stability indicated that never-married men and women may be on different pages in regards to what cohabitation represents for the level of commitment in the relationship. While women may see cohabitation as a sign of a more stable relationship, men may have no such ideas. This finding goes along with the theories of Stanley et al. who suggest that because cohabitation is often an ambiguous relationship status, partners are likely to have different ideas regarding the level of commitment in the relationship. To the contrary, for couples in which one partner or both had been divorced, cohabitation was linked with greater relationship quality and stability for both genders. It may be that these couples see cohabitation as a replacement for marriage, whereas those who have never been married may see it as a trial for marriage. King and Scott (2005) suggest that couples who use cohabitation as a replacement for marriage are generally happier in their relationships than those who use it as a precursor to marriage. Furthermore, these same researchers found that younger couples were more likely to use cohabitation as a trial for marriage than their older counterparts. In the current study, because the never-married couples in this sample were significantly younger than the other two groups, they may have been more likely to see cohabitation as a step towards marriage. As previously married individuals are less likely to want to remarry (Lewis & Moon, 1997), cohabitation may be

seen as a perfectly acceptable relationship status. Thus, while Montenegro (2003) suggests that many middle-aged adults are more likely to choose cohabitation over marriage, their reasons for choosing cohabitation may differ based on life course experiences, and such reasons likely contribute to the differences in partner perceptions and subsequent relationship quality seen between these groups.

Having children from a previous relationship was also quite different in how it related to perceptions and relationship outcomes, based on marital history. When children were involved in the relationship, never married women viewed their male partners more highly and also reported greater relationship stability, while men were less likely to report enhancement of their female partners. Because women with children are less likely to re-partner than are women without children (Stewart et al., 2003), finding a man who is willing to accept both her and her children may be reason for these females to view their partners highly and stay in their relationships. On the other hand, men may see a woman's having children as a strike against her. It is interesting that these men were actually happier and reported higher self regulation when children were present in their relationships. One interpretation may be that these men enjoy the fathering experience, as the majority of these men have likely never been fathers. Another may be that if many of these women are still hoping to marry in order to have children before they are no longer physically able to do so, and men are hesitant to commit to a long-term relationship, a woman's status as a mother may take the pressure off these men to get married, leading to greater satisfaction.

In contrast to the never-married couples, for couples in which either one or both had been divorced, having children from a previous relationship was not significantly related to any of the relationship outcomes. Furthermore, as opposed to the never-married women, the

women in these two groups reported lower partner enhancement when children were present. The finding that children were not related to relationship outcomes for couples in these two groups may partially be due to the fact that these groups report higher relationship satisfaction and stability and lower problems than their never-married men and women. Furthermore, couples in these groups may be more use to the responsibilities of childrearing and therefore do not see children as detrimental to relationship wellbeing, at least in the dating stage. Also, women in these couple groups perhaps reported lower partner enhancement when children were present because they were likely being asked to take responsibility for the man's children. The experience of being a stepmother (although these women were not married to their partners) is often difficult for women and can contribute to poorer relationship quality (Whitsett & Land, 1992), and likely in this case, to lower enhancement of a male partner.

The outcomes for relationship length indicated that, consistent with previous research, it was generally negatively related to relationship outcomes (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). The effect of relationship length seemed more frequently related to relationship quality for couples in which only one had been divorced. Thus, because these relationships seem to be focused on stability and therefore seen on a more long-term timetable, it may be that if they do not progress to commitment early on, they are more prone to relationship disintegration.

The effects of social support on relationship quality and enhancement once again indicated group differences. For couples in which both partners had never married, social support was not very predictive of relationship outcomes, although it was fairly strongly linked with perceptions. What was most interesting, however, was that men in this group

actually reported lower satisfaction when their partner's friends reported higher social approval. Although the effect was somewhat small—a one unit increase in female social approval was linked with a little over ten percent of a standard deviation decrease in satisfaction for males—it is still interesting to note that men in this group were happiest when social approval was low from both the man's side and the woman's side. Perhaps if men in this group do not see dating as mean's to a more long-term relationship, they may see high social support as pressure to form a more committed relationship and are thus less satisfied when support is high.

Once again, for the couples in which only one partner had been divorced, social approval was most strongly linked with relationship stability, providing further evidence that these couples seem to be focused on the long-term in their relationships. What was interesting, however, was that men in this group reported lower self regulation when female social approval was high. This may suggest that when these men feel approved of by the woman's social network, they see less of a need to personally take responsibility for the relationship. Because men in this group were more self-enhancing – which was opposite from the other two groups – they may already have the idea that their partner is getting the better end of the deal. Therefore, when these men feel that women's friends approve of them, they may see it as further proof that they are the better partner and thus feel less of a need to make personal changes for the betterment of the relationship. Perhaps these men see themselves as rescuing never-married female women from a life of singleness or rescuing a divorced woman and possibly her children, from financial difficulties.

Finally, social approval appeared most predictive of relationship outcomes and perceptions for couples in which both partners had been divorced. This, along with the

finding that couples in this group reported the highest levels of social approval, may suggest the important role of social support in these relationships. It may be that because these couples are likely to have more complex social networks than those in the other groups, they may place a high value on social approval. Also, because both have experienced previous marital dissolution, these couples may especially need reassurance from friends as to the quality of the relationship. One unexpected finding was that these men and women received lower social approval when stability was higher (see Tables 3 & 4). This may suggest that the friends of these men and women are wary of their entering another relationship. This could be due to men's friends seeing his establishment of a committed relationship as an abandonment of his previous family, as men must take into consideration the financial implications of remarriage for his previous family (Stewart et al., 2003). Similarly, if such difficulties are present in the relationship, women's friends may be wary of her marrying a man with obligations to a previous wife and children, especially considering this woman will likely have to take on stepmother responsibilities.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although this study provides insights on the processes and subsequent outcomes of dating relationships in midlife, there are a couple of limitations to consider. First, although the sample came from a large dataset, it was not nationally representative; thus, findings cannot be generalized to the population. Future research should especially focus on examining couples of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds, as a large majority of these couples were Caucasian. Also, due to sample size, it was not possible to compare group differences between couples in which only the man had been previously married as opposed to those in which only the woman had been previously married. Future research examining

these differences would provide greater insight into how relationship processes and outcomes differ when never-married men are dating previously married women, versus when never-married women are dating previously married men. However, in order for this to occur, surveys and enrichment tools aimed specifically at midlife couples are needed. Research is also needed that uses longitudinal data to examine the progression of dating relationships for midlife couples. Doing so would contribute to a richer understanding of how marital history and other life course factors relate to partner perceptions and relationship quality over time. Such studies would prove especially important to understanding the link between factors in midlife dating relationships that predict stable marriages and remarriages.

Conclusion

Findings from this study demonstrate the heterogeneity among midlife dating couples and how varying experiences of midlife daters play a role in predicting the quality of their relationships. While the backgrounds of younger men and women daters are likely more similar in many ways, the processes and outcomes of midlife dating relationships vary based upon several life course factors. Furthermore, this study also shows that dating at midlife likely has different purposes, depending on previous marital experience. Those who have remained single into midlife, especially men, may merely see dating as an opportunity for companionship instead of as a mechanism to find a marriage partner. Thus, these men may be considered not the “marrying type.” On the other hand, those who have been previously married may be more likely to reestablish a committed relationship, although some may have difficulties doing so based on the complexities of their social networks. These differences are important for premarital counselors and educators to take into account as they help these couples navigate the courtship process and establish successful marriages, especially

considering that dating in midlife is becoming more common. An understanding of what helps these couples to build successful marriages will have implications for not only the wellbeing of these men and women, but also for the children who are often involved in these relationships.

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Table 1. Correlations, means, standard deviations, and F-tests for independent and dependent variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Enhan ¹	-.12**	.26***	-0.04	-.11**	-0.01	-.33***	.35***	-.09*	.08*	-.10**	.49***	.41***	-.42***
2. Self Reg ²	.30***	.34***	-0.04	.12***	.08*	-.43***	.49***	-.09*	-0.05	0.07	.54***	.62***	-.67***
3. Cohab ³	-0.02	-.35***	NA	-0.05	0.01	.18***	-.13***	-0.01	-.11**	-0.07	-0.06	0.02	0.08
4. Divorce	-0.03	.20***	-0.02	.35***	.52***	-.14***	-0.07	0.11	-.24***	.34***	0.05	0.05	-0.02
5. Child ⁴	0.04	.12**	0.01	.50***	NA	-.16***	-0.07	-0.04	-.11**	0.18	.11**	0.06	-0.05
6. Length	-.22***	-.50***	.18***	-.21***	-.16***	NA	-.37***	.11*	.14***	-0.03	-.42***	-.56***	.51***
7. Support ⁵	.24***	.31***	-.13***	-0.06	-.19***	-.19***	.12**	0.07	0.06	-0.03	.40***	.63***	-.55***
8. Income	0.04	0.06	-0.01	0.05	0.06	.10*	.12**	.29***	.30***	.10*	-.26***	-.10**	.29***
9. Educ ⁶	0.06	.13***	-0.07	-.14***	-0.02	0.02	.15***	.45***	.18***	0.03	0.05	0.06	-0.01
10. Age	0.05	.08*	-0.07	.34***	0.27	0.01	-0.01	.20***	.13***	.35***	-.10*	-0.03	-0.03
11. Satis ⁷	.28***	.66***	-.19***	.22***	.16***	-.55***	.31***	0.01	0.05	0.05	.84***	.53***	-.66***
12. Stabl ⁸	.27***	.58***	-.12**	0.06	0.02	-.61***	.35***	-0.02	.08*	-0.06	.61***	.55***	-.68***
13. Probs ⁹	-.27***	-.57***	.17***	-.21***	-.12**	.56***	-.21***	0.04	-0.01	-.12**	-.57***	-.54***	.58***

Table 1 (continued). Correlations, means, standard deviations, and F-tests for independent and dependent variables

		Enhan	Self Reg	Cohab	Divorce	Child	Length	Support	Income	Educ	Age	Satis	Stabl	Probs
Never Married														
Male	M	-.12	3.85					3.38	7.00	7.71	41.69	3.57	3.74	2.00
	SD	.61	.69	NA	NA	NA	3.64	.79	2.09	1.67	5.94	.52	.61	.42
		-.20	3.82					3.21	5.98	7.62	36.31	3.65	3.67	1.97
		.55	.63					.83	2.02	1.31	6.51	.78	.74	.55
Mixed Group														
Male	M	-.15	4.22					3.32	7.11	6.81	45.36	3.97	3.94	1.78
	SD	.53	.65	NA	NA	NA	3.21	.72	1.93	2.02	6.13	.67	.89	.51
Female	M	-.14	3.86				1.67	3.26	5.89	7.09	39.72	3.99	3.82	1.81
	SD	.68	.77					.87	2.19	1.90	7.53	.81	1.03	.60
Both Divorced														
Male	M	-.19	4.16					3.40	6.99	7.03	48.17	3.95	3.88	1.77
	SD	.58	.69	NA	NA	NA	2.87	.73	1.47	1.78	6.77	.71	1.07	.59
Female	M	-.12	4.05				1.49	3.27	5.63	6.19	42.83	3.92	3.85	1.80
	SD	.54	.72					.81	1.90	2.15	7.29	.77	.94	.56
<i>F</i> -tests:														
	Male	0.17	15.81***					0.72	0.34	12.15***	54.67***	21.14***	2.44	11.67***
	Female	0.53	7.11**	NA	NA	NA	14.16***	0.27	1.83	33.07***	43.88***	9.58***	2.56	4.99**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Correlations above the diagonal are for females, those below the diagonal are for males, and those on the diagonal are between males and females. ¹Enhan = Enhancement; ²Self Reg = Self Regulation; ³Cohab = Cohabitation; ⁴Child = Children ⁵Support = Social Support; ⁶Educ = Education; ⁷Satis = Satisfaction; ⁸Stabl = Stability; and ⁹Probs = Problems.

Table 2. *Unstandardized path coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses) between enhancement and relationship satisfaction, and between self regulation and enhancement*

Exogenous Variables	Never-married group		Mixed group		Both-divorced group	
	Female Satis. ¹	Male Satis.	Female Satis.	Male Satis.	Female Satis.	Male Satis.
Female Enhancement	.41*** (.10)	-.01 (.06)	.35*** (.07)	.13 [†] (.07)	.01 (.07)	.01 (.05)
Male Enhancement	-.03 (.10)	.33*** (.05)	-.10 (.08)	-.02 (.07)	.11 (.07)	.35*** (.05)
Female Self Regulation	.60*** (.09)	.06 (.06)	.25*** (.05)	.04 (.05)	.54*** (.07)	.36*** (.05)
Male Self Regulation	-.21* (.08)	.40*** (.04)	.15* (.06)	.59*** (.06)	.29*** (.08)	.38*** (.05)
Cohabitation	-.46*** (.13)	-.01 (.06)	.36 [†] (.21)	.33 [†] (.19)	.55*** (.15)	.30** (.10)
Children	-.07 (.21)	.46*** (.11)	.01 (.07)	-.04 (.07)	-.18 [†] (.10)	.01 (.07)
Length	.03 (.05)	-.08*** (.02)	-.11** (.03)	-.09** (.03)	-.01 (.03)	-.04 [†] (.02)
Female Social Support.	.13 [†] (.07)	-.10** (.04)	.19*** (.05)	-.08 [†] (.05)	-.12* (.06)	-.05 (.04)
Male Social Support	.07 (.07)	.001 (.04)	-.06 (.05)	.11* (.05)	.21*** (.06)	.19*** (.04)
Fem.*Male Soc. Supt. ²	.07 (.06)	-.07* (.03)	-.07 (.06)	-.06 (.06)	.20** (.07)	.07 (.05)
Exogenous Variables	Fem. Enhance	Male Enhance	Fem. Enhance	Male Enhance	Fem. Enhance	Male Enhance

Cohabitation	-.21* (.09)	-.35*** (.10)	.91*** (.23)	-.22 (.20)	-.08 (.11)	.38*** (.11)
Children	1.17*** (.13)	-.40** (.15)	-.20* (.08)	.22** (.07)	-.30*** (.09)	.10 (.09)
Length	-.10** (.03)	-.04 (.04)	-.12*** (.03)	-.11*** (.02)	-.11*** (.02)	-.003 (.02)
Fem. Social Support	.28*** (.04)	.10 [†] (.05)	.22*** (.05)	.003 (.04)	.08 (.05)	.14*** (.04)
Male Social Support	.11** (.04)	.41*** (.05)	-.07 (.06)	.05 (.05)	.22*** (.05)	.15** (.05)
Fem.*Male Soc. Supt.	.06 (.05)	-.04 (.05)	.22** (.07)	.09 (.06)	.19** (.06)	.12* (.05)
Exogenous Variables	Fem. Self Reg.	Male Self Reg.	Fem. Self Reg.	Male Self Reg.	Fem. Self Reg.	Male Self Reg.
Female Enhancement	.19* (.09)	.44*** (.07)	-.08 (.08)	.24* (.09)	.16** (.05)	.30*** (.06)
Male Enhancement	-.27** (.10)	.27** (.08)	.30*** (.07)	.26** (.08)	.20*** (.05)	.26*** (.05)
Cohabitation	.15 (.10)	-.38** (.12)	-.55* (.26)	-.60** (.23)	-.18 [†] (.10)	-.97*** (.09)
Children	.24 (.17)	.81*** (.19)	.25** (.09)	-.22** (.08)	-.02 (.08)	.13 [†] (.08)
Length	.01 (.04)	-.16*** (.04)	-.06 [†] (.03)	-.16*** (.03)	-.20*** (.02)	-.14*** (.02)
Fem. Social Support	.29*** (.05)	.16* (.06)	.33*** (.05)	-.14** (.05)	.32*** (.04)	.03 (.04)
Male Social Support	.16** (.05)	.32*** (.07)	.01 (.06)	-.05 (.05)	-.30*** (.05)	.07 [†] (.04)
Fem.*Male Soc. Supt.	.08 [†] (.05)	.13* (.06)	.40*** (.07)	-.03 (.06)	.11 [†] (.05)	-.17** (.05)

Fit Indices

$\chi^2 = 43.40, p = .05; CFI = 1.00; TLI = .96; RMSEA = .03$

Note. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. ¹Satis. = satisfaction; ²Fem.*Male Soc. Supt. = female by male social support.

Table 3. *Unstandardized path coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses) between enhancement and relationship problems, and between self regulation and enhancement*

Exogenous Variables	Never-married group		Mixed group		Both-divorced group	
	Fem. ¹ Problems	Male Problems	Fem. Problems	Male Problems	Fem. Problems	Male Problems
Female Enhancement	-.34*** (.07)	-.25*** (.07)	-.04 (.04)	.07 (.05)	.03 (.04)	.03 (.04)
Male Enhancement	.21*** (.06)	.06 (.06)	-.02 (.05)	.04 (.06)	-.11** (.04)	-.20*** (.05)
Female Self Regulation	-.45*** (.06)	-.18** (.07)	-.25*** (.04)	.02 (.04)	-.34*** (.04)	-.25*** (.05)
Male Self Regulation	.07 (.05)	-.29*** (.05)	-.02 (.04)	-.33*** (.05)	-.18*** (.04)	-.23*** (.04)
Cohabitation	.16 [†] (.09)	-.03 (.09)	-.52*** (.14)	-.85*** (.15)	.03 (.08)	.15 (.10)
Children	.55*** (.14)	.33* (.15)	-.01 (.05)	.03 (.05)	.10 [†] (.05)	.11 [†] (.07)
Length	.02 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	.10*** (.02)	.15*** (.02)	.03 (.02)	.10*** (.02)
Female Social Support	-.02 (.05)	.09 [†] (.05)	-.31*** (.03)	-.14*** (.04)	-.22*** (.03)	.06 (.02)
Male Social Support	-.12* (.05)	.04 (.05)	.04 (.03)	.05 (.04)	-.04 (.03)	-.21*** (.04)
¹ Fem.*Male Soc. Supt.	-.06 (.04)	-.08* (.04)	-.04 (.04)	.02 (.05)	-.002 (.04)	-.01 (.04)
Exogenous Variables	Fem. Enhance	Male Enhance	Fem. Enhance	Male Enhance	Fem. Enhance	Male Enhance

Cohabitation	-.22* (.09)	-.32** (.11)	.85*** (.24)	-.12 (.21)	-.08 (.11)	.37*** (.11)
Children	1.18*** (.13)	-.46** (.16)	-.18* (.08)	.19* (.08)	-.30*** (.09)	.08 (.09)
Length	-.09** (.03)	-.05 (.04)	-.11*** (.03)	-.12*** (.03)	-.11*** (.02)	-.003 (.02)
Female Social Support	.29*** (.04)	.09 [†] (.05)	.23*** (.05)	-.001 (.04)	.08 [†] (.05)	.16*** (.04)
Male Social Support	.11** (.04)	.41*** (.05)	-.07 (.06)	.05 (.05)	.22*** (.05)	.15** (.05)
Fem.*Male Social Supt.	.06 (.05)	-.05 (.06)	.23*** (.07)	.08 (.06)	.19** (.06)	.13* (.06)
Exogenous Variables	Fem. Self Reg.	Male Self Reg.	Fem. Self Reg.	Male Self Reg.	Fem. Self Reg.	Male Self Reg.
Female Enhancement	.19* (.09)	.44*** (.07)	-.08 (.08)	.24* (.09)	.16** (.06)	.30*** (.06)
Male Enhancement	-.29** (.10)	.27** (.08)	.29*** (.07)	.25** (.09)	.19*** (.05)	.25*** (.05)
Cohabitation	.15 (.10)	-.38** (.12)	-.53* (.26)	-.53* (.23)	-.18 (.10)	-.97*** (.09)
Children	.24 (.17)	.81*** (.19)	.25** (.09)	-.23** (.08)	-.02 (.08)	.13 (.08)
Length	.01 (.04)	-.17 (.04)	-.06 [†] (.03)	-.17*** (.03)	-.20*** (.02)	-.15*** (.02)
Female Social Support	.29*** (.06)	.16* (.07)	.33*** (.05)	-.15** (.05)	.32*** (.04)	.16*** (.04)
Male Social Support	.16** (.05)	.33*** (.07)	.01 (.06)	-.05 (.05)	-.30*** (.05)	.08 [†] (.04)
Fem.*Male Soc.Supt. ²	.08 [†] (.05)	.12 [†] (.06)	.40*** (.07)	-.02 (.07)	.11 [†] (.06)	-.16** (.05)

Fit Indices

$\chi^2 = 21.97, p < .05$; CFI = 1.00; TLI = .92; RMSEA = .04

Note. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. ¹Fem = female; ²Fem.*Male Soc. Supt. = female by male social support.

Table 4. *Unstandardized path coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses) between enhancement and relationship stability, and between self regulation and enhancement*

Exogenous Variables	Never-married group		Mixed group		Both-divorced group	
	Fem. ¹ Stability	Male Stability	Fem. Stability	Male Stability	Fem. Stability	Male Stability
Female Enhancement	-.09 (.09)	.13 [†] (.07)	.14 (.10)	.33*** (.08)	.40*** (.06)	.47*** (.07)
Male Enhancement	.09 (.08)	.10 (.06)	.44*** (.11)	.48*** (.09)	-.10 (.07)	-.22** (.07)
Female Self Regulation	.32*** (.08)	.06 (.06)	.20* (.08)	.004 (.06)	.60*** (.06)	.43*** (.07)
Male Self Regulation	.13* (.07)	.42*** (.05)	.23* (.09)	.39*** (.07)	.23** (.07)	.39*** (.08)
Cohabitation	.34** (.10)	.08 (.08)	.51 [†] (.31)	.49* (.24)	.32* (.14)	.32* (.14)
Children	.58*** (.17)	.10 (.14)	.12 (.11)	-.02 (.09)	.01 (.10)	-.08 (.10)
Length	-.07 [†] (.04)	-.11*** (.03)	-.09 [†] (.04)	-.17*** (.03)	-.05 [†] (.03)	-.01 (.03)
Female Social Support	.41*** (.06)	-.01 (.05)	.42*** (.07)	.07 (.06)	.45*** (.05)	.24*** (.06)
Male Social Support	.11 [†] (.05)	.05 (.06)	.29*** (.07)	.29*** (.06)	.16** (.06)	.28*** (.06)
Fem.*Male Soc. Supt. ²	.13** (.05)	.002 (.04)	.05 (.09)	.01 (.07)	-.16* (.06)	-.20** (.07)
Exogenous Variables	Fem. Enhance	Male Enhance	Fem. Enhance	Male Enhance	Fem. Enhance	Male Enhance

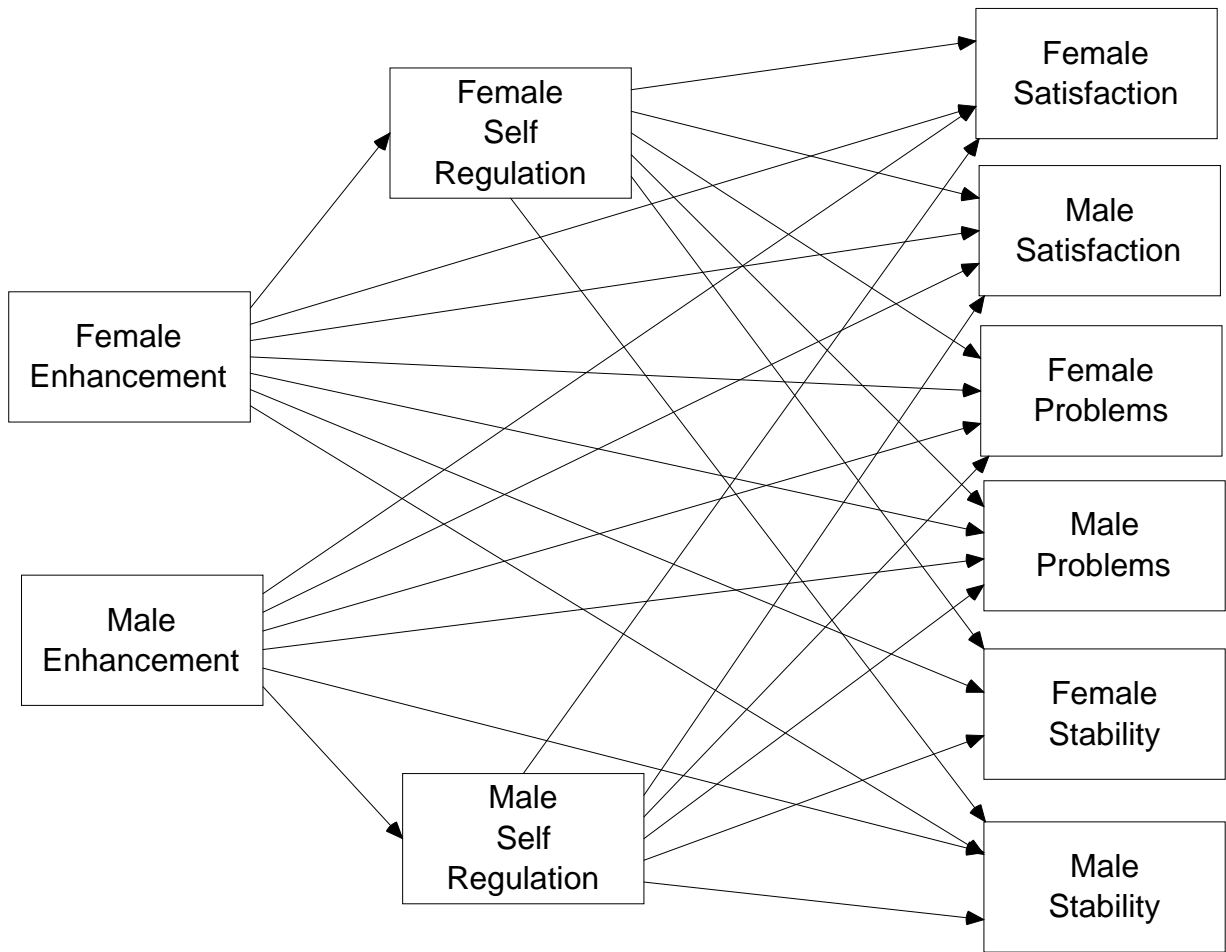
Cohabitation	-.21* (.09)	-.35*** (.10)	.91*** (.23)	-.22 (.20)	-.08 (.11)	.38*** (.11)
Children	1.17*** (.13)	-.40** (.15)	-.20* (.08)	.22** (.07)	-.30*** (.09)	.10 (.09)
Length	-.10** (.03)	-.04 (.04)	-.12*** (.03)	-.11*** (.02)	-.11*** (.02)	-.003 (.02)
Female Social Support	.28*** (.04)	.10 [†] (.05)	.22*** (.05)	.003 (.04)	.08 [†] (.05)	.14*** (.04)
Male Social Support	.11** (.04)	.41*** (.05)	-.07 (.06)	.05 (.05)	.22*** (.05)	.15** (.05)
Fem.*Male Soc. Supt.	.06 (.05)	-.04 (.05)	.22** (.07)	.09 (.06)	.19** (.06)	.12* (.05)
Exogenous Variables	Fem. Self Reg.	Male Self Reg.	Fem. Self Reg.	Male Self Reg.	Fem. Self Reg.	Male Self Reg.
Female Enhancement	.19* (.09)	.44*** (.07)	-.08 (.08)	.24* (.09)	.16** (.06)	.30*** (.06)
Male Enhancement	-.27** (.10)	.27** (.08)	.30*** (.07)	.26** (.08)	.20*** (.05)	.26*** (.05)
Cohabitation	.15 (.10)	-.38** (.12)	-.55* (.26)	-.60** (.23)	-.18 [†] (.10)	-.97*** (.09)
Children	.24 (.17)	.81*** (.19)	.25** (.09)	-.22** (.08)	-.02 (.08)	.13 [†] (.07)
Length	.01 (.04)	-.16*** (.04)	-.06 (.03)	-.16*** (.03)	-.20*** (.02)	-.14*** (.02)
Female Social Support	.29*** (.05)	.16* (.07)	.33*** (.05)	-.14** (.05)	.32*** (.04)	.03 (.04)
Male Social Support	.16** (.05)	.32*** (.06)	.01 (.06)	-.05 (.05)	-.30*** (.05)	.07 [†] (.04)
Fem.*Male Soc.Supt. ²	.08 [†] (.05)	.13* (.06)	.40*** (.07)	-.03 (.06)	.11 [†] (.05)	.17** (.05)

Fit Indices

$\chi^2 = 21.86, p = .05; CFI = 1.00; TLI = .95; RMSEA = .03$

Note. $\dagger p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001$. ¹Fem = female; ²Fem.*Male Soc. Supt. = female by male social support.

Figure 1. Conceptual model.



Note. Control variables not shown but included in the model are: *cohabitation, children, relationship length, female social support, male social support, female education, male education, female income, male income, female age, and male age.*

Figure 2. Interaction between male and female social support for male relationship satisfaction of never-married males.

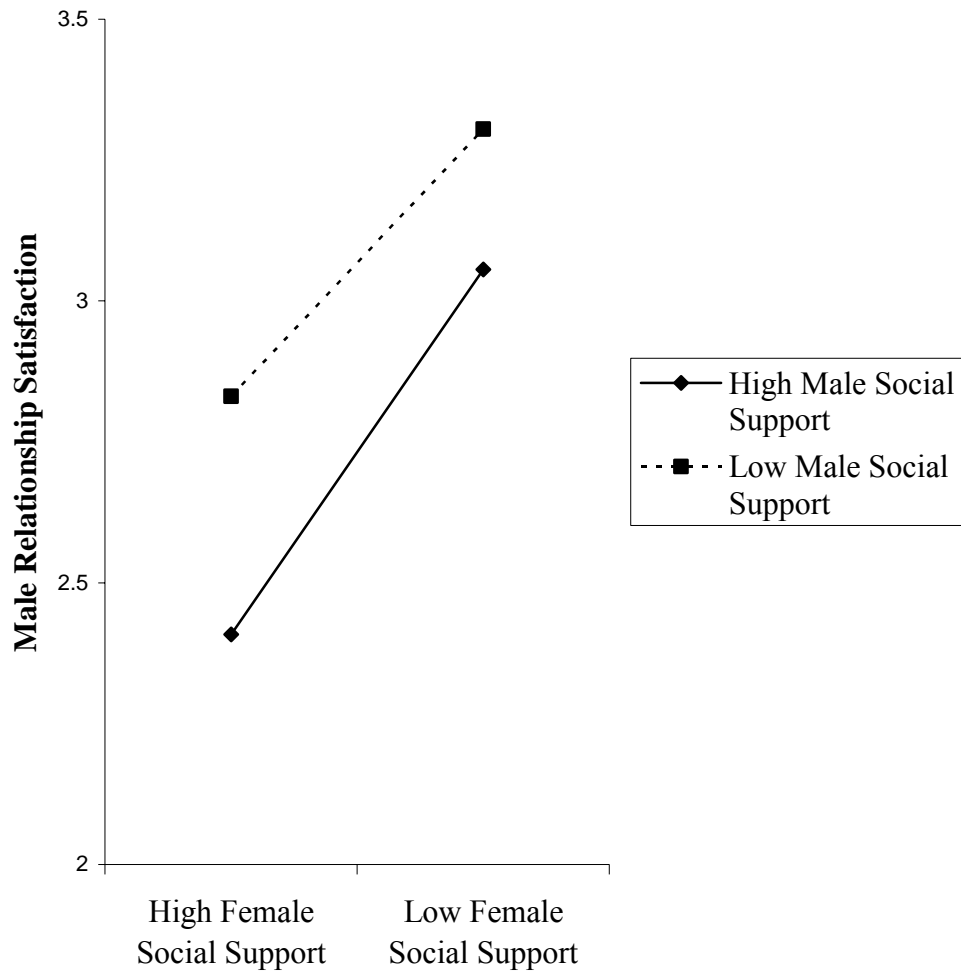


Figure 3. Interaction between male and female social support for male relationship stability of men in both-divorced couples.

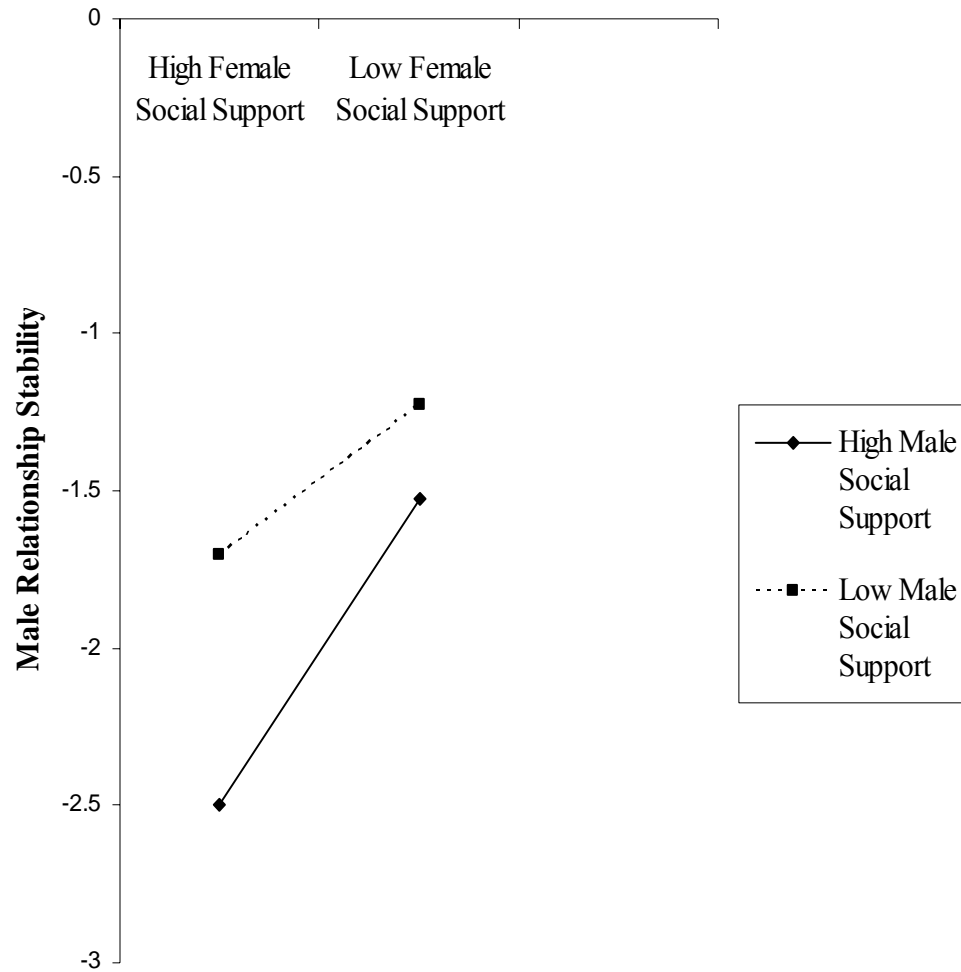


Figure 4. Interaction between male and female social support for female relationship stability of women in both-divorced couples.

