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*Old Dominion University*

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CORRELATES OF MARITAL SUCCESS: A HOMOGAMY MODEL

by

Sarah A. Raper

B.A. December 2001, Lee University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculties of  
Old Dominion University and Norfolk State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of

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Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Xiushi Yang (Director)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Katarina Wegar (Member)

\_\_\_\_\_  
William K. Agyei (Member)

## ABSTRACT

### CORRELATES OF MARITAL SUCCESS: A HOMOGAMY MODEL

Sarah A. Raper  
Old Dominion University, 2008  
Director: Dr. Xiushi Yang

This paper examines the relationship between five demographic homogamy variables and marital success. Throughout this paper, several questions were examined that seek to give a better understanding of the factors that impact the stability and quality of American marriages. Is homogamy an important issue in modern society, or have cultural advancements in American society made homogamy irrelevant? Do both ascribed and achieved characteristics still impact marital success? Data from wave one of the National Survey of Families and Households was used for the analysis. First, correlations between the heterogamy variables and marital success were evaluated. Next, regression models were used to analyze the relationship between the heterogamy variables and marital success. Results suggest that homogamy does have an impact on marital success, though results for individual variables were mixed.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION



Throughout the course of human history the institution of the family has been at the center of human life and development. In modern times as well, the family plays a significant role in the life of every human being born on earth. Even with the advanced technological progress of the twenty first century, everyone enters this life with a biological mother and a biological father. While what happens to an infant after birth may vary, every person's life is forever impacted by family. Similarly, most of our lives are directly or indirectly impacted by marriage, the lack thereof, or divorce in our families of orientation and potentially our families of procreation. Regardless of the technological and social advances American culture continues to make, the role of the family will always remain central and irreplaceable.

Monday, October 3, 2005, the Wilmington Star News reports, "Forty percent of marriages end in divorce. Can you predict if yours will, too?" (Song 2006: 1D). Divorce is a prevalent social problem that plagues today's American families. Almost everyone living in America either knows someone who is divorced or has been divorced themselves, and can see the problems that are associated with marital dissolution. Studies have shown that divorced families, especially women and children, suffer long term economic, social, and emotional effects that can change their lives forever (Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1989; Weitzman 1985). While divorce can sometimes solve the problem of an unhappy couple, there are far reaching consequences for the entire

family to which there are no easy solutions. On average, women and their children experience a 73 percent drop in their standard of living after divorce (Weitzman 1985). Clearly this drop creates significant financial and emotional problems for divorced women and children that are not quickly resolved. Women who have devoted their lives to being homemakers and stay at home mothers have the added disadvantage of being out of the workforce for a number of years and may find it difficult or impossible to find a job with a living wage that is up to their standards. While most men do not face the same economic hardships of divorce, both men and women suffer socially and in their general health and well being (Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1989). Though much of the negative stigma of divorce has dissipated, divorce still causes additional stresses to be added, social networks to be disrupted, and high emotions during the process of divorce and shortly thereafter. While time helps to heal the wounds from divorce, there are lasting effects that will remain with the men, women, and children involved.

A quick glance at the past several decades shows many changes in marital status and living arrangement trends in the United States. The Census Bureau reports that approximately 2.4 million people get married in the United States each year, and 1.2 million people get divorced (Kreider and Fields 2002). Among marital status groups, the fastest growing category is the divorced population, which more than quadrupled from 1970 to 1996 (Saluter and Lugaila 1998). In 1970, three percent (4.3 million) of the adult population age 18 and over were divorced, while 1996 figures showed ten percent (18.3 million) of the adult population was divorced (Saluter and Lugaila 1998). These numbers show a drastic increase in the number of divorced adults in the United States population. In 2001 the US Census Bureau published a report from their 1996 data on household economics that supports this finding. The study showed that while

approximately 90% of people marry at some point in their lives, nearly 50 percent of first marriages for men under 45 end in divorce, with 44-52 percent of first marriages for women of the same age group ending in divorce (Kreider and Fields 2002). The media and most popular sources, including the Census Bureau, estimate the divorce rate to be between 40 and 50 percent. While this number grew rapidly in the seventies and eighties and has since leveled off, it is still alarmingly high, especially for anyone considering marriage. Official statistics are not kept on causes of divorce, and with the increasing popularity of no fault divorce finding the true reason for the dissolution of a marriage is difficult (American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers ND). However, research shows several key factors that couples often cite as the reason they choose to divorce. Such reasons include finances and financial stressors; infidelity; lack of adequate communication; major life changes, such as the loss of a job or having children; sexual problems; lack of commitment; failed expectations; and abuse (McCloud 2006). Though divorce appears to be on the rise, and the causes of divorce are numerous, there are marriages that succeed, and this is the other side of the story that must be examined if changes are to be made in American families.

If statistics that estimate that 40 to 50 percent of marriages end in divorce are correct, it follows logically that 50 to 60 percent of marriages do not end in divorce and are therefore successful at some level. This paper is concerned with that phenomenon. More specifically, this paper seeks to identify key demographic characteristics of marriages that work. Much research has been devoted to divorce and the terrible effects it has, while less work has been done on variations within marriages that remain intact. Since divorce is such a problem in modern American society, it makes sense to study



marriage, especially marriages that are successful, in order to find solutions to the divorce problem.

Recognizing that marital success is an important issue, a theoretical framework through which I could study this phenomenon had to be researched. There is a vast collection of pop-psychology theories on marital success ranging from birth-order studies such as Dr. Kevin Leman's, to theories of personality differences, differences in ways of expressing love, and numerous others (Leman 2001). In the social sciences, valuable attempts have been made to study marital success using a variety of methods such as social-exchange theory (Levinger 1979), economic theory (Becker 1974), role theory (Lewis and Spanier 1979), conflict management (Blood 1960), interaction processes (Gottman 1993), and others. However, newly married myself and finding many of my friends and associates marrying, I noticed something that these theories did not specifically address. I became intrigued by the increasing occurrence of unlikely couples, or individuals who seemed so completely different from each other that it was hard to believe they could make it as a couple. Culturally we are seeing a breakdown of norms in marriage, allowing individuals the freedom to marry whomever they wish with less pressure from society to conform to a set of predetermined attributes. As a general rule today, people are looking to fall in love, not carry on the family line or protect the family fortune. In American society, there are no longer firm barriers preventing individuals from marrying across a variety of previous cultural barriers. Along with this phenomenon comes the possibility that marrying across such boundaries may have an effect on the success of such marriages. With this in mind, I have chosen to study marital success using a theory of homogamy.

Closely related to the idea of marital success is the practice of mate selection, a process that has been studied by the public as well as many social science researchers. While romantic theories tend to dominate the public view, Hollingshead (1950) states that all theories of selection suggested by social scientists can be categorized into two basic groups, homogamy and heterogamy. Homogamy theories argue “like attracts like” while heterogamy argues “opposites attract.” Much of the research on heterogamy focuses on individual differences in personality, such as introverts preferring to marry extroverts. As such personality differences are not the focus of this paper, and as most cultural and demographic studies support a homogamous theory of mate selection, a general theory of homogamy will be used in this study. In addition, while testing a theory of homogamy, heterogamy will also be tested by default, as the two theories are basic opposites of one another.

Every person in the United States is touched by the effects of marriage and family at some point during their life, making the study of marriage an important field in sociology. This thesis is of special importance because it tests a specific theory in marriage, the theory of homogamy, and whether it is related to marital success. Currently, many studies of homogamy deal with mate selection as opposed to marital success. Therefore, this study will take the theory of homogamy one step further by focusing on marital success across several variables. It will add to the body of knowledge that seeks to explain marital success, and will pinpoint specific factors that have an impact on marital success. While the practical implications of this research are less obvious, they do exist. First and foremost, as knowledge of factors relating to marital success increases, both couples and others who work with potential mates will have a better idea of the makeup of a successful marriage. While it is unrealistic to think

that everyone considering marriage will first make sure that they have all of the right characteristics in common with their potential mate, it is reasonable to hope that people will take these factors into consideration when looking for a mate. Also, it is possible that knowing what makes a marriage more successful will conversely prevent characteristics of unsuccessful marriages. Therefore, if couples recognize potential problems due to certain individual or background differences, their awareness may work as a protective factor in marriage. Finally, by testing the usefulness of this theory, future researchers and policy implementers will be able to take the next step by discovering how certain factors relate to marital success, how to promote successful marriages, and how to minimize the potential negative effect of individual differences. Overall, the goal of this research is to pinpoint key demographic factors related to marital success, and therefore reveal factors that protect couples from divorce and its negative impact on family life.

For this study, data from the 1989 National Survey of Households and Families will be analyzed. The goal of this analysis is to test a homogamy model for the purpose of determining if demographic similarities between husbands and wives lead to marital success, as has been suggested by earlier research. This goal is important, as it potentially holds an important key for understanding marital success. In the following chapter a review of relevant literature will be presented to serve to introduce the reader to the field of marital success and homogamy.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### HOMOLOGY

Researchers, as well as the general public, often argue that people marry others like them in terms of various demographic characteristics, a practice termed homology. Social science research on homology dates back as far as the early 1900's, and continues to be a focus of marriage studies today. Researchers argue that homology theory has its roots in functionalism, primarily through Robert Merton's work in structural analysis and general process theory (Jorgensen and Klein 1979). Broadly speaking, structural analysis is a main branch of sociological theory that views society as greater than the sum of individuals, and holds that there is a set of social structures in every society that generate social phenomena (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner 2000). In other words, social analysis proponents believe that social structures, such as the family, each have a function and work together to contribute to society as a whole, much like parts of the body work together to function as a whole. As marriage and the family are important social structures, homology becomes an important aspect of society as certain traits are valued and carried on in marriage partners.

Many variables have been considered in homology research. Weisfeld, et al. (1992) studied marital satisfaction in British marriages and tested many factors of homology including education, parental wealth, cleverness, income, decision making, health, and attractiveness, several of which are personality characteristics and not demographic characteristics. However, it has been argued that structural and demographic correlates are more useful for exploring marital conflict and dissolution

than personality reasons usually cited by couples (Burns 1984). Therefore, structural and demographic characteristics of homogamy will be essential to this study.

Much research in the area of homogamy is centered around patterns of mate selection. Stevens and Swicegood (1987) note that race, education, and social status are three characteristics associated with mate selection, and people frequently marry others similar to themselves in terms of these characteristics. These authors also note that the likelihood of within-group marriage across any characteristic is affected by the social and demographic context of the persons in the marriage market. Similarly, Kerckhoff (1964) explained that race, religion, social class, occupation, location of residence, income, age, education, and intelligence are all variables that have been discussed as factors of homogamy in terms of mate selection.

Kerckhoff (1964) discussed two basic explanations for assortive mating, or homogamy. First, he explained that one type of explanation views homogamy as a function of the opportunities that one has in life. Similar to the idea of propinquity, this argument holds that factors such as residential segregation and activity patterns determine whom one meets in life, limiting potential mates to others similar to oneself. Another type of explanation described by Kerckhoff views homogamy as the result of personal preferences and the third party enforcement of homogamy as a social norm through various social sanctions. People tend to be drawn to others like them, and family and friends tend to reinforce those choices. Other researchers seeking an explanation for homogamy have tested some facets of Kerckhoff's explanations with interesting results. For instance, Stevens (1991) studied education homogamy to see if it was a direct function of propinquity since the university setting has been described as a marriage market in and of itself. His results clearly showed that education propinquity

could not be used to explain the strong association between spouses' educational attainment, suggesting that preference or social sanctions were more powerful agents of homogamy.

Homogamy has also been researched in terms of marital success, and not merely mate selection. At a common sense level, it can be argued that having a successful marriage is a difficult endeavor, and any additional challenges only increase the likelihood of divorce or an unhappy marriage. Disparity across key demographic variables holds the potential for causing additional stress and adjustment problems for the couple, therefore decreasing their chances of a successful marriage. Dissimilarities across demographic variables has been associated with increased tension in marriage, a disruption of the power structure, a difference in personal values, different beliefs in child-rearing, and other characteristics that increase strain on a marriage (Bumpass and Sweet 1972). All of these issues are less likely to be found in homogamous marriages, arguably making them more likely to succeed. In the following sections, specific variables will be discussed as they relate to homogamy, marital selection, and marital success.

### *Age*

Age disparity between husbands and wives is another area that has been researched by social scientists (Monahan 1953; Vera, Berardo, and Berardo 1985; Atkinson and Glass 1985; Tzeng 1992). Age differences between husbands and wives may cause problems due to different values and generational views, especially when there is a large age disparity within the couple. Also, it can be argued that persons with

moderate to large age differences may have very different life experiences, which may cause potential conflict or misunderstandings.

Trends in American marriages reveal that society is moving toward age homogamy. In 1985, Atkinson and Glass studied these trends and found an increase from 37.1% age homogamous marriages in 1900, to 63.3% in 1960, and 69.9% in 1980 (1985: 687). These numbers show a clear turnaround in the past century from dominantly age heterogeneous marriages with 47.1% of women marrying older men, to the majority of women marrying men their own age (1985: 687). The dramatic increase in age homogeneous marriages should be of interest to social scientists, especially those who study marriage trends. The authors suggest that increasing gender equality may play a role in age homogamy, as well as other race and social class factors. For the purposes of this study, the drastic increase in age homogamy is of great interest, augmenting the need to determine the relationship between such homogamy and marital success.

Age differs in two important ways from the other variables that will be studied. First of all, in American society women traditionally marry males who are their age or two to three years older (Tzeng 1992). Therefore, the social norm is not necessarily exact age homogamy, but is within a close range of similarity. Secondly, the role of gender in age homogamy cannot be underestimated. Therefore, most researchers agree that exact age similarity is not essential, but that age differences greater than three or five years, especially when the wife is older than her husband, are more likely to cause marital instability and are more important for study. This is likely due to a break in the traditional gender roles and the traditional structure of a family, including a male head of household and breadwinner. The significance in age homogamy and marital success

may lie in whether or not the couple follows the tradition of a female marrying a male slightly older than she. Taking this into consideration, age homogamy is often investigated differently, such as sorting age differences into broad categories and controlling for sex.

Some researchers have argued that age homogamy has no true effect on marital satisfaction (Monahan 1953; Vera et al. 1985). However, other researchers have found significant links between age homogamy and marital success. Bumpass and Sweet's well established 1972 study found support of a link between age homogamy at marriage and marital success. Using dummy variable multiple regression with the 1970 National Fertility Study data, they tested deviations from the mean and found higher than expected marital instability when wives were older than their husbands, and when age differences between spouses were large, although none were statistically significant at the .05 level. The findings provide some support for their hypothesis, and the researchers conclude that age dissimilarity may decrease value consensus as well as disrupt the family power structure, causing increased marital tension and decreased stability.

More recently, in a study on heterogamy and marital dissolution for first marriages, Tzeng (1992) studied age differences in marriage partners. In that study, he broke age into three groups. The first group is older husband-younger wife with less than or equal to three years difference, the second group is comprised of older wife-younger husband, and the third group is older husband-younger wife with more than three years difference. He uses a discrete hazard model to determine the effects of various characteristics on marital dissolution, controlling for other important factors. His study upholds most prior research by finding that age heterogamous first marriages



are about 32% more likely to break up than age homogamous marriages in group one (Tzeng 1992). However, no significant differences were found for group two, with older wife-younger husband, contrary to previous research. Altogether, this research supports the notion that age differences between spouses can affect marital success. Other research also supports the idea that age heterogamy affects marital success. Amato and colleagues (2003) studied changes in marital quality from 1980 to 2000, finding an increase in overall heterogamy. Their analysis involved three steps, beginning with a comparison of means among their explanatory variables, then a regression of three measures of marital quality on the explanatory variables, and finally a decomposition analysis which determine the way in which changes in multiple explanatory variables relate to changes in the dependent variable over time by looking at repeated cross-sectional data. Using these analytical steps, they found age discrepancies between spouses to have a negative effect on various dimensions of marital quality (Amato et al. 2003). Again, empirical evidence supporting a negative relationship between heterogamy and marital success is clearly presented.

### *Background Socioeconomic Status*

Socioeconomic status of one's family of origin is another factor that is often associated with mate selection, and thus is of interest to researchers of homogamy. Historically, socioeconomic status was an important criterion in selecting a marriage mate. In fact, Haller (1981) argues that family social status could not have evolved unless social class homogamy prevailed. From this viewpoint, class homogamy and the intergenerational transmission of such class status are central features of a class society (Haller 1981). As the United States is considered a class based society, social class

homogamy deserves attention in this study. However, socioeconomic status is an ascriptive characteristic, and some researchers argue that ascriptive characteristics are becoming less important for marriage selection (Kalmijn 1991a). For example, Kalmijn (1991a) found that family of origin socioeconomic status has decreased in importance for mate selection, though it is still a factor of consideration.

Searching the literature revealed few empirical studies that supported a link between background socioeconomic status homogamy and marital success. However, many studies have found that socioeconomic status differences between spouses do not affect marital stability or quality. Glenn, Hoppe, and Weiner (1974) studied marital success and social class heterogamy for a 1967 sample of male fellows and active members of the American Sociological Association and their wives from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Using cross-tabulations, their findings provide no support for a negative heterogamy effect on marital stability. In fact, contrary to general thought and most textbook explanations, the lowest percentage of ever-divorced couples was wives of high class origins and husbands of lower origins. In his 1986 study on late marriages, Bitter uses multiple regression analysis as well as zero-order correlation techniques. He too finds no support for social class heterogeneity affecting marital stability. However, he does find statistically significant results concerning homogamy among other variables, suggesting that social class may have declined in importance as previously suggested. More support for this idea is found in Kalmijn's (1998) article examining many correlates of homogamy. Employing both Pearsonian correlation and multivariate loglinear models, he uses the occupational class of the father and the father-in-law to measure background socioeconomic status for the husband and wife, finding that there has been a decline in its importance for mate selection in industrialized

countries such as the United States. These findings are synonymous with prior findings, and suggest a move from the importance of ascribed statuses to achieved statuses.

However, due to its traditional importance in American society, background socioeconomic status homogamy is still an important variable as it relates to marital success in this study.

### *Religion*

Religion is another characteristic that historically plays an important role in mate selection, and arguably in marital success. Some researchers argue that religion's role in mate selection is becoming less prominent as more achieved characteristics are gaining importance, but most agree it still has an effect. For instance, Glenn (1982) studied differences in interreligious marriage trends between 1957 and 1978. He found a significant increase in intermarriage, and also found that barriers to such marriage were weakened except among Jews. Finally, he determined that while many Protestant-Protestant couples were denominationally homogamous, they had achieved this homogamy by switching denominations shortly before or after marriage. The author's results show a clear move away from strict norms concerning religious intermarriage to a more open marriage market. Similarly, Bumpass' cross sectional study of marriage cohorts revealed intermarriage among Jews, Catholics, and Protestants had increased between 1935 and 1965, a trend that is still continuing (Bumpass 1970 as cited in Kalmijn 1991b). To follow up on Bumpass' study and to address some limitations of prior research, Kalmijn (1991) did a study of 15,075 white American couples who were Protestants and Catholics at the beginning of their first marriage in order to address religious and educational homogamy trends from 1920 to 1989. The goal of this study

was to investigate changes in religious and educational homogamy, and to see if there were interactions between the two. Kalmijn found dramatic increases in Protestant and Catholic intermarriage from the 1920's to the 1980's, and found that increased educational similarity between the two groups did not account for this increase. Thus, he determined that religious heterogamy increased independently of rising educational homogamy (Kalmijn 1991a).

Unlike other relevant variables, many studies have been done concerning religious homogamy and marital success. Analyzing assorted variables of marital instability, Bumpass and Sweet's (1972) study also analyzed religious homogamy and its effects using additive multiple regression models. They found homogamous marriages to be more stable than Protestant-Catholic marriages, and also found that some inter-denominational marriages were less stable than intra-denominational marriages. Such findings support a link between religious homogamy and marital success. Likewise, Maneker and Rankin's (1993) descriptive study of California divorces from 1966 to 1971 reveals that religious homogamy is associated with longer marital duration, especially for Jewish couples. Other research suggests that mixed faith marriages are more prone to divorce and sometimes are not as satisfying as religiously homogamous marriages (Ortega, Whitt, and Williams 1998, as cited in Curtis and Ellison 2002). As religiously heterogeneous couples may have differing values and morals, it is expected that they may experience more conflict in their relationships. Using the first wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) Curtis and Ellison (2002) utilized five ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models and found that theological disparities and worship service attendance dissimilarities between partners were both positively related to frequency of marital conflicts. In other words, couples who differ in

what they believe and how often they attend religious services often have more conflict in their marital relationship. Heaton (1984) used cross-tabulation and loglinear models with data from the 1982 NORC General Social Survey and found a significant positive relationship between marital satisfaction and religious homogamy that was not mediated by the presence of children, but was greatly affected by frequency of religious attendance. His work suggests that religious attendance may mediate the homogamy effect on marital satisfaction. In a follow up study using wave one of the NSFH, Heaton and Pratt, (1990), analyzed all currently married respondents (61% of the total sample) using loglinear models and found a general tendency for denominationally homogamous couples to report greater marital stability and satisfaction. They also found church attendance similarities to have a small but significant effect on marital happiness. Thus, they found support for previous research that suggests denominational homogamy is a crucial religiosity variable when analyzing marital stability and happiness.

In order to take previous research one step further, Chinitz and Brown (2001) studied 155 Jewish same-faith and interfaith marriages to determine whether the effect of homogamy on marital stability would be mediated by agreement or disagreement on 33 specific beliefs and practices. The authors' used both exploratory factor analysis and a multiblock hierarchical logistical regression model, and their results indicated that the degree of agreement on specific Jewish issues does predict marital stability and marital conflict in both same-faith and interfaith marriages, suggesting religious homogamy may be more complex than denominational similarity.

Although religious homogamy and marital success has been studied for many years, it is still an important characteristic to evaluate. The fact that religious beliefs often account for beliefs and behaviors that extend into many aspects of one's life, and

the reality that strict traditional norms of religious group intramarriage guided much of history, provoke interesting concerns about religious intermarriage that must be investigated. Taking into consideration the complex results of previous studies on religious homogamy and marital success, as well as the steady increase in its occurrence, it is clear that this variable is essential to the study at hand.

### *Race*

Race is a final ascribed characteristic that is traditionally believed to affect both marital choice and marital quality and success. Since the United States Supreme Court declared an antimiscegenation law in Virginia to be unconstitutional in 1967, outlawing all legal restrictions on racial intermarriage, such marriages have steadily increased in frequency in the United States (Kalmijn 1993). Studying marriage license data from 33 states from 1968 to 1986, Kalmijn assesses the way in which intermarriage choice has changed for black/white marriages in America. His analysis finds a general increase in intermarriage especially pronounced for black males (1993). Similarly, Kalmijn reasserts the evidence and importance of such increase in his 1998 study, asserting that black-white intermarriage rates have increased significantly in both southern and northern states since the legal ban on intermarriage was lifted. It is also suggested that such marriages traditionally and commonly involve a white woman marrying up in socioeconomic status, suggesting that family of origin socioeconomic status may interact with race during mate selection (Kalmijn 1993; Heer 1974). This explanation is called the Davis-Merton theory, and is a key way that demographic variables may interact in mate choice (Heer 1974). Racial intermarriage has also increased for other ethnic groups. Heaton and Jacobson (2000) found that intermarriage

had increased for whites, blacks, and Hispanics, but not Asian Americans who already have lower endogamy rates than white and black Americans. Due to this overall increase, it is important to study the effects of intermarriage among racial and ethnic groups on marriage success.

Traditionally, it is believed that intermarriage between different race or ethnic groups results in decreased marital success. Heer (1974) finds an overall increase in black-white intermarriage, and then examines the durability of such marriages as compared with racially homogeneous ones. Overall, he determined that racially heterogeneous couples were less stable than homogeneous ones. After ten years, 63.4 percent of black husband-white wife marriages were still in tact, 46.7 percent of white husband-black wife were in tact, 77.8 percent of both black were still in tact, and 89.8 percent of both white were in tact (Heer 1974). While he did not take his statistical methods any further, such categorization clearly illustrates the idea that racially mixed marriages are less durable than homogamous marriages. Similarly, in a 2002 article investigating marriage in the United States, Heaton examined data from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth including a probability sample of 10,847 women and used logistic regression to find that racial heterogamy detracts from marital stability. Amato and colleagues (2003) also reveal comparable support in their study of changes in marital quality, using a three step multivariate analysis detailed earlier, and finding increased racial heterogamy to have a negative effect on dimensions of marital quality.

Other researchers have found that race and ethnicity do not have negative effects on marital stability or happiness. In 1970, Monahan examined published and unpublished Iowa state records on marriage and divorce from 1944-1967 for a total of 567,719 marriages and 132,341 divorces including 7,988 marriages and 3,205 divorces

involving African Americans. He used cross-tabulations of race and divorce statistics to derive an approximate divorce index and found mixed results concerning racial homogamy. First, Monahan found that the divorce ratio for racially mixed couples was higher than for same-race marriages for all years combined. However, he also found that black-white marriages appear to have greater stability than black-black marriages in Iowa, and that black males with white wives have more enduring marriages than whites with whites. Thus, his research suggests marital stability depends on which races are intermarrying, as well as the reference group. However, he only used bivariate analysis and did not control for many other variables that may affect marital stability and divorce. Other researchers have also found comparable results. Weller and Rofe (1988) studied 308 married women in Israel varying in ethnic descent, some in ethnically homogeneous marriages, and others in ethnically heterogeneous marriages. Overall, they found no significant differences in marital happiness between homogeneous and mixed marriages using orthogonal factor analysis. Similarly, Henderson's (2000) study of 338 married couples at the Center for the Study of Marital Roles at Washington State University sought to determine whether there were differences between ethnically intermarried and intramarried couples during marital interactions. Using t-tests, she found that intermarried and intramarried couples were not significantly different from one another, and that, contrary to popular belief, there were not inherent and irreconcilable differences in intermarried couples due to race or racial issues. Although there is contradictory evidence concerning racial homogamy and marital success, the success of interracial marriages is still an issue of much debate in today's society. Therefore race is still an important variable to consider in this study.



### *Education*

While age, socioeconomic status, race, and usually religion are ascriptive characteristics that play a role in mate selection, education is an achieved status that is also frequently associated with selection of a marriage partner (Kalmijn 1991a; 1991b). As briefly mentioned previously, when Kalmijn (1991a), compared couples from 1952-1962 with couples from 1963-1973, he found that social class origins, an ascriptive status, has decreased in importance while educational attainment has increased in importance as a variable in mate selection. Similarly, in another study he found religion was decreasing in importance for mate selection with education seeming to take its place (Kalmijn 1991b). Thus, men and women are more likely seek a mate who has attained a similar educational level as themselves.

Many researchers report similar findings. While intermarriage has increased among most demographic variables, educational heterogeneity is declining. In his study from the 1970 U. S. Census, Rockwell (1976) compared expected proportions of educational homogamy, using a chance mating model, with actual observed homogamous marriages and found an increasing tendency toward educational homogamy relative to random mating. This finding is particularly interesting given the fact that the further back in history one goes, the higher the rates of random homogamy are, as the general population had much less education than the average person does now. Therefore, even though there is more educational heterogeneity in recent years, the trend is still toward an increasing amount of homogeneity among marriage partners. In a similar study, Mare (1991) studied patterns of educationally homogamous marriages across five decades, from 1940 to 1987. He found that highly educated persons and persons who marry shortly after leaving school are the most likely to marry someone

with equal educational attainment, asserting that the time gap between school completion and marriage plays a role in the marriage market.

Researchers have argued that schools, especially colleges and universities, function as marriage markets as well as educational institutions, thus explaining the trend toward homogamy. Stevens (1991) did a study to investigate whether propinquity plays a role in educational homogamy. The results of his study clearly show that educational homogamy is not influenced by propinquity as the correlation between spouses' educational attainment remained stable whether the couple had attended the same institution or not (Stevens 1991). Such evidence shows that educational homogamy is a valuable characteristic that individuals consider when selecting a mate.

Educational homogamy is not only a factor in mate selection; it is also a correlate of marital stability and success. Using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979-1987, the National Longitudinal Survey of Young Men 1966-1981, and the National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women 1968-1985, Tzeng (1992) found that couples who have heterogamous educational attainment are at higher risk for marital instability. Dividing education into three groups, less than 12 years of school, 12 years of school, and at least 1 year of college, Tzeng used a discrete time hazard model that measures the effects of a couple's characteristics on a constant, marital dissolution, and the successive effects on the marriage. His results indicate that couples with homogeneous education were significantly more likely to have stable marriages than couples with heterogamous education. Also, the results show that heterogamous couples who move toward homogamy are less likely to divorce than those who do not change, and, conversely, homogeneous couples who become heterogeneous increase their chances of marital

dissolution (Tzeng 1992). Such results clearly indicate an important relationship between educational homogamy and marital stability and success.

Bumpass and Sweet (1972) also discuss education heterogamy. While they found no statistically significant support for overall effects of educational heterogamy on marital instability, they did find higher than expected levels of instability for various educational combinations, especially for extreme educational differences. Such results indicate that education may still play an important role both in homogamy and in marital success. Amato and colleagues (2003), using a three step multivariate analysis, also found education heterogamy to be linked to decreased marital quality in their study of changes in marital quality in the past few decades. Taken as a whole, the educational homogamy and heterogamy literature reveals the fact that education is still an important factor to consider when analyzing marital success.

Each variable in this study reveals ways in which heterogamy can have a negative effect on marital success. However, it is interesting to consider the fact that heterogamy may have positive effects on marital strength, as a study of interracial marriages noted. As the cliché goes, perhaps that which doesn't kill you, or the relationship, may make you stronger. In other words, there is a possibility that persons in heterogamous relationships have stronger marital bonds because they have been forced to deal with more challenges in their marriages. As mentioned previously, Monahan's (1970) study reveals black husbands with white wives have lower divorce outcomes, and black-white marriages are more stable than black-black marriages in terms of divorce, suggesting that differences can also be associated with marital strength and durability. Similarly, Henderson (2000) notes that racially mixed couples must

already have stronger marital bonds in order to deal with the inhospitable marital climate they enter into socially. Thus, contrary findings may be a result of such relationships.

A review of the literature clearly shows a need to further explore the relationship between homogamy and marital success. Several weaknesses can be noted from the previous literature that should be addressed. First, while many of the previous studies use multivariate analysis, others use very simple, bivariate analyses that may neglect control variables which would control for spuriousness. Similarly, many of the previous studies do not take into account the effect of several homogamy variables on each other. While a few of the studies incorporated more than one of the relevant variables, many of them focused on a single variable, ignoring the potential of other homogamy variables acting as control variables. In other words, none of the studies incorporated all of the relevant variables associated with homogamy and heterogamy, testing their continued significance when all variables are present. This research will test such significance.

Another limitation in the previous literature is the fact that none of the studies adequately discussed relationships between homogamy variables. Several mentioned the fact that ascriptive variables such as race and family of origin socioeconomic status are become less important and achieved variables, especially educational attainment, are becoming far more important for mate choice. Also, a relationship between race and socioeconomic status in interracial marriages was also suggested as a factor of mate choice (Kalmijn 1993; Heer 1974). However, this is not discussed at length, is not considered in the case of many of the variables, and is not discussed in terms of marital stability or quality.

The current study will seek to address some of these limitations. First of all, both bivariate and multivariate analyses will be performed in order to best measure the

relationship between homogamy and marital success. Also, all five homogamy variables will be included in the analysis, as well as several control variables, so that spuriousness can be ruled out. The next section will discuss each variable in depth, as well as describe the statistical methods that will be used in the study.

## HYPOTHESES

Based on prior research and theory, and in order to test a thorough homogamy model including important demographic characteristics, the following hypotheses have been developed to guide the research.

H1: Age heterogamy is negatively related to marital stability and marital quality.

A review of the relevant literature indicates that many researchers believe age heterogamy to be associated with decreased marital success due to differences in values, norms, and life experiences. Therefore, this research is expected to support prior research in this area.

H2: Background socioeconomic status heterogamy is negatively related to marital stability and marital quality.

Traditionally, socioeconomic status was a key factor in mate selection. While formal and informal restrictions preventing marriage between mates of different social statuses have lessened, residual effects may remain that cause greater stress on such marriages. Therefore, while some literature suggests that socioeconomic status is losing importance in terms of marital success, this research expects to find such heterogamy to have an effect on marital quality.

H3: Religious heterogamy is negatively related to marital stability and marital quality.

While religiously heterogamous marriages were once forbidden for many people, such marriages are very common in present day American society. However, research indicates that differing values, child rearing expectations, and other differences in fundamental beliefs impact marital success. Therefore, this research expects to find religious heterogamy associated with decreased marital success.

H4: Racial heterogamy is negatively related to marital stability and marital quality.

Similar to socioeconomic status, both formal and informal sanctions against interracial marriage have decreased, making such marriages more accessible and more commonplace. Traditionally, it was believed that racial heterogamy produced less marital success. Research in this area has mixed results, but this study expects to find support for traditional views.

H5: Educational heterogamy is negatively related to marital stability and marital quality.

Due to different life experiences and value systems, research suggests that couples with heterogeneous educational levels will have decreased marital success, and this research expects to support this finding.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

To examine patterns of homogamy and marital success, data from wave one of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH-1) is analyzed. Conducted by sociologists at the University of Wisconsin, the NSFH-1 is a national, cross-sectional probability sample of 13,017 adults taken during 1987 and 1988. The primary respondents were given in-person interviews as well as self-administered questionnaires. If the respondents were married, self-administered questionnaires (secondary questionnaires) were administered to the spouses when possible. In the cases where the primary respondent was divorced, the primary survey included questions concerning characteristics of their first spouse. The data includes over-samples of minority populations as well as other special interest populations such as cohabiting couples, recently married couples, single-parent households, and others.

The respondent's marital status was the first variable needed to qualify for inclusion in the study. All respondents who indicated "Never Married" on the "Marital Status of Respondent" question on the main questionnaire were disregarded and dropped from the data set. From the respondents that remained, "Spouse/Partner or Tertiary Questionnaire linked to this respondent" was the next qualifying characteristic. All divorced respondents were included as the main questionnaire included items relating to ex-spouses. Of all ever-married respondents who were still married to their first spouse, only those with a secondary questionnaire linked to the main questionnaire were kept as the secondary questionnaire contains all of the information for their current spouse or partner. Consequently, respondents with spouses who were deceased were not included

in the study due to lack of important data about the deceased spouse. Finally, all cases with secondary questionnaires completed by partners and not spouses were also disregarded as this study is focused on marriage only. After sorting by these qualifications, 8,973 cases remained for the study.

There are many ways to define and measure marital success or satisfaction. Well known marriage researchers, Lewis and Spanier (1979), discuss two general ways in which the social science world addresses marital success and failure. The first approach focuses on marital stability. Using this approach, a stable marriage is one that does not experience divorce, separation, desertion, or annulment, but is only ended by the death of one spouse. On the other hand, a second view focuses on the quality of the marital relationship while it is intact. Using this view, measures such as marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, marital happiness, and others are used to determine the relative quality of the marriage. Following the explanations of Lewis and Spanier (1979), I will integrate measures of marital stability and marital quality to determine marital success.

Table 1 outlines all variable names and definitions. Consistent with Lewis and Spanier (1979), marital success is divided into two components, stability and quality. Marital stability is measured by the question, “how did this marriage (first marriage) end?” Persons who are married and answered inapplicable are assumed to still be married to their first spouse, as opposed to those who responded divorce or separation. Marital quality is measured by the question “Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage?” on both the main and secondary questionnaire. The respondent’s score was added to their spouse’s score to get a final marital quality score.



Table 1. Variable Definitions.

Variable	Definition
Marital Quality	01-very unhappy – 14 very happy
Marital Stability	01-Divorced; 00-Still Married
Age Heterogamy	Difference in Age in Years
Background SES Heterogamy	Difference in Father's Education in Years
Religious Heterogamy	01-Heterogamous; 00-Homogamous
Racial Heterogamy	01-Heterogamous; 00-Homogamous
Educational Heterogamy	Difference in Education in Years
Cohabit Before Married	01-Yes; 00-No
Marital Duration	Duration of Marriage in Years
Parental Divorce	00-Both still married; 01-One divorced; 02-Both divorced

## INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

### *Age*

The respondent's age was calculated by subtracting the year of their date of birth as found in "What is your date of birth?" on the main questionnaire from the year they took the survey, either 1987 or 1988. The respondent's spouse's age was determined by the questions "Relationship to Respondent of Other Persons on Full-Time Household Roster" and "Age" which was linked to the Full-Time Household Roster question on the main questionnaire. The ex-spouse's age was determined by the questions "How old was he/she when you got married?" from the main questionnaire and "In what month and year were you married for the first time?" from the main questionnaire. Age was

calculated by subtracting the year of marriage from the current year, and then adding this number to the ex-spouse's age at marriage since the question was not directly asked of the respondent. The next step is to calculate the level of homogamy or heterogamy, which is done by subtracting the spouse or ex-spouse's age from the respondent's age.

### *Background Socioeconomic Status*

The respondent's family of origin socioeconomic status was measured by the educational level of the father; a common indicator of SES indicated by the question, "What was the highest grade of school that he (father or stepfather) completed?" Spouse's father's education was determined by the question "What was the highest grade of school that your father/stepfather completed?" as found in the secondary questionnaire. Ex-spouse's father's education was determined by the question "What was the highest grade in school that (his/her) father/stepfather completed?" Family of origin socioeconomic status heterogeneity was calculated by subtracting ex-spouse or spouse's father's years of education from the respondent's father's years of education.

### *Religion*

The respondent's religion was determined by the main questionnaire question "In what religion were you raised?" Ex-spouse's religion was measured by the question "What was your first husband/wife's religious preference at that time," indicating their religion at the time of marriage. Current spouse's religion was determined by the secondary questionnaire question, "What is your religious preference?" Religious heterogeneity is present if spouses indicated different religious categories, but degree of

heterogeneity cannot be calculated since this variable is measured at the categorical level.

### *Race*

The respondent's race was determined from the question "Which of the groups on this card best describes you," followed by several race-ethnicity categories from which the respondent could choose. Unfortunately, race-ethnicity information was not collected about the ex-spouse, so they will not be included in the analysis of racial heterogamy. However, current spouse's race was determined from the secondary questionnaire question, "Which of these groups best describes you," again followed by the same categories offered to the main respondent. Similar to religious measures, racial heterogamy exists if the couple chose different categories, but was not considered in terms of degree as it is a categorical level variable.

### *Education*

The respondent's education was measured by a variable constructed by the NSFH researchers summarizing the respondent's education by determining total years of education. Ex-Spouse's education was determined by the question "What was the highest grade in school that your (husband/wife) had completed at the time you got married?" on the main questionnaire. Current spouse's education was determined by the question "At the time your current marriage began, what was the highest grade in school that you had completed?" on the secondary questionnaire. Educational heterogeneity was calculated by subtracting the spouse or ex-spouse's years of education from the respondent's years of education.

## CONTROL VARIABLES

In addition to these independent variables, three control variables are also included in the statistical. The first control variable is marital duration, which research shows to be closely correlated with marital quality. In the case of divorced respondents, duration is calculated by subtracting the date of first marriage from the date of divorce. For respondents currently married to their first spouse, duration is calculated by subtracting the date of their marriage from the date of the interview. As noted previously, adequate information was not collected from respondents with a deceased spouse, making it necessary to exclude them from the study.

The second control variable included in this study is parental divorce. Many researchers agree that children of divorce are up to two times more likely to experience divorce themselves (Amato and DeBoer 2001; Wolfinger 2001; Teachman 2002). The research indicates the importance of including this variable as a control in the current study. Parental divorce status of the respondent was determined by questions on the main questionnaire, “Did you live with both your biological mother and father from the time you were born until age 19, or until you left home to be on your own?” and “What was the reason you stopped living with your (Parent Type) at age \_\_\_\_\_?” Whether or not the current spouse had experienced parental divorce growing up was determined by questions on the secondary questionnaire, “Did your first (husband/wife) live with both of (his/her) natural parents up to age 14?” and “Was that because they had divorced or separated, or because one of (his/her) parents had died?” Parental divorce for the ex-spouse was determined by questions 178 and 179 on the main questionnaire which are the same as questions 2 and 3 on the secondary questionnaire. The final parental divorce

variable was coded as a categorical variable to measure the increasing impact of none, one, or both sets of parents having been divorced.

The third control variable included in this study is cohabitation. Research on premarital cohabitation has consistently shown that such cohabitation is often associated with decreased marital quality and decreased marital stability (Teachman 2003; Dush, Cohan, and Amato 2003). However, some research has shown that once selection effects are controlled for, cohabitation no longer has an effect on marital success (Boyle and Kulu 2006). While there is still debate surrounding the impact of cohabitation, it is still an important variable to include as a control variable for the validity of this study. The cohabitation variable is measured by the question, "Did you and your (first) spouse live together before you were married?"

## STATISTICAL METHODS

Statistical analysis will begin with a bivariate method, Pearson's correlation analysis. Though Pearson's correlation and other bivariate statistical methods are crude measures, they are useful because it is an indication of whether a relationship exists between two continuous or dichotomous variables. Once relationships are established, more advanced statistical methods are required to gain more information about the relationships.

Regression models will be used after the bivariate analysis to look further into the relationships between independent and dependent variables. Regression models allow for the inclusion of all of the independent variables into the model in order to control for spuriousness. Two separate statistical models will be used in this study, one for marital stability and one for marital quality. Both models will include all of the

independent and control variables with one exception. The marital stability model will not include racial heterogeneity as the race of the respondent's ex-spouse is not available in the data. Logistic regression will be used to measure the effect of homogamy on marital stability since marital stability, the dependent variable in the model, is a discrete variable and not a continuous one. On the other hand, linear regression will be used to measure the effect of homogamy on marital quality. Marital quality, the dependent variable, is a continuous variable and thus can be used in a linear regression model. Both regression models will further expose the relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

##### *Marital Stability*

The marital stability model included all respondents who were ever married, with a final N of 9244 cases. It is important to note that widowed respondents were not included in this study since adequate data on their former spouse was not collected. Of the divorced or separated group, 74.4% were remarried at the time of the interview, 6.9% were currently separated, and 18.7% were currently divorced. The divorce rate for both men and women in the population studied was noticeably lower than the rates calculated by the 1996 U.S. Census bureau, nearly 50 percent of first marriages for men under 45, and 44-52 percent of first marriages for women of the same age group (Kreider and Fields 2002). Also, there is a clear tendency for divorcees to remarry at some point in their lives.

Age heterogamy was commonplace in this model as about 40% of respondents married someone with three or more years of age difference. However, the degree of age difference is small, as 90% married someone with 7.2 years of age difference or less. Since the unit of measurement in this study is the couple, it was not possible to use sex as a control variable with age heterogamy, although much research indicates that couples where the wife is older are less stable than older husband couples.

Among those ever married, 69.4% of respondents had religiously homogamous first marriages with 30.6% having religiously heterogamous first marriages. The findings support expectations that most people will marry within their religious group.

Background socioeconomic status heterogamy was fairly restricted in this group as 52.4% of respondents' first marriages were to someone with 2 or less years of difference in fathers' education. Only 15% of the population studied had more than five years of difference. Many respondents and secondary respondents did not answer or know the educational background of their father or their ex-spouse's father, leaving 48% system-missing cases, which may make this variable unreliable.

As was found with background socioeconomic status, educational heterogamy in marriage was not very common in this sample as 52.8% of couples reported educational differences of one year or less. The lack of educational heterogamy in this study may present further problems in testing this variable against marital stability.

In this study, 79.5% of couples had neither of their parents divorced, while in 20.5% at least one set of parents had divorced and in 1.8%, both sets of parents had divorced. While this again shows lower than expected divorce rates, it must be kept in mind that these numbers include marital practices from much earlier in the nineteenth century when divorce was not as common or as acceptable as it is today.

In this study a large majority of couples did not cohabit before marriage, a fact that may be explained in part by the fact that many people in the sample were married at a point in history when cohabitation was not common (Grunlan 1999). Within this sample, 29.6% of respondents were married prior to 1960, when only 400,000 couples were cohabiting in the entire United States, a number that greatly increased by 1994 (Grunlan 1999). Fifty percent of respondents in this study were married in or before 1970, and less than 8% were married during or after 1985. In fact, a strong, significant correlation was found between year of first marriage and cohabitation.



Of all the marriages in this study, half had lasted 11 years or less, with 29% of marriages lasting only 5 years at the time of the survey. Couples who were still married are also included in the calculation of marital duration, so the duration of marriage does not always indicate divorce taking place after that length of time. Incredibly, there were 148 marriages in the study that had lasted more than 50 years. The descriptive statistics for marital stability can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Marital Stability Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	(N)	Percentage
<u>Marital Stability</u>	(9244)	
Married	5309	57.24
Divorced	3935	42.60
<u>Age Heterogamy</u>	(7794)	
0.0 - 1.9	3390	43.5
2.0 - 3.9	2128	27.3
4.0 - 6.9	1430	18.3
7.0 - 9.6	439	5.6
Mean = 3.30		
Std. = 3.50		
Median = 2.33		
<u>Background SES Heterogamy</u>	(4772)	
0.0 - 2.0	2500	52.4
3.0 - 5.0	1534	32.1
6.0 - 8.0	503	10.5
9.0 - 17.0	238	5.0
Mean = 2.9		
Std. = 2.9		
Median = 2.0		

Table 2. Continued.

Variable	(N)	Percentage
<u>Religious Heterogamy</u>	(6349)	
Homogamous	4406	69.4
Heterogamous	1943	30.6
<u>Educational Heterogamy</u>	(7673)	
0.0 - 1.0	4055	52.8
2.0 - 3.0	2206	28.8
4.0 - 5.0	1052	13.7
6.0 - 7.0	266	3.5
8.0 - 19.0	94	1.2
Mean = 1.88		
Std. = 1.88		
Median = 1.0		
<u>Parental Divorce</u>	(8115)	
None	6455	79.5
One	1545	19.0
Both	115	1.4
<u>Cohabitation</u>	(9208)	
Yes	1618	17.6
No	7590	82.4
<u>Marital Duration</u>	(8833)	
0 - 9	3862	43.7
10 - 19	2067	23.4
20 - 34	1400	15.8
35 - 50	1040	11.8
Mean = 15.7		
Std. = 14.5		
Median = 11.0		

### *Marital Quality*

The marital quality model included all respondents who were currently married to their first spouse, a final N of 4381 cases. Respondents who were divorced are excluded as no data on marital quality before divorce was collected from their former spouse. Unfortunately, as with the marital stability model, widowed respondents could not be included since adequate data on their deceased spouse was not collected. The descriptive statistics for this model can be found in Table 3.

As with the stability model, about 60% of respondents married someone within 3 years of their age, and 90% married someone with 7.1 years or less age difference. The low level of variance found may have an impact on the results of this study.

In this model, 25% of couples were homogamous by background socioeconomic status, and 51.9% had 2 or fewer years of difference in fathers' education. Over 89% of couples had 6 or fewer years difference in background socioeconomic status, and only 1% had 12 or more years of difference. As with the marital stability model, there were a large number, 929 or 21%, of system missing cases for background socioeconomic status.

Religious heterogamy was more common than several other variables as 29.4% of couples had religiously heterogeneous marriages. However, there is still a general trend toward religious homogamy over time as anticipated.

There was a low degree of racial heterogamy revealed in this model as 95.7% of respondents married someone of the same race leaving only 4.3% of couples racially heterogamous. As was the case with cohabitation and year of marriage, there is a statistically significant correlation between racial heterogamy and year of marriage for

this model, suggesting that the low incidence of interracial marriage may be largely dependent on historical factors.

Education homogamy was commonplace in this model as 53.2% of couples had only one or less years of difference in education. Less than 10% of the couples in this study reported 4 or more years of difference in educational attainment. Again, this low level of variance points to the tendency to marry within ones same level of education, and may impact the overall results of this study.

Compared to current divorce trends, a relatively small group of couples experienced parental divorce as 16.6% had at least one set of parents divorced. Additionally, only 1.3% of couples had both sets of parents divorced. In 83.4% of couples in the marital quality model neither set of parents were divorced. This may reflect a relationship between parental divorce and marital stability, or may be an indicator of lower divorce levels during the time respondents' parents were married.

Findings on cohabitation in this model are similar to those of the marital stability model as the incidence of cohabitation is relatively low in this model, 18.4%. Once again, there is a strong and significant correlation between cohabitation and year of marriage suggesting that cohabitation was on the rise and its low occurrence was due in part to historical factors.

In this model of still married respondents, the average duration of marriage at the time of the survey was just over 18 years. Fifty percent of respondents were married for 14.3 years or less at the time of the survey and 25.8% had been married 5 years or less. One percent of couples surveyed had been married 56.5 years or longer with the longest recorded marriage lasting 67.75 years.

Table 3. Marital Quality Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	(N)	Percentage
<u>Marital Quality</u>	(4111)	
0 - 7 Unhappy	131	3.2
8 - 10	586	14.3
11 - 12	1064	25.9
13 - 14 Very Happy	2330	56.7
<u>Age Heterogamy</u>	(4307)	
0.0 - 1.9	1916	44.5
2.0 - 3.9	1180	27.4
4.0 - 6.9	757	17.6
7.0 - 9.2	225	5.2
Mean = 3.21		
Std. = 3.32		
Median = 2.33		
<u>Background SES Heterogamy</u>	(3452)	
0.0 - 2.0	1792	51.9
3.0 - 5.0	1114	32.3
6.0 - 8.0	379	11.0
9.0 - 18.0	167	4.8
Mean = 2.95		
Std. = 2.83		
Median = 2.00		
<u>Religious Heterogamy</u>	(4381)	
Homogamous	3093	70.6
Heterogamous	1288	29.4
<u>Racial Heterogamy</u>	(4266)	
Homogamous	4084	95.7
Heterogamous	182	4.3

Table 3. Continued.

Variable	(N)	Percentage
<u>Educational Heterogamy</u>	(4248)	
0.0 - 1.0	2260	53.2
2.0 - 3.0	1195	28.1
4.0 - 5.0	594	14.0
6.0 - 7.0	149	3.5
8.0 - 12.0	50	1.2
Mean = 1.83		
Std. = 1.88		
Median = 1.0		
<u>Parental Divorce</u>	(4381)	
None	3655	83.4
One	671	15.3
Both	55	1.3
<u>Cohabitation</u>	(4378)	
Yes	805	18.4
No	3573	81.6
<u>Marital Duration</u>	(4373)	
0 - 9	1658	37.9
10 - 19	975	22.3
20 - 34	770	17.6
35 - 60	873	20.0
Mean = 18.47		
Std. = 15.73		
Median = 14.33		

## CORRELATIONS

*Marital Stability*

In the marital stability model, age heterogamy, background socioeconomic status heterogamy, religious heterogamy, and educational heterogamy were analyzed using Pearson's Correlation. Duration of marriage, parental divorce, and cohabitation are control variables. The results of these tests can be found in Table 4.

Positive correlations seen in this table imply that as a variable increased, the likelihood of divorce increased whereas negative numbers indicate that as a variable increased, the likelihood of divorce decreased. As expected, the strongest indicator of marital stability, whether or not the respondent's first marriage ended in divorce, was marital duration. The results concur with previous research which suggests that the longer a marital relationship has existed, the more likely the couple is to remain married and the less likely the relationship is to end in divorce. As hypothesized, age and religious heterogamy had statistically significant positive relationships with divorce, as did parental divorce. Surprisingly and contrary to previous literature, cohabitation had a negative correlation with divorce, though this relationship was only significant at the .11 level.

Table 4. Correlations with Marital Stability.

Variable	Marital Stability	Significance
Age Heterogamy	.025*	.03
Background SES Heterogamy	.022	.12
Religious Heterogamy	.053**	.00
Educational Heterogamy	-.007	.54
Parental Divorce	.073**	.00
Cohabitation	-.017	.11
Marital Duration	-.258**	.00

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.00

### *Marital Quality*

In the marital quality model, age heterogamy, background socioeconomic status heterogamy, religious heterogamy, racial heterogamy, and educational heterogamy were analyzed using Pearson's Correlation. Cohabitation, parental divorce, and marital duration are included as control variables due to their previously established effect on marital quality. The results can be found in Table 5.

Positive correlations seen in this table indicate that as a variable increased, marital quality increased. Negative correlations indicate that as a variable increased, marital quality decreased. Marital duration had the strongest correlation with marital quality, as is consistent with much of the literature. While race, education, and religious heterogamy all had negative correlations with marital quality, as hypothesized, only religious heterogamy was statistically significant. Consistent with findings in previous research the control variables of cohabitation and parental divorce were negatively correlated with marital quality and were significant at the .10 and .05 levels, respectively.

Table 5. Correlations with Marital Quality.

Variable	Marital Quality	Significance
Age Heterogamy	.004	.42
Background SES Heterogamy	.003	.44
Religious Heterogamy	-.062**	.00
Racial Heterogamy	-.009	.32
Educational Heterogamy	-.004	.41
Parental Divorce	-.037*	.03
Cohabitation	-.027	.08
Marital Duration	.067**	.00

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.00



## REGRESSION MODELS

Once the correlations were calculated, separate regression models were run for marital quality and marital stability. All of the variables were included in the regression analysis in order to test their combined effect on the dependent variables. While previous research has mainly focused on one or two variables in a study, this study seeks to test for a continued effect of homogamy on marital success with all five variables present in the model.

Table 6. Marital Stability Regression Model.

Variable	B	s.e.	Significance
Age Heterogamy	-.026	.017	.135
Background SES Heterogamy	.013	.018	.476
Religious Heterogamy	.330*	.108	.002
Educational Heterogamy	.006	.029	.838
Parental Divorce	.159	.129	.215
Cohabitation	-.442**	.135	.001
Marital Duration	-.054***	.005	.000
$R^2 = .085$			

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

### *Marital Stability*

A logistic regression model was used to test the independent effects of the independent variables on marital stability. The results of this test are found in Table 6. The marital stability regression model included age heterogamy, background socioeconomic status heterogamy, religious heterogamy, and educational heterogamy as independent variables, with marital stability as the dependent variable. Parental divorce, cohabitation, and marital duration were used as control variables. Unlike with the

correlations, in the regression model, parental divorce was a dichotomous variable measuring either yes or no to either set of parents being divorced. Overall, the model was statistically significant at the .00 level with a Nagelkerke R Squared of .085. Within the model, religious heterogamy and parental divorce had positive impacts on marital stability and were both statistically significant. As religious heterogamy increased, divorce increased, and couples whose parents had experienced divorce were significantly more likely to experience divorce themselves. Marital duration and cohabitation were negatively related to marital stability and were both statistically significant. This indicates that the likelihood of divorce decreased with longer marital duration, and with the presence of cohabitation. While previous literature indicates cohabitation decreasing marital stability, this study shows support for cohabitation increasing marital stability.

The regression model supported the argument that marital stability is impacted by heterogamy across several demographic variables. Overall, these variables had a statistically significant effect on marital stability that is important to consider. As with the marital quality model, the level of variance explained is not very high (8.5%). However, this can be attributed largely to the complex nature of the marital relationship, and the limited ability of demographic variables alone to account for marital dissolution.

### *Marital Quality*

A multiple regression model was used to test the independent effects of the independent variables on marital quality. The results of this test can be found in Table 7. The marital quality regression model included age heterogamy, race heterogamy, background socioeconomic status heterogamy, religious heterogamy, and educational heterogamy as independent variables and marital quality as the dependent variable.

Marital duration, parental divorce, and cohabitation were included in the model as control variables. The model found an R Squared of .006 significant at the .05 level. Within the model, religious heterogamy and marital duration both had significant coefficients at the .00 significance level, with religious heterogamy having a negative relationship with marital quality and marital duration having a positive relationship.

Table 7. Marital Quality Regression Model.

Variable	B	s.e.	Beta	T	Sig.
Age Heterogamy	.002	.011	.003	.182	.855
Background SES					
Heterogamy	-.003	.012	-.004	-.213	.831
Religious Heterogamy	-.187	.080	-.043*	-2.35	.019
Racial Heterogamy	.017	.179	.002	.092	.926
Educational Heterogamy	-.007	.020	-.006	-.341	.733
Parental Divorce	-.067	.098	-.013	-.683	.495
Cohabitation	.024	.098	.005	.241	.810
Marital Duration	.007	.003	.053**	2.674	.008
R2 = .006					

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

Overall, the variables used in this model were found to have a statistically significant impact on marital quality, though the amount of variance explained (0.8%) is low. Much of this can be explained by the fact that many variables can affect the quality of a marital relationship, and only a small portion of that effect can be explained by the demographic variables used in this study. However, it is important to note that these variables do show evidence of the effect of heterogamy on marital quality across these demographic variables.

In summary, limited support was found for hypothesis 1 that states that *age heterogamy is negatively related to marital stability and marital quality*. Age heterogamy was positively correlated with the marital stability variable measuring divorce, and was significant at the .05 level. However, when examined along with other variables in the multiple regression, no significant relationship was found between age heterogamy and marital stability or quality. This may suggest the possibility of a spurious relationship in the correlation found between age heterogamy and marital stability. It is also possible that the impact of age heterogamy on marital stability is mediated by the other variables in the regression model.

No support was found for hypothesis 2 that holds that *background socioeconomic status heterogamy is negatively related to marital stability and marital quality*. Background socioeconomic status heterogamy had no significant correlations with either marital quality or marital stability. In addition, neither the marital stability nor the marital quality regression models found a relationship with background socioeconomic status heterogamy.

Statistically significant support was found for hypothesis 3 that states *religious heterogamy is negatively related to marital stability and marital quality*. Religious heterogamy was negatively correlated with marital quality with a Pearson's correlation of  $-.062$  significant at the .001 level. In this test it was found that as religious differences between a couple increased, marital quality decreased. In the marital stability correlation analysis, religious heterogamy was positively correlated with divorce with a Pearson's correlation of  $.053$  at the .00 significance level. This indicates that as religious differences between a couple increased, the likelihood of divorce increased as well. In addition to statistically significant correlations, religious heterogamy was also

statistically significant in both regression models. Since the variable was tested together with other variables in the regression models, this finding is important because it rules out the possibility of a spurious relationship between religious heterogamy and the dependent variables.

No support was found for hypothesis 4 that states that *racial heterogamy is negatively related to marital stability and marital quality*. Correlations between racial heterogamy and marital quality found no significant relationship, and the marital quality regression model failed to find a significant impact of racial heterogamy as well. As data on the race of ex-spouses was not collected, no tests were done concerning the relationship between race and marital stability.

Hypothesis 5, *educational heterogamy is negatively related to marital stability and marital quality*, was also tested using both correlations and regression models. Correlations run between educational heterogamy and marital stability and marital quality found no significant relationships. The regression models testing marital stability and marital quality also found no significant impact of educational heterogamy. However, it is important to note that the sex of the spouse with more education was not accounted for. Bitter (1986) suggests that if the sex of the spouse having more years of education is not accounted for, the results can be skewed both in size and direction, which is possible in this instance. A husband having more years of education than a wife may have a very different effect on a marriage than a wife who has more years of education than her husband. He argues that not accounting for these differences could even cancel out the effects of the variable (Bitter 1986). As described earlier, since sex was not controlled for, it is possible that the results for educational heterogamy have been affected.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of this research support the argument that differences across demographic variables have an effect on both the quality of marital relationships and the stability of marriages. The findings suggest that demographically homogamous marriages are more successful than heterogeneous marriages. However, while the regression models showed overall support for the selected heterogamy variables having a statistically significant combined impact on both marital quality and marital stability, the individual variables had mixed results, not always supportive or consistent with the hypotheses. This research revealed several important findings in the field of homogamy, as well as marriage research in general.

### DISCUSSION

The strongest and most consistent finding of this research is the effect that religious heterogamy has on both marital quality and marital stability. In this study, couples who did not share the same religion reported lower marital quality, and were more likely to have their marriage end in divorce. The findings in this study are consistent with much of the research previously done on religiously heterogamous marriages that found consistent relationships between religious heterogamy and higher risk of divorce (Curtis and Ellison 2002; Bumpass and Sweet 1972; Maneker and Rankin 1993), as well as lower levels of marital satisfaction (Curtis and Ellison 2002; Heaton 1984; Heaton and Pratt 1990). Part of this finding may be due to the fact that a person's religion also tends to form their core value system along with their religious belief

system. Even if a person no longer considers the religion of their upbringing an important and vital part of their daily life, its influence is likely to still be present in their morals and values. Therefore, marrying someone of a different religion may mean more than a simple difference in style of worship, or a few theological points. Additionally, a difference in religion could bring differences in morals, values, childrearing beliefs, and much more. Therefore, despite the fact that religious preference and religious activities have less of a pronounced role in modern American society, this research clearly shows that there is still a strong link between religious homogamy and marital success.

An intriguing finding concerning homogamy and marital success is the lack of evidence supporting a significant impact of educational homogamy. If the importance of traditional, ascribed barriers to heterogamous relationships such as race and background socioeconomic status are declining in American society, the importance of education, an achieved status, appears to be rising. As previously discussed, many researchers have pointed out the increasing importance of education in mate selection (Kalmijn 1991a, 1991b; Mare 1991; Rockwell 1976). Since education continues to gain importance in American society, such findings would suggest that educational similarities would also be tied to marital success. Though previous research on educational heterogamy and marital success was limited, there were findings indicating an increased risk for marital instability among couples with heterogamous educational attainment (Tzeng 1992). Surprisingly, however, no significant results were found between educational heterogeneity and success in marriage in this study.

One potential reason for the lack of significant findings concerning educational homogamy could be the sex of the spouse with more years of education. As Bitter (1986) notes, failure to distinguish between whether it is the husband or the wife who

has attained more education may negate the effect the differences have on marital quality and stability. Since men traditionally have more education in marriage, a wife having more education may have an effect on the relationship. In this study, a relationship was found between the sex of the respondent and age heterogamy, but specific testing on the effects of older male versus older female were not done, which may have skewed the results. Further test should be done to determine if controlling for sex would lead to different results.

Another potential reason for the lack of significant findings with the educational homogamy variable is the low instance of heterogamy with the sample. As previously noted, only a small percentage of couples in this study were involved in educationally heterogamous marriages. Therefore, the lack of data may skew the results and explain the lack of significant findings. Further research is needed that can address this issue more adequately.

The age of the data set may have also affected the relationship between educational heterogamy and marital success. Due to changes in education and the fact that more women are pursuing higher education now than in the 1980's, it is possible that educational heterogamy's effect is more substantial than these results show. Further testing with a more current data set is needed.

The findings concerning age heterogamy were interesting. While no relationship was found between age heterogamy and marital quality, there was a significant relationship between age heterogamy and marital stability, suggesting that age differences between couple are worthy of attention in the homogamy field.

Additionally, previous studies suggest that age disparity with an older wife may have more of an effect on marriage than disparity from an older husband (Tzeng 1992). For



this research, the sex of the older spouse was not controlled for, and this may have had an effect on the findings by potentially lessening the impact of age differences on both marital quality and marital stability. Finally, the low instance of heterogamous marriages may also play a role in the lack of significant findings. While some researchers deny the impact of age heterogamy on marital success (Monahan 1953; Vera, et al. 1985), this study suggests the presence of a significant relationship.

No relationship was found between racial differences and marital quality, which is consistent with some previous research that found racial heterogamy to have no impact on marital stability or quality (Monahan 1970; Weller and Rofe 1988; Henderson 2000). Since data on race was not collected for ex spouses, it was impossible to study the relationship between racial differences and marital stability, limiting the scope of this research. It is possible that differences in the traditional, ascribed characteristic race no longer have a significant impact on marital success. This finding would be monumental in the field of homogamy and marital success, as well as the field of sociology as a whole. However, since sufficient data was not collected, and a low percentage of couples in this study were in racially heterogamous marriages, it is necessary to do further research in this area before a final conclusion is drawn.

There was no relationship found between background socioeconomic status and marital success, which is consistent with previous research (Glenn, Hoppe, and Weiner 1974; Bitter 1986). This finding suggests that differences in couples' family of origin socioeconomic status do not impact their marital relationship as they have in the past. As the importance of social class has declined somewhat in American culture, and the ability to increase one's social class has increased, it follows that social class heterogamy would decline in importance as a measure of marital success. However, it

may be beneficial to use additional measures of socioeconomic status to further test this variable. Additionally, as with many of the other variables, a lack of heterogamous marriages may have an effect on the findings concerning background socioeconomic status homogamy.

## SPECULATIONS

There are underlying mechanisms that may have an impact on the results of this study. First of all, societal norms concerning marriage and intermarriage have encountered much change in the past fifty to sixty years. Marriages that once would have been forbidden or taboo are becoming commonplace and acceptable. Therefore, marriages that are heterogamous across certain ascriptive characteristics, such as race or background socioeconomic status, are no longer under the intense societal pressure that they may have once experienced. Also, it is possible that these characteristics no longer play as much of a formative role in shaping people's norms and values that could carry over into their marriages. However, while race and background socioeconomic status seem to be losing importance, religion has not lost its significance in marriage. As mentioned earlier, it is possible that religion has maintained a great impact in shaping the norms and values that people continue to adhere to and bring into their adult lives and marriages. Since religion is often a personal and deeply ingrained belief system that can permeate all aspects of life, it is not surprising that differences in religion can lead to instability and unhappiness in marriage.

In addition to the affect of norms and personal values, it is also possible that a couple's reason for marriage will affect the success of their marriage. Historically, and even today in traditional societies, many marriages were arranged by a couple's parents

and extended family. Commitment to a marriage was not simply based on love or attraction, but was a financial, political, and often strategic decision. Typically, arranged marriages have a much higher rate of stability, though marital quality may not be as high. As traditional and arranged marriages have decreased with time, there has also been an increase in divorce. Fox (1975) finds a significant relationship between type of marriage, love-match versus arranged, and subsequent marriage behavior in terms of power structure, sex segregation, and attitudes toward traditional sex roles. His findings show obvious differences in women whose marriages were arranged, and those who chose to marry based on love. While he did not specifically address marital stability or quality, his research has implications that should be addressed in terms of marital success. It is highly possible that a couple's reason for marriage will impact the seriousness of their commitment, and potentially the success of their marriage.

A final factor that cannot be overlooked when researching homogamy and marital success is the increase in equalitarian sex roles, along with the increasing opportunities for women in society. As American society moves toward equal opportunities for men and women, women are finding more power both outside and inside of the home. There is a strong possibility that the shift in this balance of power can affect the tendency toward homogamy as well as homogamy's impact on marital success.

## LIMITATIONS

This research had several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the data set used in this study is from the late 1980's. While this data is vitally important and still relevant to today's study of marital success, many social changes

have taken place during the past 20 years, and research using a current data set would more effectively reflect the current effect of homogamy on marital success. Also, as stated previously, there are several variables in which it would be valuable to further control for sex. Controlling for this variable would rule out spurious relationships, but would also bring out relationships that may exist but are unseen because of the effect of sex. Since the unit of measurement in this study is the couple, it is impossible to use sex as a control variable, as the couple is both male and female. Finally, it would be beneficial to use a data set that was tailored to this type of research and would include more information on ex spouses, as well as widows and widowers' deceased spouses. More complete and inclusive data would make this research more effective and useful.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

Despite its limitations, the results of this study provide several important findings for the field of homogamy and marital success. Overall, it upholds the belief that demographically homogamous marriages are more successful than demographically heterogeneous marriages. However, several of the variables that were once thought to have a significant effect on marital success do not in this study. These findings are especially useful as social norms and expectations, and their effects on marriage, are constantly changing. This research suggests that religious differences and age differences do have a measurable effect on marital success. However, other variables that were traditionally viewed as important, such as race and background socioeconomic status, did not have an effect on marital success. These changes are significant and should affect the way homogamy is studied.

Understanding variables that are linked to low marital quality and high divorce potential provides researchers with key variables that will also correlate with successful marriages. Raising awareness about such variables is important, but may not provide practical help to persons wanting to get married. However, taking this research further and investigating how and why demographically heterogamous marriages are less successful could provide couples with valuable information that will assist them in having the best marital experience possible.

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## VITA

Sarah A. Raper  
Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice  
Old Dominion University  
Norfolk, VA 23529

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## Education

M.A. Applied Sociology, May 2008; Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia

B.A. Sociology, December 2001; Lee University, Cleveland, Tennessee

## Related Experience

Registrar, Bethel College, Hampton, Virginia, November 2004-March 2006.

Adjunct Sociology Instructor, Bethel College, Hampton, Virginia, 2005.

Graduate Assistant, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia, August 2002-May 2004.

## Activities and Awards

Recipient of Tuition Grant, College of Arts and Letters, Old Dominion University, Fall 2001-Spring 2002.

Member of Alpha Kappa Delta, the International Sociology Honor Society, August 2001-December 2004.