

Spousal Esteem

Todd K. Shackelford
Florida Atlantic University

David M. Buss
University of Texas at Austin

This study tested the hypothesis that spousal esteem and disparagement are psychological states that track the costs and benefits of marriage to a particular person. Three separate data sources were used. First, 214 married participants reported on their personality, the esteem they held for their spouse, and issues the couple disagreed about. Second, participants provided information on their spouse's personality and behaviors their spouse performed that upset them. Third, couples were interviewed by two interviewers, who subsequently provided independent ratings of each participant's personality. Esteem held for a spouse negatively covaried with (a) spousal personality characteristics associated with cost-infliction, such as disagreeableness and emotional instability; (b) spousal sources of upset, such as physical abuse and inconsiderateness; and (c) frequency of conflict in six domains, including jealousy, affection, and money.

Spousal disparagement, or lack of esteem for one's spouse, is among the top five causes of divorce, cross-culturally (Betzig, 1989). An evolutionary psychological perspective (Buss, 1995) provides a heuristic guide for thinking about the causes and consequences of spousal esteem (the esteem held for one's spouse) and disparagement. According to this perspective, spousal esteem and disparagement may represent evolved psychological states that track the benefits and costs of marriage to a particular person. The underlying psychological mechanisms presumably have been designed by natural selection over human evolutionary history. At an ultimate level, therefore, these psychological mechanisms and the manifest states of spousal esteem and disparagement track what would have been conjugal costs and benefits in ancestral times. Thus, spousal esteem facilitates continued investment in the marriage. Spousal disparagement, in contrast, may moti-

vate the individual to attempt to change the existing relationship or to seek another one that may be more propitious.

The hypothesis that spousal esteem and disparagement track the benefits and costs of marriage to a particular person is not uniquely derivable from evolutionary psychological theory. This hypothesis is consistent with several other theories, including social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), equity theory (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978), and Rusbult's (1980) investment model. An evolutionary psychological perspective provided the theoretical impetus for conducting the present study, and we therefore discuss the predictions and results from the vantage point of this perspective.

Overview

We begin with a brief discussion of our conceptualization and measurement of spousal esteem. Next, we address potential covariance between spousal personality characteristics and esteem held for one's spouse. We then consider how spousal sources of upset and irritation might reliably predict spousal disparagement. Finally, we discuss the possibility that spousal esteem tracks the frequency of marital conflict. Throughout this article, we use spousal esteem and spousal disparagement as ends of a psychological continuum, rather than as independent psychological states.

Todd K. Shackelford, Division of Science–Psychology, Florida Atlantic University; David M. Buss, Department of Psychology, University of Texas at Austin.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Todd K. Shackelford, Division of Science–Psychology, Florida Atlantic University, 2912 College Avenue, Davie, Florida 33314. Electronic mail may be sent via the Internet to tshackel@fau.edu.

Defining and Measuring Spousal Esteem

We wanted to assess several broad domains of spousal esteem, including along the dimensions of physical attractiveness, social impact and poise, and intellectual acuity and potential for success. The California Observer-Evaluation Scales (COES; Phinney & Gough, 1986) provide assessments of each of these domains. The COES was developed for use by any observer. We used the COES as a spouse evaluation instrument.

The COES contains 20 items assessing four domains of spousal esteem. General esteem provides a global measure of regard for spouse. Physical esteem assesses regard for spouse's physical attractiveness. Social esteem measures perceptions of spouse's impression on others and social skills. Intellectual esteem assesses regard for spouse's intellectual abilities and potential for success.

Spousal Esteem and Spousal Personality

The five factor model of personality (Goldberg, 1981) proposes that five dimensions capture the major individual differences in personality. These bipolar factors are Surgency, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness/Intellect. Some research has been conducted on the covariation of marital satisfaction with spousal markers of the Big Five. The most consistent predictor of marital unhappiness is a spouse's low standing on the Emotional Stability factor (Buss, 1991; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). A spouse displaying low conscientiousness evokes marital dissatisfaction in his or her partner (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978; Kelly & Conley, 1987) as does a spouse manifesting low agreeableness (Burgess & Wallen, 1953; Kelly & Conley, 1987).

A spouse exhibiting low emotional stability, low conscientiousness, and low agreeableness inflicts substantial costs on his or her partner, rendering the relationship a much less beneficial and therefore much less satisfying arrangement. Buss (1991) found that women married to disagreeable and emotionally unstable men complain that their husbands are condescending, abusive, unfaithful, inconsiderate, moody, abusive of alcohol, emotionally constricted, and self-centered. Women married to men who exhibit low conscientiousness complain that

their husbands are unfaithful. Buss (1991) also found that women married to men displaying low openness/intellect complain that their husbands are neglecting, rejecting, unreliable, abusive, inconsiderate, physically self-absorbed, moody, sexually withholding, abusive of alcohol, and emotionally constricted.

In Buss's (1991) study, men's complaints about their wives also covaried with their wives' personality, but less so than was the case for women's complaints about their husbands. Men married to disagreeable women complain that their wives are condescending, unfaithful, and self-centered. Men married to women who exhibit low conscientiousness complain that their wives are abusive of alcohol and emotionally constricted. Men married to emotionally unstable women complain that their wives are possessive, dependent, jealous, and self-centered. Finally, men married to women scoring low on the Openness/Intellect factor complain that their spouses sexualize other men, abuse alcohol, and are emotionally constricted.

Thus, men and women whose spouses exhibit low levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness/intellect are exposed to significant costs. According to evolutionary psychological theory, early men and women who remained in relationships with spouses imposing such costs are less likely to have been our ancestors, for they would have been out-reproduced by men and women who either refrained from involvement with people exhibiting these undesirable personality characteristics or who defected from the relationship once involved.

In the present study, we assessed spousal esteem across four broad factors: General, Physical, Social, and Intellectual. Physical esteem approximates a multifaceted assessment of spouse's physical attractiveness. Judgments of spouse's physical attractiveness can be made relatively independent of spouse's personality (Henss, 1996), and we therefore did not expect to find relationships between spouse's personality and physical esteem of spouse.

Prediction 1: Spouse's disagreeableness, emotional instability, undependability, and close-mindedness will negatively correlate with social, intellectual, and general esteem of spouse.

We believed that the relationships among the dimensions of spousal esteem and spousal

surgency were likely to be sex-differentiated. Surgency is linked with social ascendance and resource acquisition in men (Hogan, 1983). Because women more than men value social ascendance and resource acquisition in a spouse (Buss, 1989b), this led to our second prediction.

Prediction 2: Husband's surgency will positively correlate with wife's general, social, and intellectual esteem of husband.

Spousal Esteem and Spousal Sources of Upset and Irritation

Buss (1989a) empirically developed a taxonomy of the sources of upset and irritation among long-term partners. Buss (1989a) identified 15 categories subsuming 147 acts that a man or woman might do that elicits irritation, anger, or upset in his or her partner. Spousal sources of upset represent relatively direct assessments of spousal cost-infliction (Buss, 1989a); therefore, we believed they would negatively covary with esteem of spouse.

Prediction 3: Complaints about spouse will negatively correlate with own social, intellectual, and general esteem of spouse.

We did not expect to document significant relationships between physical esteem of spouse and spousal sources of upset. Relative to the other dimensions of spousal esteem, we believed that assessments of spousal physical attractiveness would be less dependent on the fluctuating interpersonal benefits received and costs incurred from marriage to a particular person.

Spousal Esteem and Marital Conflict

The frequency of marital conflict also provides a relatively direct assessment of the costs associated with involvement with a particular person (Buss, 1989a). To assess the content and frequency of marital conflict, we developed an instrument to be completed by each spouse that assesses 82 issues that might generate conflict between spouses. The 82 issues reflect the following conflict domains: attention and affection, jealousy and infidelity, future plans—money, marital sex, chores and responsibilities, and control and dominance.

Prediction 4: Marital conflict will negatively correlate with social, intellectual, and general esteem of spouse.

As with previous predictions, we did not expect to find significant covariance between physical esteem of spouse and the frequency of marital conflict.

The general hypothesis tested in this study was that spousal esteem and disparagement are psychological states that track ancestrally relevant costs and benefits of marriage to a particular person. To test the predictions, we collected self-report, spouse-report, and interviewer-report data on a sample of 107 married couples.

Method

Participants

Participants were 214 individuals, 107 men and 107 women, who had been married less than one year. Participants were located through the public records of marriage licenses issued within a large mid-Western county. All couples who had been married within a 6-month period were contacted by letter and invited to participate in this study. The majority of participants were Caucasian. The mean age of the wives was 25.52 years ($SD = 4.06$; range = 18 to 36). The mean age of husbands was 26.79 years ($SD = 3.75$; range = 17 to 41). This was the first marriage for 96% of our sample. Four percent of couples had one child; the remaining 96% of couples had no children. Couples had been romantically involved for an average of 44 months ($SD = 24.64$; range = 1 month to about 8 years). Two-thirds of couples had cohabited before marriage for an average of 1.26 years ($SD = 1.8$ years). Thirty-two percent of our sample reported that they were Protestant, 22% Catholic, about 4% Jewish, and 11% "other." Thirty-one percent of respondents reported no religious affiliation. The annual income of husbands ranged from \$0 (unemployed) to \$87,000, averaging \$21,000 ($SD = \$12,000$). The annual income of wives ranged from \$0 (unemployed) to \$68,000, averaging \$16,400 ($SD = \$10,500$). Husbands had completed an average of 16.47 years of education ($SD = 2.71$; range = 11 to 23 years). Wives had completed an average of 15.99 years of education ($SD = 2.94$; range = 7 to 25 years).

Procedure

Participants participated in three waves of assessment. First, they received through the mail a battery of self-report instruments to be completed at home. This battery included a personality instrument. Second, participants came to a testing session one week after receiving the battery of self-report

instruments. Spouses were separated to preserve independence and to prevent contamination attributable to discussion. Participants reported on their spouse's personality, the esteem they held for their spouse, issues the couple disagreed about, and acts their spouse did that they found upsetting or irritating (spousal sources of upset). Confidentiality of all responses was assured. Not even the participant's spouse could obtain responses without written permission from the relevant partner.

Third, couples were interviewed toward the end of the testing session by a male and a female interviewer drawn from a rotating staff of 10 interviewers to provide information about each participant's personality. The interviewers asked participants a standard set of questions about how they met, sources of attraction, sources of conflict, and their similarities and differences. Immediately after the interview, the interviewers independently recorded their perceptions of each participant's personality characteristics.

Materials

Spousal esteem. To assess spousal esteem, participants completed the COES (Phinney & Gough, 1986). The COES contains 20 items assessing four factors of spousal esteem: General Esteem, a global measure of regard for spouse; Physical Esteem, assessing regard for spouse's physical attractiveness; Social Esteem, measuring perceptions of spouse's impression on others; and Intellectual Esteem, assessing regard for spouse's intellectual abilities and potential for success. Each item is rated on a 9-point scale, with varying anchors depending on the attribute rated in that item. All scales are presented such that 1 = extremely low esteem of spouse on the attribute and 9 = extremely high esteem of spouse on the attribute. With 20 items total, five items are unit-weighted and summed to produce each of the four indexes of spouse evaluation. We factor-analyzed the 20 items for men and women separately and then for men and women together to determine whether the intended four factors emerged. For each analysis, the four factors emerged with only trivial misassignment of items to factors. Alpha reliabilities for the four factors were as follows: General Esteem = .90, Physical Esteem = .88, Social Esteem = .85, Intellectual Esteem = .86.

Five personality factors: Self-report. Participants completed a 40-item personality instrument during the self-report phase of the study. This instrument consists of 40 bipolar adjective scales, eight each for the following personality factors (sample items in parentheses): Surgency (dominant-submissive, bold-timid), Agreeableness (selfless-selfish, warm-cold), Conscientiousness (reliable-undependable, hard-working-lazy), Emotional Stability (secure-insecure,

even-tempered-temperamental), and Openness/Intellect (curious-uncurious, intelligent-stupid). The instructions were as follows: "Please read the following list of characteristics and circle the number that *best describes* you generally." Each bipolar scale was rated on a 7-point scale, with the high and low anchors positioned at opposite ends of the scale. Over the midpoint (4) of each scale was positioned the term *neither*. The five personality dimensions were scored by summing the eight relevant scales for each dimension. This instrument is based on factor loadings reported by Goldberg (1983). Alpha reliabilities for each 8-item factor were as follows: Surgency = .77, Agreeableness = .62, Conscientiousness = .72, Emotional Stability = .73, Openness/Intellect = .63. Factor analyses of self-ratings, spouse ratings, and interviewer ratings using this measure cleanly replicated the five-factor solution for all three data sources (see Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997).

Five personality factors: Spouse report. A parallel version of Goldberg's (1983) instrument was administered in a separate testing session to the spouse of each participant. The instructions were as follows: "Please read the following list of characteristics and circle the number which best describes *your partner* generally." The five personality dimensions were scored by summing the relevant eight bipolar scales. Alpha reliabilities for each 8-item factor were as follows: Surgency = .74, Agreeableness = .77, Conscientiousness = .74, Emotional Stability = .77, Openness/Intellect = .73.

Five personality factors: Interviewer report. Each couple was interviewed by a pair of trained interviewers drawn from a 10-member team. One interviewer was male, the other female. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes, during which the couple answered a standard set of questions, including "How did you meet?" "What are the similarities and differences between you?" and "What are the sources of conflict in your marriage?"

Following each interview, the two interviewers independently rated each participant on an observer-based version of Goldberg's (1983) instrument. As with self-reports and spouse reports, the five personality dimensions were scored by summing the relevant eight bipolar scales. The two interviewer ratings manifested significant agreement along all five factors ($r = .55$ for Surgency, $.43$ for Agreeableness, $.56$ for Conscientiousness, $.48$ for Emotional Stability, and $.51$ for Openness/Intellect; all $ps < .001$, two-tailed) and were therefore standardized and summed to form five more reliable scores for each participant. Alpha reliabilities for each 8-item factor for the composited interviewer reports were as follows: Surgency = .90, Agreeableness = .88,

Conscientiousness = .88, Emotional Stability = .83, Openness/Intellect = .92.

Self-ratings, spouse ratings, and aggregate interviewer ratings were significantly positively correlated for each personality factor (mean r s were as follows: Surgency, .52; Agreeableness, .24; Conscientiousness, .51; Emotional Stability, .42; Openness/Intellect, .31; all p s < .001, two-tailed) and were therefore standardized and summed to create a composite score for each participant along each dimension. According to classical true score theory (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), these total composite scores are more valid than scores generated from any one of the individual data sources, because true score variance will cumulate, whereas the unique method variance associated with each individual data source will not cumulate. Alpha reliabilities for each 8-item factor for the total composites were as follows: Surgency = .90, Agreeableness = .88, Conscientiousness = .88, Emotional Stability = .83, Openness/Intellect α = .92.

Spousal sources of upset and irritation. During the testing session when the husband and wife were physically separated, participants completed an instrument titled "Sources of Irritation and Upset." This instrument contained the following instructions: "Below is a list of things that spouses sometimes do that irritate, annoy, anger, or upset each other. Please place an 'X' next to those acts your husband [wife] has performed *within the past year* that have irritated, annoyed, angered, or upset you." Following these instructions were 147 acts, previously nominated by a separate panel (see Buss, 1989a).

Factor analysis (Buss, 1989a) revealed the following 15 factors (sample acts in parentheses): Condescending (He treated me like I was stupid or inferior), Jealous (She acted jealous), Neglecting (He would not spend enough time with me), Abusive (She hit me), Unfaithful (He had sex with another woman), Inconsiderate (She did not help clean up), Physically Self-Absorbed (He fussed too much with his appearance), Moody (She was moody), Sexually Withholding (He refused to have sex with me), Sexualizing of Others (She talked about men as if they were sex objects), Abusive of Alcohol-Emotionally Constricted (He drank too much alcohol; He hid all his emotions to act tough), Disheveled (She did not take care of her appearance), Insulting of Partner's Attractiveness (He told me I was ugly), Sexually Aggressive (She tried to force sex acts on me), and Self-Centered (He was self-centered).

Issues that couples disagree about. During the testing session when the husband and wife were physically separated, participants completed an instrument titled "Issues that Couples Sometimes Disagree About." This instrument contained the following instructions: "Below is a list of issues that couples

sometimes disagree about. Please read each one and circle on the rating scale whether or not you and your spouse have disagreed about the issue *within the past six months*, and if so, how often." For each issue, participants circled *never, rarely, sometimes, or often*. Following these instructions were 82 issues about which couples might disagree. The 82 issues were generated by our 10-member research staff, a review of the marital conflict literature, and discussions with married men and women not involved in this project. Because we were interested in securing maximally reliable assessments of marital conflict, we averaged spouses' reports of disagreement for each of the 82 issues.

Principal-components analysis with varimax rotation revealed six factors of marital conflict, accounting for 52% of the interitem variance. Seventy-one issues loaded at least |.40| on one of the six factors. We created scales by unit-weighted sums of the issues loading at least |.40| on the factors. The six scales were as follows (alpha reliability and sample issues in parentheses): Attention and Affection (α = .94; not showing enough love or affection), Jealousy and Infidelity (α = .89; jealousy; lack of fidelity), Future Plans-Money (α = .91; future plans; goals in life; money), Marital Sex (α = .88; frequency of sex; one wants sex, other doesn't), Chores and Responsibilities (α = .89; chores; sharing responsibilities), and Control and Dominance (α = .85; dominance; who's in control).

Results

Descriptive Statistics for Spousal Esteem

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for spousal esteem, separately for husbands and wives. Correlated means t tests revealed that men and women did not significantly differ in general, social, or intellectual esteem for spouse (all p s > .05, two-tailed). Men reported significantly greater physical esteem for spouse than did women, $t(91) = 3.69$, $p < .001$, two-tailed.

Correlations Among the Dimensions of Spousal Esteem

Table 2 presents the correlations among the four dimensions of spousal esteem. The correlations for men appear below the diagonal, and those for women appear above the diagonal. The pattern of correlations was similar for men and women and suggested that the COES assessed four distinct dimensions of spousal esteem. For both men and women, the four scales shared

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Spousal Esteem

Participant	Spousal esteem							
	General		Physical		Social		Intellectual	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Husbands	8.20	0.65	7.40	0.93	7.79	0.68	7.81	0.77
Wives	8.32	0.73	7.85	0.80	7.80	0.89	7.99	0.82

Note. Each of the four spouse evaluation dimensions is composed of 5 items. All item responses are scored from 1 to 9, where 1 = low esteem of spouse and 9 = high esteem of spouse. Data were provided by 92 husbands and 103 wives.

about 30% of the variance each accounted for. For each scale, at least 70% of the variance accounted for was unique to that scale.

Spousal Personality

Table 3 presents the correlations of spousal esteem with spouse's composite standings on the five personality factors, separately for husbands and wives. Husband's disagreeableness, emotional instability, and close-mindedness negatively correlated with wife's social, intellectual, and general esteem of spouse, supporting Prediction 1. Also supporting Prediction 1, wife's agreeableness, conscientiousness, and (for general and intellectual esteem) openness/intellect positively correlated with husband's esteem of wife. Contrary to Prediction 1, wife's conscientiousness was unrelated to husband's esteem of wife, and husband's emotional stability was unrelated to wife's esteem of husband. Husband's surgency was positively correlated with wife's general, social, and intellectual esteem of her husband, whereas wife's surgency was unrelated to husband's

esteem of wife. Prediction 2 was strongly supported.

Spousal Sources of Upset and Irritation

Table 4 presents the correlations of spousal esteem with complaints about spouse, separately for men and women. Wives' complaints about their husbands were negatively predictive of their general, social, and intellectual esteem of husband, supporting Prediction 3. Husband's abusiveness appeared to be the best predictor of wife's decreased spousal esteem ($r = -.38, p < .001$; $r = -.37, p < .001$; and $r = -.28, p < .01$, with wife's general, social, and intellectual esteem of spouse, respectively; all *ps* two-tailed). Prediction 3 was generally not supported for men: Only husbands' general spousal esteem was reliably associated with complaints about their wife.

Marital Conflict

Table 5 presents correlations of spousal esteem with six domains of marital conflict, separately for men and women. Looking first at the left section of Table 5, husbands' general, social, and intellectual esteem of wife were negatively correlated with many of the conflict domains, supporting Prediction 4. Also supporting Prediction 4, husbands' physical esteem of their wives was not predicted by conflict in any domain. Across the general, social, and intellectual esteem domains, husbands' esteem of wife appeared to be best predicted by conflict in the domains of attention and affection (respective $r_s = -.42, p < .001$; $-.24, p = .02$; and $-.28, p = .007$; all *ps* two-tailed) and jealousy and infidelity (respective $r_s = -.33, p = .001$;

Table 2
Correlations Among Dimensions of Husbands' and Wives' Spousal Esteem

Spousal esteem	1	2	3	4
1. General		.56	.65	.67
2. Physical	.43		.45	.45
3. Social	.62	.45		.50
4. Intellectual	.60	.42	.66	

Note. Correlations for husbands are below diagonal; correlations for wives are above diagonal. All correlations are significant at $p < .001$ (two-tailed). Data were provided by 94 husbands and 103 wives.

Table 3
*Correlations of Spousal Esteem With Spouse's Standings
 On Big Five Personality Factors*

Big Five personality factors	Spousal esteem			
	General	Physical	Social	Intellectual
Husbands' spousal esteem				
Wife's composite score				
Surgency	.08	.19	.19	.18
Agreeableness	.22*	.14	.26**	.21*
Conscientiousness	.03	.11	.02	.11
Emotional Stability	.27**	.10	.32***	.30**
Openness/Intellect	.23*	.09	.11	.43***
Wives' spousal esteem				
Husband's composite score				
Surgency	.19*	.04	.29**	.28**
Agreeableness	.35***	.06	.43***	.19
Conscientiousness	.31***	.22*	.29**	.26**
Emotional Stability	.16	-.02	.19	.16
Openness/Intellect	.39***	.13	.33***	.56***

Note. Data were provided by 94 husbands and 103 wives.
 * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

-.23, $p = .03$; and -.30, $p = .004$; all ps two-tailed).

The right section of Table 5 reveals that wives' esteem of husband across all four esteem

dimensions was negatively associated with conflict about attention and affection, jealousy and infidelity, future plans—money, and chores and responsibilities. Conflict about marital sex

Table 4
Correlations of Spousal Esteem With Spousal Sources of Upset

Spousal source of upset (factor)	Wife's esteem of husband				Husband's esteem of wife			
	General	Physical	Social	Intellectual	General	Physical	Social	Intellectual
Condescending	-.27**	-.05	-.19*	-.03	-.15	.11	-.12	.00
Jealous	-.21*	-.06	-.09	-.01	-.21*	-.03	-.18	-.12
Neglecting	.02	.00	-.02	.10	-.05	-.21*	-.03	-.13
Abusive	-.38***	-.19	-.37***	-.28**	-.17	.12	-.12	-.05
Unfaithful	-.18	-.04	-.16	-.05	-.23*	-.04	-.13	-.08
Inconsiderate	-.35***	-.18	-.16	-.24**	-.15	-.08	-.12	-.08
Physically Self-Absorbed	-.08	.12	-.07	-.11	-.22*	-.04	-.06	-.08
Moody	-.32***	-.14	-.31***	-.21*	-.19	-.14	-.12	-.12
Sexually Withholding	-.14	-.06	-.28**	-.14	-.22*	-.01	-.13	-.16
Sexualizing of Others	-.24*	-.16	-.34***	-.17	-.09	.01	-.05	-.03
Alcoholic-Emotionally Constricted	-.21*	-.02	-.09	-.13	.01	-.11	-.05	-.10
Disheveled in Appearance	-.24**	-.14	-.20*	-.10	-.02	-.18	-.05	-.17
Insulting of Partner's Attractiveness	-.05	.10	-.08	-.03	.09	-.03	.05	-.07
Sexually Aggressive	-.31**	-.15	-.13	-.24*	-.16	.09	-.15	.04
Self-Centered	-.23*	-.03	-.24**	-.15	-.11	-.02	-.21*	-.16

Note. Data were provided by 94 husbands and 103 wives.
 * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 5
Correlations of Spousal Esteem With Marital Conflict

Conflict domain (factor)	Husband's esteem of wife				Wife's esteem of husband			
	General	Physical	Social	Intellectual	General	Physical	Social	Intellectual
Attention and Affection	-.42***	-.05	-.24*	-.28**	-.46***	-.25**	-.28**	-.30**
Jealousy and Infidelity	-.33***	.02	-.23*	-.30**	-.46***	-.35***	-.36***	-.24*
Future Plans—Money	-.39***	-.13	-.14	-.16	-.46***	-.32***	-.25**	-.32***
Marital Sex	-.22*	-.03	-.10	-.13	-.38***	-.37***	-.17	-.12
Chores and Responsibilities	-.42***	-.12	-.21*	-.18	-.54***	-.33***	-.35***	-.37***
Control and Dominance	-.06	.08	.06	.03	-.34***	-.24**	-.15	-.06

Note. Reports of conflict within each conflict domain are composited across husband and wife reports. Data were provided by 94 husbands and 103 wives.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

and control and dominance negatively correlated with wife's general and physical spousal esteem but not with wife's social and intellectual spousal esteem. Prediction 4 was supported for women, with the exception that women's physical esteem of spouse negatively covaried with marital conflict. The strongest and most consistent predictor of women's decreased spousal esteem across the four esteem dimensions appeared to be conflict about chores and responsibilities ($r_s = -.54, -.33, -.35$, and $-.37$ for general, physical, social, and intellectual esteem, respectively; all $p_s \leq .001$, two-tailed).

Discussion

This study tested four predictions derived from the hypothesis that spousal esteem and disparagement function as psychological states that track ancestrally relevant costs and benefits of marriage to a particular person. In the following sections, we highlight and discuss the most important findings of this research.

Spousal Personality and Spousal Esteem

If feelings of disparagement toward one's spouse fluctuate with spousal cost-infliction, then men and women whose spouse embodies personality traits associated with spousal cost-infliction should report greater disparagement for their spouses. Previous research has documented that disagreeable, emotionally unstable, undependable, and close-minded people inflict substantial costs on their spouses.

We predicted (Prediction 1) that men and

women married to spouses exhibiting low agreeableness, low conscientiousness, low emotional stability, and low openness/intellect would report greater general, social, and intellectual spousal disparagement than men and women whose spouses did not embody these undesirable personality attributes. We predicted that physical esteem of spouse would not covary with these undesirable personality attributes insofar as judgments of physical attractiveness are relatively independent of interpersonal cost-infliction. We found some support for this prediction. Men in our sample married to disagreeable, emotionally unstable, and close-minded women reported less esteem for their spouses. Women married to disagreeable, undependable, and close-minded men also reported less esteem for their spouses. We found only one significant correlation between men's and women's physical esteem of spouse and spousal personality: Men married to conscientious women rated their wives as more physically attractive than men married to undependable, unreliable women.

Contrary to Prediction 1, men who were married to women scoring low on the Conscientiousness factor and women who were married to men scoring low on the Emotional Stability factor did not report significantly lower spousal esteem along any esteem dimension. The positive relationships obtained between women's general, social, and intellectual spousal esteem and husbands' standings on emotional stability were in the predicted direction and significant at the relaxed alpha criterion of .10 ($r_s = .16, .19$, and $.16$, respectively), suggesting

that our results require replication with a new and perhaps larger sample of couples.

The null relationships between a wife's conscientiousness and a husband's esteem of wife, however, were less equivocal. Previous research documents that unreliable, undependable wives inflict various costs on their husbands. It is therefore not clear why men's spousal esteem did not covary with their wife's level of conscientiousness. One possibility for future research is that wives scoring low on the Conscientiousness factor bestow benefits on their husbands that balance out the costs they inflict on them. Women scoring low on the Conscientiousness factor report significantly higher sex drives and greater interest in sex than women scoring high on Conscientiousness (Costa, Fagan, Piedmont, Ponticas, & Wise, 1992). Women scoring low on the Conscientiousness factor may grant more frequent sexual access to their husbands. Frequency of sexual intercourse is strongly predictive of men's marital satisfaction (Kelly & Conley, 1987).

Surgency is linked with social ascendance and resource acquisition in men. Because women more than men value social ascendance and resource acquisition in a spouse, we predicted (Prediction 2) that spouse's surgency would positively correlate with wives' but not husbands' general, social, and intellectual esteem of spouse. This prediction was strongly supported.

Spousal Sources of Upset and Spousal Esteem

We predicted (Prediction 3) that spousal sources of upset, as relatively direct assessments of spousal cost-infliction, would negatively predict men's and women's general, social, and intellectual esteem of spouse. This prediction was supported for wives' esteem of their husbands. Husbands' esteem of their wives, in contrast, was only weakly predicted by their complaints about their spouses and for the general esteem dimension only. Why spousal esteem is differently predicted by complaints about spouse for men and women remains an important area for future work.

Marital Conflict and Spousal Esteem

The frequency of marital conflict also provides a relatively direct assessment of the costs

of marriage to a particular person. We developed an instrument that assesses the frequency of disagreement between spouses in six conflict domains. As predicted (Prediction 4), the frequency of disagreement for many of the conflict domains negatively covaried with men's and especially women's general, social, and intellectual esteem of spouse. Consistent with Prediction 4, husbands' physical esteem of their wives—their judgments of their wives' physical attractiveness—did not covary with the frequency of conflict in any domain. Wives' physical esteem of their husbands, in contrast, was strongly and consistently associated with less frequent conflict across all six domains.

The strongest and most consistent predictors of men's spousal disparagement appeared to be more frequent conflict over attention and affection and over jealousy and infidelity. The strongest and most consistent predictor of women's spousal disparagement appeared to be more frequent conflict over chores and responsibilities. Conflict surrounding attention and affection might reflect men's suspicions of wifely infidelity. A husband who feels neglected by his wife, for example, may worry that her attention and affection are being diverted to another man. Conflict surrounding chores and responsibilities might reflect a man's refusal to contribute to the "women's work" of housekeeping and the anger and irritation this refusal evokes in his wife.

Although this instrument provides useful information about what and how often couples disagree, it does not provide critical information, such as the following: Whose behavior is at issue?—the husband's? the wife's? both spouses'? Who initiated the conflict? Knowing, for example, that a couple has frequent arguments about jealousy and infidelity is interesting, but it leaves important variables unspecified, such as who was jealous or unfaithful, why he or she was jealous or unfaithful, what he or she was jealous about, and with whom he or she was unfaithful.

Limitations and Conclusions

One limitation of this study pertains to the sample of couples. The use of newlywed couples is likely to have had the consequence of restricting the range of variation on several of the variables we examined, including spousal

esteem, spousal sources of upset, and frequency of conflict. Newlywed men and women, relative to longer-married couples, are likely to have greater esteem for their spouses, complain of fewer sources of upset, and report less frequent conflict. This range restriction, however, would have operated to attenuate the relationships we discovered. The magnitudes of our results may therefore be lower-bound estimates of the actual relationships between spousal esteem and spousal personality, sources of upset, and marital conflict.

A second set of limitations is not unique to the present study but is characteristic of all cross-sectional research. Longitudinal studies of marriage allow for a causal analysis of spousal esteem that cannot be achieved in cross-sectional designs (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In addition, longitudinal designs uniquely provide a window to a better understanding of how and why spousal esteem might fluctuate over time. Longitudinal designs possess their own methodological limitations (see Karney & Bradbury, 1995) but nevertheless can provide important information about marital interaction and processes that is inaccessible to cross-sectional investigations. The present study documented several important predictors of spousal esteem that could be further examined in longitudinal context: Does spousal personality reliably predict esteem of spouse beyond the first year of marriage? If spousal sources of upset and irritation fluctuate over the course of marriage, do they nevertheless continue to predict increased spousal disparagement?

We hypothesized that spousal esteem and disparagement are psychological states that track the costs and benefits of marriage to a particular person. In the present sample, spousal personality attributes known to be associated with severe cost-infliction positively covaried with spousal disparagement. Spousal sources of upset, ranging from moodiness to physical abuse, positively predicted men's and women's spousal disparagement. Less frequent conflict across several domains predicted men's and especially women's increased spousal esteem.

Although an evolutionary psychological perspective provided the theoretical catalyst for conducting this study, several other perspectives, including social exchange theory and equity theory, provide equally useful frame-

works for interpreting the results. Which of these perspectives, if any, provides the most comprehensive and parsimonious account of the causes and consequences of spousal esteem and disparagement remains a topic for future research. This study nevertheless makes an important contribution by documenting that spousal esteem and disparagement predictably track the costs and benefits of marriage to a particular person across several key domains, including spousal personality, sources of upset and irritation, and the frequency of interpersonal conflict.

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Randy Gerson Memorial Grant

The American Psychological Foundation (APF) announces the Randy Gerson Memorial Grant to be given in 1998. The grant has been created to advance the systemic understanding of couple dynamics and/or multigenerational processes. Work that advances theory, assessment, or clinical practice in these areas shall be considered eligible for grants through the fund.

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Applicants from a variety of professional or educational settings are encouraged to apply. To be eligible for consideration, applicants must have a doctorate (or equivalent PsyD, or EdD). Awards will be given on alternate years to students and professionals. **The 1998 grant will go to a professional.**

Application should include:

- A statement of the proposed project for grant consideration
- A rationale for how the project meets the goals of the fund
- A budget for the project
- A statement about how the results of the project will be disseminated (published paper, report, monograph, etc.)
- Personal reference material (vita and two letters of recommendation)
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Amount of grant:

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For additional information:

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