Why Do Personality Traits Predict Divorce? Multiple Pathways Through Satisfaction

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While previous studies indicate that personality traits influence the likelihood of divorce, the processes that drive this relationship have yet to be examined. Accordingly, the current study utilized a nationally representative, longitudinal sample ($N = 8,206$) to test whether relationship satisfaction is a pathway by which personality traits influence relationship dissolution. Specifically, we examined 2 different pathways: the enduring dynamics and emergent distress pathways. The *enduring dynamics* pathway specifies that the association between personality and relationship satisfaction reflects ongoing relationship dynamics, which are presumed to be stable across a relationship. In contrast, the *emergent distress* pathway proposes that personality leads to worsening dynamics across the course of a relationship, which is indicated by changes in satisfaction. For each pathway, we assessed actor, partner, and combined effects for the Big Five. Results replicate previous research in that personality traits prospectively predict relationship dissolution. Both the enduring dynamics and emergent distress pathways served to explain this relationship, though the enduring dynamics model evidenced the largest effects. The emergent distress pathway was stronger for couples who experienced certain life events, suggesting that personality plays a role in adapting to changing life circumstances. Moreover, results suggest that the personality of the dyad is important in this process: Above and beyond actor effects, partner effects influenced relationship functioning (although the influence of combined effects was less clear). In sum, the current study demonstrates that personality traits shape the overall quality of one's relationship, which in turn influences the likelihood of relationship dissolution.

Keywords: romantic couples, personality traits, relationship dissolution, divorce, relationship satisfaction

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Romantic relationships serve as one of the most meaningful and influential components in people's lives. Attaining a satisfying marriage or romantic relationship is a nearly universal goal (Roberts & Robins, 2000), and involvement in a romantic relationship impacts one's daily life and well-being (Impett et al., 2012; Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). Thus, it is not surprising that the dissolution of a relationship (e.g., in the form of breaking up or divorce) can have many negative consequences for the couple members themselves (Booth & Amato, 1991; Forste & Heaton, 2004; Johnson & Wu, 2002; Lucas, 2005; Myers, 2000; Williams & Umberson, 2004), as well as their children and even society (Kiernan, 1992; Schramm, 2006). Given the significant individual and societal burdens associated with relationship dissolution, it is important to understand *why* some relationships are more likely to dissolve than others.

However, no study of which we are aware has systematically examined the pathways by which personality traits contribute to relationship dissolution. In the current study, we utilized a longitudinal, nationally representative sample of romantic couples to examine how personality influences divorce. Two distinct pathways were tested, each examining whether personality traits influence the likelihood of relationship dissolution through influencing the quality of the relationship on average and over time (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007).

Potential Processes by Which Personality Influences Relationship Dissolution

Remarkably, simple assessments of personality traits prospectively predict marital divorce and relationship dissolution among

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dating couples (Kelly & Conley, 1987; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 2003; Tucker, Kressin, Spiro, & Ruscio, 1998). The finding that personality traits predict how long a couple stays romantically involved has been replicated in a number of different samples and within different age periods and cohorts, such that personality serves as a predicting factor of dissolution a decade or more into the future (Barry, 1970; Bentler & Newcomb, 1978; Cate, Levin, & Richmond, 2002; Eysenck, 1980; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 2003; Newcomb & Bentler, 1980; Roberts et al., 2007; Shaver & Brennan, 1992; Tucker et al., 1998). According to a recent meta-analysis, the personality traits of conscientiousness, neuroticism, and agreeableness are among the best psychological predictors of divorce, even surpassing the effects of socioeconomic status and IQ, such that low levels of conscientiousness and agreeableness and high levels of neuroticism are associated with relationship dissolution (Roberts et al., 2007).

While it is well established that personality predicts relationship dissolution, there is inconsistency in which traits are associated with dissolution, and it is currently unknown what mechanisms drive this association. However, theorists hypothesize that personality traits ultimately influence relationship dissolution through their influence on the overall quality of the relationship (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Roberts et al., 2007). The quality of a relationship is shaped by the day-to-day functioning of the couple, including the typical behaviors and communication patterns they exhibit with one another (Donnellan, Assad, Robins, & Conger, 2007; Kelley et al., 1983). For example, personality traits predict the nature of daily interactions between couples, including how often they agree with one another, use humor, show affection, act with anger or hostility, act possessive, or use maladaptive coping skills (Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2010; Buss, 1991; Donnellan, Conger, & Bryant, 2004; Donnellan et al., 2007; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). These day-to-day experiences naturally shape global assessments of the quality of the relationship or, in other words, how satisfied one is within the relationship (Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2010; Gottman et al., 1998; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; McNulty & Russell, 2010; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2002). As a result, relationship satisfaction serves as a valuable proxy for the day-to-day behavioral exchanges and experiences within a relationship that are inherently influenced by personality (Kelley et al., 1983). Thus, relationship satisfaction could explain why some relationships fail, while others succeed.

The current study examines two different pathways by which personality traits can influence relationship dissolution: the enduring dynamics and emergent distress pathways (Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001). For both pathways, we investigated three different components of personality within the context of a romantic relationship: personality ratings for each member of the romantic couple (i.e., actor and partner effects) and the combined effects of both members. Figure 1 illustrates these two different conceptual pathways.

Enduring Dynamics Model

The enduring dynamics model suggests that personality traits have an ongoing influence on relationship quality throughout the course of a relationship (Huston et al., 2001). Given that personality is an enduring aspect of the people in the relationship (as demonstrated by its strong rank-order consistency; Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000) and that personality traits shape the experiences that one has within a relationship (Kelley et al., 1983), personality is likely to have a similar influence on relationship (dis)satisfaction throughout its course—whether it be on the first day or the twentieth anniversary of the relationship. For instance, if neuroticism is associated with relationship dissatisfaction, highly neurotic individuals would tend to be more dissatisfied in their relationship from the beginning, continue to be more dissatisfied throughout the relationship, and be more likely to experience a

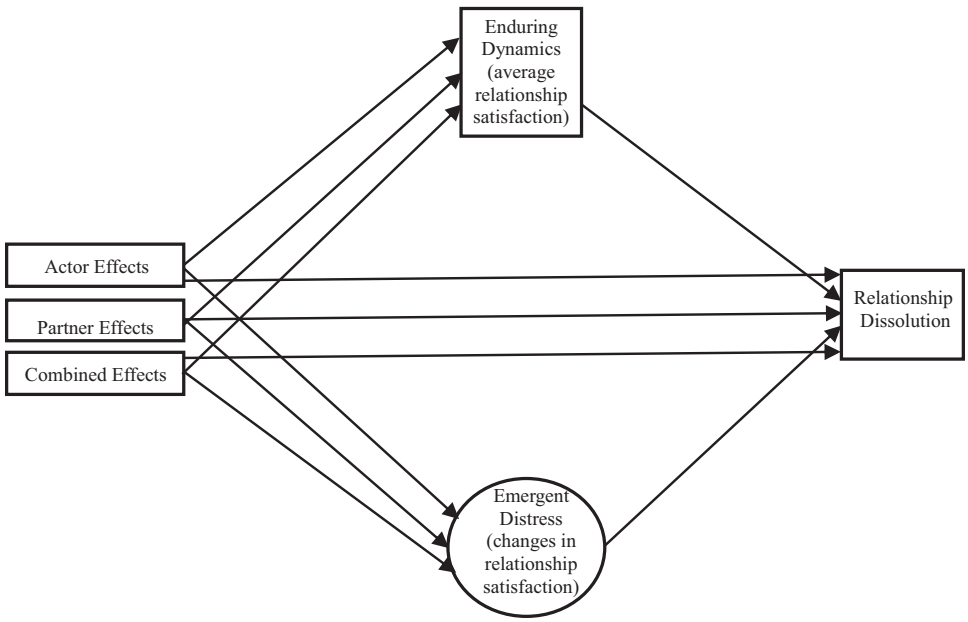

Figure 1. Simultaneous mediation model (tested separately for each pathway).

break-up at any point in the relationship. Since poorer quality relationships are more likely to dissolve (Karney & Bradbury, 2000), the link between personality traits and relationship dissolution could be a result of enduring dynamics.

Numerous studies have found support for the enduring dynamics model. Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have shown that personality traits continue to be associated with relationship satisfaction at similar levels at varying time points throughout the relationship. Such studies have been replicated among couples across the spectrum of relationship types, including individuals who were dating, engaged, newlywed, or involved in long-term marital relationships (Barelds, 2005; Donnellan et al., 2004; Dyrenforth, Kashy, Donnellan, & Lucas, 2010; Holland & Roisman, 2008; Karney & Bradbury, 1995, 1997; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Noftle & Shaver, 2006; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000; Robins et al., 2002; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000; White, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2004). In general, personality traits predict relationship satisfaction regardless of length of relationship, type of relationship, or age of the couple. We next describe three avenues by which specific traits influence relationship satisfaction.

Actor influences on enduring dynamics. The most commonly studied way that personality traits influence relationship satisfaction is through an individual's self-reported personality traits (henceforth referred to as *actor effects*, per Kenny, 1996). Although nearly all of the Big Five traits are associated with global measures of relationship satisfaction, neuroticism tends to emerge as the strongest and most consistent predictor, such that higher levels of neuroticism are negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004; Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1994; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Robins et al., 2002; White et al., 2004). High levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion exhibit modest associations with relationship satisfaction as well, albeit in a positive direction (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978; Heller et al., 2004; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Stroud, Durbin, Saigal, & Knobloch-Fedders, 2010; Watson et al., 2000; White et al., 2004). Finally, the effects for openness are less clear; some studies have found evidence for a positive association (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997; Shaver & Brennan, 1992), while others have found a negative association (Dyrenforth et al., 2010), yet most studies have found no association at all (Donnellan et al., 2004; Holland & Roisman, 2008; Noftle & Shaver, 2006; Watson & Humrichouse, 2006).

Partner influences on enduring dynamics. Beyond actor effects, another way in which personality traits impact relationship satisfaction is through the personality traits of one's romantic partner, which is commonly referred to as *partner effects* (Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2010). That is, one's relationship satisfaction is influenced by his or her partner's personality traits, regardless of his or her own personality traits. Presumably, such partner effects exist because some traits directly influence the relationship, thus damaging or enhancing day-to-day relationship experiences for the other member of the relationship (Malouff et al., 2010). For instance, a partner who is high in neuroticism would be prone to engaging in negative communication patterns (e.g., high hostility), whereas a partner who is high in agreeableness would be prone to engaging in positive communication patterns (e.g., high warmth; Donnellan et al., 2004). Regardless of an actor's own personality traits, it is inherent in the dyadic nature of interactions for the partner's traits to have a continual negative or positive impact on the quality of the relationship and inextricably influence the actor's level of relationship satisfaction (Malouff et al., 2010). A number of studies have shown that relationship satisfaction is indeed influenced by partner effects, above and beyond actor effects (Malouff et al., 2010; Robins et al., 2000). The influence of partner personality traits parallels the associations and directions between actor personality traits and satisfaction described previously, such that partner neuroticism appears to be the most important trait for relationship satisfaction (Barelds, 2005; Donnellan et al., 2007; Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Malouff et al., 2010; Robins et al., 2000; Watson et al., 2004), though partner levels of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness also influence relationship satisfaction (Barelds, 2005; Botwin et al., 1997; Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Holland & Roisman, 2008; Watson et al., 2004).

Combined effects on enduring dynamics. Another avenue by which personality traits influence relationship satisfaction is through the combined effect of both members' traits within the couple. That is, the effect of one couple member's personality traits may inherently depend on the levels of the other member. Such combined effects could exist if the personality traits of the actor evoke certain responses from the partner that drive their behaviors (Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000). For example, an individual who is low in agreeableness may elicit especially callous actions from a partner who is also low in agreeableness, and consequently, the interaction of their traits likely yields a deleterious effect on satisfaction in the relationship.

The interactive nature of a couple's personality traits has been measured in a variety of ways, yet its influence on relationship satisfaction has been inconsistent across studies. For example, some studies that examined the combination of both romantic partners' personality traits found an effect on satisfaction (Caspi & Herbener, 1990; Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Eysenck & Wakefield, 1981; Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Luo & Snider, 2009; Markey & Markey, 2007; Schmitt, 2002), whereas others showed no association (Donnellan et al., 2007; Gattis, Berns, Simpson, & Christensen, 2004; Neyer & Voigt, 2004; Robins et al., 2000; Shiota & Levenson, 2007). Thus, the extent to which the combined effects of personality traits, above and beyond unique actor and partner effects, influence relationship satisfaction over time remains unclear.

Emergent Distress Model

A second pathway by which personality traits may affect the quality of the relationship—and ultimately relationship dissolution—is through their influence on *changes* in relationship satisfaction. The emergent distress model posits that personality traits influence changes in the quality of the relationship, whereby some traits lead to consequential declines in relationship satisfaction (Huston et al., 2001). Given that there are ups and downs in any relationship, relationship satisfaction itself is not a static construct and can indeed change over time. In fact, for the majority of married couples, there tends to be a decrease in relationship satisfaction across time (Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Kurdek, 1998; McNulty, O'Mara, & Karney, 2008; McNulty & Russell, 2010; Umberson, Williams, Powers, Chen, & Campbell, 2005; VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). While most couples do tend to experience a decrease in relationship satisfaction, these changes

are not universal; for some couples, relationship satisfaction actually increases across time, whereas for others it stays the same (Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Lavner & Bradbury, 2010). Nonetheless, declines in relationship satisfaction are distinctly associated with divorce (Lavner, Bradbury, & Karney, 2012). Thus, in addition to low levels of relationship satisfaction, changes in relationship satisfaction also play an important role in the dissolution process.

In general, personality traits can influence changes in satisfaction by coloring the interpretation and frequency of adverse experiences that occur as the relationship unfolds across time. For example, a disagreeable or neurotic member of a couple would become increasingly dissatisfied with his or her partner after continually experiencing emotions and behaviors that are detrimental to the relationship. Similarly, someone high in openness may have an increasingly wandering eye over time that leads him or her to be increasingly less satisfied in the current relationship. After a while, these dynamics may reach a breaking point where there is a greater likelihood of dissolution because of the decreased levels of relationship satisfaction.

Certain life events, such as having a new child, facing a worsening financial situation, developing a serious illness, or experiencing the death of a loved one, potentially could exacerbate these emergent distress processes, given the impact that life stressors can have on relationship satisfaction (Neff & Karney, 2004, 2007; Randall & Bodenmann, 2009; Repetti, Wang, & Saxbe, 2009; Story & Bradbury, 2004). Moreover, major life events may be viewed as more or less detrimental or life-altering based on one's personality, even if the events are objectively similar (Bonanno, 2004; Gomez, Krings, Bangerter, & Grob, 2009; Headey, 2006, 2008; Lucas, 2007). For example, the tendency of neurotic individuals to anticipate and react to an event more negatively could exacerbate their distress surrounding a stressful life event, resulting in greater strife within their romantic relationships. Although personality traits do not moderate the association between major events and changes in overall life satisfaction (Yap, Anusic, & Lucas, 2012), no study has examined whether major life events influence relationship satisfaction. Unlike life satisfaction, which is mostly considered to be a trait-like construct (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), relationship quality may be more vulnerable to contextual factors such as stressful events. Because of these factors, emergent distress processes may play a more important role in the dissolution process when individuals are facing difficult or stressful times.

Actor influences on emergent distress. Currently, the extent to which personality traits are associated with changes in relationship satisfaction remains unclear, as there are a limited number of studies in this area, and those that do exist have found conflicting results. For example, in two studies, traits related to conscientiousness and neuroticism predicted changes in quality of relationships for couples between the ages of 18 and 26 (Robins et al., 2002) and in dating couples over a year (Slatcher & Vazire, 2009). Similarly, another study found that neuroticism predicted declines in marital satisfaction in newlyweds approximately 1 year after their weddings (Fisher & McNulty, 2008). Other studies, however, have found no relationship between neuroticism and changes in relationship satisfaction (Caughlin et al., 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1997). These latter findings are somewhat surprising in light of the emergent distress model, where traits like neuroticism should predict interpersonal transgressions that accumulate and take a toll over time—ultimately resulting in quicker and more extreme declines in relationship satisfaction.

Partner influences on emergent distress. Presumably, partner traits, regardless of actor traits, also influence changes in satisfaction over time. However, it remains unknown whether partner personality influences changes in satisfaction over the course of a relationship as most previous studies on change have focused solely on actor personality traits, with the exception of traits related to neuroticism. Of the three studies that have investigated this question with neuroticism, two found that partner traits related to neuroticism are associated with changes in relationship satisfaction (Caughlin et al., 2000; Fisher & McNulty, 2008) and one did not (Karney & Bradbury, 1997). Clearly the sole focus on neuroticism—in addition to the limited number of studies that have addressed this question—leaves many questions unanswered.

Combined effects on emergent distress. Finally, in addition to influencing overall levels of relationship satisfaction, the combined effects of both couple members' personality traits may also influence changes in satisfaction over the course of the relationship. To our knowledge, only one study has examined this question. Contrary to expectations, this study found that middle-aged couples who exhibited similar levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness actually evidenced greater *declines* in marital satisfaction over a 12-year period (Shiota & Levenson, 2007). These findings prompted the authors to suggest that the old adage of "birds of the same feather" may not be beneficial in terms of relationships as they unfold over time. More research is needed to draw conclusions about the combined effects of personality traits on changes in the quality of romantic relationships. Given the interpersonal nature of relationships and the fact that relationships are dynamic and malleable across time, it is quite surprising that we have little knowledge about the combined effects of personality traits on change (or stability) in relationship satisfaction.

Current Study

The current study used a nationally representative, 4-year longitudinal sample of Australian households to investigate two pathways between personality traits and relationship dissolution: the enduring dynamics model and the emergent distress model. Initial analyses established the prospective relationship between personality traits and relationship dissolution. As this finding replicated those of past studies, we next tested the two pathways, via three avenues: actor, partner, and combined effects. First, we expected that actor and partner personality traits would predict satisfaction, regardless of the length of a relationship (with neuroticism demonstrating the largest effect). Specifically, we expected that high levels of neuroticism would be associated with the likelihood of dissolution because of its negative association with relationship satisfaction. Also, we expected, though to a lesser extent, that agreeableness and conscientiousness would negatively predict dissolution because of their positive associations with relationship satisfaction. However, given previously inconsistent findings on the topic, we made no explicit hypotheses for the combined effects of couple personality. To test the enduring dynamics explanation of relationship dissolution, we tested a series of mediation models for each avenue. We expected that relationship satisfaction would

help to explain the association between personality and relationship dissolution, most notably the trait of neuroticism.

Second, personality traits were expected to influence *changes* in relationship satisfaction in addition to average levels of satisfaction. To test this hypothesis, we first conducted analyses for the emergent distress model that paralleled those conducted for the enduring dynamics model. Given the number of inconsistent findings regarding the association between personality traits and changes in relationship satisfaction, we did not make explicit hypotheses about the influence of each type of trait effect on changes in satisfaction. To test the emergent distress pathway toward relationship dissolution, we conducted a series of mediation models to assess for traits that demonstrated significant actor, partner, or combined effects on changes in relationship satisfaction. We then explored the emergent distress model only for subsamples of individuals who experienced various life events. We hypothesized that agreeableness would function as a buffer against declines in satisfaction, whereas neuroticism would endanger the health of the relationship.

Although the enduring dynamics and emergent distress pathways are not mutually exclusive, we expected that the enduring dynamics pathway would better explain the link between personality traits and dissolution compared with the emergent distress pathway, given that levels of relationship satisfaction predict breakups better than changes in satisfaction (Lavner et al., 2012).

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants consisted of individuals from the Household, Income, and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, which began in 2000 (Wooden & Watson, 2007). The HILDA survey is a panel study that collects information from a large, nationally representative sample of households about economic and social factors on an annual basis. In the current study, we used data collected annually at five different time points (Wave 1–Wave 5) over a 4-year period from 2005 to 2009. The current study included individuals who participated in the HILDA survey who were married (n = 6,654) or involved in de facto relationships (i.e., relationships in which two people live together as a couple and are not married, n = 1,552), some of which consisted of same-sex couples (n = 74) at Wave 1 (total N = 8,206; women = 4,110, or 50.1%). At Wave 1, individuals had been involved in their current marriages for an average of 22.8 years (SD = 15.9) or in their current de facto relationships for an average of 5.1 years (SD = 5.9). Each member of the romantic couple was included as a target (i.e., actor) participant in the study. Thus, each household included two participants, as each member of the couple served as both an actor and a partner (total N of romantic couples = 4,103). Some individuals reported getting separated or divorced between Wave 1 and Wave 5 (N = 764; approximately 11%). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 93 years and differed between couple types, $F(2, 8203) = 608.65$, $p < .05$, such that participants who were married tended to be older (M = 49.82 years, SD = 14.56) than those in same-sex de facto relationships (M = 39.20 years, SD = 11.16), t = 6.42, $p < .05$, d = 0.82, and opposite-sex de facto relationships (M = 35.76 years, SD = 12.33), t = 34.55, $p < .05$, d = 1.04. Individuals in same-sex de facto relationships also tended to be older than individuals in opposite-sex de facto relationships, t = 2.04, $p < .05$, d = 0.29.

Measures

Personality traits. We assessed personality traits using a 36-item self-report measure of the Big Five traits (based on Saucier's (1994) 40 Big Five mini-markers). At Wave 1, participants were asked to rate the extent to which each adjective described them on a 7-point scale, in which 7 denoted *Describes me very well*. Eight items were used to measure extraversion (α = .78) and seven items were each used to measure agreeableness (α = .77), conscientiousness (α = .79), neuroticism (α = .79), and openness (α = .66).

Relationship satisfaction. We assessed relationship satisfaction at each wave (Waves 1–5) using a one-item question that asked participants how satisfied they were with their romantic partner on a 0–10 scale, in which 10 denoted *Completely satisfied* (Dyrenforth et al., 2010). Each measure of satisfaction was combined and averaged (α = .88), resulting in one variable reflecting relationship satisfaction over the course of 4 years (M = 8.25, SD = 1.70).[1] The measurement of changes in relationship satisfaction is described in the Analyses section.

Relationship dissolution. Relationship dissolution was a binary variable indicating whether the romantic relationship that existed during Wave 1 was still intact at Wave 5. Relationship dissolution was measured with items that asked participants whether they had (a) separated or (b) divorced in the past 12 months at Waves 2, 3, 4, and 5. Due to their legal marital status, de facto couples who had broken up could not indicate "yes" for experiencing a divorce; therefore, we combined separation with divorce to more precisely estimate the number of relationships that dissolved. Individuals who dropped out or did not indicate whether they were still married or divorced were treated as missing data.

Life events. We assessed life events at each wave (Waves 1–5) by having participants indicate whether (0 = no and 1 = yes) a major life event had happened during the past 12 months. Out of all respondents in the sample, 14% had become pregnant (n = 1,145), 12.8% had or adopted a new child (n = 1,051), 2.7% experienced the death of a child (n = 222), 33.1% experienced the death of a close family member or relative (n = 2,715), 28.1% experienced the death of a friend (n = 2,305), 10.1% experienced major financial improvement (n = 829), 8.3% experienced major financial worsening (n = 684), 22.4% experienced a serious personal injury or illness (n = 1,835), 41.6% had a close family member or relative experience a serious personal injury or illness (n = 3,411), 0.3% had been detained in jail (n = 28), 3.2% had a close family member detained in jail (n = 266), 7.2% were fired (n = 591), 26.3% started a new job (n = 2,160), 15.2% were promoted (n = 1,244), 8.2% retired (n = 669), 31.4% moved (n = 2,580), 11.4% were a victim of a property crime (n = 935), and 2.5% were a victim of physical violence (n = 208). Only life events that occurred during the study period were included. Given

[1] We performed analyses involving future relationship satisfaction using only Wave 5 as well and found that the results were similar regardless of whether we used Wave 5 or an average between all the waves. We report results using the aggregate of all waves, as it is a more reliable measure of relationship satisfaction.

that such events often influence both partners in a relationship, we created couple-level dummy variables for each event indicating that the event was reported by either couple member during the study period. A *total life events* variable was created by summing all major life events reported at Waves 1 through 5 for both actors and partners ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 2.37$; range: 0–26). Similarly, we created a *total negative events* variable by summing all events that could be considered uniformly negative for participants ($M = 2.3$, $SD = 2.37$; range: 0–21).[2] Of the total sample, 93% ($n = 7{,}660$) were in a relationship in which either couple member reported experiencing at least one life event.

Covariates. All covariates were assessed at Wave 1. *Relationship duration* was assessed by asking participants how long they had been involved in their current de facto relationship or marriage. *Religious identification* was indicated by a dummy variable in which 0 = no religion and 1 = any religion (80.3%). *De facto relationships* was a continuous variable indicated by the number of de facto relationships in which a participant had ever been involved, including his or her current relationship (of those who reported, 46.2% reported zero, 34.4% reported one, 12.2% reported two, 4.9% reported three, 1.7% reported four, and 0.6% reported five or more; missing data = 6.2%). *Marriage* was an ordinal variable that indicated how many times a participant had been legally married, including his or her current relationship (13.2% had never married, 73.7% married once, 11.7% married twice, 1.3% married three times, 0.1% married four or more times; missing data = 6.2%). *Children* was a dummy variable indicating whether a participant had ever had children in which 0 = no and 1 = yes (82.6%). *Resident children* was a dummy variable indicating whether a participant currently had children living in his or her home in which 0 = no and 1 = yes (45.2%); missing data = 6.2%. *Employed* was a dummy variable indicating whether a participant was currently employed in which 0 = no and 1 = yes (68.2%); missing data = 6.2%. *Income* was a standardized ordinal variable indicating the combined income of everyone in a participant's household, before tax and other deductions were taken out, during the last financial year (before standardizing on a scale from 1 to 11, $M = 7.6$, $SD = 2.46$, which was between the $50,000 and $79,999 brackets); missing data = 2.4%. *Education* was a standardized ordinal variable indicating the highest level of education a participant achieved (before standardizing on a scale from 1 to 9 where 9 describes the highest possible level of education, $M = 4.06$, $SD = 2.7$, which indicates completion of Year 12 [high school equivalent] in combination with additional education but no advanced degree); missing data = 6.2%.

Analyses

The first set of analyses used personality traits to predict relationship dissolution. Since relationship dissolution was shared across dyad members, separate actor and partner effects could not be estimated using the traditional actor–partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny, 1996). Rather, as both couple members' traits influenced the shared dependent variable (i.e., dissolution), we only estimated actor effects. We used a logit link function to estimate the model, and we clustered standard errors by dyad to account for the correlated errors between partners. This approach is similar to constraining the actor and partner pathways to be equal in APIM analyses that estimate predictors of between-dyad outcomes and accounts for the nonindependence within couples.

To test whether personality traits predicted future levels of relationship satisfaction, we examined whether personality traits assessed at Wave 1 predicted each individual's average level of relationship satisfaction across the next 4 years (Wave 1–Wave 5). Using the lmer package in R, we constructed multilevel models to estimate the APIM model. This model treats the individual (i.e., actor) as the Level-1 unit and the couple as the Level-2 unit. With this approach, the dependence between each member of the couple is appropriately accounted for (Spain, Jackson, & Edmonds, 2012). To examine the combination of personality traits within a couple, we created an interaction term for each possible combination of actor and partner personality traits (e.g., Actor Extraversion × Partner Agreeableness). First, we examined the moderating effect of one partner trait on each of the actor's Big Five traits, and vice versa, and then we examined each possible combined effect in separate analyses.

The next set of analyses tested whether personality traits were associated with changes in relationship satisfaction. Latent growth models were constructed to model changes in relationship satisfaction over time using Mplus Version 6.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2011). The basic unconditional latent growth model defined two latent factors (intercept and slope) that describe the starting value of the first occasion of measurement and the rate of change. The latent intercept was the result of fixing all loadings to 1, whereas the latent slope factor was scaled by fixing the loading at Wave 1 to 0, Wave 2 to 1, Wave 3 to 2, Wave 4 to 3, and Wave 5 to 4. Individuals were allowed to differ in their starting values and rate of changes. Variance components of the intercept and slope reflect these individual differences. Intercept and slope parameters were allowed to covary to gauge whether starting value was associated with subsequent changes. Each member of the couple had their own change slope; however, we necessarily took into consideration the nonindependence of both couple members' slopes within each dyad (Kashy, Donnellan, Burt, & McGue, 2008). Slope factor scores indicating the amount of change in relationship satisfaction for each actor and partner were exported for subsequent analyses, which paralleled those described for predicting future relationship satisfaction.

To test the enduring dynamics and emergent distress pathways between traits and dissolution, bootstrapped mediation tests were performed using the binary mediation command in Stata (which replicates the PROCESS macro for SPSS; Hayes & Preacher, in press). These analyses were only performed for significant trait–dissolution associations. The enduring dynamics pathway and the emergent distress pathway were then compared by simultaneously including both average satisfaction and changes in satisfaction in the mediation models for each relevant trait.

As reported in Tables 1, 2, and 3, we controlled for a variety of demographic variables. Since age and relationship duration were highly correlated ($r = .85$; older couples who were still together at

[2] Negative life events include death of a child, death of a close family member or relative, death of a friend, financial worsening, serious personal injury or illness, serious injury or illness to a close family member or relative, detainment in jail, detainment of a family member in jail, getting fired, being the victim of a property crime, and being the victim of physical violence.

Table 1
Personality Traits Predicting Relationship Dissolution

Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	b	*SE*	*z*	Odds ratio	*b*	*SE*	*z*	Odds ratio
Extraversion	0.03	0.04	0.59	1.03	0.02	0.05	0.34	1.02
Agreeableness	−0.09*	0.04	−2.16	0.91*	−0.01	0.06	−0.15	0.99
Conscientiousness	−0.13*	0.04	−3.15	0.88*	0.02	0.05	0.48	1.02
Neuroticism	0.31*	0.04	7.24	1.36*	0.15*	0.05	2.94	1.16*
Openness	0.30*	0.05	6.48	1.35*	0.22*	0.05	4.13	1.24*
Sex					−0.07	0.05	−1.41	0.93
Relationship duration					−0.85*	0.12	−7.17	0.43*
Religious identification					0.26*	0.11	2.32	1.30*
De facto relationships					0.18*	0.04	4.12	1.20*
Marriages					−0.42*	0.10	−4.35	0.66*
Children					0.23	0.21	1.06	1.25
Resident children					−0.01	0.17	−0.08	0.99
Employed					−0.16	0.12	−1.35	0.85
Income					−0.15*	0.07	−2.01	0.86*
Education					−0.27*	0.05	−5.07	0.77*

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Wave 1 tended to be married for longer periods of time), controlling for both age and duration resulted in high levels of multicollinearity. Thus, we controlled for duration (rather than age) in the subsequent models, as it is a more relevant feature of relationships. Results were similar when age was controlled for instead of duration. Predictor variables in Model 1 of Tables 1, 2, and 3 were tested in separate analyses to facilitate ease of interpretation and to replicate the analytic plan of past studies that examined personality and these dependent variables (most notably, divorce; see Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Unless specified otherwise, all additional models controlled for the other Big Five traits by testing all of the personality effects simultaneously; doing so provided a stronger test of each trait's unique effect because it partialed out the overlap that exists among constructs.

Results

Married, Opposite-Sex De Facto, and Same-Sex De Facto Couples

Before testing our primary hypotheses, we examined both sex differences and couple-type differences (i.e., married vs. opposite-sex de facto, married vs. same-sex de facto, and opposite-sex de facto vs. same-sex de facto couples) among primary study variables; see Table 4 for summary statistics and mean level differences and Table 5 for zero-order correlations). *Sex* was a dummy variable in which 0 = male and 1 = female. All continuous variables were standardized for ease of interpretation with the exceptions of age, de facto relationships, and marriages. In some cases, we found differences between groups; however, due to the large total sample size, we expected that the results of some tests would reach statistical significance (see Table 4).

Additionally, the analyses described in the following sections were performed separately for married, opposite-sex de facto, and same-sex de facto couples. Consistent with the notion that the processes that govern relationship functioning, including personality traits, can be generalized across same-sex and opposite-sex couples (Kurdek, 2004; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007), our analyses indicated that there were very few differences between the three groups for the trait effects on each dependent variable.[3] Thus, we collapsed across all three couple types and report results for the full sample.

Do Personality Traits Predict Relationship Dissolution?

As described earlier, a binary logistic regression used personality traits at Wave 1 to predict relationship dissolution across the study period (Table 1). For each predictor, we report the coefficients and the odds ratios (OR), which represent the change in the odds of dissolution associated with a one-unit change in each Big Five trait. In the initial model (Table 1, Model 1), agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness significantly predicted relationship dissolution ($b = -0.09$, $z = -2.16$, OR = 0.91; $b = -0.13$, $z = -3.15$, OR = 0.88; $b = 0.31$, $z = 7.24$, OR = 1.36; and $b = 0.30$, $z = 6.48$, OR = 1.35, $p < .05$, respectively). When the other Big Five traits and demographic variables (sex, relationship duration, religious identification, de facto relationships, marriages, children, resident children, employment status, household income, and education) were controlled for, the traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness no longer had significant effects (Table 1, Model 2). Figure 2 illustrates that the likelihood of relationship dissolution increases for individuals who are less agreeable or conscientious, or more neurotic or open to new experiences.

[3] Results from the analyses separated by couple type are available as supplemental materials. We tested Trait × Couple Type interactions (in which couple type was an indicator variable, using same-sex de facto couples as the comparison group and then using married couples as the comparison group) for baseline models predicting relationship dissolution, relationship satisfaction, and changes in relationship satisfaction. In general, there were few differences (five significant interactions out of 30 analyses), but a few interesting findings emerged. Specifically, neuroticism did not predict dissolution for same-sex de facto couples and openness did not predict dissolution for either type of unmarried couple. Also, although agreeableness predicted relationship satisfaction for all couple types, the effect was significantly stronger for same-sex couples.

Table 2
Personality Traits Predicting Future Levels of Relationship Satisfaction

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	b	*SE*	*t*	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*b*	*SE*	*t*
Extraversion	0.05*	0.01	5.67	0.03*	0.01	2.65	0.05*	0.01	4.22	0.06*	0.02	3.53
Agreeableness	0.09*	0.01	9.26	0.11*	0.01	8.06	0.13*	0.01	9.32	0.14*	0.02	7.54
Conscientiousness	0.06*	0.01	5.88	0.03*	0.01	2.34	0.03*	0.01	2.30	0.05*	0.02	2.77
Neuroticism	−0.12*	0.01	−12.51	−0.10*	0.01	−7.53	−0.07*	0.01	−5.46	−0.01	0.02	−0.74
Openness	−0.09*	0.01	−8.42	−0.09*	0.01	−8.18	−0.09*	0.01	−7.72	−0.09*	0.02	−5.38
Partner Extraversion				0.02	0.01	1.25	0.02	0.01	1.93	0.03	0.02	1.84
Partner Agreeableness				0.12*	0.01	8.60	0.07*	0.01	5.44	0.04	0.02	1.89
Partner Conscientiousness				0.03*	0.01	2.60	0.02	0.01	1.93	0.01	0.02	0.55
Partner Neuroticism				−0.07*	0.01	−4.93	−0.07*	0.01	−5.17	−0.10*	0.02	−5.05
Partner Openness				−0.04*	0.01	−3.60	−0.02*	0.01	−2.17	−0.04*	0.02	−2.42
Sex							−0.19*	0.02	−11.25	−0.20*	0.02	−11.48
Relationship duration							0.01	0.02	0.59	0.01	0.02	0.40
Religious identification							0.00	0.03	−0.09	0.00	0.03	−0.18
De facto relationships							−0.04*	0.01	−3.12	−0.04*	0.01	−3.15
Marriages							0.02	0.02	1.05	0.03	0.02	1.16
Children							−0.09*	0.05	−2.05	−0.10*	0.05	−2.16
Resident Children							−0.22*	0.04	−6.13	−0.22*	0.04	−6.10
Employed							−0.10*	0.03	−3.67	−0.10*	0.03	−3.72
Income							0.00	0.02	0.11	0.00	0.02	0.15
Education							−0.01	0.01	−1.05	−0.01	0.01	−1.05
Extraversion × Sex										−0.02	0.02	−0.99
Agreeableness × Sex										−0.03	0.03	−0.99
Conscientiousness × Sex										−0.04	0.02	−1.54
Neuroticism × Sex										−0.12*	0.03	−4.21
Openness × Sex										0.01	0.03	0.31
Partner Extraversion × Sex										−0.01	0.02	−0.57
Partner Agreeableness × Sex										0.06*	0.03	2.03
Partner Conscientiousness × Sex										0.03	0.02	1.23
Partner Neuroticism × Sex										0.05*	0.03	1.97
Partner Openness × Sex										0.03	0.03	1.32

Note. Partner variable × Sex = interaction with sex.
* $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Next, a series of moderator models were constructed, in which we tested the effects of personality traits across gender and relationship duration. Overall, neuroticism and openness predicted relationship dissolution for both sexes and regardless of relationship lengths. No significant effects for gender or duration emerged for other traits.

Finally, we examined the combined effects of couples' personality traits as predictors of relationship dissolution. We conducted exploratory tests of combined effects and found no evidence (0 out of 80 interactions were statistically significant), both when we included and excluded demographic variables in our models.[4]

Enduring Dynamics Model: Does Relationship Satisfaction Explain Why Personality Traits Predict Relationship Dissolution?

In the next set of analyses, we used multilevel modeling to test whether the enduring dynamics between personality traits and future levels of relationship satisfaction explain why personality traits influence relationship dissolution. In order to examine this, we first tested whether personality traits predicted future levels of relationship satisfaction (see Table 2).

Actor effects. Higher levels of extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness ($b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 5.67$; $b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 9.26$; and $b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 5.88$, respectively, $p < .05$), as well as lower levels of neuroticism and openness ($b = -0.12$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -12.51$ and $b = -0.09$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -8.42$, respectively, $p < .05$), predicted greater relationship satisfaction over the course of the 4-year period (Table 2, Model 1).

Partner effects. Partner personality traits were also found to predict relationship satisfaction, above and beyond actor levels of personality (Table 2, Model 2). Specifically, having a partner who is highly agreeable or conscientious ($b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 8.60$, and $b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 2.60$, respectively, $p < .05$) was associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. In contrast, low levels of neuroticism and openness ($b = -0.07$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -4.93$, and $b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -3.60$, respectively, $p < .05$), were associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Controlling for the demographic variables had little impact on relationship satisfaction, except that the effect of partner conscientiousness no longer remained significant (Table 2, Model 3).

[4] The statistically significant results for the combined effects analyses can be found in the supplemental materials. The null results for all combined effects analyses (for each dependent variable: relationship dissolution, relationship satisfaction, and changes in relationship satisfaction) are available on request from the first author.

Table 3
Personality Traits Predicting Changes in Relationship Satisfaction

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	b	*SE*	*t*	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*b*	*SE*	*t*
Extraversion	0.00	0.01	−0.40	−0.02	0.01	−1.09	0.00	0.01	−0.07
Agreeableness	0.00	0.01	−0.65	0.01	0.02	0.38	0.01	0.02	0.90
Conscientiousness	0.00	0.01	−0.06	0.02	0.01	1.16	0.01	0.01	0.84
Neuroticism	−0.01	0.01	−0.75	0.00	0.01	−0.20	0.02	0.02	1.15
Openness	−0.02*	0.01	−2.59	−0.03*	0.01	−2.08	−0.01	0.01	−1.07
Partner Extraversion				−0.02	0.01	−1.13	0.00	0.01	−0.30
Partner Agreeableness				0.02	0.02	1.11	0.00	0.02	0.05
Partner Conscientiousness				0.02	0.01	1.31	0.01	0.01	0.70
Partner Neuroticism				0.00	0.01	0.14	0.01	0.02	0.63
Partner Openness				−0.01	0.01	−0.81	0.01	0.01	0.47
Sex							−0.07*	0.01	−5.13
Relationship duration							0.10*	0.02	4.41
Religious identification							−0.04	0.02	−1.61
De facto relationships							−0.02	0.01	−1.62
Marriages							0.02	0.02	1.06
Children							0.02	0.04	0.45
Resident children							−0.05	0.04	−1.35
Employed							0.01	0.02	0.24
Income							0.03	0.02	1.62
Education							0.00	0.01	−0.33

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Next, a series of models were tested to examine whether sex and relationship duration served as possible moderators. There were significant Sex × Trait interactions for actor and partner neuroticism ($b = -0.12$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = -4.21$, and $b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = 1.97$, $p < .05$, respectively). When decomposed, these findings indicated that having higher actor levels of neuroticism was associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction for women ($b = -0.13$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = -6.80$, $p < .05$) but for not men ($b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = -0.74$, $p > .05$). For partner effects, having a partner with higher levels of neuroticism was associated

Table 4
Summary Statistics and Comparisons by Sex and Couple Type

Variable	Mean	*SD*	Mean		Males vs. females (Cohen's *d*)	Mean			Cohen's *d*		
			Males	Females		MC	OS	SS	MC vs. OS	MC vs. SS	OS vs. SS
Extraversion	4.63	0.97	4.50	4.76	−0.27*	4.63	4.68	4.53	0.06	−0.10	−0.10
Agreeableness	5.50	0.83	5.27	5.72	−0.56*	5.52	5.40	5.59	−0.15*	0.08	0.08
Conscientiousness	5.26	0.96	5.15	5.37	−0.23*	5.30	5.10	5.16	−0.20*	−0.14	−0.14
Neuroticism	2.87	0.99	2.88	2.86	0.02	2.82	3.07	3.02	0.25*	0.20	0.20
Openness	4.07	0.91	4.11	4.03	0.09*	4.01	4.31	4.53	0.33*	0.57*	0.57
Relationship duration	19.62	16.12	19.67	19.57	0.01	22.79	5.09	5.25	−1.21*	−1.11*	−1.11
Age	47.19	15.17	48.47	45.91	0.17*	49.82	35.76	39.20	−0.99*	−0.73*	−0.73*
Religious identification	0.80	0.40	0.79	0.82	−0.08*	0.83	0.69	0.68	−0.36*	−0.41*	−0.41
De facto relationships	0.86	1.11	0.89	0.83	0.05*	0.65	1.73	2.14	1.06*	1.50*	1.50*
Marriages	1.02	0.56	1.02	1.01	0.01	1.17	0.37	0.18	−1.73*	−2.32*	−2.32*
Children	0.83	0.38	0.83	0.82	0.01	0.89	0.56	0.18	−0.96*	−2.32*	−2.32*
Resident children	0.51	0.50	0.49	0.52	−0.07*	0.55	0.34	0.01	−0.43*	−1.08*	−1.08*
Employed	0.68	0.47	0.75	0.62	0.29*	0.66	0.80	0.86	0.30*	0.43*	0.43
Income	7.60	2.46	7.60	7.60	0.00	7.56	7.71	8.56	0.06*	0.40*	0.40*
Education	4.06	2.66	4.37	3.78	0.22*	4.05	4.06	5.08	0.00	0.38*	0.38*
Relationship satisfaction Wave 1	8.35	1.87	8.46	8.24	0.12*	8.37	8.23	8.42	−0.07*	0.03	0.03
Relationship satisfaction Wave 2	8.40	1.89	8.52	8.28	0.12*	8.42	8.28	8.66	−0.08*	0.13	0.13
Relationship satisfaction Wave 3	8.23	1.94	8.39	8.09	0.16*	8.26	8.10	8.13	−0.08*	−0.07	−0.07
Relationship satisfaction Wave 4	8.27	1.91	8.43	8.12	0.16*	8.30	8.13	8.13	−0.09*	−0.09	−0.09
Relationship satisfaction Wave 5	8.17	1.97	8.30	8.05	0.13*	8.19	8.07	8.16	−0.06	−0.01	−0.01
Changes in relationship satisfaction	−0.06	0.15	−0.06	−0.07	0.05*	−0.06	−0.07	−0.09	−0.06*	−0.22	−0.22
Relationship dissolution	0.11	0.31	0.11	0.11	0.00	0.08	0.25	0.27	0.58*	0.70*	0.70

Note. Comparisons report effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) from two-sample *t* tests. MC = married couples; OS = opposite-sex de facto couples; SS = same-sex de facto couples.
* $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Table 5
Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Extraversion	1.00													
2. Agreeableness	0.31*	1.00												
3. Conscientiousness	0.22*	0.36*	1.00											
4. Neuroticism	−0.28*	−0.46*	−0.33*	1.00										
5. Openness	0.05*	0.02	0.01	0.16*	1.00									
6. Relationship duration	−0.05*	0.10*	0.08*	−0.16*	−0.16*	1.00								
7. Age	−0.05*	0.10*	0.09*	−0.17*	−0.11*	0.83*	1.00							
8. Relationship satisfaction Wave 1	0.12*	0.19*	0.13*	−0.21*	−0.09*	0.04*	0.06*	1.00						
9. Relationship satisfaction Wave 2	0.09*	0.17*	0.12*	−0.18*	−0.09*	0.08*	0.10*	0.66*	1.00					
10. Relationship satisfaction Wave 3	0.08*	0.16*	0.11*	−0.18*	−0.11*	0.09*	0.09*	0.64*	0.67*	1.00				
11. Relationship satisfaction Wave 4	0.08*	0.16*	0.12*	−0.19*	−0.10*	0.13*	0.14*	0.60*	0.63*	0.68*	1.00			
12. Relationship satisfaction Wave 5	0.10*	0.17*	0.12*	−0.18*	−0.10*	0.12*	0.13*	0.56*	0.59*	0.64*	0.68*	1.00		
13. Changes in relationship satisfaction	0.00	0.03*	0.03*	−0.04*	−0.04*	0.13*	0.11*	−0.18*	−0.00	0.23*	0.44*	0.63*	1.00	
14. Relationship dissolution	0.01	−0.03*	−0.05*	0.06*	0.04*	−0.11*	−0.09*	−0.10*	−0.12*	−0.13*	−0.13*	−0.13*	−0.08*	1.00

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

with lower levels of relationship satisfaction for women ($b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = -2.23$, $p < .05$) significantly more so than for men ($b = -0.10$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = -5.05$, $p < .05$). We also found a significant interaction between sex and partner levels of agreeableness ($b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = 2.03$, $p < .05$). Specifically, while partner agreeableness was found to predict future relationship satisfaction, this effect was further augmented for women ($b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = 5.16$, $p < .05$) but not for men ($b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = 1.89$, $p > .05$) whose partners had especially high levels of agreeableness.

Consistent with the enduring dynamics hypothesis, relationship duration did not moderate the relationship between personality traits and satisfaction for any of the Big Five traits.

Combined effects. We further investigated the influence of both couple members' personality traits on future levels of relationship satisfaction by examining the combined effects between actor and partner levels of each of the Big Five traits. Again, we found little evidence of any combined effects when accounting for demographic variables. While the combined effects of actor and partner agreeableness, actor and partner neuroticism, as well as actor agreeableness and partner neuroticism, consistently emerged when demographic variables were not included in the models, overall the influence of combined effects on relationship satisfaction was minimal (15 out of 150 interactions were statistically significant; see Footnote [4]).

Indirect effects of relationship satisfaction for dissolution. Specifically, actor and partner effects were used to test whether relationship satisfaction mediated the association between personality traits and relationship dissolution. As a necessary prerequisite to these analyses, we found that low levels of relationship satisfaction predicted dissolution ($b = -0.67$, $SE = 0.03$, $z = -19.79$, $p < .05$). In order to examine whether the indirect effect of relationship satisfaction explained the association between personality traits and dissolution, we performed a number of bootstrapped mediation tests (Table 6). A negative indirect effect of relationship satisfaction emerged for actor agreeableness with a point estimate of –.07 (95% confidence interval, or CI [–.08, –.06]) and actor conscientiousness with a point estimate of –.05 (95% CI [–.05, –.04]), such that individuals low in agreeableness and conscientiousness were more likely to experience a breakup as a result of being less satisfied in their relationship. A positive indirect effect of relationship satisfaction emerged for actor neuroticism with a point estimate of .07 (95% CI [.06, .08]) and actor openness with a point estimate of .04 (95% CI [.03, .04]), such that individuals high in neuroticism and openness were more likely to experience a breakup as a result of being less satisfied in their relationships.

We found a similar pattern of results for partner traits. Specifically, a negative indirect effect of relationship satisfaction for partner agreeableness with a point estimate of –.06 (95% CI [–.07, –.05]) and partner conscientiousness with a point estimate of –.04 (95% CI [–05, –.03]), and a positive indirect effect of relationship satisfaction for partner neuroticism with a point estimate of .05 (95% CI [.04, .06]) and partner openness with a point estimate of .02 (95% CI [.01, .03]) on relationship dissolution also emerged. We also tested these same models controlling for all actor and partner traits and the demographic variables included in the previous analyses and each of the indirect effects described remained significant. Overall, these findings provide strong support for the enduring dynamics pathway and indicate that relationship satisfaction serves to explain why personality traits influence relationship dissolution (see Table 6).

Emergent Distress Model: Do Changes in Relationship Satisfaction Explain Why Personality Traits Predict Relationship Dissolution?

We next examined whether the trajectories of relationship satisfaction explained the relationship between personality and relationship dissolution. First, we established whether changes in relationship satisfaction emerged. The model fit the data

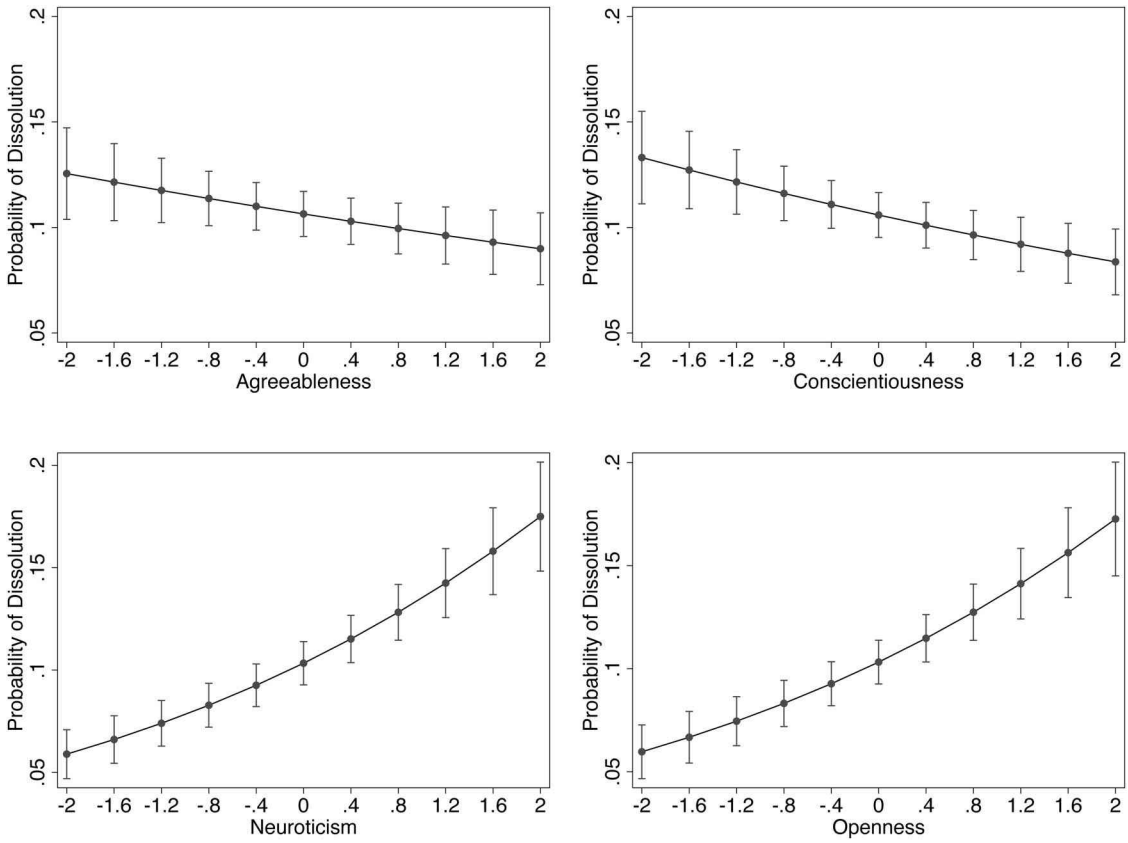

Figure 2. Likelihood of dissolution with 95% confidence intervals for each trait (presented as *z* scores).

quite well (comparative fit index, or CFI = .99; root-mean-square error of approximation, or RMSEA = .03) and indicated a small but significant normative decline in relationship satisfaction across the study period (–.06, $SE = 0.01$, $p < .05$). However, there were significant individual differences in this change, such that some individuals experienced this decline at a greater rate than others, while others did not change at all in relationship satisfaction (.07, $SE = 0.00$, $p < .05$). Accordingly, individual relationship satisfaction trajectories were used in the subsequent analyses. Interestingly, there was a positive associ-

Table 6
Effects of Personality Traits on Relationship Dissolution

Trait	Enduring dynamics			Emergent distress		
	Direct effects	Indirect effects	95% CI	Direct effects	Indirect effects	95% CI
Agreeableness	.02 (.02)	**−.07 (.01)**	[−.08, −.06]	—	—	—
Conscientiousness	−.02 (.02)	**−.05 (.00)**	[−.05, −.04]	—	—	—
Neuroticism	**.09 (.02)**	**.07 (.01)**	[.06, .08]	—	—	—
Openness	**.12 (.02)**	**.04 (.00)**	[.03, .04]	**.15 (.02)**	**.004 (.00)**	[.001, .008]
Partner agreeableness	.01 (.02)	**−.06 (.01)**	[−.07, −.05]	—	—	—
Partner conscientiousness	−.03 (.02)	**−.04 (.01)**	[−.05, −.03]	—	—	—
Partner neuroticism	**.09 (.02)**	**.05 (.00)**	[.04, .06]	—	—	—
Partner openness	**.11 (.02)**	**.02 (.00)**	[.01, .03]	—	—	—
Subsamples[a]						
Neuroticism (death of friend)				**.17 (.03)**	**01 (.00)**	[.00, .02]
Neuroticism (financial worsening)				**.11 (.04)**	01 (.01)	[−.00, .02]
Neuroticism (new job)				**.15 (.03)**	00 (.00)	[−.00, .01]
Openness (family injury or illness)				**.13 (.03)**	**01 (.00)**	[.00, .01]

Note. *N* ranges from 6,000 to 6,181 for full sample analyses. All bold numbers are statistically significant at $p < .05$. Values in parentheses are bootstrapped standard errors. CI reflects the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect.
[a] Subsamples include participants who personally and/or whose partner experienced the respective life events.

ation between average relationship satisfaction and changes in satisfaction ($r = .22$, $p < .05$) such that the more satisfied participants were on average across the study period, the more likely they were to increase in relationship satisfaction or, in reference to the mean trends, less likely to have relationship satisfaction decline over time.

Actor effects. Only one of the Big Five traits was found to predict changes in relationship satisfaction over time (Table 5, Model 1). Individuals with high levels of openness ($b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -2.59$, $p < .05$) tended to experience greater declines in relationship satisfaction compared with individuals with low levels of openness.

Partner effects. No partner personality traits were found to predict changes in relationship satisfaction, after controlling for actor levels of personality (Table 5, Model 2). When simultaneously including partner traits and demographic variables in the model, the effect of actor openness no longer remained significant (Table 5, Model 3).

Sex and duration were also tested as moderators in the relationships between personality traits and changes in satisfaction. No interactions were evidenced.

Combined effects. The interactions between actor and partner personality traits were not significant whether demographic covariates were included or excluded, indicating that the combined effects of actor and partner traits are not important for changes in relationship satisfaction (see Footnote 4).

Influence of life events on emergent distress. We considered that the emergent distress pathway may play a more significant role if major life events occurred in couples' lives that could introduce strife into their relationships. We did not control for demographic variables in these models because such controls have the potential to take away meaningful variance. Interestingly, personality traits were associated with changes in relationship satisfaction when couple members experienced major life events. Neuroticism was associated with steeper declines in relationship satisfaction for couples who experienced the death of a friend ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -2.41$, $p < .05$), experienced financial worsening ($b = -0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = -2.65$, $p < .05$), and started a new job ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -1.95$, $p = .05$). Openness was associated with steeper declines in relationship satisfaction for couples who experienced the death of a child ($b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = -2.33$, $p < .05$), were the victim of a property crime ($b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = -2.15$, $p < .05$), and had a close family member or relative become seriously injured or ill ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -3.22$, $p < .05$).

Collapsing across all life experiences, openness was associated with greater declines for participants who personally or whose partner experienced at least one major life event ($b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -2.32$, $p < .05$). Interestingly, a positive conscientiousness effect ($b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -2.32$, $p < .05$) emerged for individuals in relationships in which neither couple member reported experiencing any major life event during the study period ($N = 546$, or 6.7% of the total sample). In other words, high levels of conscientiousness ($b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = 1.98$, $p < .05$) served as a buffer against declines in relationship satisfaction but only for the couples who did not face any major life event.

The total number of negative events moderated the associations between actor neuroticism and openness with declines in relationship satisfaction ($b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.00$, $t = -2.02$, and $b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.00$, $t = -2.01$, respectively, $p = .05$). For people who experienced the average number of negative events, neuroticism did not influence changes in how satisfied they were in their relationships ($b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -2.39$, $p < .05$), but for people who experienced more negative events, neuroticism was associated with significant declines in relationship satisfaction ($b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -2.03$, $p < .05$). Similarly, stronger effects of openness emerged for couples who experienced negative life events during the course of the study ($b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -2.04$, $p < .05$).[5]

Indirect effects. Given that actor openness was the only trait that predicted changes in both relationship satisfaction and dissolution in the full sample (Table 5, Models 1 and 2), only this trait was used to examine whether changes in relationship satisfaction mediated the association between personality traits and relationship dissolution. Although the openness effect was no longer significant when controlling for demographic variables (Table 5, Model 3), testing the emergent distress pathway for this trait is important without including such controls, given that openness is

[5] In addition to actor effects, we also examined partner effects—whether the association between a partner's personality traits and one's own changes in relationship satisfaction depended on one's personal experiences of total negative events. Indeed, the association between partner agreeableness and actor changes in relationship satisfaction depended on the number of actor-reported negative events ($b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.00$, $t = 2.16$, $p < .05$), suggesting that partner agreeableness positively influences changes in actor levels of satisfaction (or buffers against declines) when an actor is more vulnerable—as in the case of experiencing more negative life events. Additionally, we examined whether the association between a partner's personality traits and one's own changes in relationship satisfaction depended on the partner's experiences of total negative events; no significant results emerged.

Finally, we examined combined effects—we performed exploratory analyses testing combined effects on changes in relationship satisfaction for the respective subsamples of individuals who personally or whose partner experienced a given major life event. Several significant combined effects emerged; however, without a priori hypotheses, we do not draw any conclusions about these findings. Nonetheless, we summarize the significant interactions as follows:

For couples who had or adopted a new child: Actor Agreeableness × Partner Extraversion, Actor Agreeableness × Partner Conscientiousness, and Actor Agreeableness × Partner Neuroticism.

For couples who found they were expecting a child: Actor Agreeableness × Partner Extraversion and Actor Agreeableness × Partner Neuroticism.

For couples who experienced the death of a friend: Actor Neuroticism × Partner Neuroticism.

For couples who experienced the death of a child: Actor Conscientiousness × Partner Extraversion and Actor Agreeableness × Partner Agreeableness.

For couples who experienced financial worsening: Actor Openness × Partner Extraversion.

For couples in which a member was fired: Actor Agreeableness × Partner Openness.

For couples in which the actor experienced personal injury or illness: Actor Agreeableness × Partner Extraversion and Actor Openness × Partner Openness.

For couples in which the actor personally went to jail: Actor Agreeableness × Partner Extraversion and Actor Agreeableness × Partner Conscientiousness.

For couples who retired: Actor Neuroticism × Partner Extraversion, Actor Openness × Partner Agreeableness, and Actor Openness × Partner Conscientiousness.

No significant combined effects emerged for the other life events.

associated with many of these covariates: relationship duration ($r = -.20$), religious identification ($r = .11$), de facto relationships ($r = .16$), marriages ($r = -.05$), employment status ($r = .10$), income ($r = .12$), and education ($r = .27$), and these overlapping variables can obscure the true relationship between personality and dissolution if the covariates are acting as mediating variables. As a necessary prerequisite to these analyses, we found that declines in relationship satisfaction predicted dissolution ($b = -0.24$, $SE = 0.03$, $z = 7.16$, $p < .05$). Results from a bootstrapped mediation test suggested that there was a positive, yet small, indirect effect for changes in relationship satisfaction for actor openness with a point estimate of .004 (95% CI [.001, .008]) on relationship dissolution (see Table 6). Thus, these findings provide some support for the emergent distress pathway.

Based on the findings indicating that objective life events influence the emergent distress process, we examined whether changes in relationship satisfaction mediated the association between personality traits and relationship dissolution in the subsamples who experienced a given life event (Table 6). As a necessary prerequisite for these analyses, declines in relationship satisfaction predicted dissolution in the death of friend subsample ($b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -7.55$, $p < .05$), financial worsening subsample ($b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -3.55$, $p < .05$), new job subsample ($b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -3.62$, $p < .05$), and family injury or illness subsample ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.00$, $t = -7.80$, $p < .05$), but not in the property crime subsample ($b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = -1.32$, $p > .05$). Results from bootstrapped mediation tests suggested only two indirect effects. For couples who experienced the death of a friend, there was a positive indirect effect for changes in relationship satisfaction for actor neuroticism (.01; 95% CI [.00, .02]) on relationship dissolution. For couples who had a close family member or relative experience a serious injury or illness, there was also a positive indirect effect for actor openness with a point estimate of .01 (95% CI [.00, .01]; see Table 6).

Finally, for the full sample, the unique effects of the enduring dynamics pathway and the emergent distress pathway were compared by simultaneously including both average satisfaction and changes in satisfaction in the mediation models for each relevant trait (which only included actor openness). In this model, the enduring dynamics pathway (.04, $SE = .00$; 95% CI [.03, .05]) remained a significant explanatory pathway for openness in the prediction of relationship dissolution, while the emergent distress pathway no longer remained significant (.00, $SE = .00$; 95% CI [–.00, .00]).

Discussion

The current study fills an important gap in the personality and relationships literature, as it is the first to systematically examine why personality traits predict relationship dissolution. In line with previous studies (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Roberts et al., 2007), agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness predicted which couples separated or divorced. In an attempt to understand why some relationships are more likely to dissolve, we examined two possible explanations: the enduring dynamics pathway and the emergent distress pathway. Personality traits were also examined from three different perspectives—actor, partner, and the combined effects of each member—to allow a better understanding of the influence of personality on relationship outcomes. These findings and their implications for the processes involved in relationship dissolution are discussed in the following text.

The current study was designed to test the notion that relationship quality is a major determinant of a successful relationship (Karney & Bradbury, 2000). Given the rank-order consistency of personality traits (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000), we were not surprised that stronger evidence was found in support of the enduring dynamics pathway. These findings indicate that the positive and negative interpersonal dynamics that exist in a committed relationship endure over time, regardless of the length of relationship.

The traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and, openness were all important to the enduring dynamics pathway. In general, low levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness and high levels of neuroticism and openness influence a number of negative daily experiences that, over time, impact the quality of a romantic relationship and ultimately lead to increased risk for breaking up. First, couple members who are low in agreeableness are prone to engage in negative communication patterns (e.g., Donnellan et al., 2004; Gottman et al., 1998; Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996), and, similarly, couple members who are low in conscientiousness are more likely to have impulsive reactions (Robins et al., 2000), both of which can escalate negativity in marital conflict. Additionally, having a partner who lacks warmth and tends to ineffectively regulate his responses contributes to less overall satisfaction in a relationship for both couple members. This relationship dissatisfaction explains why individuals who are disagreeable and unconscientious (or whose partners are disagreeable and unconscientious) are more likely to experience relationship dissolution. Although these effects no longer remained significant when Big Five traits and demographic variables were controlled for simultaneously, these findings are important to consider when understanding how these results reflect the real world (in which other variables are not held constant) and fit into the context of the broader literature. For instance, our baseline model replicated the influence of agreeableness and conscientiousness on divorce (Roberts et al., 2007), whereas when accounting for a wide variety of relationship, demographic, and personality variables, neuroticism and openness were the primary predictors.

The effect of neuroticism is consistent across our various models and replicates numerous studies (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Roberts et al., 2007). For neuroticism, the low quality of the relationship likely stems from the tendency of neurotic individuals to experience more negative emotions on average (Watson & Clark, 1984). These negative emotions influence how people perceive stressful situations that are bound to occur in relationships. For example, individuals high in neuroticism are likely to both perseverate on difficult situations in the relationship and perceive the existence of more conflict and disagreement (Bolger & Schilling, 1991), as well as engage in less intimacy (White et al., 2004) compared with people low in neuroticism. Thus, neurotic couple members most likely experience dissatisfaction in their relationships because in general they experience high levels of negative affect and subsequently influence their partners in negative ways.

Indeed, partner levels of neuroticism also played a role in the dissolution process above and beyond actor neuroticism. On one hand, this is unsurprising, given that both partners can contribute to shared experiences. On the other hand, the influence of person-

ality from both members of the dyad implies that couple members react unfavorably to negative moods and relationship dynamics stemming from their partner, indicating that neuroticism influences more than just one's self-perceptions of relationship satisfaction (Donnellan et al., 2004; McNulty, 2008). Together these negative dynamics result in greater dissatisfaction for both members in the relationship, which increases the probability that the relationship will not work out (Caughlin et al., 2000).

With regard to openness, high levels of both actor and partner openness resulted in lower levels of relationship quality and, ultimately, a greater likelihood of dissolution. This novel finding is quite interesting, given the mixed results of previous work on the effect of openness in relationships (e.g., Botwin et al., 1997; Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Watson & Humrichouse, 2006) and the paucity of studies that include openness in the prediction of divorce (Roberts et al., 2007). It is often the case that relationship satisfaction suffers in couples who "get stuck in a rut," such that, in addition to conflict, mere boredom poses a challenge in relationships (Tsapelas, Aron, & Orbuch, 2009). Presumably, openness would limit this tendency, as individuals who are high in openness tend to habitually seek new experiences (McCrae & Sutin, 2009; Zuckerman, Kuhlman, Joireman, Teta, & Kraft, 1993), thus staving off boredom and increasing novelty in relationships. Instead, our results suggest that high levels of openness may lead to another common trope involved in relationships: "a wandering eye." In particular, openness is associated with permissive relationship styles (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987), such that people who are especially open are more likely to cheat (Orzeck & Lung, 2005). While open individuals may be more likely to seek out novel partners, that is likely not the only reason that highly open people would have lower levels of satisfaction and an increased likelihood of divorce. Strife in a couple arises if partners' interests are not shared or if one individual believes his or her partner is devoting too much time to activities at the expense of time spent on the relationship (Buss, 1989; Lutz-Zois, Bradley, Mihalik, & Moorman-Eavers, 2006; Swim & Surra, 1999). It is highly likely that openness plays a role in these types of conflicts, given that openness is associated with a diverse array of hobbies (Jackson et al., 2014).

Consistent with previous research, we also did not find gender differences in the likelihood of dissolution (Huston et al., 2001; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 2003). However, sex moderated the influence of actor and partner neuroticism and partner agreeableness on average levels of relationship satisfaction. One explanation for the gender difference in neuroticism is related to differences in the tendency to seek social support in times of stress, such that females are more likely to do so (Eagly & Crowley, 1986). Females who are especially neurotic thus become more stressed than their emotionally stable counterparts, likely seek support from their partners, and then feel dissatisfied in the relationship if the interaction does not go well. On the other hand, males are less likely to seek support in the first place, protecting them from being disappointed and affecting their relationship satisfaction. The differences between genders for agreeableness may occur because the behaviors associated with agreeableness are manifested differently in males than in females during conflict, depending on their needs for closeness (e.g., males exhibit a lack of warmth and caring by withdrawing, whereas females tend to demand; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Perhaps it is the disparity between partners' needs for closeness versus independence that can account for why agreeableness is a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction for females, but not males, with agreeable partners.

In contrast to our findings for the enduring dynamics pathway, less evidence was found for the emergent distress pathway, though we did find that openness influenced changes in relationship satisfaction, which, in turn, influenced relationship dissolution. Overall, it appears that personality traits do not uniformly influence changes in relationship satisfaction above and beyond initial levels despite the plausible impact of personality on relationship dynamics as they unfold across time. The lack of association was not because we failed to find changes in relationship satisfaction, as many couples experienced increased and decreased relationship quality. While previous studies have shown mixed evidence for the influence of personality traits on changes in relationship satisfaction (e.g., Caughlin et al., 2000; Fisher & McNulty, 2008; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Robins et al., 2002; Slatcher & Vazire, 2009), the study discrepancies likely come from the different ways each study modeled changes in relationship satisfaction. Previous studies that found an association used only two time points to assess changes in relationship satisfaction (e.g., Fisher & McNulty, 2008; Robins et al., 2002), whereas our study used five assessments of relationship satisfaction to better assess relationship satisfaction trajectories. Moreover, unlike many previous studies, the current study was not limited to examining change solely by following newlyweds over time. Rather, our representative sample enabled us to look beyond the well-established declines in satisfaction that follow the honeymoon phase and to test how traits influence changes in relationship satisfaction at any juncture in a relationship.

Changes in the well-being of a relationship is a core relationship process for same-sex and opposite-sex couples (Kurdek, 2004). While the general pattern was that personality traits did not influence changes in relationship satisfaction, we did find a small effect of openness, which, in turn, had downstream effects on the likelihood of relationship dissolution. As discussed earlier in reference to the enduring dynamics pathway, individuals who are highly open have a tendency to explore novel experiences and enjoy a wide number of activities (Jackson et al., 2014; McCrae & Sutin, 2009), which may have a deleterious impact on the relationship. In addition to resulting in overall lower levels of relationship satisfaction, our results suggest that over time this effect may compound or reach a breaking point within the dyad, where it is increasingly dissatisfying to be in a relationship with someone high in openness. It is unclear, however, if these decreases in satisfaction result from a tendency for one's eye to wander with respect to participating in new activities or eyeing new partners. Alternatively, the association between openness and changes in satisfaction may result from the tendency for people with high levels of openness to be more amenable to divorce compared with their less open counterparts. Indeed, people with more positive attitudes toward divorce tend to experience declines in marital quality, suggesting that a less stigmatized view of divorce actually undermines the longevity of the relationship (Amato & Rogers, 1999). Given that such a lack of commitment to the norm of life-long marriage is associated with more liberal tendencies, presumably people high on openness are less constrained by traditional proprieties in relationships. In light of these pathways link-

ing openness to decreasing levels of satisfaction, it is intriguing that openness is considered a desirable characteristic in potential romantic partners (Botwin et al., 1997). However, this apparent contradiction between what partners desire and what is beneficial is in line with recent research showing that desirable characteristics in potential partners do not necessarily lead to better and longer relationships (Eastwick & Neff, 2012).

While we did not find strong support for the emergent distress pathway when examining the entire sample, our results shed light on how emergent distress can play an important role for couples who experience various major life events. First, for people who experienced a greater number of negative events, neuroticism and openness were associated with significant declines in relationship satisfaction. We also found that neuroticism and openness influenced the likelihood of dissolution via decreases in relationship satisfaction surrounding certain negative events. Interestingly, conscientiousness had a positive effect on changes in relationship satisfaction, such that especially conscientious couples who did not endure any major life event during the study period did not follow the tendency to decrease in how satisfied they were in their relationships. Perhaps the organization and careful planning of these couples kept them protected from potentially life-altering events that could put them at risk for declines in relationship satisfaction. Overall, the real-life experiences that can occur over the life span are important to take into consideration when studying the processes that underlie the association between personality traits and romantic relationship outcomes. Personality may be especially related to changes in relationship satisfaction when real-world experiences push the normal status quo off-kilter.

We found little evidence for the combined effects of actor and partner traits on the various relationship outcomes, similar to previous research findings on personality interactions across couple members (Robins et al., 2000). Although Robins and colleagues concluded that such synergistic models did not predict relationship quality and satisfaction, we believe that more research on combined effects may be warranted. While some trait combinations that emerged in the current study did not seem theoretically defensible, this was not the case for all combined effects. For instance, consider the Actor Agreeableness × Partner Agreeableness effect. Some previous work on the synergistic interactions between dyads suggests that two highly agreeable people tend to have more harmonious interactions on a daily basis than two disagreeable people (Cuperman & Ickes, 2009). Also, having similarly high levels of agreeableness between partners promotes increased warmth and positivity and, thus, a greater likelihood of relationship success (Luo & Klohnen, 2005). Thus, same-trait combinations such as the combined agreeableness effect should be examined more in depth in the context of romantic relationships. In light of the interdependent nature of romantic relationships, we expected that a healthy combination of different traits across partners would also be beneficial for the success of the relationship, although our analyses were exploratory. For instance, some research suggests that the interaction between high levels of neuroticism and high levels of conscientiousness within an individual are associated with better health outcomes (Turiano, Moynihan, Mroczek, & Chapman, 2013) and that compensatory conscientiousness (a partner's level of conscientiousness regardless of one's own conscientiousness) also predicts better health over time (Roberts, Smith, Jackson, & Edmonds., 2009). Nonetheless, we did not find meaningful effects in light of the numerous analyses we conducted. However, such null results provide useful information for other researchers, especially in light of our adequately powered study.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Our study has a number of strengths over previous prospective research on relationship quality and dissolution. Specifically, the large, representative sample provided us with adequate power to test the effect of each trait on future levels of relationship satisfaction, changes in relationship satisfaction, and relationship dissolution. This sample allowed us to also examine psychological and relationship variables in the context of the real world, accounting for a variety of demographic variables and including objective life events that were important for more comprehensively understanding how personality traits function in relationships. In addition, the current study was the first to use both actor and partner reports of each Big Five personality trait to investigate the effects of the Big Five personality traits and their combined effects on changes in relationship satisfaction. Also, while most previous studies that examined personality predictors of changes in relationship quality utilized only two time points, the current study used five time points, which resulted in a more accurate estimate of change. Most important, to our knowledge, this study was the first to attempt to systematically explain *why* personality traits are associated with relationship dissolution.

Another advantage our study offered was the examination of multiple types of romantic couples, including individuals involved in opposite-sex de facto committed relationships (in which two people live together as a couple and are not married), a component of the population that has yet to be included in prospective studies of personality and long-term relationships. While emerging evidence suggests that differences in dissolution across couple types can be explained by the legal status conferred by marriage (Balsam, Beauchaine, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2008), information about the longevity of same-sex and opposite-sex de facto relationships that is comparable to divorce statistics for heterosexual marriages is not accessible (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Including married, opposite-sex de facto, and same-sex de facto couples in a single study sheds light on relationship processes in an especially representative manner. Although few differences in trait effects emerged across couple types, future research designed to focus on different kinds of romantic relationships may consider personality a variable worthy of investigation.

Despite these strengths, a number of aspects of our study could be improved upon. First, data for the current study were only collected over a 4-year period, which is a fairly modest timeframe and may have served to attenuate the magnitude of some of our findings. Another limitation of the current study is that personality traits were only measured through self-report. While both actor and partner personality traits were assessed, having each member of the couple also rate their partner's personality would help clarify the pathways between personality traits and relationship dissolution. Additionally, it is possible that the negative effects of neuroticism on relationship satisfaction are partially due to measurement overlap. This concern is somewhat mitigated given that our partner reports evidence similar relationships, suggesting that overlap between measurements is not entirely responsible for our

findings. Last, mechanisms other than the enduring dynamics and emergent distress pathways could also potentially explain the effect of personality on dissolution. Future research should aim to identify the specific daily interactions, behaviors, and feelings that feed into assessments of relationship quality that make up the enduring dynamics and emergent distress pathways.

Conclusion

Divorce has significant emotional and societal costs, and until now, the reasons as to why certain couples were more likely to break up were largely unknown. Our findings illustrate how both the overall quality of the relationship and changes in relationship quality serve as explanations for why personality traits impact the likelihood of dissolution. Furthermore, we found that the success or failure of a relationship depends on both couple members within the dyad and that the objective life events that occur in couples' lives are another context through which personality pervades relationship functioning. Together these findings underscore the many dynamics that influence relationship dissolution and point to personality traits as a pivotal factor in understanding the course of romantic relationships across the lifespan.

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Table 1.1

Personality Traits Predicting Relationship Dissolution Among Same Sex De facto Couples

	Model 1				Model 2			
	b	S.E.	*z*	Odds Ratio	*b*	S.E.	*z*	Odds Ratio
Extraversion	0.29	(0.34)	0.87	1.34	0.52	(0.46)	1.14	1.68
Agreeableness	−0.13	(0.40)	−0.31	0.88	−0.31	(0.54)	−0.57	0.73
Conscientiousness	0.06	(0.25)	0.25	1.06	0.15	(0.38)	0.40	1.17
Neuroticism	−0.31	(0.24)	−1.27	0.74	−0.25	(0.66)	−0.39	0.78
Openness	−0.40	(0.27)	−1.44	0.67	−0.31	(0.48)	−0.65	0.73
Sex					−1.02	(1.58)	−0.65	0.36
Relationship Duration					−0.41	(2.09)	−0.20	0.66
Religious Identification					0.06	(0.84)	0.07	1.06
Defacto Relationships					0.17	(0.25)	0.67	1.18
Employed					−0.12	(0.85)	−0.14	0.89
Income					0.77	(0.84)	0.92	2.16
Education					−0.75	(0.63)	−1.19	0.47

Note. $*$ denotes $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Table 1.2

Personality Traits Predicting Relationship Dissolution Among Opposite Sex De facto Couples

	Model 1				Model 2			
	b	S.E.	*z*	Odds Ratio	*b*	S.E.	*z*	Odds Ratio
Extraversion	0.02	(0.07)	0.28	1.02	0.08	(0.08)	1.04	1.08
Agreeableness	−0.01	(0.07)	−0.12	0.99	0.01	(0.09)	0.06	1.01
Conscientiousness	−0.09	(0.07)	−1.29	0.91	0.03	(0.08)	0.42	1.04
Neuroticism	0.29∗	(0.07)	4.09∗	1.42∗	0.26∗	(0.08)	3.11	1.30∗
Openness	0.04	(0.07)	0.52	1.04	0.06	(0.09)	0.70	1.06
Sex					−0.06	(0.09)	−0.68	0.94
Relationship Duration					−1.66∗	(0.50)	−3.32	0.19∗
Religious Identification					0.36∗	(0.17)	2.11	1.43∗
Defacto Relationships					0.05	(0.07)	0.70	1.05
Marriages					0.12	(0.15)	0.77	1.12
Children					0.39	(0.30)	1.30	1.48
Resident Children					−0.15	(0.27)	−0.56	0.86
Employed					0.02	(0.22)	0.10	1.02
Income					−0.27∗	(0.13)	−2.08	0.76∗
Education					−0.24∗	(0.09)	−2.65	0.78∗

Note. ∗ denotes $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Table 1.3

Personality Traits Predicting Relationship Dissolution Among Married Couples

	Model 1				Model 2			
	b	S.E.	*z*	Odds Ratio	*b*	S.E.	*z*	Odds Ratio
Extraversion	−0.00	(0.06)	−0.03	1.00	−0.01	(0.06)	−0.22	0.99
Agreeableness	−0.09	(0.06)	−0.54	0.91	−0.01	(0.08)	−0.17	0.99
Conscientiousness	−0.08	(0.06)	−1.44	0.92	0.01	(0.06)	0.10	1.01
Neuroticism	0.26∗	(0.06)	4.53	1.29∗	0.11	(0.06)	1.67	1.11
Openness	0.35∗	(0.06)	5.57	1.42∗	0.32∗	(0.07)	4.60	1.38∗
Sex					−0.09	(0.06)	−1.45	0.91
Relationship Duration					−0.51∗	(0.14)	−3.59	0.60∗
Religious Identification					0.27	(0.16)	1.74	1.31
Defacto Relationships					0.21∗	(0.06)	3.29	1.23∗
Marriages					−0.17	(0.16)	−1.10	0.84
Children					−0.19	(0.30)	−0.62	0.83
Resident Children					0.54∗	(0.23)	2.34	1.72∗
Employed					−0.22	(0.14)	−1.52	0.81
Income					−0.13	(0.09)	−1.42	0.88
Education					−0.23∗	(0.07)	−3.49	0.79∗

Note. ∗ denotes $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Table 2.1

Personality Traits Predicting Future Levels of Relationship Satisfaction Among Same Sex De facto Couples

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	b	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*
Extraversion	0.10	(0.11)	0.89	−0.01	(0.11)	−0.08	0.01	(0.10)	0.09	−0.30	(0.19)	−1.56
Agreeableness	0.42∗	(0.12)	3.45	0.40∗	(0.12)	3.25	0.44∗	(0.12)	3.60	0.62∗	(0.27)	2.28
Conscientiousness	0.13	(0.10)	1.31	0.08	(0.10)	0.79	0.15	(0.10)	1.41	0.26	(0.17)	1.48
Neuroticism	−0.21	(0.11)	−1.85	−0.12	(0.13)	−0.97	0.05	(0.15)	0.35	−0.64∗	(0.21)	−3.02
Openness	−0.12	(0.09)	−1.29	−0.12	(0.09)	−1.33	−0.14	(0.10)	−1.41	0.11	(0.20)	0.56
P Extraversion				−0.12	(0.11)	−1.11	−0.05	(0.10)	−0.51	0.46∗	(0.15)	3.10
P Agreeableness				0.22	(0.12)	1.84	0.11	(0.14)	0.75	−0.72∗	(0.30)	−2.40
P Conscientiousness				0.00	(0.10)	0.03	0.05	(0.11)	0.49	−0.73∗	(0.16)	−4.57
P Neuroticism				0.03	(0.13)	0.21	0.26	(0.14)	1.81	0.21	(0.19)	1.10
P Openness				−0.09	(0.09)	−1.02	−0.23∗	(0.09)	−2.56	−0.68∗	(0.19)	−3.63
Sex							0.10	(0.27)	0.38	−0.38	(0.25)	−1.51
Relationship Duration							−0.57	(0.89)	−0.65	−0.83	(0.77)	−1.07
Religious Identification							−0.29	(0.22)	−1.33	−0.39∗	(0.15)	−2.55
Defacto Relationships							0.03	(0.07)	0.44	−0.00	(0.06)	−0.07
Marriages							0.30	(0.41)	0.73	0.97∗	(0.33)	2.93
Children							0.16	(0.43)	0.37	−0.42	(0.40)	−1.04
Resident Children							−3.19∗	(1.00)	−3.21	−2.20∗	(0.82)	−2.67
Employed							−0.44	(0.32)	−1.37	−0.60∗	(0.24)	−2.49
Income							−0.13	(0.16)	−0.79	−0.42∗	(0.13)	−3.33
Education							0.27	(0.14)	1.93	0.13	(0.10)	1.24
Extraversion × Sex										0.24	(0.21)	1.14
Agreeableness × Sex										−0.25	(0.30)	−0.86
Conscientiousness × Sex										−0.14	(0.19)	−0.74
Neuroticism × Sex										0.64∗	(0.25)	2.59
Openness × Sex										−0.18	(0.21)	−0.85
P Extraversion × Sex										−0.37∗	(0.17)	−2.22
P Agreeableness × Sex										0.87∗	(0.31)	2.79
P Conscientiousness × Sex										1.07∗	(0.18)	5.88
P Neuroticism × Sex										−0.11	(0.21)	−0.52
P Openness × Sex										0.55∗	(0.20)	2.76

Note. P = partner variable, × Sex = interaction with Sex. ∗ denotes $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Table 2.2

Personality Traits Predicting Future Levels of Relationship Satisfaction Among Opposite Sex De facto Couples

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	b	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*
Extraversion	0.09∗	(0.02)	4.18	0.08∗	(0.03)	2.72	0.07∗	(0.03)	2.55	0.08	(0.04)	1.93
Agreeableness	0.11∗	(0.02)	4.86	0.11∗	(0.03)	3.60	0.13∗	(0.03)	3.96	0.09	(0.05)	1.89
Conscientiousness	0.06∗	(0.02)	2.58	−0.01	(0.03)	−0.40	−0.01	(0.03)	−0.39	−0.00	(0.04)	−0.00
Neuroticism	−0.15∗	(0.02)	−6.54	−0.15∗	(0.03)	−4.90	−0.14∗	(0.03)	−4.40	−0.09∗	(0.05)	−1.97
Openness	−0.03	(0.02)	−1.26	−0.02	(0.03)	−0.69	−0.04	(0.03)	−1.32	−0.05	(0.05)	−1.02
P Extraversion				0.03	(0.03)	0.88	0.01	(0.03)	0.39	−0.00	(0.04)	−0.03
P Agreeableness				0.10∗	(0.03)	3.25	0.08∗	(0.03)	2.35	0.06	(0.05)	1.33
P Conscientiousness				0.01	(0.03)	0.35	0.01	(0.03)	0.30	0.01	(0.04)	0.24
P Neuroticism				−0.09∗	(0.03)	−2.82	−0.11∗	(0.03)	−3.36	−0.14∗	(0.05)	−3.10
P Openness				−0.01	(0.03)	−0.43	−0.02	(0.03)	−0.69	0.01	(0.04)	0.28
Sex							−0.11∗	(0.04)	−2.51	−0.09	(0.05)	−1.96
Relationship Duration							−0.21∗	(0.09)	−2.29	−0.21∗	(0.09)	−2.26
Religious Identification							−0.06	(0.05)	−1.10	−0.06	(0.05)	−1.16
Defacto Relationships							−0.09∗	(0.02)	−3.88	−0.09∗	(0.02)	−3.85
Marriages							0.06	(0.05)	1.23	0.06	(0.05)	1.13
Children							−0.10	(0.09)	−1.17	−0.12	(0.09)	−1.38
Resident Children							−0.05	(0.09)	−0.63	−0.05	(0.09)	−0.58
Employed							−0.10	(0.07)	−1.41	−0.10	(0.07)	−1.40
Income							−0.01	(0.04)	−0.34	−0.01	(0.04)	−0.30
Education							−0.01	(0.03)	−0.23	−0.01	(0.03)	−0.21
Extraversion × Sex										−0.01	(0.05)	−0.09
Agreeableness × Sex										0.09	(0.07)	1.42
Conscientiousness × Sex										−0.03	(0.06)	−0.45
Neuroticism × Sex										−0.09	(0.07)	−1.41
Openness × Sex										0.02	(0.06)	0.38
P Extraversion × Sex										0.02	(0.05)	0.39
P Agreeableness × Sex										0.02	(0.07)	0.30
P Conscientiousness × Sex										−0.01	(0.06)	−0.17
P Neuroticism × Sex										0.07	(0.07)	1.00
P Openness × Sex										−0.06	(0.06)	−1.01

Note. P = partner variable, × Sex = interaction with Sex. ∗ denotes $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Table 2.3

Personality Traits Predicting Future Levels of Relationship Satisfaction Among Married Couples

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	b	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*
Extraversion	0.04∗	(0.01)	4.18	0.02	(0.01)	1.77	0.05∗	(0.01)	3.43	0.05∗	(0.02)	2.69
Agreeableness	0.08∗	(0.01)	7.55	0.11∗	(0.02)	7.01	0.12∗	(0.02)	8.04	0.15∗	(0.02)	7.04
Conscientiousness	0.05∗	(0.01)	5.03	0.04∗	(0.01)	2.81	0.04∗	(0.01)	2.79	0.06∗	(0.02)	2.95
Neuroticism	−0.11∗	(0.01)	−10.38	−0.09∗	(0.01)	−5.98	−0.06∗	(0.01)	−4.02	0.00	(0.02)	0.16
Openness	−0.09∗	(0.01)	−8.35	−0.11∗	(0.01)	−8.58	−0.10∗	(0.01)	−7.72	−0.10∗	(0.02)	−5.01
P Extraversion				0.02	(0.01)	1.16	0.03∗	(0.01)	2.06	0.04∗	(0.02)	2.41
P Agreeableness				0.12∗	(0.02)	7.88	0.07∗	(0.02)	4.75	0.03	(0.02)	1.35
P Conscientiousness				0.04∗	(0.01)	2.72	0.03	(0.01)	1.86	0.01	(0.02)	0.64
P Neuroticism				−0.06∗	(0.01)	−4.15	−0.06∗	(0.01)	−4.26	−0.09∗	(0.02)	−4.13
P Openness				−0.05∗	(0.01)	−3.79	−0.03∗	(0.01)	−2.18	−0.05∗	(0.02)	−2.79
Sex							−0.21∗	(0.02)	−11.36	−0.22∗	(0.02)	−11.57
Relationship Duration							0.02	(0.02)	0.99	0.02	(0.02)	0.75
Religious Identification							0.02	(0.03)	0.64	0.02	(0.03)	0.57
Defacto Relationships							−0.03∗	(0.01)	−1.99	−0.03∗	(0.01)	−1.98
Marriages							0.02	(0.03)	0.64	0.02	(0.03)	0.66
Children							−0.10	(0.05)	−1.83	−0.10	(0.05)	−1.84
Resident Children							−0.24∗	(0.04)	−5.84	−0.24∗	(0.04)	−5.88
Employed							−0.10∗	(0.03)	−3.33	−0.10∗	(0.03)	−3.38
Income							0.01	(0.02)	0.74	0.01	(0.02)	0.77
Education							−0.02	(0.01)	−1.44	−0.02	(0.01)	−1.43
Extraversion × Sex										−0.02	(0.03)	−0.57
Agreeableness × Sex										−0.05	(0.03)	−1.55
Conscientiousness × Sex										−0.03	(0.03)	−1.24
Neuroticism × Sex										−0.12∗	(0.03)	−3.99
Openness × Sex										−0.01	(0.03)	−0.24
P Extraversion × Sex										−0.03	(0.03)	−1.28
P Agreeableness × Sex										0.07∗	(0.03)	2.20
P Conscientiousness × Sex										0.03	(0.03)	1.11
P Neuroticism × Sex										0.05	(0.03)	1.66
P Openness × Sex										0.05	(0.03)	1.80

Note. P = partner variable, × Sex = interaction with Sex. ∗ denotes $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Table 3.1

Personality Traits Predicting Changes in Relationship Satisfaction Among Same Sex De Facto Couples

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	b	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*
Extraversion	−0.14	(0.07)	−1.93	−0.04	(0.15)	−0.27	−0.05	(0.15)	−0.31
Agreeableness	−0.12	(0.09)	−1.37	0.04	(0.16)	0.23	0.01	(0.16)	0.08
Conscientiousness	−0.09	(0.07)	−1.20	0.04	(0.13)	0.28	−0.06	(0.14)	−0.42
Neuroticism	0.03	(0.08)	0.44	0.34	(0.18)	1.83	0.19	(0.20)	0.93
Openness	0.01	(0.07)	0.12	−0.03	(0.11)	−0.31	−0.07	(0.11)	−0.61
P Extraversion				0.09	(0.15)	0.61	0.12	(0.15)	0.80
P Agreeableness				0.13	(0.16)	0.79	0.15	(0.16)	0.96
P Conscientiousness				0.10	(0.13)	0.79	0.02	(0.14)	0.14
P Neuroticism				0.37∗	(0.18)	2.03	0.21	(0.20)	1.02
P Openness				−0.04	(0.11)	−0.39	−0.01	(0.11)	−0.07
Sex							−0.50	(0.45)	−1.12
Relationship Duration							2.33	(1.49)	1.56
Religious Identification							0.19∗	(0.09)	2.12
Defacto Relationships							0.02	(0.03)	0.80
Marriages							0.30	(0.20)	1.54
Children							0.01	(0.21)	0.07
Resident Children							0.38	(0.47)	0.80
Employed							0.12	(0.13)	0.97
Income							−0.14	(0.31)	−0.45
Education							−0.02	(0.07)	−0.26

Note. P = partner variable. ∗ denotes $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Table 3.2

Personality Traits Predicting Changes in Relationship Satisfaction Among Opposite Sex De Facto Couples

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	b	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*
Extraversion	0.00	(0.02)	−0.02	0.03	(0.03)	0.74	0.03	(0.03)	0.99
Agreeableness	−0.02	(0.02)	−0.91	−0.00	(0.04)	−0.11	0.01	(0.04)	0.23
Conscientiousness	−0.04∗	(0.02)	−2.01	−0.03	(0.03)	−0.97	−0.03	(0.04)	−0.91
Neuroticism	0.01	(0.02)	0.38	−0.00	(0.04)	−0.10	0.01	(0.04)	0.21
Openness	−0.03	(0.02)	−1.52	−0.01	(0.03)	−0.25	−0.01	(0.03)	−0.35
P Extraversion				0.03	(0.03)	0.81	0.04	(0.03)	1.08
P Agreeableness				0.00	(0.04)	0.01	−0.01	(0.04)	−0.21
P Conscientiousness				−0.00	(0.03)	−0.10	−0.01	(0.04)	−0.15
P Neuroticism				−0.01	(0.04)	−0.28	−0.00	(0.04)	−0.10
P Openness				0.03	(0.03)	1.08	0.04	(0.03)	1.22
Sex							−0.06	(0.04)	−1.51
Relationship Duration							0.12	(0.12)	1.01
Religious Identification							−0.01	(0.05)	−0.25
Defacto Relationships							−0.05∗	(0.02)	−2.29
Marriages							0.06	(0.05)	1.29
Children							−0.05	(0.09)	−0.55
Resident Children							−0.15	(0.09)	−1.68
Employed							−0.01	(0.07)	−0.12
Income							−0.00	(0.05)	−0.07
Education							0.00	(0.03)	0.09

Note. P = partner variable. $*$ denotes $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Table 3.3

Personality Traits Predicting Changes in Relationship Satisfaction Among Married Couples

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	b	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*	*b*	S.E.	*t*
Extraversion	−0.00	(0.01)	−0.22	−0.02	(0.02)	−1.52	−0.01	(0.02)	−0.63
Agreeableness	−0.00	(0.01)	−0.18	0.01	(0.02)	0.47	0.02	(0.02)	1.02
Conscientiousness	0.01	(0.01)	0.99	0.03	(0.02)	1.77	0.02	(0.02)	1.51
Neuroticism	−0.01	(0.01)	−1.04	−0.00	(0.02)	−0.26	0.02	(0.02)	1.08
Openness	−0.02∗	(0.01)	−2.02	−0.03∗	(0.01)	−2.05	−0.02	(0.01)	−1.26
P Extraversion				−0.03	(0.02)	−1.67	−0.01	(0.02)	−0.94
P Agreeableness				0.02	(0.02)	1.14	0.00	(0.02)	0.12
P Conscientiousness				0.02	(0.02)	1.48	0.02	(0.02)	1.02
P Neuroticism				0.00	(0.02)	0.17	0.01	(0.02)	0.62
P Openness				−0.02	(0.01)	−1.21	−0.00	(0.01)	−0.13
Sex							−0.07∗	(0.01)	−5.00
Relationship Duration							0.12∗	(0.03)	4.80
Religious Identification							−0.05	(0.03)	−1.79
Defacto Relationships							−0.01	(0.01)	−0.52
Marriages							0.03	(0.03)	1.20
Children							0.06	(0.05)	1.17
Resident Children							−0.00	(0.04)	−0.11
Employed							0.01	(0.02)	0.36
Income							0.04	(0.02)	1.75
Education							−0.00	(0.01)	−0.28

Note. P = partner variable. $*$ denotes $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Supplemental Materials
"Why Do Personality Traits Predict Divorce? Multiple Pathways Through Satisfaction"
by B. C. Solomon & J. J. Jackson, 2014, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*
http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0036190

Statistically Significant Combined Effects in the Prediction of Relationship Satisfaction

Testing one actor trait × partner trait interaction at a time, controlling for all actor traits and partner traits:

Interaction	***b***	**SE**	***t***
Actor Agreeableness × Partner Agreeableness	0.03	0.01	2.11
Actor Neuroticism × Partner Neuroticism	0.03	0.01	2.08
Actor Agreeableness × Partner Neuroticism	-0.03	0.01	-2.98

Testing five actor trait × partner trait interactions simultaneously (in which one partner trait is the moderator with each actor trait), controlling for all actor traits and partner traits:

Interaction	***b***	**SE**	***t***
Actor Agreeableness × Partner Agreeableness	0.04	0.15	2.70
Actor Neuroticism × Partner Agreeableness	0.02	0.01	2.21
Actor Neuroticism × Partner Conscientiousness	0.02	0.01	2.20
Actor Extraversion × Partner Neuroticism	0.02	0.01	2.07
Actor Agreeableness × Partner Neuroticism	-0.02	0.01	-2.16

Testing five actor trait × partner trait interactions simultaneously (in which one actor trait is the moderator with each partner trait), controlling for all actor traits and partner traits:

Interaction	***b***	**SE**	***t***
Partner Neuroticism × Actor Agreeableness	-0.02	0.01	-2.08
Partner Neuroticism × Actor Neuroticism	0.05	0.01	3.04

Testing one actor trait × partner trait interaction at a time, controlling for all actor traits, partner traits, and demographic variables:

Interaction	***b***	**SE**	***t***
Partner Neuroticism × Actor Agreeableness	-0.02	0.01	-2.11

Testing five actor trait × partner trait interactions simultaneously (in which one partner trait is the moderator with each actor trait), controlling for all actor traits, partner traits, and demographic variables:

Interaction	***b***	**SE**	***t***
Actor Neuroticism × Partner Conscientiousness	0.03	0.01	2.52
Actor Extraversion × Partner Neuroticism	0.02	0.01	2.23

Testing five actor trait × partner trait interactions simultaneously (in which one actor trait is the moderator with each partner trait), controlling for all actor traits, partner traits, and demographic variables:

Interaction	***b***	**SE**	***t***

Partner Conscientiousness × Actor Neuroticism	0.02	0.01	2.10
Partner Neuroticism × Actor Neuroticism	0.04	0.01	2.60