

October 2020

## Personality Traits and Transition to First Marriage

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### Recommended Citation

Sasudevan, Sumangala, "Personality Traits and Transition to First Marriage" (2020). *MA Research Paper*. 40.

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Personality Traits and Transition to First Marriage

by

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A research paper accepted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Department of Sociology  
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2020

**Context:** During the search for a potential partner, individuals emphasize personality as a key factor. The Big Five personality types (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness) have been commonly used in social psychology literature to analyse personality types in relation to marital satisfaction and relationship outcomes (Botwin, Buss and Shakelford 1997; Holland & Roisman 2008).

**Objectives:** The purpose of this study is to 1) analyse the relationships between the big five personality types and the transition into first marriage; and 2) explore how childhood socioeconomic status moderates the relationship between childhood personality types to first marriage.

**Data and Methods:** I run a logistic regression using data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY97), which includes men and women born between 1980 and 1984 organized in person-year files (n= 2, 218). Each personality trait from the Big Five are categorized into levels of low, medium and high.

**Results:** High levels of Agreeableness, Extraversion, Conscientiousness are associated with an increase in marriage, while Openness was associated with a delay in marriage. With all controls added, high levels of Extraversion, Conscientiousness and medium levels of Conscientiousness are associated with an increase in marriage. As well, high levels of familial religiosity in childhood were also associated with 18% increase risk in marriage. When at least one parent has a Bachelor's degree, there is a 17% decrease in the transition to marriage. Similarly, when respondents have less than a high school education, they have a 31% decrease in the transition to marriage, while completing four or more years of college have 20% increase in the transition to marriage.

**Keywords:** Big Five, Personality, Marriage Transition, Agreeableness, Openness, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, First Marriage

In recent decades, there have been fewer marriages, yet many individuals still wish to be married (Martin, Astone and Peters 2014). This is extremely prevalent among young adults (Geiger & Livingston 2019). While they still desire to be married in the future, many have delayed marriage. Marital trends and trajectories have been vastly studied, yet an individualistic component, such as personality traits, has not been incorporated in many studies toward union formation. Social psychology literature points to personality as predictors of romantic life and many individuals desire mates with personality types that will match their own (Shiota & Levenson 2007; Holland & Roisman 2008).

Personality traits such as the Big Five includes the following traits: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae 2008). I will use these traits to examine the transition to marriage. Personality traits have not been quantitatively examined towards the transition to marriage, despite the importance in relationship processes (Holland & Roisman 2008). High levels of Conscientiousness and Extraversion are some of the traits that are associated with an increased risk to the transition to marriage, while Openness, surprisingly is associated with a delay in marriage.

The purpose of this study is to examine how personality types influence the likelihood of the transition to marriage. My study will 1) analyze the relationships between childhood personality types and the transition to first marriage and 2) examine how childhood socioeconomic status moderates the relationships between personality types and transition to first marriage.

### **Literature Review**

Marriage is often perceived to be an intimate relationship between two individuals for the sake of family formation, yet the state is an integral part of the marital relationship. Marriage is a

social institution, by which entry into a legalized union to ensure “proper” reproduction is seen as a response to social norms (Goldstein & Kenney 2001; Cherlin 2004; Carter 2008). Marriage was initially a legal unification between families for economic survival, yet the need for marriage lessened as industrialization took over (Milan 2000; Fumia 2010). At its core, the institution of marriage has multiple functions to maintain and construction relationships such as regulation of sexual behaviour, organization of care, support and legal recognition of children etc. (Cherlin 2004). However, numerous studies have contradicted some of these described functions such as the regulation of sexual behaviour, in which births occurred outside of wedlock (Hayford, Guzzo and Smock 2014; Martin, Astone and Peters 2014; Manning, Smock and Fetro 2019).

Indeed, the institution of marriage has gradually become de-institutionalized in contemporary society. De-institutionalization is defined as the weakening of social norms and expectations that prescribe individual behaviours, values and beliefs within a social institution (Cherlin 2004). In reference to marriage, de-institutionalization ultimately leads to a higher proportion of adults staying single longer or entering alternative marriage patterns, thus delaying the transition into marriage. Cherlin describes some of the functions of the marriage institution which include the regulation of sexual behaviour, organization of care, support and legal recognition of children etc. (2004). The weakening marriage institution can be explained by the second demographic transition.

The first demographic transition occurred in Western countries from the 18th century to around the second half of the 20th century and refers to the decline in fertility and mortality (Lesthaege 2010). The second demographic transition is often attributed to the changing economic, political and social spheres (Lesthaege 2010; Billari & Liefbroer 2010; Lesthaege

2014; Manning et al. 2019). Due to these changing spheres, the second demographic transition distinguishes itself from the first demographic transition by continuing to further instill the decline in fertility and mortality rates, by larger social changes, such as a growing disconnect between marriage and procreation (Cherlin 2004; Hayford et al. 2014; Eickmeyer and Manning 2018), numerous living arrangements including living apart together (Levin 2004) and cohabitation (Manning et al. 2019) that may either replace or forego marriage entirely (Lesthaege 2010; Billari & Liefbroer 2010; Lesthaege 2014). Forces such as growth in gender equality, growth in financial concerns and responsibilities, importance of education and specialized skills for specialized work are all factors that have affected family formation processes (Lesthaege 2010; Billari & Liefbroer 2010). For example, a study conducted indicated that women felt less of a need to marry due to their own financial independence (Pessin 2018). As well, numerous studies presented how women value their education and financial independence, thus delaying the entry to first marriage (Oppenheimer 1988). Moreover, studies have been conducted which present more individuals are deciding to forego marry or never marry (Bennet 2012; Manning et al. 2019).

Furthermore, as links between marriage and the core institutional functions of marriage weaken due to changes in family formation behaviours and changes in economic activity, individualized family systems begin to take over. Previous studies have examined the alternative family forms, discussing how functions of traditional marriages are neither unique nor necessary for marriage (Hayford et al. 2014; Eickmeyer and Manning 2018). Studies note cohabitation has evolved from being a precursor to marriage to replacing marriage itself (Manning et al. 2019), and the increased tolerance in non-marital childbearing has led to a decline in marriage (Hayford et al. 2014; Astone, Martin and Peters 2015). While these studies have analysed how variables

such as education (Oppenheimer 1988), gender (Lloyd and South 1996), race (Furstenberg 1996; Guzzo 2004), and socioeconomic status (Carlson 1979) influence the transition to marriage, very few studies have considered quantitatively analysing personality traits and its transition to marriage. Thus, the current study will build upon previous research and examine personality traits as a factor in marital transition.

### **Marriage Market: Theoretical Framework**

I use Gary Becker's work on marriage markets as a theoretical framework. Becker compares the marriage market to the labour market, in which individuals are in competition with each other to find the best possible mate, restricted to the conditions of the market (Becker 1974). Becker's theory of marriage markets is enduring as individuals compete to find the best possible partner and in turn exchange services to maintain the marital relationship (Becker 1974). In Becker's model, individuals assess the costs and benefits of a potential spouse and if the benefits outweigh the costs, then marriage occurs (Becker 1974, Michael & Tuma 1985). As a result, a marriage market is presumed to exist. Although, marriage was framed as a necessity for survival, it is almost always voluntary, by either the individuals wanting to marry or the parents of the marriageable couple (Becker 1974). Thus, this voluntary marriage will raise the utility level of both partners, compared to when they were single.

Becker outlines two main sorting of mates: optimal and assortative. According to Becker, optimal mating refers to when two persons not married to each other could not marry and make one better off without making the other worse off. In other words, the most ideal match where both partners maximize their individual gains through marriage. Of course, this is under the most idealistic circumstances. The other is assortative which refers to when individuals differ in one or more traits. This type of matching deals the sorting of likes and unlikes. The most common is the

association of likes where individuals' traits often complement each other, while the unlikes are where traits substitute each other, which is less common. For example, men who are in highly paid jobs might have a wife who earns less but excels in every other aspect (Oppenheimer 1988).

He notes that utility is not solely based on socioeconomic factors such as income level, but factors such as beauty, intelligence and personality also have an effect on non-market productivity. As a result, the increase in value of traits and characteristics that have positive effects on non-market productivity will also increase the gain from productivity. In this study, personality traits that can be used for trade within the marriage mating process, where certain traits make an individual more or less attractive as a potential partner.

Building upon Becker's work, Oppenheimer theorizes a marriage formation model based on job search theory. With this model, individuals looking for a mate lack sufficient knowledge to know which mate is the best, and as searching is costly, both indirectly and directly, the best possible outcome is to accept the most minimally acceptable match (Oppenheimer 1988). Furthermore, Oppenheimer argues that searching within the marriage markets is quite different than labour markets, as while marriage may focus on maximizing income similar to jobs, nonmonetary rewards may also come from marriage searches (Oppenheimer 1988).

Although, she argues that examining marital successes and matching based on maximizing socioeconomic statuses, it is too narrow of an approach (Oppenheimer 1988). She states that marriage provides intimacy, compassion, lifelong partnership that is not easily quantifiable, brining need to further examine subjective characteristics such as personality into marital matches. The majority of previous studies have examined the role of economic resources at union formation, with measures such as income (Clarkberg 1999; Oppenheimer et al. 1997; Sweeny 2002), educational attainment (Clarkberg 1999; Goldstein and Kenney 2001), and work



experience (Clarkberg 1999; Oppenheimr et al. 1997; Sweeney 2002). Thus, my study will fill the gap of research that has not explicitly explored the role of personality as an indicator for marriage.

Previous literature adopts Becker's model of marriage as a paradigm focusing on the timing of entry over the total proportion marrying, specifically looking at early marriages (Michael & Tuma 1985). Michael and Tuma (1985) identify three personal and family background factors that may influence early marriage, which include: 1) unpleasant or unproductive family circumstances such as low parental income and low levels of education, 2) characteristics that are unusual in the marriage market such as foreign-born to be less likely to be born early and 3) factors that raise the cost of divorce or marriage, which are expected to lower the likelihood of early marriage. This particular study's framework might be difficult to incorporate into contemporary understandings of marriage, as individuals who have a lower socioeconomic status are more likely to enter cohabiting unions and forego marriage for their economic survival (Clarkberg 1999; Billari & Liefbroer 2016; Eickmeyer & Manning 2018).

Studies have focused on socioeconomic factors because they are decisive in producing trends in marriage (Oppenheimer 1988). Familial characteristics also have quite an influence in deciding the marriage markets for individuals. Family background characteristics can be described as traits of families that relate to their social, human, financial capital (Carlson 1979). For example, one study using the National Survey of Families and Households, analysed the effects of characteristics such as childhood living arrangements on adult's attitudes toward marriage, divorce and non-marital childbearing (Trent & South 1972). Results showed that the strongest predictors are age, sex and marital status with older, married men having more traditional attitudes (Trent & South 1972). While higher parental socioeconomic status and

maternal employment displayed liberal attitudes (Trent & South 1972). Family biographies of parents affect their children's life course trajectories in a multitude of ways through the socialization process, which reinforce intergenerational similarities in family formation (Raab 2017). For example, children who were born or raised in non-traditional family arrangements during childhood continue to reproduce non-traditional family arrangements as they age.

### Personality Traits and the Big Five

Marriage markets suggests that certain factors, besides socioeconomic factors, have an effect on nonmarket productivity. One factor that is explicitly named is personality (Becker 1974; Oppenheimer 1988). In sociology literature, scholarship on marital demographic patterns and transitions to marriage have not looked at how personality types or traits influence an individuals' likelihood of entering a union; whether it be a martial union or a non-marital union. Comparatively, social psychology literature has vastly explored personality traits and personality types in relation to marital satisfaction (Carlson & Williams 1984; Shiota & Levenson 2007; Nilforooshan, Ahmadi, Fatehzadeh and Ghasemi 2013, French, Popovich, Robins and Homer 2014). Studies in social psychology have also looked at how traits such as optimism, Agreeableness, Extraversion and Neuroticism impact marital and life satisfaction in long term marriages (Boyer-Pennington, Pennigton and Spink 2009; Shota & Levenson 2007), yet there have not been many studies that explore personality types influencing the transition to marriage.

Only one study that I know of has analysed how personal traits affect the likelihood of entering in either marriage or cohabitation using data from the National Study of Adolescent Health (ADD Health) by using a personality traits index (French et al. 2014). In this specific study, data was taken from Wave 3 of ADD Health dataset, which collected information about respondents' social networks, friendships and personal traits. Interviewers ranked the

respondent's physical attractiveness, personality and grooming using a scale from 1 (very unattractive/poorly groomed) to 5 (very attractive/very well groomed) (French et al. 2014). This study, they did not use the Big Five as a premise for personality but constructed a personal traits index by adding scores for physical attractiveness, personality and grooming (French et al. 2014). In their secondary analysis, the personality traits index was replaced with separate measures to better understand the individual contributions. Each variable of personality, grooming and physical attractiveness, had categories of less than average, average, and above average. Results indicated that having a higher score on the personality index was associated with an increase risk of entering marriage but did not have a significant influence on entering a cohabiting relationship (French et al. 2014).

Personality is quite a contested topic in the social psychology literature. There are various ways of measuring personality (i.e. Myers-Brigg, Jungian typology, Hexaco etc.). One of the most common ways to identify personality types is using the five-factor model (FMM). This is also referred to by other names such as the Big Five and NEO-PI (NEO-Personality Index). For the purposes of this study, I will use the five-factor model to analyze how personality traits affect the transition to marriage. I will use the term Big Five throughout the rest of the study, but it can also be used interchangeably with the other terms: five factor model (FMM) and NEO-PI.

Research on personality, especially the Big Five, has a long history within social psychology literature, starting with Fiske's (1949) initial research on personality factor structure and Norman's (1963) five factor taxonomy (Ehrler, Evans and McGhee 1999). Initially, the instrument started off as a three-factor model constructed by Costa and McCrae in 1983 and published 1985, psychology literature started to use the instrument more in depth (Costa & McCrae 2008). As a result, they continuously revised items to improve internal consistency and

readability. The current instrument has a five-factor model, adding in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness in 1992 (Costa & McCrae 2008). Certain survey models of the NEO-PI also analyze facets under each personality type, which are smaller traits that make up the major categorizations (Shaver & Brennan 1992; Ehrler et al. 1999; White, Henderick and Henderick 2004). According to this model, many of our personality traits can be reduced into one of the five categories: Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness to Experience (O), Agreeableness (A) and Conscientiousness (C) (Shota and Levenson 2007).

It is important to note that the Big Five is not a theory but adopts premises of trait theory to provide explanations for its categorizations (White et al. 2004). Trait theory indicates that persons can be defined by individual characteristics that are thought to involve patterns of thought and thought to be stable over time (White et al. 2004). There have been numerous validity studies that show support for the existence of the model and its stability over long periods of time (Digman 1990; McCrae & Costa 1994; Ehrler et al. 1999; White et al. 2004). Social psychology literature also notes that these traits are established during developmental years, from childhood to early adulthood, remaining stable afterwards (Specht, Egloff & Schmukle 2012). Therefore, the Big Five is an acceptable measure within the analysis and for the purposes of this study.

Individuals who are open to experiences generally have active imaginations, receptive to new ideas and approaches. People who have high levels of Openness are more unconventional and are willing to question authority, open to new social and ethical ideas (Ehrler et al. 1999). Several studies have generally concluded that positive traits such as Openness to Experience on marital satisfaction is generally beneficial (Botwin, Buss and Shakelford 1997; Holland & Roisman 2008). However, other studies have indicated weak relationships of openness to marital

quality (Holland & Roisman 2008; Nilforooshan 2013). Therefore, it is not unlikely to suggest that people who identify as having Openness personality trait might cohabit rather than marry or might forego marriage all together, due to their acceptance to new ideas and approaches. Therefore, I hypothesize that it is likely to for individuals who identify with the Openness personality trait are more likely to to delay their marriage in regard to their unconventional ideas but due to the attractiveness of a positive trait, individuals who have the Openness personality trait may also be more likely to transition to marriage (Hypothesis 1).

Agreeableness is defined as individuals who are sympathetic to others and are altruistic in nature (Ehrler et al. 1999). Previous studies have noted that Agreeableness or Kindness is one the most highly sought out traits in mate by both men and women (Buss & Barnes 1986; French et al. 2014). Since Agreeableness is an attractive trait for both men and women, I hypothesize that individuals with high levels of Agreeableness are more attractive to potential partners and are more likely to enter the transition to marriage (Hypothesis 2).

Individuals who are Conscientiousness are purposeful and strong-willed. Studies have shown that individuals with high levels of Conscientiousness have more academic and occupational achievement but often have workaholic tendencies (Ehrler et al. 1999). In regard to marriage, there are generally mixed reviews for the Conscientiousness personality trait. Some studies have shown lower marital quality (Holland & Roisman 2008), while others have shown higher (Botwin et al. 1997; Gattis et al. 2004). Therefore, I hypothesize that individuals that have high levels of Conscientiousness might indicate a delayed transition to marriage, as high levels of Conscientiousness are associated with academic and occupational achievement (Hypothesis 3). Thus, they may delay marriage in favour of receiving educational attainment or occupational attainment (Digman 1989; Ehrler et al. 1999; Oppenheimer 1988).

Neuroticism is defined as individuals who are prone to negative affects. Many common traits include anxiety, depression and self-consciousness (Shaver & Brennan 1992; Ehrler et al. 1999; White et al. 2004). While in relationships, studies have found that higher levels of Neuroticism in both men and women hinders marital satisfaction and marital stability (Shiota & Levenson 2007). Many have defined those who identify with Neuroticism as irrational and prone to psychological distress, which may hinder marital stability and satisfaction (Shaver & Brennan 1992).

Individuals who are extraverted tend to be outgoing, energetic and optimistic. One cross-sectional study by Lester, Haig and Monello (1989) found that high levels of Extraversion in one spouse were associated with lower marital satisfaction in the other. However, in another cross-sectional study, they found that Extraversion had no effect on marital satisfaction (Gattis, Berns, Simpson and Christensen 2004).

Previous studies on personality and marital satisfaction have found that the Big Five explain interpersonal differences in personality in relation between marital outcomes and personality; neuroticism in particular has a main role in predicting marital quality (Holland & Roisman 2008; Nilforooshan et al. 2013). Generally, studies have found that individuals who have a high degree of positive traits such as agreeableness and extraversion experience better marital quality than those that do not (Botwin et al. 1997; Gattis et al. 2004; Holland & Roisman 2008). These findings may suggest that socially desirable partners to have happier and more stable marriages, but also suggest that more socially desirable partners have positive qualities that are desirable in a mate, increasing the likelihood of the transition to marriage. Since positive traits are highly valued among a mate (Buss & Barnes 1986), individuals with more positive personality traits are more likely to transition to marriage (Hypothesis 4).

Religion also has an important role within marital transitions as religion and marriage are closely intertwined (Wilcox & Wolfinger 2007; Carter 2008; Rademaker & Petterson 2019). However, recent trends suggest that religion has become less important for partner decisions and other factors such as financial stability and personal choice are emphasized more (Cherlin 2004; McClendon 2016). Respondents may come from religious families, which may have an influence in their decisions to transition to marriage. I hypothesize that individuals with higher religiosity levels in childhood are more likely to transition to marriage than other religiosity levels (Hypothesis 5).

### **Methods**

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) collects information from individuals throughout their lives about significant life events. The NLSY's 1997 cohort (NLSY97) is a nationally representative sample of 8,984 American men and women born from 1980 to 1984 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020). The NLSY97 collects information on respondents' labour market behaviour, educational experiences and family formation processes (U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020). Interviews are conducted annually from 1997 to 2011 and biannually since; the latest round is round 18 (2017-2018). For the purposes of this study, the majority of the data was taken from Wave 1 (1997), although several time varying variables come from later rounds.

### **Analytic Sample**

The data were organized as person-year records. The initial sample began with 215,616 (n= 8,984) person-year observations. Pew Research's analysis of the 2014 American Community Survey found that approximately 57,800 minors aged 15 to 17 were married as of 2014 (McClendon & Sandstrom 2016). As this analysis points to evidence that there is quite a number

of minors that are legally marrying with parent's consent, respondents younger than 15 at the initial round of survey collection were excluded. The lowest recorded age in this sample is 15, while the highest recorded age is 36. Respondents who were missing information about the timing of their transition to first marriage were also excluded from the sample; those who were single throughout the observation period were included in the sample. The final analytic sample contains a total of 34,365 person-year observations (n= 2, 218).

### **Dependent Variable**

The outcome measures individuals' transition to first marriage. An individual is coded as 0 until they first transition to marriage, at which point they are coded as 1. After this point, they are removed from the risk set.

### **Independent Variables**

The key independent variables include 10 items from the NEO-Personality index, which were categorized into the big five personality traits: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. The 10-item personality index was taken from round 12 (2008), when it was first measured. Social psychology literature shows that the big five personality types are often formed in childhood and early adulthood, and that they are relatively stable throughout the course of individuals' lives (Specht et al. 2012). Negative items were reverse coded, and their row totals were summed to create a scale variable. These scales were then recoded into three-category variables of low, medium and high for a specific personality trait out of the big five; low represented scores that were under the 33<sup>rd</sup> percentile, medium represented scores that were between the 33<sup>rd</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> percentile, while high represented scores at the 66<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher.

Familial religiosity was constructed in a similar manner. This measure consisted of three



variables, measured in the first rounds (1997-1998) that were used to initially create a scale: 1) the responding's parent's frequency in attending worship, 2) non-responding parent's frequency in attending worship and 3) frequency of family involvement in religious activities per week (Li 2014). This was then created into a scale and collapsed into a categorical variable measuring low, medium and high familial religiosity levels.

### **Controls**

Race was created as a series of dummy variables of Non-Hispanic Black/Non-Hispanic, Black, Non-Hispanic and Hispanic. The other binary variables included sex (1=female), citizenship (1=US citizen), Parent's Education (1=where at least one parent has a Bachelor's degree) and Urban (1 = if they lived in an urban as opposed to rural area). Region had the following categories of Northeast, North Central, South and West. Household structure was surveyed in the first round, measuring who the respondent lived with at the time of the survey. This variable was collapsed into 5 categories; living with both biological parents, living with biological mother and stepfather, single mother household, single father household and other, which included living with grandparents. Missing information was imputed from the following two rounds of the survey. Gross family income was constructed the same way as the main independent variables. Gross family income was surveyed in the first round and was also collapsed into three categories of low, medium and high gross family income. Similarly, to the household structure, missing information was imputed from the following two rounds of the survey.

The only time varying control was respondent's education, which was taken from every round of the survey. This variable was measured in four categories; less than high school, completed high school, some college and completed bachelor's degree and/or postgrad. Missing

information was imputed based on previous and following years.

### **Analytical Approach**

I first organized my data into person-year observations to implement discrete-time event history analysis. Discrete time methods examine non-repeated events of a single kind (Allison 2014). This was the most acceptable way of measuring as the survey designates time into large chunks instead of continuous time. For the dependent variable, there is no information on the exact date and time when individuals first, only the year. First, I describe the sample overall, and compare those who do transition to a first marriage over the course of the risk period to those who do not. Chi-square tests assess the association between my main independent variables and whether or not one gets married. Second, Kaplan-Meier curves illustrate the changing hazard of entering marriage. Third, I estimate binary logistic models to analyze the relationship between the likelihood of transitioning to marriage and individuals' personality traits and familial religiosity. Model 1 consists of the main independent variables, model 2 adds in socioeconomic factors, and model 3 includes all controls. All analyses were run after omitting individuals with missing information, and estimates are unweighted. Weighted results are substantively similar as those presented here and are available from the author upon request.

### **Results**

[<Insert Table 1>](#)

In Table 1, I ran a descriptive table, generating a mean and standard deviation for all variables in the overall sample population, the unmarried sub-sample and the married sub-sample. There are around 51.8% males to 48.2% females within the analytical sample, but it is evident that more women (52.4%) are married at the end of the current survey and more men (47.6%) remain single. As well, age brings about some expected results. Overall, individuals

have an approximate mean of 30 years old in the sample, but those who are single have a much higher mean age at 34, while those who are married are 25, which is around 10 years younger. This supports current literature describing how the current age of individuals yet to marry has increased (Martin et al. 2014). This is also due to the observation period, as the starting age for observation is 15 and the observation period ends in the mid 30s.

Overall, the sample is highly educated, with 38.2% of the sample have completed four or more years of college, 22.5% of the sample have completed some college, 22.5% hold high school diplomas and 13.6% completed less than high school. Results for unmarried and married individuals were quite similar as well; 38.3% of unmarried individuals completed four or more years of college, while 38.1% of married individuals completed four or more years of college.

In the overall sample, 44.7% of individuals identified as having high levels of openness, 45.7% of single individuals identified as having high levels of openness and 44% of married individuals identified as having high openness. While social psychologists have defined individuals with high levels of openness as more accepting of unconventional ideas such as alternative forms of marriage (Ehrler et al. 1999), there is not a substantial difference between unmarried and married individuals to claim that unmarried individuals are more likely to enter non-traditional marriage forms. Similarly, openness is also a desirable trait for marriage (Shiota & Levenson 2007; French et al. 2014), but due the small difference between married and unmarried individuals, I cannot explicitly claim that openness is a desirable trait for marriage.

As expected, married individuals had high levels of positive traits; around 41% for Extraversion and 42.3% for Agreeableness, indicating that positive personality traits are more desirable in marital partners (Shiota & Levenson 2007; French et al. 2014). Comparatively, there was a higher proportion of individuals with high Neuroticism levels among the unmarried

population (42.8%) compared to the married population (35.2%). Therefore, as a preliminary analysis, I can support Hypothesis 1, by which individuals with more positive traits are more likely to be married than those with negative traits.

[<Insert Table 2>](#)

In Table 2, chi-square tests were conducted to test for associations between the main independent variables and whether or not one transitions to marriage over the observation period.

Overall, most personality traits were found to have significant associations of being married and not married. Individuals who identified as having high levels of openness are more likely to stay single (45.7%) than get married (44%) but was not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). Thus, having openness as a personality trait does not have a strong association between the transition to first marriage. Similarly, familial religiosity levels in childhood was also not significant as an even proportion of singles (42.4%) and married (40.6%) persons had medium levels of religiosity.

With a difference of seven points, individuals with high Conscientious personality traits were more likely to be married, compared to 31% of non-married persons ( $p < 0.001$ ). Among the proportion with high Neuroticism traits, 42.8% of the single sub-sample are more likely to stay single compared to 35.2% of married high Ns ( $p < 0.01$ ). By the end of the observation period, 38% of individuals who had high levels of Agreeableness were unmarried while 42.3% of respondents were married ( $p < 0.05$ ).

[<Insert Kaplan Meir Curves>](#)

In Figure 1, I ran a Kaplan-Meier survival estimate which presents the amount of years it takes for individuals to transition to marriage. The observation period in the Kaplan-Meier starts at 0 and continues up until 25. In this graph, 0 represents the lowest recorded age in the dataset

(15), and each additional year on the graph represents a one-year increase in age until mid 20s, which is the highest recorded age (36). As individuals who have not transitioned to marriage is at risk of transitioning to marriage. It should be noted that as the survey is still ongoing, individuals who were not married by the current round were assigned the highest recorded age. In general, as individuals reach mid 20s, they transition to marriage, thus enter the risk of marriage.

Figure 2 presents another Kaplan-Meier curve by gender. Females are more likely than males to enter the risk of marriage. As well, females are more likely to be younger than males when they first transition to marriage.

[<Insert Table 3>](#)

In Table 3, I ran a logistic regression with three different models. Model 1 contains the key independent variables of personality traits and familial religiosity. Model 2 adds onto the key independent variables with socioeconomic variables such as household structure, parent education, respondent's education. Model 3 is the final model with all controls added. In Model 1, high levels of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Extraversion with the exception of openness indicate an increase in the likelihood to marry, compared to those with low levels of said personality traits. This supports Hypothesis 1, where people with personality types that are perceived as positive are more likely to marry. This would indicate that positive traits are universally a desirable trait for marriage and for enduring marriages (Shiota & Levenson 2007). In Model 1, individuals with high levels of agreeableness, are 20.2% more likely to transition to marriage ( $p < 0.001$ ). While, Agreeableness is one of most sought out personality types in mates (Buss and Barnes 1986; French et al. 2014), with socioeconomic and demographic variables it loses its significance. This suggests, that while agreeableness is an attractive trait, other factors such as education level might influence the transition to marriage, when people are looking for

potential mates. As well, while agreeableness may not have much of a significance in influencing individuals transition to marriage, there have been numerous psychological studies documenting its importance in marital satisfaction and enduring marriages (Botwin et al. 1997; Gattis et al. 2004; Holland & Roisman 2008).

As expected, those who have high levels of openness are associated with a lower likelihood of getting married, compared to those with lower levels of openness ( $p < 0.01$ ), thus delay their marriage, which support Hypothesis 1. Due to the nature of openness personality trait, these individuals have unconventional ideas, thus more likely to cohabit or enter other marriage forms (Ehrler et al. 1999). Another possibility is that since high Os are drawn to different forms of aesthetics, culture and intelligence, they may satisfy their curiosity in other ways and not consider marriage (Shaver & Brennan 1992; Ehrler et al. 1999 ).

Those who define themselves as having high levels of conscientiousness are 30.3% more likely to transition to marriage, compared to those with low levels of conscientiousness ( $p < 0.001$ ). This is unexpected from Hypothesis 3, in which I expected those with high levels of Conscientiousness to delay marriage. Persons who identify themselves as having high levels of Conscientiousness are defined as determined, as studies have shown those with high levels of Conscientiousness are associated with academic achievement, occupational achievement and school adaption (Digman 1989; Ehrler et al. 1999). This might imply have a better likelihood of marriage because they might be more financially ready for marriage (Oppenheimer 1988).

Familial religiosity on the other hand, was not significant until the last model with all controls. In Model 3, individuals who come from a highly religious family are 18% more likely to transition to marriage compared to those from not as religious families ( $p < 0.05$ ).

When just considering age, every year increase in age, the likelihood of marriage also

increases by a factor of 2.19 times, but when considering its squared term, the transition of marriage increases at a decreasing rate ( $p < 0.001$ ). This is supported by the literature, where marriage increases with age, but the potential mates within the marriage market also decrease (Oppenheimer 1988). Also as expected, those who are protestant evangelicals are more likely to enter marriage than Catholics due to their religious nature (Billari & Liefbroer 2016). Individuals who are atheist/agnostic are 28% more likely to transition to marriage compared to Catholics.

If either parent had a BA, individuals would be 17% more likely to delay their marital searches ( $p < 0.05$ ). This may suggest that individuals whose parent or parents have a BA, may follow a similar path their parents did (Raab 2017). Respondent's own educational achievement also influenced the transition to marriage. Individuals who had less than high school education, are 31% less likely to transition to marriage ( $p < 0.001$ ), compared to individuals who at least completed a high school education. Respondents who have completed four or more years of education are 20% more likely to transition to marriage ( $p < 0.05$ ), compared to those who have completed a high school education. This result support previous studies as college increases the potential marriage market pool and individuals who are more likely to stabilize themselves are more attractive as potential mates (Becker 1974; Oppenheimer 1988).

Some other results were quite expected. Females are 36% more likely to enter marriage than males with all controls ( $p < 0.001$ ). This was also expressed within table 1, where 57% of the married sub-sample were female. Women are perceived uphold to the ideology of marriage and to some extent rely on their partner's income in marriage, which suggests h (Oppenheimer 1988; Manning, Trella and Lyons 2010). Men also feel some responsibility to establish their independence so they can work for marriage and family (Oppenheimer 1988). It was also expected that Blacks were less likely to transition to marriage, at 60% less likely to get married

compared to non-Hispanics and non-Black individuals. This is supported by previous literature and this would suggest that blacks are more likely to cohabit due to financial burdens in having a marriage ceremony and start a family through cohabitation and alternative marriage forms (Guzzo 2004; Furstenberg 1996).

### **Discussion and Limitations**

In general, more subjective measures such as personality did reveal much pertinent information about the marital transition and marriage making process. From Table 1, it is evident that positive traits such as openness, agreeableness and extraversion are associated with an earlier transition to marriage, compared with the other traits. Although unmarried persons identified more with negative traits such as Neuroticism, they also identified with positive traits such as Openness. For example, around 43% of the single population possessed high neuroticism traits compared with 35.2% of the married population who also possessed high neuroticism traits. At the same time, 45.7% of the unmarried population identified as having high openness levels, while the 44% of the married population identified as having high openness levels. This might imply that while individuals who possess positive traits such as Openness, Agreeableness and Extraversion, it may not always be associated with an earlier transition to marriage.

As well, social psychology literature points out that positive traits are beneficial towards marriage, as individuals with positive traits such as Openness, Extraversion and Agreeableness, have healthier, happier and more stable marriages than negative traits, which is also a commonly held belief (Shiota & Levenson 2007; Holland & Roisman 2008; French et al. 2014). With the addition of socioeconomic and demographic factors, traits like Agreeableness which is considered among one of the most important traits in social psychology literature as being an important relationship stability indicator (Buss & Barnes 1986; Shiota & Levenson 2007; French



et al. 2014) did not have influence in the transition to marriage. In Model 1, high levels of Agreeableness had a 20% increase in the risk of transition to marriage ( $p < 0.05$ ), compared to lower levels. In Model 2, high levels of Agreeableness dropped to a 16% increase in the risk of transition to marriage ( $p < 0.05$ ), compared to low levels of Agreeableness. With all controls, high levels of Agreeableness only had a 10% risk of transition to marriage but was not significant. This would indicate that while personality is important when meeting a lifelong partner, socioeconomic status continues to play a much larger role in the marriage process.

While socioeconomic factors may have played a big role, individuals are not actively calculating their costs and gains while meeting, but assess their matches and mates based on affective interactions (Oppenheimer 1988). This is commonly played into contemporary society's understanding of the matchmaking process as individuals seek out traits like kindness and optimism in mates (French et al. 2014). Indeed, the results have shown that high levels of Conscientiousness and Extraversion increase the risk of marriage by 30% and 29% respectively, but socioeconomic factors appear to have a stronger association with an increased risk to transition to marriage. For example, respondents who identified as being protestant evangelical have a 38% increase in the risk of transitioning, compared to Catholics. As well, being from the North Central region compared to Northeast, has a 51% increased risk to transition to marriage.

While this study has investigated personality traits and the transition to marriage, there are also limitations that must be discussed. Previous studies have noted that some of the deciding factors to transitions to marriage is the transition to employment, along with individual's income (Oppenheimer 1988), which was not incorporated in this study. When looking at timing of transitions to marriage, transitions to employment are also looked at in tandem because work has influences in structuring a couple's lifestyle in determining their socioeconomic status as well as

an individual's current position within the labour market affects the ability to marry (Oppenheimer 1988). Moreover, this study only focused on entry to first marriage and not any other marriage or family forms. Comparing entry to cohabitation with entry to first marriage, might have given differing results. For example, I would expect that there might be little variation with personality traits influencing cohabitation and marriage. For example, high levels of Agreeableness would be a personality trait that might have little variation between the transition to cohabitation and the transition to marriage, because it is a desirable trait that mates look for (Ehrler et al. 1999). Moreover, I would also expect traits like Openness might also have little variation between the transitions to cohabitation and marriage, because previous studies have noted it is also a trait that individuals look for when starting relationships and a trait that is associated with marital satisfaction (Buss & Barnes 1986; French et al. 2014).

Personality types and characteristics are still topics of everyday conversation that uphold great importance within the marital processes. Personality not only helps influence the transition to marriage, but also the situations after marriage; the enduring marriages, the satisfied happier marriages, the stable marriages, as noted in psychology literature. While personality may be difficult to measure as it is quite subjective in nature, psychologists have done excellent work in proving the model's validity and usefulness. Within this study, the Big Five personality traits; Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, have been used to analyse the influence traits have on the transition to marriage. Indeed, high levels of traits such as Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness increase the transition to marriage. However, high levels of a positively defined trait such as Openness is associated with a delay in marriage, but studies have noted its importance in marital satisfaction and marital stability (Ehrler et al. 1999; Botwin et al. 1997; Holland & Roisman 2008). This presents an interesting

social space where certain personality traits that may be increase the transition to marriage but may operate differently when individuals are married. Specifically, personality traits may be valued differently before and after marriage.

Table 1:

**Table 1: Sample Descriptives**

Variable	Overall Sample		Not Married		Married	
	Mean (%)	Standard Deviation	Mean (%)	Standard Deviation	Mean (%)	Standard Deviation
<b>Sex</b>						
Female	42.2	0.50	42.3	0.49	52.4	0.50
Male	51.8	0.50	57.7	0.49	47.6	0.50
<b>Citizenship</b>						
Not a citizen	3.4	0.18	3.0	0.17	3.6	0.19
Citizen	96.6	0.18	97.0	0.17	96.4	0.19
<b>Race</b>						
Non-Black/Non-Hispanic	63.1	0.48	55.3	0.50	68.7	0.46
Black	16.7	0.37	24.1	0.43	11.4	0.32
Hispanic	19.4	0.39	20.0	0.40	19.0	0.39
Mixed Non-Hispanic	0.7	0.08	0.06	0.08	0.08	0.09
<b>Region</b>						
Northeast	17.1	0.38	20.5	0.40	14.7	0.35
North Central	25.7	0.44	21.5	0.41	28.7	0.45
South	33.5	0.47	35.0	0.48	32.4	0.47
West	23.7	0.42	23.0	0.42	24.1	0.43
<b>Urban/Rural Indicator</b>						
Lives in an Urban Area	71.2	0.45	74.7	0.43	31.3	0.46
Lives in a Rural Area	28.8	0.45	25.3	0.43	68.7	0.46
<b>Openness</b>						
Low	24.7	0.43	24.8	0.43	24.6	0.43
Medium	30.6	0.46	29.5	0.46	31.4	0.46
High	44.7	0.50	45.7	0.50	44.0	0.50
<b>Conscientiousness</b>						
Low	33.4	0.47	38.8	0.49	29.5	0.46
Medium	31.4	0.46	30.0	0.46	32.5	0.47
High	35.2	0.48	31.3	0.46	38.0	0.48
<b>Extraversion</b>						
Low	22.4	0.42	26.2	0.44	19.7	0.40
Medium	40.2	0.49	41.2	0.49	39.4	0.49
High	37.3	0.48	32.5	0.47	40.9	0.49
<b>Agreeableness</b>						
Low	25.1	0.43	28.0	0.45	23.0	0.42
Medium	34.3	0.47	34.0	0.47	34.6	0.47
High	40.5	0.49	38.0	0.49	42.3	0.49
<b>Neuroticism</b>						
Low	34.1	0.47	32.0	0.47	35.7	0.48
Medium	27.5	0.45	25.3	0.43	29.1	0.45

High	38.4	0.49	42.8	0.50	35.2	0.48
<b>Familial Religiosity</b>						
Low	34.8	0.48	35.6	0.48	34.1	0.47
Medium	41.4	0.49	42.4	0.49	40.6	0.49
High	23.9	0.43	21.9	0.41	25.2	0.43
<b>Age (In years)</b>	29.5	5.7	34.9	0.79	25.6	4.24
<b>Respondent's Religion</b>						
Catholic	32.3	0.47	35.0	0.48	30.3	0.46
Protestant Evangelical	47.8	0.50	45.1	0.50	49.7	0.50
Protestant	8.5	0.28	7.9	0.27	8.9	0.28
Religion Non-Christian	2.0	0.14	2.1	0.14	1.8	0.13
No Religion Atheist/Agnostic	9.5	0.29	9.8	0.30	9.2	0.30
<b>Household Structure</b>						
Both Biological Parents	75.3	0.43	72.7	0.44	77.2	0.42
Biological mother and Stepfather	16.0	0.37	17.6	0.38	15.0	0.36
Single Mother	2.7	0.16	3.2	0.18	2.3	0.15
Single Father	0.6	0.08	1.2	0.11	0.2	0.05
Other	5.3	0.22	5.3	0.22	5.3	0.22
<b>Gross Family Income</b>						
Low	19.7	0.40	22.3	0.42	17.8	0.38
Medium	33.7	0.47	34.0	0.47	33.5	0.47
High	46.6	0.50	43.7	0.50	48.7	0.50
<b>Parent's Education</b>						
Does not have a BA	65.5	0.47	67.1	0.47	64.3	0.48
Has a BA	34.5	47.5	33.0	0.47	35.7	0.48
<b>Respondent's Education</b>						
Less than High School	13.6	0.34	15.2	0.36	12.4	0.33
High School	22.5	0.42	21.4	0.41	23.4	0.42
Some College	25.6	0.44	25.0	0.43	26.1	0.44
Four or more years of College	38.2	0.49	38.3	0.49	38.1	0.49

Table 2

Table 2: Chi Square Test

Variable	Not Married	Married	Significance Level
	n=926 Percentage (%)	n=1, 292 Percentage (%)	
<b>Openness</b>			
Low	25.0	24.6	
Medium	29.4	31.4	
High	45.7	44.0	p>0.05
<b>Conscientiousness</b>			
Low	38.8	29.4	
Medium	30.0	32.5	
High	31.3	38.0	p<0.001
<b>Extraversion</b>			
Low	26.2	19.7	
Medium	41.2	39.3	
High	32.5	40.9	p<0.001
<b>Agreeableness</b>			
Low	28.0	23.1	
Medium	34.0	35.6	
High	38.0	42.3	p<0.05
<b>Neuroticism</b>			
Low	32.0	35.7	
Medium	25.3	29.1	
High	42.8	35.2	p<0.01
<b>Familial Religiosity</b>			
Low	35.6	34.1	
Medium	42.4	40.6	
High	22.0	25.2	p>0.05

Kaplan Meir Curves

Figure 1

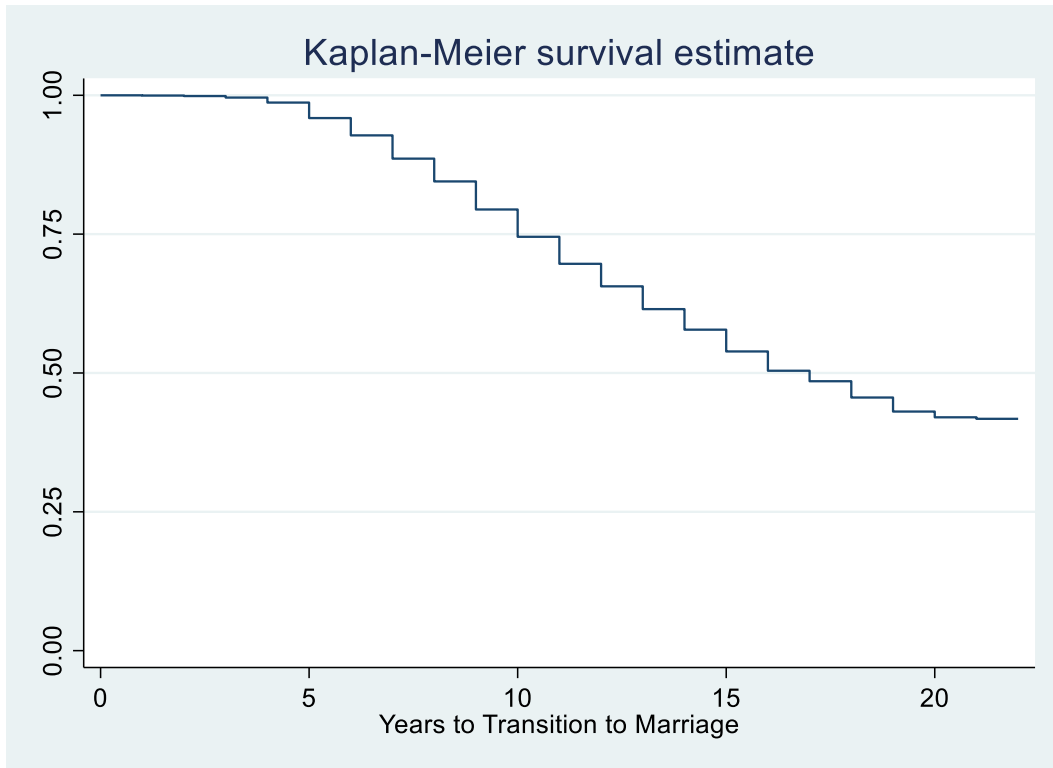


Figure 2

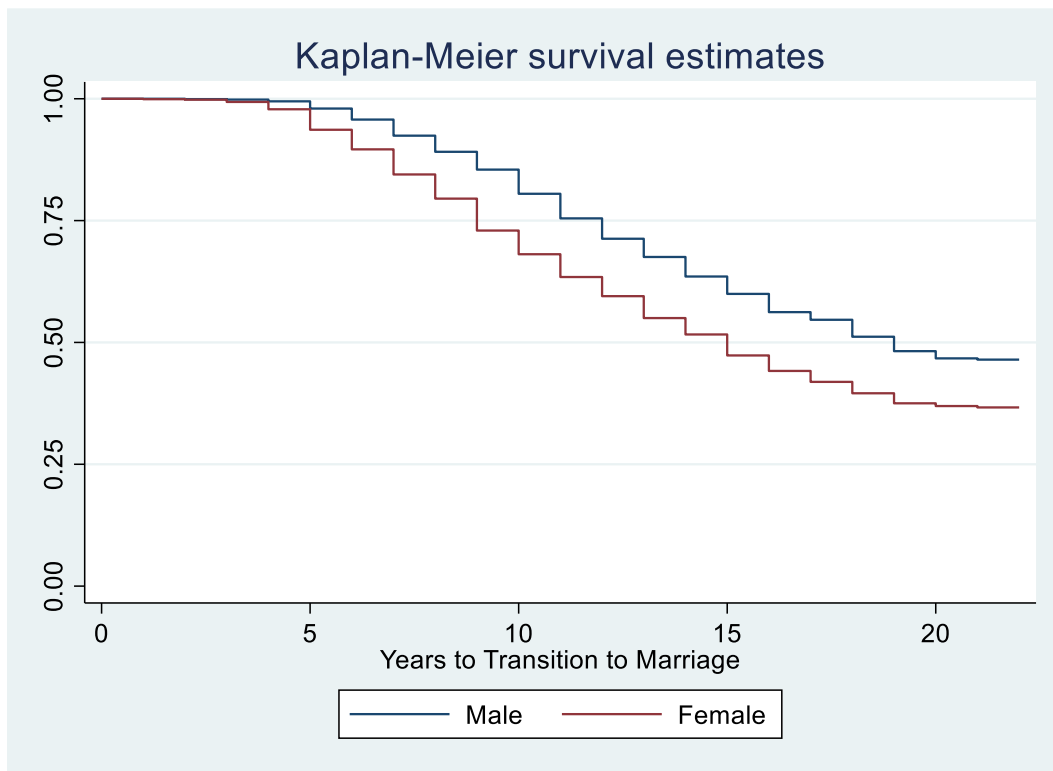


Table 3

Table 3: Logistic Regression by Entry to First Marriage, n= 2, 218

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
Openness						
Medium	0.94	0.07	0.93	0.07	0.90	0.07
High	0.81**	0.06	0.82**	0.06	0.86	0.06
Conscientiousness						
Medium	1.23**	0.09	1.20*	0.09	1.17*	0.09
High	1.32***	0.09	1.29***	0.09	1.30***	0.10
Extraversion						
Medium	1.14	0.09	1.17	0.09	1.12	0.09
High	1.43***	0.11	1.41***	0.11	1.29**	0.11
Agreeableness						
Medium	1.15	0.09	1.13	0.09	1.08	0.08
High	1.2*	0.09	1.16*	0.09	1.10	0.09
Neuroticism						
Medium	1.05	0.08	1.05	0.08	1.05	0.08
High	0.92	0.07	0.93	0.07	0.93	0.07
Familial Religiosity						
Medium	0.96	0.06	0.94	0.07	1.04	0.08
High	1.14	0.09	1.07	0.09	1.18*	0.07
Age	3.51***	0.23	3.11***	0.22	3.19***	0.22
Age <sup>2</sup>	0.98***	0.00	0.98***	0.00	0.98***	0.00
Respondent's Religion						
Protestant Evangelical			1.22**	0.08	1.38***	0.11
Protestant			1.24	0.14	1.25	0.14
Religion Non-Christian			0.93	0.20	0.97	0.22
No religion atheist/agnostic			1.13	0.13	1.27*	0.15
Household Structure						
Biological mother and stepfather			0.89	0.07	0.97	0.08
Single mother			0.84	0.16	0.92	0.18
Single father			0.29*	0.17	0.39	0.23
Other			1.02	0.13	1.19	0.16
Gross Family Income						
Medium			1.00	0.09	0.99	0.09
High			1.01	0.09	0.92	0.08
Parent's Education = has BA			0.85*	0.06	0.83**	0.06
Respondent's Education						
Less than high School			0.70***	0.07	0.69***	0.07
Some College			1.18	0.07	0.90	0.08
Four or more years of College			1.26**	0.12	1.20*	0.10
Female					1.34***	0.08
Citizen					0.78	0.13



Race			
Black		0.42***	0.04
Hispanic		0.97	0.09
Mixed non-Hispanic		1.08	0.36
Region			
North Central		1.51***	0.14
South		1.40***	0.13
West		1.41***	0.14
Urban =lives in urban area		0.88	0.06
Log Likelihood	-5144.38	-5115.57	-5043.84
R <sup>2</sup>	6.57%	7.10%	8.40%
*** $p < 0.001$ ; ** $p < 0.01$ ; * $p < 0.05$			

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