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Brian J. Willoughby¹ and Scott S. Hall²

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Abstract

Utilizing a sample of 571 college students, we examined the varying marital paradigms held by emerging adults. Drawing on Marital Paradigm Theory, we explored how beliefs about Marital Salience, timing, process, context, permanence, and centrality created unique paradigms about marriage. We found evidence that emerging adults can be separated into at least three marital paradigms, labeled Enthusiast, Delayer, and Hesitant. We found that most emerging adults hold a Hesitant marital paradigm highlighted by a strong belief in the importance of marriage and a desire to marry but a general belief in the lack of Marital Permanence and a hesitation to marry quickly. Other results suggested that marital paradigms are linked to demographic characteristics such as age and religiosity and also linked to risk-taking behaviors, particularly alcohol use and binge drinking rates. Specifically, those emerging adults who held an Enthusiast paradigm reported less alcohol or binge drinking compared to those in the Hesitant class.

Keywords

marital attitudes, marital beliefs, marital paradigms, marriage, young adulthood, emerging adulthood

For nearly the past half century, union formation and dissolution trends during the third decade of life have become more diverse and challenging to understand (Sassler, 2010). Marriage is now typically delayed well into the late 20s for both men and women (Johnson & Dye, 2005) and a growing proportion of the young adult population remains never married (Wilcox & Marquardt, 2011). What is often labeled as “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2000) is a period of extended identity and relational exploration that is markedly different from previous generations. Typically conceptualized as the time period between the ages of 18 and 25 (Arnett, 2000), these shifting demographic and relational trends have allowed emerging adulthood to be a time period largely navigated outside of the context of marriage (Carroll et al., 2007).

Despite the apparent disconnect between the emerging adulthood period and marital formation, research indicates that emerging adults have not necessarily abandoned the institution of marriage. Although marital transitions may often be delayed compared to previous generations, most current emerging adults will eventually marry by the time they reach the age of 40 (Settersten & Ray, 2010) and marriage remains a tangible, sought-after goal for most (Cherlin, 2009). With marriage still an important yet distant goal for many emerging adults, scholars have increasingly focused on how beliefs, values, and attitudes toward this future goal may influence individual and relational development during emerging adulthood (Carroll et al., 2007; Willoughby, Hall, & Luczak, 2013). Such research has shown that emerging adults not only value marriage but

that the differing conceptualizations they hold about marriage correlate with variations in dating behavior and attitudes (Crissey, 2005; Willoughby & Carroll, 2012), risk-taking behavior (Carroll et al., 2007; Clark, Poulin, & Kohler, 2009), and eventual union formation decisions (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, & Waite, 1995; Thornton, Axinn, & Xie, 2007).

Despite this scholarship, few studies to date have sought to holistically and empirically capture the differing ways that emerging adults may think about marriage. While scholars have consistently argued that marital beliefs are likely multifaceted (Hall, 2006), previous studies have often only attempted to understand specific elements of an individual’s marital beliefs. As noted by Willoughby (2010), “most studies that do focus on marital attitudes typically rely on one or two item measures of a single construct that represent an eclectic variety of different marital attitudes” (p. 1306). This has led to the discussion of emerging adults holding either “positive” or “negative” (Mosko & Pistole, 2010) or in some cases “traditional” or “nontraditional” (Carroll et al., 2007; Wilcox & Dew, 2010) views of marriage without acknowledging the possibility that

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emerging adults' views of marriage are likely more diverse than these dichotomies suggest. To date, no study has explored how the combination of various marital beliefs, what some scholars have called marital paradigms (Willoughby et al., 2013), may provide a more complex understanding of the link between marital beliefs and emerging adult behavior.

The purpose of the present study was to address this gap by providing results from a preliminary study assessing multiple aspects of emerging adults' conceptualization of marriage with a goal to both find common themes in these beliefs and explore how such variations in marital belief combinations might be associated with differing behavioral patterns and background factors. We explored how these differing marital belief combinations were associated with demographic backgrounds, beliefs about other areas of an individual's life, and current behavioral patterns to provide a complete picture of how marital beliefs are situated within emerging adulthood.

Marital Beliefs and Emerging Adulthood

While marital belief scholarship has had a long history in the fields of psychology, family science, and sociology, scholarly interest in the topic of marital beliefs has increased in the last decade as several scholars have argued that in a union formation landscape of delayed marriage, beliefs about marriage should become a more important variable of interest among developmental and family scholars (Carroll et al., 2007). Beliefs about marriage among emerging adults have long been tied to previous experiences with family and other familial contexts. Previous research has suggested that individuals who hold more positive marital beliefs are more likely to be religious (Carroll et al., 2007; Dollahite, Hawkins, & Parr, 2012; Gubernskaya, 2010; Kaufman, & Goldscheider, 2007), come from married parents (Burgoyne & Hames, 2002; Cunningham, & Thronton, 2007), and be younger (Carroll et al., 2007).

Research has also suggested links between marital beliefs and future decision making. This includes studies suggesting that marital beliefs are associated with eventual transitions to both cohabitation and marriage (Clarkberg et al., 1995; Goldscheider, Kaufman, & Sassler, 2009; Hoffnung, 2004).

If marital beliefs influence long-term union transitions, they likely influence short-term decision making. Along these lines, scholars have shown that beliefs about the importance of marriage, Marital Timing, and eventual gender roles within marriage have associations with behaviors such as the likelihood of drinking (Carroll et al., 2007) and premarital sexual behavior (Clark et al., 2009; Salts & Seismore, 1994; Simons, Burt, & Tambling, 2013). Such marital beliefs are also associated with beliefs about childbearing and have been shown to impact marital childbearing rates (Barber, 2001).

Collectively, this body of research has shown evidence that specific marital beliefs are associated with a wide variety of short-term and long-term decision making. However, to date this research has exclusively focused on linking specific types of marital beliefs (i.e., expected timing and importance) to various outcome variables. However, the *combinations* of various

marital beliefs and the associations between these combinations and behaviors are untapped areas of potential scholarship. As previously noted, most literature exploring marital beliefs among emerging adults have implicitly assumed that emerging adults hold beliefs that are either positive or negative regarding marriage or regarding a specific element of marital beliefs. For example, while previous research has shown that later versus early beliefs about Marital Timing (Clark et al., 2009) and high versus low marital importance (Carroll et al., 2007) are related to emerging adult risk taking, scholars have not explored how combinations of both expected Marital Timing and marital importance might provide a better understanding of associations between marital beliefs and risk taking. For many emerging adults, these beliefs do not likely exist in isolation of each other nor are they likely perfectly correlated. While we might expect that an emerging adult who places high importance on marriage would have an earlier expected age of marriage, another emerging adult with positive beliefs about marriage might seek to delay marriage in order to obtain an education and have more resources to devote to that marriage. These interconnections between types of marital beliefs likely speak to a deeper meaning attributed to marriage as a whole (Willoughby et al., 2013).

While no definite claim to a typology of marital beliefs currently exists, some scholars have offered suggestions to how emerging adults may differ in their collective marital beliefs. Shulman and Connolly (2013) suggested that many emerging adults hold pessimistic views of marriage "characterized by a postponement of marriage and involvement in unstable relationships" (p. 30). This might suggest a combination of beliefs related to a later expected age of marriage, a negative appraisal of the marital institution generally, and a valuing of education and career over marriage. Park and Rosen (2013) recently found while developing a General Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale that three dimensions of beliefs emerged; one positive, one negative, and one that captures fears and doubt about marriage generally. Recent qualitative evidence also suggests that multiple marital belief sets exist among emerging adults (Kefalas, Furstenberg, Carr, & Napolitano, 2011). Kefalas and colleagues identified at least two unique types of emerging adults (marriage naturalists and marriage planners) based on their distinct views of marriage with most emerging adults holding a marriage planner mind-set that involved valuing marriage but desiring to carefully plan marriage in conjunction with other life goals. Marriage naturalists conversely move quickly and seamlessly into marriage and believe that marriage is the enviable outcome of committed relationships. Finally, Hall (2006) identified three groups of emerging adults based solely on how they viewed the marital institution in terms of the importance of romance, role hierarchy, mutuality, and self-fulfillment in marriage. This collection of studies suggests that emerging adults may be grouped into like-minded categories based on their marital beliefs. However, these studies have still utilized only a small subset of measurement to explore marital beliefs, and none of them explored how these combinations may be linked with emerging adult decision making.

Theoretical Foundations

Willoughby, Hall, and Luczak (2013) recently offered a holistic conceptual framework for understanding how individuals think about marriage. They argued that each individual holds a “marital paradigm” which is comprised of both beliefs about getting and beliefs about being married. One’s marital paradigm is theorized to be comprised of six dimensions labeled Marital Timing, Marital Salience, Marital Context, Marital Process, Marital Permanence, and Marital Centrality. Marital Timing captures beliefs about the ideal and expected timing of marriage, while Marital Salience captures beliefs about the relative and overall importance of marriage and being married. Beliefs about marital context include beliefs regarding the context that marriage should occur within. For example, these are beliefs about when couples are ready for marriage, specific religious requirements needed prior to marriage, beliefs about ideal wedding contexts, and beliefs about marriage readiness. Marital Process beliefs are those regarding what marriage should be like, including beliefs about gender roles and other relational process behaviors in marriage. Finally, Marital Centrality involves beliefs about the importance of the marital/spousal role in relation to other adult roles once married while Marital Permanence captures beliefs about commitment to marriage and acceptability of divorce.

Relevant to the present study, Willoughby and colleagues further argued one’s marital paradigm, or the collective way one thinks about marriage, is not determined by only one of these dimensions but the unique combinations of beliefs across the six proposed dimensions. These collective beliefs were theorized to influence individuals’ intentions to engage in certain individual and relational behaviors and thus will direct their behaviors before, during, and after the marital transition. The term “intention” here is meant to “describe a specific inclination to engage in a behavior, similar to previous conceptualizations of the term attitude” (Willoughby et al., 2013, p. 17). One’s marital paradigm was then theorized to influence the specific inclinations an individual has on a daily basis.

As a framework designed to help describe one’s marital paradigm, Marital Paradigm Theory is utilized in this study as the underlying framework used to assess emerging adult’s marital beliefs. To date, no empirical measurement of all six dimensions of one’s marital paradigm has been undertaken. With the goal of exploring whether emerging adults held more than positive/negative representations of marriage, this study utilized measurement on all six dimensions along with mixture modeling to understand whether emerging adults might be grouped into common paradigms and how emerging adults differ from each other on their collective marital paradigms. While little previous scholarship exists which would allow for the estimation of what types of groups may emerge from this type of analysis, scholars do generally agree that many emerging adults have similar collections of beliefs. As previously mentioned, many scholars agree that most emerging adults hold positive beliefs about marriage yet prioritize elements such as education and work during this period of their life

(Shulman & Connolly, 2013) and that many emerging adults are balancing work goals and relational goals (Kefalas et al., 2011; Shulman & Nurmi, 2010). Other scholars have argued some emerging adults may be fearful of marriage leading to an ambivalent set of marital beliefs (Park & Rosen, 2013). Even if these assumptions about most emerging adults are correct, it is unknown what collection of marital beliefs such emerging adults would have.

Hypotheses

Based on previous scholarship, we present one research question and two hypotheses to be explored in this study. While some previous studies have suggested the multiple groups of emerging adults may exist based on marital beliefs (Hall, 2006; Kefalas et al., 2011), this preliminary investigation is the first to explore such groups across assessments of multiple dimensions of marital beliefs. We begin by addressing the following general research question related to classifying emerging adults based on their marital beliefs:

Research Question 1: Are marital beliefs of emerging adults (that are assessed along a variety of dimensions) organized in coherent marital paradigms that transcend a positive versus negative orientation divide?

We addressed this question using multiple assessments of marital beliefs across the six dimensions of Marital Paradigm Theory.

We further explored what kinds of paradigms might be identified and how such paradigms might be associated with both background differences and current behaviors. As noted, previous research has often distinguished between emerging adults who hold “traditional” beliefs about marriage and those who hold more “liberal” views of marriage (Wilcox & Dew, 2010) and we adopt this terminology here. In this study, traditional beliefs include beliefs about marrying younger, marrying with the expectation of more traditional gender roles, and placing more importance on marriage. Based on previous research suggesting differences based on demographic factors such as age, religiosity, and parental marital status (Burgoyne & Hames, 2002; Carroll et al., 2007), we propose the following specific hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Emerging adults who are younger, more religious, and come from currently married parents will hold a more traditional paradigm regarding marriage compared to others.

Additionally, previous scholarship has suggested that more traditional marital beliefs are associated with less risk-taking behavior (Carroll et al., 2007) but more engagement in sexual and dating behavior (Clark et al., 2009; Crissey, 2005). Given these findings, we also propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Emerging adults who hold a more traditional paradigm regarding marriage will engage in less binge

drinking, alcohol use, and drug use but engage in more sexual and dating behavior than emerging adults with less traditional beliefs about marriage.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample for this study consisted of 571 unmarried emerging adults from a large public university in the Midwest. Students were undergraduates who were included in a university-wide research pool and were sent an e-mail from the research team inviting them to participate in a study on marital beliefs. This research pool included students across campus although students had the option of “opting out” of receiving e-mails. The total number of students in the research pool was not available from the university. However, demographic distributions on age, race, and religious affiliation in the sample mirrored that of the university as a whole, suggesting at least partial evidence that the current sample may be an adequate representation of the university. Participants were given a brief description of the study and asked to follow a link to an online survey. If students agreed to participate and followed the link, they were given additional information on the study and asked to indicate informed consent before proceeding to the survey itself. Once participants had completed the survey, they were thanked for their time and entered into a random drawing for a series of US\$50 gift cards. All aspects of study design and data collection were approved by the institutional review board at all authors’ universities.

The sample was primarily female (75%) and White (90%). The average age was 20.82 ($SD = 3.53$). Almost half (48%) of participants labeled themselves as “Christian,” while 16% labeled themselves as Roman Catholic. Most individuals in the sample reported that their parents were still married (69%). Seventy-two percent of the sample reported being in some form of current romantic relationship. Over half of the participants were currently employed, while the majority (90%) labeled themselves as heterosexual. The grade point average was 3.26 ($SD = .31$), and 69% reported that their parent’s combined income exceeded US\$50,000 per year. Only 3% of the sample reported any children, See Table 1 for a full summary of sample demographics.

Measures

Beliefs about getting married. In line with Marital Paradigm Theory (Willoughby et al., 2013), we assessed beliefs about both getting and being married.¹ First, we assessed three dimensions of beliefs about getting married. Two single items were used to assess *Marital Timing*. One asked all participants “At what age do you expect to marry?” while a second asked “What is the ideal age for someone to get married?” *Marital Salience* was assessed by averaging responses on 6 items ($\alpha = .85$). These items included “Getting married is more important to me than having a successful career,” “Getting married is more important than my educational pursuits and achievements,” “Getting

Table 1. Sample Demographics Including Means, Standard Deviations, and Proportions of Total Sample.

Variable	n (%)	M	SD
Gender			
Male	140 (25%)		
Female	426 (75%)		
Age		20.82	3.53
Relationship status			
Single	159 (28%)		
Casual relationship	86 (15%)		
Committed relationship	258 (45%)		
Engaged	68 (12%)		
Cohabiting history			
Ever cohabited	80.3%		
Never cohabited	19.7%		
Race			
White	513 (90%)		
African American	22 (4%)		
Latino	12 (2%)		
Other	23 (4%)		
Sexual orientation			
Heterosexual	509 (90%)		
Homosexual/bisexual	60 (10%)		
Virgin status			
Yes	355 (62%)		
No	213 (38%)		
Employment status			
Yes	306 (54%)		
No	264 (46%)		
Religious affiliation			
Christian	274 (48%)		
Roman catholic	90 (16%)		
Atheist	32 (6%)		
No affiliation	71 (12%)		
Other	104 (18%)		
Parents’ marital status			
Married	391 (68%)		
Not married	180 (32%)		
Parent’s income ^a		5.23	2.29
Religiosity ^b		2.80	1.10
Number of children		.06	.127
GPA		3.26	.315

Note. GPA = grade point average.

^aAssessed on a scale from 1 to 8.

^bAssessed on a scale from 1 to 4.

married is among my top priorities during this time in my life,” “All in all, there are more advantages to being single than to being married (reverse coded),” “Getting married is a very important goal for me,” and “I would like to be married now.” Agreement with these items was measured on a 6-point scale (1 = *very strongly disagree* and 6 = *very strongly agree*). Finally, two items were used to assess beliefs regarding the wedding context. Participants were asked their agreement with the following two statements on a 6-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 6 = *strongly agree*): “Having an expensive and elaborate wedding is very important to me” and “The location of my wedding is extremely important to me.” These items tap into beliefs about the context under which marriage should take

place, thus tapping into one element of beliefs about *Marital Context*.

Beliefs about being married. The three dimensions for beliefs about being married were also assessed. First, a single-item assessment, adapted from a measure developed by Kerpelman and Schvaneveldt (1999), was used to assess part of the *Marital Centrality* dimension. Participants were asked to indicate how much importance they expected to place on the following aspects of their life in the future: marriage, parenting, career, and personal leisure/hobbies. Participants were asked to assign a percentage importance to each of these four areas with the total adding to 100%. The percentage of importance placed on marriage was utilized in this study as a continuous measure and allowed for an assessment of the relative centrality of one's future marital role compared to other adult roles and obligations. In addition to this item, we assessed an alternative components of *Marital Centrality*—overall importance of their future role as spouse (3 items; $\alpha = .74$) utilizing a 6-point scale (1 = *not true at all* and 6 = *very true*). The 3 items are as follows: “A person's marriage should take priority over individual goals,” “Having a successful marriage is more important to me than having a successful career,” and “Having a successful marriage is one of the most important accomplishments you can have in life.”

The next two scales included items used previously to measure a variety of marital beliefs (Hall, 2006), all of which represent the *Marital Process* aspect of Marital Paradigms. Both scales utilized the same 6-point scale as previous items. Three items were used to assess *marital roles*, namely beliefs about gender roles in marriage ($\alpha = .85$). These items were “In an ideal marriage, the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home,” “Husbands should have the final say when there are disagreements about the family,” and “Wives should have most of the say with decisions about housework and childcare.” The average of these items was computed with higher numbers indicating a stronger belief in more traditional gender roles within a marriage. Another aspect of Marital Process—*marital effort* was assessed by averaging two items aimed at assessing the perceived effort that marriage would entail ($r = .45, p < .001$). The items included “Happy marriages require hard work” and “If you have to work hard to make your marriage happy, it's not a good marriage (reverse coded).”

Marital Permanence was assessed by averaging 3 items ($\alpha = .82$), each assessed on the same 6-point scale (1 = *not true at all* and 6 = *very true*). These items included “Personal happiness is more important than putting up with a bad marriage (reverse coded),” “It is okay to divorce when a person's needs are no longer met (reverse coded),” and “Marriage is for life, even if the couple is unhappy.” Higher scores indicated greater belief in Marital Permanence.

We note that some constructs utilized single-item measures. While not ideal, previous research has suggested that some single-item assessments of marital beliefs provide robust measurement and strong predictive ability (Carroll et al., 2007). In

addition, to test the validity of our multiple item scales and the proposed factor loadings for assessments using multiple items, we entered all marital belief items from our five multi-item scales (Marital Salience, Marital Centrality, marital roles, marital effort, and Marital Permanence) into an exploratory factor analysis to see if five factors emerged. Principle axis factoring with varimax rotation was utilized. Results suggested a four-, not five-factor structure (full results not presented here but available from the first author upon request). Examination of the rotated factor loadings revealed that this was due to the Marital Centrality items cross loading on the Marital Salience factor and 1 item (“a person's marriage should take priority over individual goals”) cross loading on three factors. Based on these results, this single item was dropped and the remaining Marital Salience and Marital Centrality items were combined into one factor labeled marital importance comprising eight items. These remaining items were then subjected to a confirmatory factor analyses to confirm the structure of the measurement items. This measurement model suggested adequate measurement fit, $\chi^2(90) = 319.45, p < .001$; root mean square error of approximation = .06; comparative fit index = .95; standardized root mean square residual = .05. We also examined each individual item and scale for normality and outliers. All items and scales appeared to be normally distributed based on these initial analyses.

Behavioral/attitudinal measures. Several assessments of current behaviors and attitudes were assessed. All were assessed on the same 5-point scale asking participants how often they participated in each behavior during the last month. The scale ranged from 0 (*none*) to 5 (*every day or almost every day*). Behaviors assessed included “engage in sexual intercourse,” “engage in sexual behaviors other than intercourse (such as fondling or oral sex),” “View pornography (online or offline, such as movies, websites, magazines, and/or strip clubs),” “Drink alcohol,” and “Engage in binge drinking (drinking 4–5 drinks in one occasion).”

Permissive sexual attitudes were assessed by averaging 3 items ($\alpha = .78$). These items included “It is all right for two people to get together for sex and not necessarily expect anything further,” “It is better if two married people begin their sexual experience with each other (reverse coded),” and “It is all right for two people to have sexual intercourse before marriage.” Responses ranged from 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 6 (*very strongly agree*).

Attitudes toward cohabitation and child centeredness were assessed using scales utilized in previous scholarship on beliefs (see Carroll et al., 2007). Attitudes toward cohabitation ($\alpha = .84$) were assessed by averaging 3 items based on the same 6-point agreement scale as sexual permissiveness. These 3 items were the following: “Living together first is a good way of testing how workable a couple's marriage would be,” “It is all right for an unmarried couple to live together as long as they have plans to marry,” and “It is all right for a couple to live together without planning to get married.” Finally, child centeredness was assessed by averaging 3 items (same 6-point scale;

$\alpha = .89$). These items included “Having children is a very important goal for me,” “Being a mother and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a woman can have,” and “Being a father and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a woman can have.”

Demographics and controls. Several control variables were utilized due to their previously established relationships with both marital beliefs and dependent variables. These included gender (coded male = 0), age, currently in relationship (0 = *not currently in a relationship* and 1 = *in a relationship*), engagement status (coded 0 = *not engaged* and 1 = *engaged*), and race (coded 0 = *White* and 1 = *non-White*). Cohabiting history was assessed with 1 item asking participants to indicate how many romantic partners they had ever lived with. Participants who indicated any previous or current cohabiting partner were coded as 1 (0 indicating *no cohabiting history*). Sexual orientation was also coded and controlled for (0 = *heterosexual* and 1 = *not heterosexual*). Virginal status was controlled for and was assessed by asking participants how many sexual partners (either committed or noncommitted) they have had in their lifetime. This information was used to code a dichotomous variable where those who indicated no previous sexual partners were coded as “0,” and those with any sexual experience were coded as “1.” Employment status was based on if participants reported any paid employment. This variable was coded 0 (*no paid employment*) or 1 (*any paid employment*). Religiosity was measured by averaging 3 items, “I look to my faith as providing meaning and purpose in my life,” “My faith is an important part of who I am as a person,” and “My relationship with God is extremely important to me.” Agreement with these statements was assessed on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 4 = *strongly agree*). Internal consistency was acceptable ($\alpha = .97$). Parent’s current marital status was assessed as 0 (*married*) or 1 (*not married*). This item asked participants to report their parents’ current marital status among several options including never married, widowed, divorced, or married. Parental income was assessed with 1 item (0 = *none*; 1 = *US\$5,000–US\$14,999*; 2 = *US\$15,000–US\$29,999*; 3 = *US\$30,000–US\$49,999*; 4 = *US\$50,000–US\$74,999*; 5 = *US\$75,000–US\$100,000*; 6 = *US\$100,001–US\$249,000*; and 7 = *over US\$250,000*) asking “to the best of your knowledge, what is your parents’ (combined) yearly income before taxes and deductions?”

Data Analysis Plan

Data analyses took place in several steps. First, all single items and scales assessing marital paradigms were entered into a latent class mixture model to determine how classes of emerging adults might form within the data set based on responses to marital paradigm assessments. Sequential latent class models were tested starting with two classes and progressing to six classes. Latent class solutions of two to six classes were explored and model fit indices were examined to determine the best fitting model (see Table 2). When deciding on the proper

Table 2. Model Fit Statistics and Sample Cell Sizes for Marital Paradigm Latent Classes of Two to Four Classes.

	Latent Classes		
	2	3	4
BIC	20,780	20,463	20,353
AIC	20,658	20,298	20,144
Adjusted LMR	675.31*	374.12	171.08
Entropy	0.769	0.829	0.867
<i>n</i> per class			
1	374	55	54
2	197	183	184
3	—	333	331
4	—	—	2

Note. BIC = Bayesian information criterion; AIC = Akaike information criterion; LMR = Lo-Mendell-Rubin.

* $p < .05$.

latent class solutions, several fit indices were utilized including Bayesian information criterion (BIC), Akaike information criterion (AIC), adjusted Lo-Mendell-Rubin (LMR), and entropy values. Model fit is determined by finding a model where BIC and AIC values are minimized, adjusted LMR values are non-significant, and entropy values approach one (Celeux & Soromenho, 1996; Nylund, Asparouhov, & Muthen, 2007).

After the optimal number of classes was determined, marital paradigm class was utilized in multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and multiple analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) models to assess mean differences by class on demographic and background factors as well as current behavioral and attitudinal variables. Models assessing behavior and attitudinal differences controlled for background factors include gender, parent’s marital status, sexual orientation, religiosity, parents’ income, virgin status, relationship status, employment status, and age. These models were used to determine whether mean differences may be attributed to paradigm classes or underlying individual factors. Given previous research suggesting that marital beliefs and their correlates may differ by gender (Carroll et al., 2007; Willoughby & Dworkin, 2009), gender interactions were also tested and when significant were subjected to post hoc simple slope analyses (Aiken & West, 1991). All data were assumed to be missing at random and no variable in the study had more than 2% missing data. Preliminary analyses suggested that those with missing data did not differ from those with complete data on several background factors.

Results

Paradigm Typologies

We first ran latent class analyses including assessment on all six dimensions of marital paradigms which included four scales (marital importance, Marital Permanence, marital effort, and marital roles) as well as five additional single-item measures of marital beliefs (see Table 3 for a summary of items included

Table 3. Summary of Final Measurement for Assessments of All Six Dimensions of Marital Beliefs Based on Marital Paradigm Theory and Means and Standard Deviations on Marital Paradigm Assessments for Three Marital Paradigm Classes.

Construct	# of items	Scale	α	Paradigm Class		
				Enthusiast ($n = 183$)	Hesitant ($n = 333$)	Delayer ($n = 55$)
1. Marital Timing						
Ideal age of marriage	1	0–50		24.20 ^a (3.13)	25.63 ^b (1.87)	30.13 ^c (4.76)
Expected age of marriage	1	0–50		23.94 ^a (2.21)	26.07 ^b (2.70)	35.15 ^c (5.55)
2. Marital Salience						
Overall importance of marriage	8 ^a	1–6	.87	3.87 ^a (.611)	2.83 ^b (.644)	1.62 ^c (.491)
3. Marital Context						
Expensive wedding	1	1–6		2.47 ^a (1.12)	2.24 ^a (1.04)	1.65 ^b (1.09)
Importance of wedding location	1	1–6		3.98 ^a (1.20)	3.95 ^a (1.29)	2.80 ^b (1.57)
4. Marital Centrality						
Relative centrality of spousal role	1	0–100		38.65 ^a (9.85)	27.60 ^b (7.83)	15.07 ^c (10.87)
5. Marital Process						
Gender role expectations	3	1–6	.85	3.13 ^a (1.22)	2.05 ^b (1.08)	1.42 ^c (.828)
Perceived effort of being married	2	1–6	.45 ^b	5.42 ^a (.718)	4.87 ^b (.997)	4.70 ^b (1.18)
6. Marital Permanence						
General belief in permanence	3	1–6	.82	4.78 ^a (.985)	2.89 ^b (1.01)	2.14 ^c (1.02)

Note. CFA = confirmatory factor analysis; EFA = exploratory factor analysis. Standard deviations in parentheses. Different superscripts represent means which significantly differed ($p < .05$).

^aFinal combination of Marital Salience items and 2 items assessing general Marital Centrality based on EFA and CFA results.

^bCorrelation coefficient.

and which items/scales corresponded to each of the six dimensions). Single-item assessments included items assessing ideal and expected age of marriage, both items assessing wedding context, and the item assessing Marital Centrality. Model fit indices can be found in Table 2. Optimal model fit was derived by exploring multiple fit indices as well as theoretical considerations such as class size and interpretability. For our sample, BIC and AIC values decreased from the two-class to the six-class solution although most major declines were found up until the four-class solution, suggesting that the addition of a second, third, and fourth class improved the overall model fit. Adjusted LMR values were significant with the two-class solution (adjusted LMR = 675.31, $p = .037$), suggesting that the two-class solution offered a better fitting model than the one-class solution. However, the adjusted LMR values for our three-class solution were not significant (adjusted LMR = 374.12, $p = .063$), suggesting that LMR values did not suggest the three-class solution was a significantly better fitting model. Entropy values peaked in the four-class solution (entropy = .867) before decreasing, suggesting that the four-class solution was optimal.

Overall, three fit indices (AIC, BIC, and entropy) suggested a four-class solution was the best fit for our data while one index (adjusted LMR) suggested a two-class solution. Therefore, a four-class solution was initially selected as the best fit for our data. However, a closer visual examination of the four-class solution revealed a probable class membership of only two individuals in one of the four classes. This suggested that one of the four classes was not practically meaningful. Based on this information, the three-class model was determined to be the best solution for the data as this was the solution that optimized the best fit based on three of our four

indices (AIC, BIC, and entropy) and also producing meaningful class differences. To further validate this solution, the sample was randomly split in half and a similar LCA was conducted on each half of the data. Results (available from the first author upon request) mirrored results for the full sample and each half of the data suggested a three-class solution was the best fit. Individuals in the data set were assigned to one of the three classes based on their generated probability of class membership.

Descriptive Results

Table 3 summarizes means and standard deviations across the three paradigm classes. As noted in the table, we labeled these three paradigm groups Enthusiast, Delayer, and Hesitant. Enthusiasts ($n = 183$; 32%) included emerging adults who collectively expressed the mostly positive beliefs about marriage and an eagerness to transition to marriage. We labeled the Enthusiast group to capture their commitment to marriage and their strong desire to engage in the dating and marital transition process. As a group, Enthusiasts placed the most importance and permanence on marriage. They also expressed a stronger belief that marriage would require effort and adhered to traditional marital gender roles more than those in other groups. In terms of timing, they also believed in the shortest timetable toward marriage. Enthusiasts also reported the youngest ideal and expected age of marriage. Interestingly, this was the only group which reported a younger expected age of marriage ($M = 23.93$) than ideal ($M = 24.20$) although this difference was not significant ($p = .29$). All other differences were statistically significant ($p < .05$). While this group placed the most importance on their wedding (in terms of location and price), these

differences with other groups were small compared to other indicators and significantly differed from the Delayer group.

The smallest group fell on the other end of the spectrum, a group we labeled Delayer ($n = 55$; 10%) to capture their general desire to delay (or possibly avoid) marital transitions. This group reported an expected age of marriage that was almost a decade later than the other two groups (although they also expressed the most variation as a group). They also generally placed less importance and permanence on marriage compared to the other two groups, reported less belief that marriage required effort compared to the Enthusiast class and were the least traditional as a group in terms of their belief in marital gender roles. Again, all these differences were statistically significant ($p < .05$). Results suggested that this group deprioritized marriage compared to other life goals.

The final group was our largest group ($n = 333$) and represented over half (58%) of the sample. We labeled this group Hesitant to capture what appeared to be a general ambiguity or hesitation regarding marriage. This group reported means on marital importance, marital effort, marital roles, ideal length of dating, and the proportion of importance placed on the marital role, which were in between the other groups. In other ways, they trended toward the Enthusiast group, suggesting that marriage was a priority in their life. For example, those in the Hesitant group reported an ideal age of marriage ($M = 25.63$) relatively close, although significantly different, to those in the Enthusiast group ($M = 24.20$). However, unlike those in the Enthusiast group, who expected to marry before this ideal, those in the Hesitant group expected to bypass this ideal and marry later ($M = 26.07$), and this difference was significant, $t(331) = 2.52$, $p = .01$. Part of this hesitancy about marriage may be in the permanence they placed on marital relationships. Those in the Hesitant group ($M = 2.89$) scored more closely as a group to those in the Delayer group ($M = 2.14$) compared to the Enthusiast group ($M = 3.78$) on measures of Marital Permanence although, again, all three classes significantly differed. In other words, those in the Hesitant group appeared to value marriage and expect to marry but were more hesitant about the permanence of marriage and expect to marry later than what they thought would be ideal.

Paradigms and Demographics

We next sought to explore demographic and background differences across individuals in each paradigm group to test Hypothesis 1. MANOVA models with one factor (paradigm group) were constructed to test mean differences across age, religiosity, and parents' income. Results suggested multivariate differences, Wilks' $\Lambda = .691$, $F(6, 1078) = 36.49$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .169$. Step-down univariate F -tests were significant for all three variables including age, $F(2, 541) = 17.84$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .062$; parents' income, $F(2, 541) = 4.96$, $p = .007$, partial $\eta^2 = .018$; and religiosity, $F(2, 541) = 90.31$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .250$. Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni method to control for multiple comparisons suggested those in the Delayer class were significantly

Table 4. Mean Differences and Proportions on Background and Demographic Factors by Paradigm Group.

Variables	Enthusiast, $n = 183$	Hesitant, $n = 333$	Delayer, $n = 55$
Hypothesis 1 predictions			
Age	20.49 ^a	20.72 ^a	22.57 ^b
Religiosity ^a	3.54 ^a	2.56 ^b	1.84 ^c
Parents married*	79.2%	66.1%	47.3%
Other background and demographic factors			
Parents' income ^b	5.36 ^a	5.28 ^a	4.64 ^b
Male*	18.7%	24.3%	47.3%
In relationship*	66.7%	55.9%	32.7%
Engaged*	23%	7.8%	0%
White	92.3%	88.6%	90.9%
Ever cohabited	16.6%	19.9%	29.1%
Virgin*	54.6%	30.9%	20%
Heterosexual*	100%	93.5%	87.8%
Working	57.4%	53.7%	59.3%
Parents married*	79.2%	66.1%	47.3%

Note. Differing superscripts represent means which significantly differed ($p < .05$). Percentages reflect proportion within each class.

^aAssessed on a scale from 1 to 4.

^bSingle item, ranges from 1 (none) to 8 (over US\$250,000).

*Chi-square differences across classes significant ($p < .001$).

older than those in both the Hesitant and Enthusiast groups who did not differ from each other. Those in the Delayer class also reported significantly less parental income than those in both other classes. Significant differences were found in religiosity among all classes. Those in the Delayer class reported the lowest levels of religiosity while those in the Enthusiast class reported the highest religiosity. Means are reported in Table 4.

We also tested differences by the paradigm group on gender, race, virgin status, parent's current marital status, cohabiting history, and employment status (see Table 4). Significant differences were found when assessing differences among groups based on gender, $\chi^2(2) = 17.17$, $p < .001$; parents' marital status, $\chi^2(2) = 21.46$, $p < .001$; and virgin status, $\chi^2(2) = 34.27$, $p < .001$. Results suggested that women were overrepresented in the Enthusiast (81.3% of class) and Hesitant (75.7% of class) compared to the Delayer (52.7% of class) class. Those who reported their parents were not married were overrepresented in the Delayer class. The proportion of virgins was also higher in the Enthusiast class (54.6% of class) than that in the Delayer class (20% of class).

We next tested the associations between paradigm class membership, current dating, and engagement status. Results indicated significant differences for being in a romantic relationship, $\chi^2(2) = 19.63$, $p < .001$. Those who were currently in a romantic relationship were overrepresented in the Enthusiast (66.7% of class) and Hesitant (55.9% of classes). Those who were currently dating only comprised 32.7% of the Delayer class. Results were also significant for engagement status, $\chi^2(2) = 34.04$, $p < .001$. Engaged participants were overrepresented in the Enthusiast class (23%). None of the participants in the Delayer class were engaged, while 7.8% of those in the Hesitant class were engaged.

Paradigms, Current Behavior, and Attitudes

Finally, we tested behavior and attitudinal differences across paradigm type. We first tested basic mean differences by the paradigm group across current sexual intercourse behavior, other sexual behavior, pornography use, alcohol use, binge drinking, attitudes toward cohabitation, child centeredness, and sexual permissiveness. Multivariate results were significant, Wilks' $\Lambda = .592$, $F(16, 1084) = 20.29$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .230$. Step-down F -tests were also significant for all variables. Post hoc analyses again using the Bonferroni method to control for multiple comparisons found that those in the Enthusiast group reported less current sexual activity (both intercourse and other sexual behavior) than those in the Hesitant group. Those in the Delayer group reported significantly higher pornography use than those in both other classes. Those in the Enthusiast class also reported significantly less alcohol use and binge drinking than those in other two classes. Sexual attitudes were found to be progressively more permissive, moving from the Enthusiast, to Hesitant, to Delayer classes.

To see if these differences held once controls were introduced, MANCOVAs were run which controlled for gender, age, relationship status, sexual orientation, virgin status, employment status, religiosity, parent's marital status, and parents' income. We included many of the previously explored demographic factors as our initial analyses suggested that latent classes did differ on these factors. These controls allowed for an investigation of whether latent class differences on behavioral and attitudinal variables might be attributed to these underlying demographic characteristics. Multivariate results remained significant even with controls in the model, Wilks' $\Lambda = .745$, $F(16, 964) = 9.56$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .137$, although the effect was greatly reduced. Step-down F -tests were significant assessing differences on alcohol use, $F(2, 410) = 3.63$, $p = .027$, partial $\eta^2 = .015$; binge drinking, $F(2, 410) = 3.18$, $p = .043$; partial $\eta^2 = .013$; attitudes toward cohabitation, $F(2, 410) = 24.27$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .090$; child centeredness, $F(2, 410) = 34.28$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .123$; and permissive sexual attitudes, $F(2, 410) = 28.26$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .104$. Estimated means accounting for control variables are reported in Table 5. Once controls were accounted for, all three paradigm groups differed on their child centeredness beliefs, attitudes toward cohabitation, and permissive sexual attitudes. Individuals in the Enthusiast class reported the highest child centeredness, least positive attitudes toward cohabitation, and the most conservative sexual attitudes; those in the Hesitant class were in the middle but significantly different from the other two classes, while those in the Delayer class reported the lowest child centeredness, most positive attitudes toward cohabitation, and the most permissive sexual attitudes.

We next tested for gender interactions by including a gender by paradigm group interaction term into MANCOVA models. Significant gender by paradigm class interactions was found on assessments of sexual attitudes, $F(2, 488) = 11.56$, $p < .001$, and pornography use, $F(2, 488) = 16.50$, $p < .001$. Separate MANCOVA models for each gender were examined to explore

Table 5. Estimated Mean Differences on Behaviors in the Last Year and Attitudinal Variables by Paradigm Group.

Variables	Enthusiast	Hesitant	Delayer
Sexual intercourse	1.75 ^a	1.80 ^a	2.04 ^a
Other sexual behaviors [†]	2.19 ^a	2.32 ^a	2.65 ^a
Pornography use	2.24 ^a	2.37 ^a	2.39 ^a
All alcohol use	2.28 ^a	2.61 ^b	2.55 ^{ab}
Binge drinking	1.55 ^a	1.82 ^b	1.78 ^{ab}
Attitudes toward cohabitation	2.94 ^a	3.76 ^b	3.91 ^c
Permissive sexual attitudes	2.52 ^a	3.14 ^b	3.55 ^c
Child centeredness	4.95 ^a	4.46 ^b	3.19 ^c

Note. Different superscripts represent means which significantly differed ($p < .05$). Analyses controlled for gender, age, relationship status, sexual orientation, virgin status, employment status, religiosity, parent's marital status, and parents' income.

[†]Included fondling and/or oral sex.

these interactions. Figures 1 and 2, respectively, graphically depict these interactions based on estimated means. Among both men and women, those in the Enthusiast class were significantly less permissive than those in other two classes. However, the difference among men in the Enthusiast and Hesitant classes appeared to be larger than the difference in women. However, this difference was found not to be statistically significant. For men, pornography use significantly differed ($p = .01$) between those in the Enthusiast ($M = 2.42$) and Hesitant ($M = 3.32$) classes with those in the Enthusiast class reporting less pornography use. This difference was not seen among women ($p = .99$).

Discussion

Results from this study provide several important insights into how emerging adults view and conceptualize marriage and how such marital beliefs intersect with individual decision making. Overall, the combination of several marital beliefs provided evidence of three prominent marital paradigms among emerging adults. This distinction is important as it suggests that emerging adults do not hold simply positive or negative (two groups) sets of marital beliefs. Instead, results suggested that at least three dynamic paradigms existed that consisted of unique combinations of several marital beliefs.

These three clear paradigms were comprised of those emerging adults who were very engaged and enthusiastic about the marital transition process, those who wished to delay, postpone, or possibly avoid the marital transition and those emerging adults who valued marriage but were not keen on quickly making the jump to matrimony. While such preliminary results should not be interpreted as proposing the existence of only three classes of marital paradigms among all emerging adults, such evidence suggests that the marital beliefs of emerging adults do not lie across one continuum. Future investigation of low-income and noncollege populations may produce three, four, or more classes of marital paradigms as the marital beliefs and trajectory of these samples likely differ

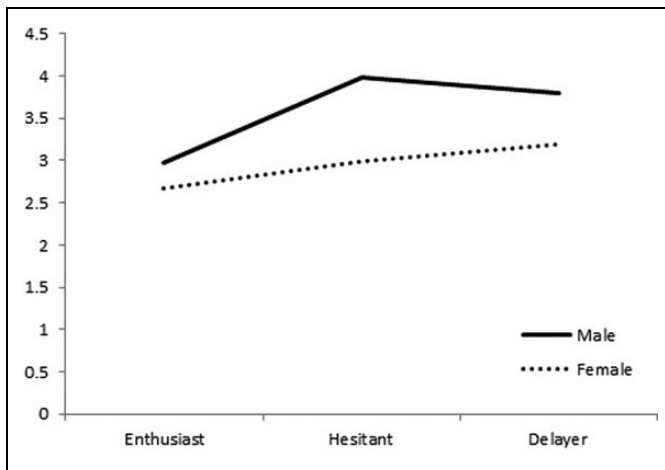


Figure 1. Estimated means on sexual attitude scale by gender and paradigm group.

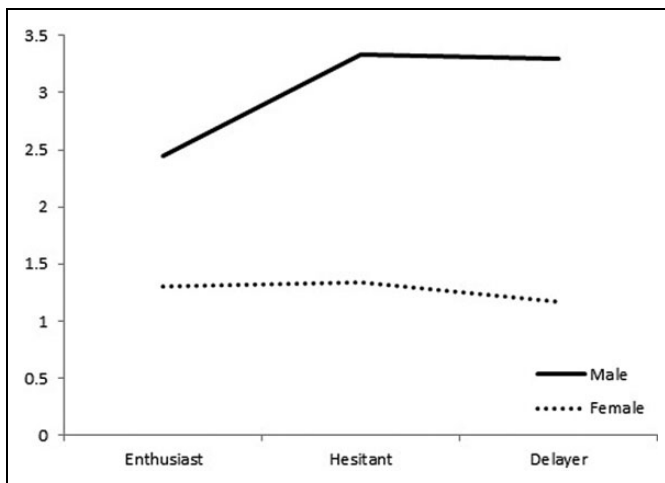


Figure 2. Estimated means on pornography use by gender and paradigm class.

from those of college students (Edin, Kefalas, & Reed, 2004; Manning & Smock, 2002).

One of the other important contributions of this study is the identification of a subset of emerging adults who desired to delay or avoid marriage. While comprising only 10% of the current sample, these emerging adults who held a Delayer paradigm were more likely to come from unmarried parents and lower income family backgrounds, two factors that tend to be correlated together, and may hint at the possibility that these emerging adults may be seeking to avoid an institution they experienced within a negative context in their family of origin. Some evidence has suggested that individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be less prone to view marriage as an expected life outcome (Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005), while other studies have suggested that children from divorced or unmarried parents report more negative attitudes toward marriage (Dennison & Koerner, 2006). Much of this “retreat” from marriage may be due to the perceived financial barriers to marriage and the perception that

both partners must be financially stable to move toward a marriage (Edin & Reed, 2005; Gibson-Davis et al., 2005). In this way, even college students from lower class backgrounds may see less incentive, or at least more barriers, to marriage. While the specific beliefs about financial barriers to marriage were not assessed in this study, future studies should explore how such barriers interact with results seen here. Delayers may also simply be prioritizing other elements of their life such as education and peer relationships as suggested by some emerging adult scholars (Shulman & Connolly, 2013).

While three marital paradigms emerged, it is important to note that vast majority (almost 60% in the current sample) of emerging adults were placed in the “Hesitant” paradigm. Several studies have documented that while emerging adults hold marriage in high regard (Carroll et al., 2007), many tend to prioritize other endeavors such as schooling over marriage (Gassanov, Nichoson, & Koch-Turner, 2008) and many emerging adults harbor some fears and anxieties about what marriage might bring (Miller, Sessler, & Kusi-Appouh, 2011). This large group of emerging adults is likely related to the “marriage planner” group as identified by Kefalas, Furstenberg, Carr, and Napolitano (2011) who value marriage but believe such a transition needs to be balanced with other goals and carefully planned for.

Despite having an overall positive perspective on marriage, emerging adults who held a Hesitant paradigm were also largely cautious about the permanence of marriage, averaging much closer to those in the Delayer class than those in the Enthusiast class. While the relative size of this group may be an artifact of the college sample utilized, this may reflect a degree of both uncertainty and ambiguity among many emerging adults as they consider the possibility of marriage in the future. While they may desire and expect to marry, western culture has seen an increased acceptance and proliferation of divorce (Cherlin, 2009), which may create either a fear or assumption of eventual divorce among many emerging adults. Conversely, this lower belief in the permanence of marriage may also indicate that emerging adults have high expectations of marriage they are unsure will be met by future marital partners or that perhaps they are becoming less likely to tolerate unhappy marriages. Future research should explore the exact reasons for this hesitancy among emerging adults to better understand the potential strengths and weaknesses of such a mind-set.

Regardless of the reason, the expectation that first marriages may not last appears to be a central component of the marital paradigms of many emerging adults. While we did not directly assess the fear of divorce in this study, other studies have noted pessimism among adolescents regarding the permanence of marriage (Wilcox, 2010), and it appears that such an outlook may carry into emerging adulthood. Such findings may also suggest that this large class of emerging adults is articulating what Cherlin (2009) argued are the competing and sometimes counterintuitive notions of marriage in the United States where marriage is held in high regard yet viewed as a possible threat to free will and personal agency. This may explain why those in the Hesitant group reported elevated levels of binge drinking compared to other groups, possibly signifying that among this

group, marriage may be viewed as interfering with experimentation and risk-taking behaviors.

The Enthusiast group appeared to capture the more traditional mind-set around marriage held by a minority of emerging adults as noted by other scholars (Kefalas et al., 2011; Wilcox & Dew, 2010). These emerging adults seem focused on marriage and likely will transition to marriage sooner than their peers (Willoughby, 2014). Like other paradigm groups, this may have both positive and negative results. On the one hand, earlier transitions to marriage in the 20s increase the likelihood of marital happiness based on evidence from some studies (Glenn, Uecker, & Love, 2010). However, Enthusiast's focus on marriage may also lead to a reprioritization of career prospects and find many, especially women, postponing or ending schooling (Hymowitz, Carroll, Wilcox, & Kaye, 2013). Again, such strengths and weaknesses can only be speculated and future research should attempt to track such paradigm groups over time to explore how they may alter trajectories and well-being during emerging adulthood.

In terms of linking marital paradigms to our dependent variables, results from this study largely mirrored findings from previous studies and continued to provide evidence that marital beliefs are an important component of emerging adult development. Both Hypotheses 1 and 2 were largely confirmed. Notably, net of several individual and demographic controls, marital paradigms were significantly linked to several risk-taking factors, particularly alcohol use and binge drinking. Mirroring previous results (Carroll et al., 2007; Willoughby & Dworkin, 2009), emerging adults who held an Enthusiast paradigm reported significantly less drinking behaviors than those who held a Hesitant paradigm even after holding constant several demographic controls. As suggested by previous scholars, these findings are likely linked to the concept of anticipatory socialization (Burr, Day, & Bahr, 1993) where emerging adults who expect to make significant relational commitments in the near future have already begun to make behavioral changes to conform to these anticipated adult roles. Results from this study suggest that such associations are not merely confined to single constructs of marital beliefs but may represent more generalized associations between marital beliefs and risk-taking behavior.

One difference in this study and previous research was that, unlike previous studies which have found a continuous relationship between an expected delay in marriage and increased risk taking, we found that those in the Hesitant class reported significantly higher levels of alcohol consumption and binge drinking than those in the Enthusiast class. Those who held a Delayer paradigm (marked by the longest ideal and expected timing of marriage) did not report significantly more risk-taking than those in the other groups. While an expected delay in marriage may be generally linked to more risk taking as evidenced by previous studies (Carroll et al., 2007; Willoughby & Dworkin, 2009), results from this study, utilizing a more complex assessment of marital beliefs, suggested a slightly different picture. In addition, differences in sexual behavior within a relationship found in this study appear to be largely mediated by background factors. No paradigm class differences were found once controls were taken into account,

suggesting that initial differences found among paradigm classes was largely due to underlying individual factors and not to the paradigms themselves. Despite previous studies finding links between sexual behavior and marital beliefs (Willoughby & Dworkin, 2009), such findings suggest further study of these associations is warranted. Likewise, gender moderation results suggested that the patterns found here were largely stable across gender. There was limited evidence that behavioral decisions of men may be more influenced by marital paradigms compared to women, but additional empirical research is needed to further substantiate this claim.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be noted that limit the generalizability of our study. First, the sample came from one university in the Midwest, which was comprised of mostly females and was predominately Caucasian, making broad generalizations regarding the marital paradigms of emerging adults difficult and unwarranted. University students on both the east and west coast as well as those in other countries may have presented differing results than those found here. Additionally, many scholars have noted the likely differences between college and noncollege emerging adults, and care should be taken before generalizing these paradigm findings to noncollege populations. Even within our college sample, some subgroups not assessed in this study should be explored in future investigations. For example, this study did not assess whether the samples involved were full- or part-time students or the previous marital history of each student. Such information may be important in further delineation of subgroups of marital paradigms in the future. We do note that the evidence of three marital paradigms was found among a relatively homogenous sample, suggesting that as scholars explore paradigms among more diverse samples even more differing paradigms may emerge.

We also note that although the measurement found in this study was more robust than many studies of marital beliefs, such measurement still needs further refinement and validation. For example, this study only assessed one aspect of beliefs about Marital Context (beliefs about wedding contexts), and other Marital Context beliefs may have resulted in slightly differing results. Although we hoped to capture marital beliefs pertinent to all six components of marital paradigms, we found that the Marital Salience and the Marital Centrality items loaded onto the same factor. Upon reflection this is not surprising, given that both have to do with the importance of marriage. However, they are conceptually different in that the former has to do with getting married and the latter about prioritizing marriage once married. It is likely that unmarried individuals hold relatively congruent beliefs about both, so a study that includes both constructs for unmarried individuals is likely to yield little variation. However, studies that include married individuals may find that Marital Centrality and salience do represent orthogonal constructs. Further research is needed to determine whether these dimensions are truly distinct.

As the first study to attempt to empirically assess various components of Marital Paradigm Theory, there is certainly much more work to do in order to develop standardized measures of marital beliefs that can be translated to many different populations and subgroups. Further study is also needed to understand whether the depth of measurement presented here is truly “value added” in the sense of capturing unique paradigm types that transcend typical classifications of traditional and nontraditional beliefs about marriage. The presence of three and not two paradigm types suggests such additional measurement is beneficial but further study should continue to explore this assumption. Also, while our models did control for many demographic and individual features, which may be confounding factors, additional factors such as family of origin processes and family structure growing up should be investigated in future studies to explore how they may impact associations found in this study. Effect size statistics suggested a small to medium effect of marital paradigms and such marital beliefs are only one of many factors that influence the decision making and behaviors of emerging adults.

Finally, due to the cross-sectional nature of our data collection, it is impossible to infer casual directions between marital paradigms and dependent variables, a current limitation of this area as noted in other studies (Willoughby, 2010). As suggested by Marital Paradigm Theory (Willoughby et al., 2013), marital paradigms and behavior likely influence each other in a reciprocal relationship, with paradigms being influenced by experience and experience altering paradigms. Longitudinal studies are needed to understand the nature of these reciprocal effects.

Despite these limitations, this study provided important new information of marital beliefs and how such beliefs impact emerging adult development. As the first study to empirically utilize components of Marital Paradigm Theory, we found evidence that emerging adults do indeed hold differing and measurable marital paradigms that transcend traditional distinctions between emerging adults who are either for or against marriage. While each individual may hold a unique paradigm about marriage, such paradigms appear to cluster around common themes. Given that marital beliefs have been shown to have a long-term, developmental impact on decision making (Willoughby, 2012), understanding such common paradigms should continue to be an important focus for scholars in this area and may inform both policy and education during this time period. Such findings show the potential implications of cultural norms around marriage that are driven by both public policy and cultural discourse. Scholars should continue to explore how and why beliefs about long-term union formation hold such an important connection to the day-to-day lives of emerging adults.

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Note

1. A full description of marital paradigm questions with summary statistics could be obtained from the corresponding author.

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