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AN ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES OF
SOUTHERN BAPTIST PASTORS TOWARD
PREMARITAL EDUCATION

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AN ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES OF
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PREMARITAL EDUCATION

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To Karen Nicole Coffee,

my best friend, and to our children

Mallorie Nicole, Benjamin Carter, and Owen Andrew Coffee.

Each of these is God's gracious gift to me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	ix
Chapter	
1. RESEARCH CONCERN	1
Introduction to the Research Problem.	1
Research Purpose	7
Research Questions	8
Delimitations of the Study	8
Terminology	9
Research Assumptions	10
Procedural Overview	11
2. PRECEDENT LITERATURE	16
Biblical Theology of Marriage	16
The State of Marriage	21
Factors Affecting Marital Stability and Satisfaction.	29
Premarital Education	36
3. METHDOLOLOGICAL DESIGN	54
Research Question Synopsis	54
Design Overview	55
Population.	55
Delimitations	56
Limitations of Generalization	57

Chapter	Page
Instrumentation	58
Procedures	59
4. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS.....	63
Content Analysis	63
Compilation of the Research Data	64
Demographic Data	65
Findings	79
5. CONCLUSIONS	98
Research Purpose	98
Research Questions	98
Research Implications	99
Research Applications	114
Research Limitations	117
Further Research	117
 Appendix	
1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREMARITAL EDUCATION CONTENT.....	121
2. RESEARCH TOOL	127
3. LETTER TO SAMPLE	132
REFERENCE LIST.....	133

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Tabulation and percentage of occurrences of broader topics.	53
2. Mean and standard deviation by attitudinal item.	81
3. Frequency count of attitudinal scale scores.	82
4. Number of weddings and provision of premarital education per year.	84
5. Resources regularly utilized in premarital education.	85
6. Curricular content components regularly covered.	87
7. Curricular content layers and percentage of the sample covering all areas within the layer.	89
8. Chi-square goodness of fit by curricular content component.	91
9. Chi-square test of independence of pastoral demographics and ministry context of regularly covering layer 1 content areas is premarital education.	94
10. Chi-square test of independence of pastoral demographics and ministry context of regularly covering layer 2 content areas is premarital education.	95
11. Chi-square test of independence of pastoral demographics and ministry context of regularly covering layer 3 content areas is premarital education.	96
12. Chi-square test of independence of pastoral demographics and ministry context of regularly covering layer 4 content areas is premarital education.	96

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Distribution of age. . . . .	.66
2. Distribution of marital status. . . . .	.67
3. Distribution of years of marriage.	67
4. Distribution of ministry position. . . . .	.68
5. Distribution of ministry position funding.	69
6. Distribution of years of pastoral service.	69
7. Distribution of education completed. . . . .	.70
8. Distribution of formal academic courses. . . . .	.71
9. Distribution of other training courses.	72
10. Distribution of staff size.	73
11. Distribution of church context.	74
12. Distribution of church size. . . . .	.75
13. Distribution of church location.	76
14. Distribution of weddings officiated. . . . .	.76
15. Distribution of premarital education services provided. . . . .	.77
16. Distribution of number of premarital education sessions. . . . .	.78
17. Frequency distribution of composite attitudinal scale scores. . . . .	.82
18. Resources regularly utilized by category.	85
19. Curricular content components regularly covered	87

20. Comparison of calculated chi-square values by curricular content component. . . . 91

PREFACE

Writing a dissertation is a daunting, yet very rewarding, process. At least it was for me. Any such endeavor is made easier when you have the support and encouragement of others. This dissertation simply would not have been written without the sacrifice, assistance, and patience of many to whom I owe a debt of gratitude.

I am grateful to the saints at Morley Baptist Church, whose early investment in my spiritual growth has served me well and has provided a firm foundation for my life in Christ. Whatever I have become as a follower of Christ was predicated by their love and instruction in the initial stages of my faith. Likewise I am thankful for my grandmother, Betty June “Granny” Coffee, whose spiritual life served as an early example to me. I will never be able to adequately express my appreciation to my parents (John Edward Coffee and Peggy Sue Lynch) for the sacrifices they made for my benefit and for their continual encouragement and support for my academic pursuits. Thanks also to Lynwood Baptist Church and to my pastor and colleagues on staff who always believed that this project would be completed and gave me the space that I needed to make this a reality.

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Finally, and most significantly, all glory to God for sending His Son to bring me to salvation and for calling me into His service!

John Kevin Coffee

Jackson, Missouri

December 2012

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH CONCERN

This study is a comparative analysis of the attitudes and practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education. This study is designed to describe the attitudes and practices of Southern Baptist pastors and to describe the similarities and differences that may exist between the self-described practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee and the best practices prescribed in the secular and religious literature base as well as published marital preparation programs.

Introduction to the Research Problem

Genesis 2:23-25 states that marriage is an ancient institution that was initiated by God shortly after his work in creation. Marriage endures today as a social, cultural, economic, and religious institution and is “one of the most nearly universal of human institutions. No other touches so intimately the life of practically every member of the earth’s population” (Terman 1938, 1). According to the National Vital Statistics Report, in the twelve month period preceding (and including) June 2007, there were 2,169,000 marriages in the United States (National Center for Health Statistics 2008, 1). Despite this notable number, marriage may be seeing a decline in popularity in the United States as the percentage of the population that is currently married has decreased since 1970 (Olson and Olson 2000, 4). A potential decline in popularity aside, the institution of

marriage has other problems as well. Perhaps most notably, it is estimated, and widely reported, that approximately one-half of all first-time marriages end in divorce (Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach 2000, 964; Halford et al. 2003, 386). In an effort to address concerns over the divorce rate as well as the rate of marital dissatisfaction, scholars and educators have designed, implemented, and advocated for programs of marital education (Carroll and Doherty 2003, 105). It is estimated that 75% of first marriages occur within religious organizations (Stanley et al. 2001, 67), suggesting that religious organizations and clergy may be in a unique place to realize widespread impact on the preparation of couples as they move toward marriage. In fact, multiple writers have stated the importance of clergy involvement in providing premarital education (Stanley 2001, 272; Stanley et al. 2001, 67; Barlow 1999, 3).

Divorce and Marital Unhappiness

According to Hicks, divorce rates in the United States appear to be at a plateau (Hicks et al. 2004, 98), or slightly decreasing. In 2007, the rate was 3.4 divorces per 1000 total population. In 2006 this number was 3.6 per 1000 total population; in 2005 there were 3.7 divorces per 1000 total population (National Center for Health Statistics 2008, 1). In 1998, there were 4.2 divorces per 1000 total population (National Center for Health Statistics 1999, 1). In a 2000 work Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach noted that the divorce rate in the United States had been declining steadily since 1992 (Bradbury, Findham, and Beach 2000, 964). The rates continue, however, to be approximated at 50% of first-time marriages (Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach 2000, 964; Halford et al. 2003, 386).

Typically preceding divorce is the presence of marital unhappiness or dissatisfaction on the part of one or both spouses. Researchers have drawn a plethora of conclusions and have noted even more suggestions about marital satisfaction. The following are important highlights of this discussion:

1. Married individuals experience a marked decrease in their overall positive feelings about marriage for the first ten years of the marriage relationship (Glenn 1998, 573).
2. Neither marital happiness nor divorce proneness realized significant changes between 1980 and 2000 (Amato et al. 2000, 19).
3. The seeds of marital distress and divorce are sown before the marriage event (Clements, Stanley, and Markman 2004, 621).
4. There is evidence that factors foreshadowing marital dissatisfaction can be detected and addressed prior to a marriage (Stanley 2001, 276; Smith, Vivian, and O'Leary 1990, 795-96).

Factors Affecting Marital Success

Multiple factors have been proposed pertaining to marital success. One factor that appears time and time again in the literature is that of marital interactions, which include verbal communication, conflict resolution, and affective responses (Clements, Stanley, and Markman 2004, 621; Hawkins et al. 2004; 547-48; Ogle and Hasz 2004, 24-26; Halford et al. 2003, 387; Holman 2001, 20; Stanley 2001, 276; Larson and Holman 1994, 232; Smith, Vivian, and O'Leary 1990, 792). Other factors can be grouped into domains.

In their review of the literature pertaining to premarital prediction of marital quality and stability, Holman and Larson divide the specific factors into three broader domains. Background and contextual factors comprise the first domain. This domain includes issues such as family of origin, sociocultural factors (i.e., race, age at marriage,

occupation, class, and income), and current external contexts which may affect the marriage relationship. The second domain is that of individual traits and behaviors such as personality traits (i.e., neuroticism). The final domain suggested by Holman and Larson is that of couple interactional processes. Here factors are considered related to homogamy (i.e., religion, intelligence, age, race, economic status, beliefs, values, and attitudes), interpersonal similarity (i.e., attitudes, beliefs, values), interactional history (i.e., cohabitation, length of acquaintance, premarital sexual activity, and premarital pregnancy), and interactional processes (i.e., communication, conflict resolution, and consensus building) (Holman and Larson 1994, 229-33).

Other factors pertain to marital success. Halford et al. considered the effects of life transitions (Halford et al. 2003, 388). Ogle and Hasz reviewed the importance of marital cognition as it pertains to individual expectations, perceptions, attributions, and assumptions. They also made a case for the importance of forgiveness and positive/negative balance in the marriage relationship (Ogle and Hasz 2004). Amato et al. found that employment status of the wife related to marital satisfaction (Amato et al. 2003: 17). Stanley voices the importance of couple emphasis on preserving their friendship as well as commitment beliefs (Stanley 2001, 276). Hawkins et al. discusses the role of couple and individual motivation (Hawkins et al. 2004, 548). Holman discusses the role of family of origin (Holman 2001, 14-20).

Premarital Education

Concerns over marital discord and dissolution have led to the emergence of premarital education. These programs have been utilized to some degree since the 1920s. The first documented effort to develop a strategy of premarital intervention was in 1924.

During that year Ernest Groves taught the first known course in preparation for family life at Boston University (Stahmann and Hiebert 1997, 5). In 1932, the Merrill-Palmer Institute developed the first program of premarital education (Carroll and Doherty 2003, 106). A standardized program was developed at the Philadelphia Marriage Council in 1941 with the stated purpose of assisting young couples to secure a “better understanding of what companionship in married life involves and thus help them avoid some of the causes of marital difficulties” (Mudd, Freeman, and Rose 1941, 98). From its infancy in the early 1900s to the 1960s “counselors tended to conceptualize marital problems as the problem of one individual in the relationship. Therefore, premarital education, as we understand it today, was not a regular part of professional clinical practice.” This trend turned in the 1970’s with a heightened interest in premarital education that coincided with an increase in the divorce rate in the United States (Carroll and Doherty 2003, 106).

Program Efficacy

Certain models of premarital education have been demonstrated to be efficacious for improving “couples’ readiness and preparation for marriage” (McGeorge and Carlson 2006, 182). Furthermore, in a robust meta-analysis of thirteen studies on the efficacy of premarital education programs, Carroll and Doherty concluded that “premarital prevention programs are generally effective in producing significant immediate gains in communication processes, conflict management skills, and overall relationship quality, and that these gains appear to hold for at least 6 months to 3 years” (Carroll and Doherty 2003, 114). In a 2003 review Halford et al. noted that multiple studies in the 1980s found that skills-based premarital education programs produced immediate improvements in relationship skills. Finally, there is “strong evidence that

skills-based relationship education helps couples acquire and maintain relationship skills” (Halford et al. 2003, 391). While more research is needed (particularly longitudinal studies) to firm support for these conclusions, there is sufficient evidence to move state and local governments to establish incentives and requirements for engaged couples to participate in approved premarital education programs (Larson et al. 2002, 233; Stanley 2001, 272).

Clergy Involvement

There is evidence of the history and effectiveness of clergy involvement in premarital education. Two works published in the 1950s provide a beginning point for the emphasis among evangelicals. In 1958 Wayne E. Oates, professor of psychology of religion at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, published a work on premarital pastoral care (Oates 1958). That same year the Methodist Church published a similar work (Board of Publication of The Methodist Church 1958). Overall, however, though “clergy have had a long history of meeting with couples prior to their weddings, only in the past three decades has the focus of these meetings shifted from education about the nature and meaning of the marriage rite itself to education geared at preparing couples for marriage” (Carroll and Doherty 2003, 106). In fact, crediting the work of Hunt, Hof, and DeMaria on marriage enrichment, Halford notes that “structured relationship education began with the work of religious organizations, and evolved from the brief counsel often offered by religious marriage celebrants, such as priests, rabbis, and ministers, to marrying couples (Halford 2004, 559).

Clergy are in a unique position with regard to marriage and premarital education as nearly 75% of first marriages occur within a religious organization, though it

is noted that less than one-half of religious organizations currently provide premarital services of any consequence (Stanley et al. 2001, 67). When clergy do provide premarital education, however, they can be successful. Stanley et al. found that clergy could be trained to deliver premarital education using a skills-based approach and be as successful as university staff (Stanley et al. 2001, 72). Halford et al. similarly noted “the data suggest that we can successfully train trainers to use evidence-based programs in community settings and set the stage for widely disseminating relationship education program” (Halford et al. 2003, 392).

Research Purpose

The pervasive nature of marriage and the biblical, social, economic, cultural, and mental health implications of marriage demand that attention be given to high rates of marital dissatisfaction and dissolution in the United States. Marriage is seen as a sacred rite among the religious. As a result, clergy are often accessed to perform marriage ceremonies. This places clergy in a unique position to impact the engaged couple in a manner that may increase couple marital satisfaction as well as their ability to navigate marital dissatisfaction and stave off divorce. The field of premarital education continues to burgeon and further research must be conducted to replicate and validate recent findings about the efficacy of these programs. However, enough is known about premarital education to initiate inquiry into the role of clergy as it pertains to premarital education. The purpose of this study was to describe the attitudes and practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education. A further purpose of this study was to identify domains of prescribed best

practices in premarital education and to compare these best practices with the overall practices of the sample.

Research Questions

The following five research questions guided this study:

1. What are the attitudes of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education?
2. What are the practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee as they relate to premarital education?
3. What are the curricular content components in premarital education models as practiced by Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee?
4. What similarities or differences, if any, exist between the identified curricular content components of premarital education models and the components present in the premarital education practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee?
5. What relationship, if any, exists between the attitudes and practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education and the demographic characteristics of the pastors?

Delimitations of the Study

The first delimitation of the study is that the sample was limited to a particular group of clergy. The clergy studied were pastors serving in Southern Baptist churches in the Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee of Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, and Kentucky. The second delimitation of the study is that only pastors currently serving in a Southern Baptist church will be studied. Retired pastors, former pastors, or pastors in the midst of a pastoral transition between churches will not be studied.

The third delimitation of the study is that the research will not consider how competently pastors are practicing their approach to premarital education. The study

only identified key components of premarital education models found in the literature and then compared and contrasted those components to the components present in the premarital education strategies utilized by pastors and associate pastors.

These delimitations limit the generalizability of the findings. The results elicited from this study will generalize only to the specific group of clergy studied. The results may not be generalized to other denomination or religious organizations. However, the findings will provide an initial framework for understanding how a particular group of clergy approaches the issue of premarital education.

Terminology

Associate pastor. Persons serving on the ministerial staff of a church who possess leadership responsibilities for a specific area or areas within the spiritual life of a local congregation. For the purpose of this study the associate pastor will represent multiple possibilities of specific areas of leadership including, but not necessarily limited to, education, students, college students, administration, preschool, worship/music, missions, evangelism, or any combination thereof.

Marriage. A permanent relationship union between one man and one woman that is recognized by the presiding government as a legal entity.

Premarital education. The intentional process of delivering to engaged couples information that is intended to improve couple readiness and preparation for marriage by reducing risk factors for marital dissatisfaction and/or dissolution.

Premarital assessment questionnaire. Standardized inventory that is given to both parties of an engaged couple that measures the couple on various scales. Premarital assessment questionnaires are often utilized for the purpose of gathering demographic

information and also to assist the provider of premarital education with information related to couple compatibility. Premarital assessment questionnaires vary somewhat as to the exact traits or characteristics that they measure. Examples of premarital assessment questionnaires include PreMarital Preparation And Relationship Enhancement (PREPARE) (Olson 1996), Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study (FOCCUS) (Markey, Micheletto, and Becker 1997), and RELATionship Evaluation (RELATE) (Holman et al. 1997).

Risk factors. Variable factors within a relationship that may, depending upon the value, intensity, and frequency of the variable, increase the possibility or likelihood of marital dissatisfaction and/or divorce. Two types of risk factors are static and dynamic. Static factors do not change as a result of intervention or education. Examples of static factors are age at marriage and family of origin. Dynamic factors are subject to change as a result of intervention or education. Examples of dynamic factors include couple communication and relationship expectations (Halford 2004, 562).

Senior pastor. An ordained man who possesses the primary leadership responsibilities for the general spiritual development and growth of a local congregation.

Solo pastor. A senior pastor who is the only pastor serving a particular local congregation at any given time.

Research Assumptions

Certain assumptions are foundational to this study. Following is a list of these assumptions:

1. The researcher assumed that marriage is an institution that is valuable to society at large as well as to individuals.

2. The researcher assumed that it is a worthwhile endeavor to increase marital satisfaction and to decrease instances of divorce.
3. The researcher assumed that pastors will respond to questions in a forthright manner.
4. The researcher assumed that pastors who practice premarital education do so in a competent manner.
5. The researcher assumed that the curricular content components identified in the literature and in current premarital education programs do represent constructs that are effective in increasing marital satisfaction and decreasing marital discord and divorce.

Procedural Overview

Initially, a literature review was conducted and included in chapter 2 of this document so that key components of premarital education programs were identified. The researcher conducted a content analysis in order to identify the key components of premarital education programs that are recommended in the literature base and/or are present in current premarital education programs and models. The key components provided the basis for one portion of a research instrument that was created with the assistance of an expert panel to ensure that the instrument was both reliable and valid.

Validity is defined as the extent to which the research tool measures what it is actually intended to measure (Leedy and Ormrod 2005, 92). Reliability is defined as the extent to which the instrument yields consistent results when the characteristic being measured has not changed (Leedy and Ormrod 2005 93). The expert panel testing the validity and reliability of the research tool was composed of pastors, counselors, and academicians with substantial experience in the field of premarital education and who were not in the possible sample population. The questions included in the research tool were strategically planned and designed specifically for this study. The validity and

reliability of the research tool was field-tested by submitting the instrument to the panel of experts who made judgments on the validity of the survey.

The instrument included three major areas of inquiry. The first section of the instrument focused on demographic data that described characteristics of the respondents. The second section of the instrument measured the attitudes of the respondents toward premarital education. The third section of the instrument inquired as to the current practices of the respondents as they relate to premarital education.

Upon completion and validation of the research tool and upon receiving permission from the Ethics Committee at Southern Seminary to use human subjects in this research, the researcher obtain a sample of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee: Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Illinois.

The sample population of the current research was pastors from 1070 Southern Baptist churches in Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, and Kentucky. The 1070 pastors studied were selected utilizing a multistage sampling approach (Leedy and Ormrod 2005, 206-7) in combination with a purposive sampling method designed to ensure that a sufficient number of larger churches are included in the study.

The researcher obtained maps from each state convention depicting the location of each association (groups of Southern Baptist churches freely affiliating and cooperating with one another within a particular geographical area) within the state. Utilizing these maps, the states to be studied were divided into four quadrants. This was accomplished by the researcher adding the number of associations in each state. The number of associations was then divided by four, indicating the number of associations to be assigned to each quadrant of the state. The researcher then assigned each association

to a quadrant based upon its nearest proximity to the geographical designation of northeast, northwest, southwest, southeast. Because of the shape of the state of Kentucky, the counties in Kentucky were assigned by the researcher based upon their nearest proximity to the geographical designations of north, southwest, south-central, and southeast.

Next, 6 associations were randomly selected from all of the associations within each quadrant. Ninety-six associations total, 24 per state were randomly selected. Third, 11 churches were randomly selected from each of the associations. Theoretically, this procedure would have totaled 66 churches per quadrant, 264 churches per state, and 1056 churches identified in the multi-stage random sampling procedure. However, in some cases randomly selected associations did not contain 11 churches. As a result, the number of churches selected from the random sampling portion of the multi-stage approach was 1022.

In order to ensure the randomness of the procedure, each association within a particular quadrant was assigned a number between 1 and the total number of associations within that particular quadrant. A computerized random number generator was utilized to randomly select 26 numbers which corresponded to associations within the quadrant. Likewise, all of the churches within a randomly selected association were assigned a number between 1 and the total number of churches within that association. A random number generator was utilized to randomly select 11 numbers which corresponded to up to 11 churches which were then selected to be included in the study. In addition to these 1022 churches, 48 churches were purposively identified and included in the study. To obtain these churches, the researcher contacted the state associations and

asked for the names of 12 larger churches within the state. The total number of churches included in the study was 1070.

Each of the 1070 churches was mailed a packet via United States Postal Service on April 29, 2012. The packet was mailed to the church address and was addressed to Pastor. The mailing packet included a cover letter (Appendix 3), a copy of the research tool (Appendix 2), as well as a self-addressed stamped return envelope addressed to the researcher. The cover letter and the research tool both indicated that responses should be returned by May 1, 2012. At the end of the allotted time, 222 valid responses had been received and were included in the study.

Once the surveys were returned, the researcher tabulated the responses and utilized descriptive statistics to describe the sample and then utilized non-parametric statistics to identify and understand any similarities or differences that exist between the respondents' practices toward premarital education and those practices recommended within the secular and religious literature base. Specifically, the chi-square goodness of fit and the chi-square test of independence measures were utilized.

Once the completed instruments were returned the responses were tabulated and reported. The results are reported in chapter 4 and are organized as follows. The first section utilizes descriptive statistics to report demographic information about the participants. The second section describes the attitudes of the respondents toward premarital education. The third section describes the current practices of the participants as they relate to premarital education, including a description of the self-reported content areas covered by the respondent when they conduct premarital education sessions. The fourth section describes any potential differences or similarities between the content areas

revealed in the curriculum content analysis of existing literature as reported at the end of chapter 2 and those reportedly used by the participants of the study. The fifth section identifies how, if at all, demographic characteristics and/or attitude toward premarital education predicts practices. Chapter 5 considers the results and their implications, as well as offers suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENT LITERATURE

“Marriage in the United States is clearly in trouble, yet it remains our foundational and arguably most important social institution” (Blankenhorn 2007, 219-20). Much has been written to establish and prescribe remedy for Blankenhorn’s thesis that marriage in the United States is in trouble. The current review of literature will explore the subject as it relates to the research concern stated in chapter one. Most notably, the topic of marital preparation will be reviewed in detail with a particular emphasis on the structure and content of marital preparation programs as well as clergy involvement in marital preparation. Factors pertaining to marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction as well as marital success and dissolution will be reviewed. Marriage as a social, cultural, economic, and religious institution will also be investigated. Initially, however, the literature review will consider marriage and divorce from a biblical theology perspective.

Biblical Theology of Marriage

A biblical understanding of marriage must, by necessity, begin at creation. The biblical teaching on marriage, however, extends well past the creation account, throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament. While it is beyond the purview of this work to expound upon every biblical reference pertaining to marriage, a brief overview will be important in laying the groundwork for this study.

Marriage at Creation

It was at creation that God formed the first man and the first woman (Gen 2:7; 18-22). The creation of Adam and Eve "...leads naturally to their relationship expressed through marriage . . ." (Clendenen 2001, 222). A primary basis for this relationship can be found in the biblical teaching that they were created in the image of God (Gen 1:26). "God did not create human beings to be isolated persons, but, in making us in His image, He made us in such a way that we can attain interpersonal unity of various sort in all forms of human society" (Grudem 1994, 454). Marriage began at creation, or immediately thereafter and is therefore foundational in terms of its significance for human society.

Among the foundational precepts of biblical theology as it relates to marriage is the understanding that marriage was intended by God to be a life-long melding together of a man and woman, as the two mysteriously become one flesh (Gen 2:24). This unity is not merely physical, but also extends to the spiritual and emotional aspects of the individuals and their union (Grudem 1994, 454). This creation precept is reiterated in the New Testament (Eph 5:31) as the Apostle Paul relates the teaching to how a husband is to love his wife. The Apostle teaches that husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies, for in fact she is now his own flesh (Knight 2006, 172-73).

In the creation account the reader finds a perfect union between man and woman that exemplified the love of the creator and the love of Adam for Eve. This love was unselfish and unmarred by sin (MacArthur 1994, 19). The words of John Phillips, though somewhat romantic, are formative in gaining an understanding of God's original purpose in marriage at creation:

Thus the Bible describes the world's earliest wedding. It took place in paradise. It was planned by God. It embodied the highest and holiest of ideals. It set forth the absolute so far as courtship and marriage are concerned. If its ideals seem too high for us, it is surely because we have strayed so far, as a race, from Adam's garden home. (Phillips 1980, 54)

Marriage in the Old Testament

Beyond the creation account, the Old Testament contains important narrative and teaching about marriage. In Genesis 24 the reader of Scripture views the betrothal and marriage of Isaac and Rebekah. In this very early example of marriage it has been suggested that marriage as a social institution can be discovered. The relationship between Isaac and Rebekah progressed through 4 steps of betrothal common in Old Testament Israel. The first stage, asking, may have begun with a simple request, but would also include serious negotiations between the man and the family of the bride-to-be. It was here that a new and important relationship was forged, not only between man and woman, but also between families or clans. The social implications of such a union were immense. The second stage, giving, reflects the action of the family of the bride at the conclusion of the negotiations. The third stage, taking of the bride, corresponds to the giving by the bride's family and results in the groom's agreeing to the relationship and the bride being, in fact, betrothed. Finally, the act of becoming is the final stage of the marriage and seals a legally binding arrangement (Martin 2003, 16).

In the book of Ruth "the love that exists between a husband and a wife gives shape to and is shaped by the larger set of familial obligations that characterize the marriage bond" (Anderson 2008, 31). Here Ruth clings to the mother of her deceased husband and travels with her to a land not her own. There

she meets her future husband, Boaz. Upon marriage Ruth later becomes part of the lineage of Jesus Christ (Matt 1:5).

A recurrent metaphor in the Old Testament is that of comparing the relationship between God and the nation of Israel to the relationship between a husband and wife (Isa 54:5; 62:5, Jer 2:2; Hos 2:19). This metaphor extends well into the New Testament and nowhere is more vivid than in the book of Hosea where Israel is portrayed as the charlatan wife and God is the forgiving, loving, and faithful husband. Israel is often forgetful of her commitment to God and finds herself a whore to other gods (Jer 3:1). This graphic depiction sets forth a high ideal of the importance of marital fidelity.

God's view of marriage is such that marital faithlessness is not permitted. From creation marriage was intended to be temporally permanent (Matt 19:8). The permanence of the union does not leave room for extramarital affairs (Exod 20:14; Job 24:14-17; Jer 29:23). or the longing for someone who is not one's spouse (Exod 20:17). Furthermore, Old Testament teaching indicates that adultery is not only harmful to the marriage, but to the individual as well (Prov 5:1-23; 7:4-27).

Marriage in the New Testament

In the Gospels Jesus upheld the value of marriage. He related the prohibition of divorce directly to the creation account in Genesis when He stated that although Moses had allowed for divorce in some cases divorce was outside of God's will from the beginning (Matt 19:8). Jesus further built His teaching on divorce upon the creation account when He quoted Genesis 2:24 and added that God

has joined the married couple so that no person should separate them from one another (Matt 19:5).

Though placing high value on marital permanence (1 Cor 7:10-11) and fidelity (Heb 13:4), the New Testament does appear to make allowances for divorce in extreme circumstances. In the aforementioned passage (Matt 19:1-9) Jesus makes an allowance for divorce in the case of the marital unfaithfulness of a spouse. His words, however, should be taken within the context of His previous statement indicating that Moses had allowed for divorce but that from the beginning it was not part of God's plan. In the Epistles, the Apostle Paul writes about an allowance for divorce in the case where a regenerate spouse is married to an unregenerate spouse who desires to divorce the regenerate spouse. In this case, the New Testament offers an allowance for divorce (1 Cor 7:12-17). It is important to note, however, that neither of these allowances are commands to divorce.

The New Testament extends the imagery and metaphor of the relationship of God to His chosen nation of Israel. In the New Testament, however, the imagery shifts from a nation as the bride to the Church as the bride of Christ and Christ as her bridegroom. These depictions are found in the Gospels (Matt 22:1-14; 25:1-13; John 3:29), the Epistles (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22-33), as well as in the Revelation (19:6-9) (Clark 2008, 10). This metaphor provides a powerful basis upon which to understand the biblical paradigm for husband/wife relationships. This paradigm teaches that husbands are to love their wives sacrificially (Eph 5:25) and that wives are to submit to the authority and leadership of their husbands (Eph 5:22; Colossians

3:18-19; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1) just as Christ loves the church sacrificially and the church is to submit to the authority of Christ in all things.

Throughout the Bible, from creation, through the Old Testament, and throughout the New Testament a biblical theology of marriage can be seen. While marriage is not advisable in all circumstances (1 Cor 7:32-35, 39-40; 2 Cor 6:14), it is an institution that was initiated by God at creation and is sustained and perpetuated by Him. Furthermore, “the meaning of marriage is the display of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and His people” (Piper 2009, 15).

The State of Marriage

As previously stated, marriage is an ancient institution that was initiated, according to the biblical record of Genesis, by God, shortly after His work in creation (2:23-25). Marriage endures today as a social, cultural, economic, and religious institution and is “one of the most nearly universal of human institutions. No other touches so intimately the life of practically every member of the earth’s population” (Terman 1938, 1). Lief asserts that “marriage has been a feature of all known societies since records were first kept” (Lief 2005, 6).

Marriage as an Institution

The Institute for American Values has identified at least six important aspects of marriage that make it a healthy institution. First, marriage is a legal contract that demands public recognition as well as legal protection. Second, marriage is a financial partnership between two individuals and within the context of a larger economy. Third, marriage is a sacred promise with profound spiritual

implications. Fourth, marriage is a sexual union encouraging and sustaining monogamously committed individuals one to another. Fifth, marriage is a personal bond through which the deepest hopes of a man and a woman fulfill their desire to know and be known in an intimate manner with another human being. Sixth, marriage is a family-making bond, securing the family as the basic building block of society (Institute for American Values 2000, 8-9).

The benefits of a healthy marriage are numerous. Ramboz states that some of these benefits include improved mental health, higher quality sexual relationships, improved financial position, decreased domestic violence, as well as longer lives for those who are married (Ramboz 2003, 11-12). Fagan has noted that the negative effects of divorce are as significant as the benefits of marriage and include devastating consequences for children of divorced parents. These consequences include heightened associations with juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, crime, and poor academic performance (Fagan 2001, 3). He further notes that children of divorce exhibit more physical health symptoms than do their counterparts from intact families (Fagan 2000, 1). The Institute for American Values has identified twenty-six conclusions indicating the positive effect of marriage to the family, the economy, the physical health and longevity of the individual, as well as the mental and emotional health of the individual (Institute for American Values 2005, americanvalues.org). These assertions notwithstanding, the institution of marriage has been, and continues to be threatened today.

The Deinstitutionalization of Marriage

The threats to modern marriage are many and they are great. At the forefront of these challenges may be the deinstitutionalization of marriage; that is to say that the norms that have regulated marriage in the United States have shifted significantly since in 1960s and 1970s. According to the National Vital Statistics Report, in the twelve month period preceding (and including) June 2007, there were 2,169,000 marriages in the United States (National Center for Health Statistics 2008, 1). Despite this notable number, recent research demonstrates a decline in popularity in the United States as the percentage of the population that was currently married between 1970 and 2000 decreased (Olson and Olson 2000, 4). Noting a trend spanning more than 4 decades, Wilcox reports that in 1960 69.3% of all males age 15 and older as well as 65.9% of all women age 15 and older were married. By 2008 that number had decreased as 53.7% of all males age 15 and older and 50.0% of all females age 15 and older were married (Wilcox 2009, 65). A further example of this deinstitutionalization of marriage can be seen in the shift between marriage as a chosen state of mutual commitment to marriage as a legal contract. Wilson notes that “the family ended its career as a status and fully accepted its new position as a contract, one that could be modified in many ways, rejected if one found it displeasing, and submitted to court review whenever its terms appear to have been violated” (Wilson 2002, 99). Along with this change came the realization that “any couple that agrees that they want a divorce can get one” (Lief 2005, 13).

Evidence pointing to the deinstitutionalization of marriage can be seen in a rise in the prevalence of cohabitation and its acceptance as an alternative to

marriage. Cherlin identifies four stages in this process: (1) cohabitation as a fringe movement; (2) cohabitation as an acceptable proving ground for marriage, (3) cohabitation as an acceptable alternative to marriage, and (4) cohabitation as equal to marriage (Cherlin 2004, 849). Prior to 1950 the number of cohabiting couples in the United States constituted less than 5% of the general population, and a majority of those were among the less educated (Cherlin, 2004 852). However, Wilson reports that the number of unmarried cohabiting couples in the United States increased by a factor of 11 between 1960 and 2002 (Wilson 2002, 18). This trend has been substantiated by the rise in out-of-wedlock births occurring to cohabiting couples from 29% in the early 1980s to 39% in the early 1990s (Institute for American Values 2000, 6). Among individuals in their 20's and 30's, more than one-half have experienced cohabitation, and this despite evidence that "premarital cohabitation is positively related to marital disagreement, conflict, instability as well as negatively associated with marital interaction, satisfaction, communication, and commitment (Brown et al 2006). More and more, it seems, couples in America are forgoing traditional marriage in favor of unmarried cohabitation.

Other important factors in the deinstitutionalization of marriage have been identified as "increases in intimacy expectation . . . the greater economic independence of women, 'no-fault' divorce reform, the rise of social insurance programs that make individuals less dependent on families, the expansion of market and consumer mores into family life, and lesser social supports and pressures to get and stay married" (Institute for American Values 2000, 5).

Generational Differences

Rainer and Rainer identify and discuss five American generations from the early 1900s to the early 2000s. These generations are (1) the G.I. Generation, which was born between 1904 and 1924; (2) the Silent Generation, which was born between 1925 and 1945; (3) the Boomer Generation, which was born between 1946 and 1964; (4) Generation X, which was born between 1965 and 1979; and (5) the Millennial Generation, which was born between 1980 and 2000 (Rainer and Rainer 2011, 8). While other generational theorists, such as Strauss and Howe offer, in some cases, slightly different names and dates, there is general agreement on these generations. For example, Strauss and Howe date the G.I. Generation from 1901 and they refer to Generation X as the 13th Generation, and date it from 1961 to 1981 (Strauss and Howe 1997, 136-38). A further example of the slight differences in generational monikers can be seen in the work of Susan Mitchell who extends the years of birth of those in the G.I. Generation to 1933 and then offers a different name for the generation born between the G.I. Generation and the Boomer Generation. Here she utilizes the term Swing Generation (Mitchell 1998, 5-7).

These generations of Americans were born out of unique historical contexts and emerged with views of marriage and commitment that are varied. The results and reaction to married were somewhat varied as well. In 1998 Mitchell reported that among persons currently married those from the WWII Generation, those born before 1933, more frequently (70%) reported being very happy in their marriage than those in the Swing Generation (64%), Generation X (67%), and the Baby Boom Generation (56%) (Mitchell 1998, 36-37). The Baby Boom Generation married at younger ages and in

greater proportion than previous generations (Mitchell 1998, 234-35) while members of Generation X tended to stay single longer (Mitchell 1995, 90-91). The Baby Boom Generation “came of age rebelling against the worldly blueprints of their parents” (Strauss and Howe 1997, 137). Experiencing a high level of independence and being influenced by the zeitgeist of the 1960s and 1970s, these married people were taught that “perfectly nice people might not stay together forever, erasing the cultural stigma of failing at romance and, thereby, legitimating being alone” (Kutulas 2010, 698). Furthermore, the Baby Boom Generation rejected, en masse, traditional social roles and became much more open to a more egalitarian view of marriage (Light 1988, 114). During the 1970s couples who cohabitated prior to marriage began to rise (Cherelin 2009, 90). As a result, “by the 1980s the standard (traditional) family was gone, replaced by single-parent families, two-earner couples, and a much greater focus on the individual” (Light 1988, 146).

Twenge reports that among those born between 1970 and 1990, a group that she refers to as GenMe, and who are married, marital satisfaction is reportedly less than their counterparts from previous generations. Furthermore this group reported less interaction, more conflict, more anger, and more jealousy (Twenge 2006, 133). This is due, in part, to the fact that this generation largely “survived a hurried childhood of divorce, latchkeys, (and) open classrooms” (Strauss and Howe 1997, 137). Comparing the late G.I. Generation and the Silent Generation to Generation X, Schneider and Stevenson note that “in the 1950s, being married was highly desirable and the proportion of people who never married was low, as was the divorce rate. In the 1990s, marriages are less important” (Schneider and Stevenson 1999, 31).

Rainer and Rainer report that the Millennial Generation has a promising belief in marriage. They note that among this group, only 2% of their research sample was currently divorced or separated. Alternatively, 86% stated that intended to marry once, or not at all. 61% stated that family was really important in life, and a spouse or partner was listed as the fifth most important element of life. Overall, the Millennial Generation appears to have a keen interest in returning to more traditional family values (Rainer and Rainer 2011, 61-76).

Divorce Statistics

The divorce rate in America is widely reported as an approximation of 50% of first-time marriages (Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach 2000, 964; Halford et al. 2003, 386; Popenoe and Whitehead 2004, 18). “For the average couple marrying for the first time in recent years, the lifetime probability of divorce or separation remains between 40 and 50 percent” (Wilcox 2009, 77). According to Hicks, divorce rates in the United States appear to be at a plateau (Hicks et al. 2004, 98), or slightly decreasing. In 2007, the rate was 3.4 divorces per 1000 total population. In 2006 this number was 3.6 per 1000 total population; in 2005 there were 3.7 divorces per 1000 total population (National Center for Health Statistics 2008, 1). In 1998, there were 4.2 divorces per 1000 total population (National Center for Health Statistics 1999, 1). In a 2000 work Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach noted that the divorce rate in the United States had been declining steadily since 1992 (Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach 2000, 964). What is currently unascertainable is whether these declining rates are sustainable over time or if they are merely a brief and only slight fluctuation in an overall trend toward increasing divorce rates that can be traced

back to Colonial America (Lief 2005). “The American divorce rate today is nearly twice that of 1960, but has declined since hitting the highest point in the early 1980’s” (Wilcox 2009, 77).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2001 approximately 1 out of 5 adults have been divorced. Previously divorced men are more likely to be remarried than are previously divorced women. First marriages that end in divorce last approximately 8 years, on average. Of couples married in the previous year, 62% involved men and women who were both entering their first marriage (Krieder 2005, 1). Despite the noted evidence of movement toward the deinstitutionalization marriage, and the cited statistical information regarding divorce, marriage remains a “core value and aspiration of many Americans” (Waite and Gallagher 2000, 2).

Within the four states to be included in this study, Kentucky has the highest rate of divorce. In 2009 4.6 out of every 1000 Kentucky residents experienced a divorce. Tennessee ranked second highest, with 3.9 out of every 1000 Tennessee residents experiencing a divorce in 2009. With a rate of 3.7 out of every 1000 residents, Missouri experienced the third highest rate of divorce per capita of the four states. With a rate of 2.5 out of every 1000 residents, Illinois residents experienced the lowest rate of divorce out of the four states to be studied (cdc.gov 2011/nchs/dats/nvss/divorce_rates_90_95_99-09.pdf). Based upon these individual state rates, the average rate of divorce among the four states to be included in this study can be calculated at 3.6 per 1000. The national average for divorces per capita in 2009 was 3.5 out every 1000 (cdc.gov 2011/nchs/nvss/marriage_divorce_tables.html).

Factors Affecting Marital Stability and Satisfaction

A myriad of factors have been suggested to pertain to marital success and satisfaction. One manner in which to organize these factors is to arrange them into three distinct domains: (1) background and contextual factors, (2) individual traits and behaviors, and (3) couple interactional processes (Larson and Holman 1994).

Background and Contextual Factors

Factors placed into this domain primarily relate to historical events or contextual circumstances from which the marriage relationship arises. These factors are predetermined reality; they are unchangeable and static. Examples of factors that fit into this category include the family of origin of each member of the pre-married party. Kunz notes a link between parental divorce and adult child marital dissatisfaction and divorce. Adult children whose parents have divorced are more likely to experience marital dissolution than are the adult children of parents whose marriage remain intact (Kunz 2001, 19-20). Likewise when “parents reported more conflict, problem, and instability in their marriages in 1980, children reported less happiness, less interaction, more conflict, more problems, and greater instability in 1997” (Amato and Booth 2001,632). Lehrer echoed the relationship between parental divorce and the likelihood of subsequent children’s divorce and extended this to include children of parents who never married (Amato and Booth 2004, 475).

Holman and Larson cite Larson, Holman, and Harmer (1994) and report that a cluster of factors related to the dynamics of the family-of-origin of the married party were positively correlated to marital satisfaction and stability. This cluster includes the quality of parents’ marriage, quality of family environment, and the quality of parent-child

relationships. Holman et al. found that there was a significant correlation between this cluster of factors in the family-of-origin of the husband and (1) the husband's marital satisfaction, (2) the husband's marital stability as it relates to his thoughts of divorce, (3) wife's marital satisfaction, and (4) wife's marital stability, but not her thoughts of divorce (Holman and Larson 1994, 230).

Age at the time of marriage has been shown to be a risk factor for marital dissatisfaction and divorce. Bumpass et al. report that women who marry at age twenty-five or above are two-thirds less likely to have their marriage disrupted than are those who marry in their teen years (Bumpass et al. 1991, 32). Booth and Edwards found that people marrying in their early twenties scored the lowest on marriage instability measures (Booth and Edwards 1985, 71). Bradbury et al. credit the decline of the divorce rates in the 1990s in part to the pointed rise in the average age at first marriage that came about during that time period (Bradbury et al. 2000, 964). Larson and Holman state strongly that "the relationship between young age at marriage and marital instability is among the strongest and most consistently documented in the research literature" (Larson and Holman 1994, 230).

Premarital cohabitation has been shown to have negative effects on marital satisfaction and stability. Bumpass et al. report that women who have cohabitated with their husband before marriage "have marriage disruption rates that are 50% higher than those who did not" (Bumpass et al. 1991, 32). Amato et al. note that "studies consistently show that couples who cohabited prior to marriage, compared with those who did not, report lower marital happiness, interact less frequently, have more arguments, and are more likely to see their marriages end in divorce" (Amato et al. 2003, 3).

Other background and contextual factors have been identified as well. Income and education are among these (Heaton 2002, 400). Kurdek noted that low income levels of the husband as well as low income and education levels of the wife were reliable predictors of marital disruption (Kurdek 1993, 238). Brown, Orbuch, and Bauermeister found that during the first seven years of marriage, wives' education had a protective effect against the odds of divorce (Brown, Orbuch, and Bauermeister 2008, 192). In a previous study, Kurdek identified premarital pregnancy, history of divorce, and the presence of a step-child as risk-factors for accelerating the decline of marital satisfaction (Kurdek 1991, 44).

Racial and religious heterogeneity are significant factors, with religious heterogeneity being a much greater predictor of marital stability and satisfaction (Heaton 2002, 402). Lehrer and Chiswick note the key factor in this area is not religious background but religious beliefs at the time of marriage. "Religious compatibility between spouses at the time of marriage has a large influence on marital stability, rivaling in magnitude that of age at marriage and . . . dominating any adverse effects of differences in religious background" (Lehrer and Chiswick 1993, 385). Later they note that the magnitude of the destabilizing effect of dissimilar religiosity among married couples depends in part on the degree of dissimilarity of the beliefs and practices of the faith adherents as well as "with the clarity with which they define their respective boundaries" (Lehrer and Chiswick 1993, 400). Religion in general is a factor as well as those with no religious affiliation have higher rates of marital dissolution than those with a religious affiliation. Those couples who attended religious services more frequently experienced lower instances of marital dissolution (Brown et al. 2008, 192; Call and

Heaton 1997, 385-86). It is interesting to note that Booth et al. found that the relationship between religion and marital quality is somewhat reciprocal in that certain religious activities increase marital happiness just as marital happiness also appears to increase some religious activity (Booth et al. 1995, 661).

Individual Traits and Behaviors

Many studies have looked at the potential effects of individual traits and behaviors of pre-married couples on marital satisfaction. Botwin et al. found “strong evidence that personality plays a critical role in mate selection and marital happiness” (Botwin et al. 1997, 128-29). Among personality traits, neuroticism has been correlated to marital dissatisfaction. That is to say that higher levels of neuroticism (inability to regulate anxiety) in one member of the pre-married couple is related to higher levels of marital distress. Conversely, it has been noted that higher levels of extroversion are related to higher levels of marital satisfaction and stability. Low levels of self-concept and high levels of depression have been associated with marital dissatisfaction. Couples who possess positive beliefs about the ability of their partner to change are more likely to have a successful marriage than those couples who are pessimistic about the ability to change. Generally speaking, it has been noted that personality factors are more predictive of marital quality than are background factors (Larson and Holman 1994, 231-32).

Furthermore, a correlation between low abandonment anxiety and marital satisfaction has been found, which is consistent with other findings on anxiety (neuroticism). Likewise, couples who possess the ability to regulate negative affect are more likely to experience fulfillment in marriage. That is to say that couples who can minimize the amount of negativity that they emanate toward their spouse are able to also

minimize damage to the relationship during times of stress and/or conflict (Halford et al. 2003, 388). Relationships in which one or more participants possess an inability to control or decrease physiological arousal to conflict are more likely to experience marital dissatisfaction and dissolution (Stanley 2001, 276; Gottman 1993b, 66). Marriages in which one or both partners possess low levels of agreeableness, emotional stability, and intellectual-openness are more likely to experience higher levels of marital distress than those relationship characterized by the presence of higher levels of these traits (Botwin et al. 1997, 134).

Spousal attributions of partner behaviors also play a role in marital satisfaction and success. Karney and Bradbury stated that “satisfied spouses tend to view their partners’ positive behaviors as the result of stable, internal causes and dismiss negative behaviors as the result of temporary, external causes. Distressed spouses, in contrast, tend to view their partners as the cause of negative behaviors and find temporary, external causes for positive behaviors” (Karney and Bradbury 2000, 295).

Ogle and Hasz reviewed the importance of marital cognition as it pertains to individual expectations, perceptions, attributions, and assumptions and made a case for the importance of forgiveness and positive/negative balance in the marriage relationship (Ogle and Hasz 2004). Likewise Orathinkal and Vansteenwegen have noted a positive correlation between forgiveness and marital satisfaction (Orathinkal and Vansteenwegen 2006, 256). Marital distress and the presence of a psychological disorder in the marriage relationship have also been correlated (Halford et al. 2003, 388). These disorders can range from severe psychiatric disorders to depression, alcohol abuse, as well as some

anxiety disorders. Finally, Hawkins et al. have highlighted the role of couple and individual motivation for marital satisfaction (Hawkins et al. 2004, 548).

Couple Interactional Processes

In this third and final domain of factors affecting marital stability and satisfaction much has been researched and reported. In general, couple interactional processes contain dynamic factors related to “the cognitive, behavioral, and affective processes that occur when partners are together” (Halford et al. 2003, 387). Perhaps chief among the factors within this domain are communication and conflict resolution.

“The ability to communicate effectively is generally regarded by counselors and teachers of family life education as a major component of mental health and as imperative for problem-solving in human relationships” (Bienvenu 1975, 65). Since these words were penned in the 1970s the precise relationship between marital satisfaction and success and communication and conflict resolution has been oft debated and rarely clarified. While many researchers maintain the position that effective communication plays an important role in a couple’s ability to achieve a satisfying marriage (Ogle and Hasz 2004, 26; Halford et al. 2003, 387), there remains variance in what communication is considered effective and what is not considered effective for marital success and stability. Christensen and Shenk found that “nondistressed couples evidenced more mutual constructive communication” than did couples in the study who were distressed or divorcing (Christensen and Shenk 1991, 462). Burleson and Denton, in part responding to Christensen and Shenk, sought more specific language in the discussion related to communication and marital distress. They charged that Christensen and Shenk attributed their findings to greater communication skills amongst the

nondistressed couples when in fact Christensen and Shenk did not measure skills at all. From there, Burleson and Denton introduce three distinctions into the study of communication studies: motivations, skills, and behaviors (Burleson and Denton 1997, 886). Having parsed out these constructs, Burleson and Denton found in their study “complex and contingent patterns of association between an individual’s communication skills and their marital satisfaction” (Burleson and Denton 1997, 898). Part of the complexity of this issue is that research has demonstrated gender differences with respect to communication skill level and marital stability and success (Schilling et al. 2003, 49; Lloyd 1987).

Berns, Jacobsen, and Gottman provide a definition of positive communication and negative communication. They assert that positive communication includes the presence of negotiating, listening, validating, as well as the presence of positive nonverbal behavior and affect. Negative communication includes the lack of the aforementioned positive communication traits as well as the presence of interrupting, demanding, and dominating (Berns, Jacobsen, and Gottman 1999, 668).

For many researchers the key to marital stability and success is found not merely in how couples communicate, but in how they interact while in conflict. Generally speaking, couples whose communication style includes the avoidance of conflict, competitiveness, or negativity experience lower levels of satisfaction. Conversely, couples whose styles of conflict are more positively toned experience higher levels of marital satisfaction (Segrin, Hanzal, and Domschke 2009, 209). John Gottman has noted what he terms the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.” According to Gottman, these negative interactions during conflict predict marital instability and

dissatisfaction. Gottman has identified these interactions as complaining/criticizing, defensiveness, contemptuousness and stonewalling (Gottman 1994, 110-11).

Spousal affect during conflict has been found to be related to marital success and satisfaction. Gottman et al. reported that negative start-up by the wife was part of a pattern that predicted divorce (Gottman et al. 1998, 17). Here they defined negative start-up as “the escalation of one partner’s neutral affect to the other partner’s negative affect” (Gottman et al. 1998, 7). Hanzal and Segrin noted that “wives’ negative affectivity is significantly associated with their own lower marital satisfaction and husbands’ lower marital satisfaction” and that “for all spouses, negative affectivity was associated with a tendency to engage in more dysfunctional conflict styles” (Hanzal and Segrin 2009, 150). Finally, an important relationship between forgiveness and marital success and satisfaction has been noted (Fincham, Beach, and Davila 2004, 2007).

Premarital Education

Against the backdrop of increasing rates of divorce and marital dissatisfaction as well as the important benefits of marriage, “marriage preparation or premarital counseling has been advocated as an important preventative measure to divorce” (Williams, et al 1999, 271). Stanley asserts 4 key benefits to premarital education. These benefits include slowing the couple down to foster deliberation, communicating to the couple that marriage matters, educate the couple on options should marital distress occur later, and lower the risk of marital distress and dissolution (Stanley 2001, 272).

Similarly, Fournier and Olsen assert “premarital and newlywed programs can serve to reduce the emotional pain and financial burden experienced by . . . adults and children each year who directly experience divorce” (Fournier and Olsen 1986, 195). Likewise

Robert Stahmann , citing Stahmann and Salts (1993), asserts six typical goals of premarital education programs: (1) increasing couple stability and satisfaction for the short term and the long term; (2) easing the transition from single life to married life; (3) enhancing the communication skills of the couple; (4) increasing friendship and commitment to the relationship; (5) increasing couple intimacy; and (6) enhancing problem-solving and decision making skills in areas such as marital roles and finances (Stahmann 2000, 105).

History

Premarital education programs have been utilized to some degree since the 1920s. The first documented effort to develop a strategy of premarital intervention was in 1924. During that year Ernest Groves taught the first known course in preparation for family life at Boston University (Stahmann and Hiebert 1997, 5). In 1932, the Merrill-Palmer Institute developed the first program of premarital prevention (Carroll and Doherty 2003, 106). A standardized program was developed at the Philadelphia Marriage Council in 1941 with the stated purpose of assisting young couples to secure a “better understanding of what companionship in married life involves and thus help them avoid some of the causes of marital difficulties” (Mudd, Freeman, and Rose 1941, 98). The stated goals of this program were to “provide education and information about married life to couples contemplating marriage and to help prospective spouses work out whatever interpersonal difficulties they were experiencing at the time” (Bagarozzi and Rauen 1981, 13-14). From its infancy in the early 1900s to the 1960s “counselors tended to conceptualize marital problems as the problem of one individual in the relationship. Therefore, premarital education, as we understand it today, was not a regular part of

professional clinical practice.” This trend turned in the 1970s with a heightened interest in premarital education that coincided with an increase in the divorce rate in the United States (Carroll and Doherty 2003, 106).

Through the last two decades of the twentieth century and into the new millennium premarital education continued to burgeon as a multidisciplinary field of study (Ooms 2005, 1) and has drawn the attention and trust of state and local governments as they attempt to provide a response to the declination in the success and satisfaction of marriages in the United States (Wilmouth 2005, 26-27; Ooms, Bouchet, and Parke 2004; Stanley 2001, 272).

In the 1990s at least two significant occurrences came about that effected the premarital education movement. In 1995, Diane Sollee coined the term marriage education. She subsequently created a national clearinghouse to facilitate the cooperation and communication between various marriage education groups. Her efforts worked to jump start close collaboration between professionals and lay people working in their communities toward the goal of increasing marital success and satisfaction. During that same period Michael McManus began to call for religious leaders to assert more leadership in this area. He began a movement called Marriage Savers in 1996 with the aim of assisting churches in their efforts to strengthen marriages (Doherty and Anderson 2004, 426-27).

Clergy Involvement

There is evidence of the history and effectiveness of clergy involvement in premarital education. Three works published in the 1950s provide a beginning point for the emphasis among evangelicals. In 1958 Wayne E. Oates, professor of psychology of

religion at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, published a work on premarital pastoral care (Oates 1958). That same year the Methodist Church published a similar work (Board of Publication of The Methodist Church 1958) and Arthur Tingue published an article related to the role of the clergy in premarital education where he outlined several areas of emphasis and a structure for the premarital counseling process (1958). Overall, however, though “clergy have had a long history of meeting with couples prior to their weddings, only in the past three decades has the focus of these meetings shifted from education about the nature and meaning of the marriage rite itself to education geared at preparing couples for marriage” (Carroll and Doherty 2003, 106). In fact, crediting the work of Hunt, Hof, and DeMaria on marriage enrichment, Halford notes that “structured relationship education began with the work of religious organizations, and evolved from the brief counsel often offered by religious marriage celebrants, such as priests, rabbis, and ministers, to marrying couples (Halford 2004, 559).

“Counseling and psychology are not incidental to the callings of a minister of Jesus Christ” (Moore 2008, 3). Specifically, clergy are in a unique position with regard to marriage and premarital education as they are often sought out for providing premarital education services because of the strong link between the family and the church (Jones and Stahmann 1994, 181). Nearly 75% of first marriages occur within a religious organization, though it is noted that less than one-half of religious organizations currently provide premarital services of any consequence (Stanley et al. 2001, 67). “Ninety percent of couples who have received premarital counseling did so in a religious setting” (Wilmoth 2006, 21). Not only do premarital couples frequently see clergy as important participants in the marriage process but clergy see themselves as important here as well.

In a study of 213 clergy members 94% believed that they were the primary providers of premarital education services (Jones and Stahmann 182).

There is potential for clergy to significantly impact marriage in a positive manner when they provide effective premarital education (Wilmoth 2006, 31). Studies show clergy can be successful and effective if they take on this task and provide premarital education. Stanley et al. found that clergy could be trained to deliver premarital education using a skills-based approach and be as successful as university staff (2001, 72). Halford et al. similarly noted, “The data suggest that we can successfully train trainers to use evidence-based programs in community settings and set the stage for widely disseminating relationship education program” (2003, 392). In a study of married couples who has participated in a premarital education program, participants rated clergy as the most helpful providers of the program (Williams et al. 1999, 275).

Despite this potential for successful preparation many obstacles exist that must be overcome. Lack of training, being unaware of available resources, insufficient time, and church finances are among the highest rated hindrances to clergy involvement in premarital education (Wilmoth 2005, 139). Lack of training has been an issue for many years. Summers and Cunningham, writing twenty-five years earlier, noted the dearth of seminaries and universities which provided courses on premarital counseling (Summers and Cunningham 1989, 332).

When clergy does deliver premarital education, Wayne Oates recommends the following goals of the process: (1) to make arrangements of the procedural details of the wedding ceremony; (2) to allow the pre-married couple to discuss their feelings about their relationship; (3) to build a substantial relationship between the couple and the

pastor; (4) to relate the couple to a primary system of faith; (5) to communicate a pastoral blessing to the couple and their marriage; (6) to allow the couple to reconcile previous broken relationships so that the marriage relationship is not adversely affected by them; (7) the communication of basic information that the couple desires (Oates 1975, 69-71).

Program Efficacy

Certain models of premarital education have been demonstrated to be efficacious for improving “couples’ readiness and preparation for marriage” (McGeorge and Carlson 2006, 182; Cole and Cole 1999, 274-75). Furthermore, in a robust meta-analysis of thirteen studies on the efficacy of premarital education programs, Carroll and Doherty concluded that “premarital prevention programs are generally effective in producing significant immediate gains in communication processes, conflict management skills, and overall relationship quality, and that these gains appear to hold for at least 6 months to 3 years” (Carroll and Doherty 2003, 114). Commenting on this study, Stanley et al assert that in the Carroll and Doherty meta-analysis “12 of the 13 studies found significant differences favoring couples that received premarital education” These studies looked at, among other factors, problem-solving skills, marital conflict, and marital satisfaction (Stanley et al. 2006, 117). In a 2003 review Halford et al. noted that multiple studies in the 1980s found that skills-based premarital education programs produced immediate improvements in relationship skills and that there is “strong evidence that skills-based relationship education helps couples acquire and maintain relationship skills” (Halford et al. 2003, 391). Ooms, citing a 2005 study by the Urban Institute, noted evidence from “previous narrative reviews and meta-analyses that

marriage and relationship programs provide benefits for the couples they serve” (Ooms 2005, 7).

In one German study, researchers found that couples who participated in a 6-session learning program focusing on effective communication and problem-solving skills were less likely to have experienced a marital dissolution by the 3-year follow-up and were more likely to have experienced higher levels of marital adjustment and improved communication when compared to couples who did not participate in the program (Hahlweg et al. 1998, 552).

In some cases, premarital education was found to be beneficial for participants in a manner that was less directly related to the overall satisfaction or stability of the marriage. For example, a study of United States Army personnel reported that soldiers who had participated in premarital education were more likely to pursue marital therapy when future problems arise than were those who did not participate in premarital education. Furthermore, these soldiers who did participate in premarital education sought marital therapy at lower levels of marital distress than did their counterparts (Schumm, Silliman, and Bell 2000, 183-84).

In addition to measured benefits, a plethora of unmeasured benefits have been proposed. Among these are (1) introducing hope for marriage partners that divorce can be avoided and that problems can be overcome; (2) normalizing relationship challenges; (3) raising the level of understanding that marriage takes work and conscious effort to succeed; (4) building a more supportive environment within the relationship that is more conducive to positive interaction (Ooms 2005, 7-8).

While efficacy for premarital education in general has been identified and established, it must be noted that evaluating the efficacy of a specific program of premarital education is complicated and rare. In fact the majority of existing premarital education programs have not been empirically evaluated or validated for efficacy. This may be due, in part, to a lack of funding or lack of expertise in the evaluation of such programs (Adler-Baeder, Higginbotham, and Lamke 2004, 537). Fournier and Olsen offer further insight into the obstacles that have clouded research on existing programs. They identified five such obstacles: (1) lack of comparable control groups; (2) use of only subjective self-reports by subjects; (3) lack of longitudinal studies that provided long-term evaluation; (4) use of instruments that lack credibility of evidence of reliability and/or validity; and (5) research designs that are unable to isolate comparative effectiveness across premarital education programs (Fournier and Olsen 1986, 213).

Curricular Content

A plethora of premarital education programs exist which are aimed at a wide array of “target audiences in religious settings, communities in general, schools, universities, and clinical practice (Adler-Baeder, Higginbotham, and Lamke 2004, 537). The purpose of this section of the literature review is to (1) identify in the literature base recommended content areas for premarital education programs; (2) review current premarital education programs and identify curricular content areas from those programs; (3) perform a content analysis of the literature base as well as current programs to identify areas of concern for premarital education.

Recommended content from the literature base. The vast majority of researchers and writers in this area echo the sentiment of Scott Stanley, “My opinion is that far too much time is dedicated to unchangeable factors in many forms of premarital training (Stanley 2001, 276).” Hawkins et al. suggest three domains of importance in a marriage education program. The first domain, relationship skills, includes a focus on interactional processes, communication patterns, and problem-solving behaviors that sustain or weaken marriages. The second domain is that of awareness, knowledge, and attitudes. Here the focus is on the importance of helping couples to become aware of common problems to avoid and raising awareness of the effort that will be required to sustain a healthy marriage. The authors assert that couples should be introduced to the importance of making significant personal sacrifices for the good of the marriage relationship. The final aspect of this domain is educating the couple on the institutional and societal features of marriage and how their marriage should contribute to a healthy society. The third domain proposed is that of motivation and virtues. Here couples should be encouraged to dismiss the consumer ethic that permeates culture and embrace the motivations of commitment, generosity, justice, and loyalty (Hawkins et al. 2004, 547-48).

Williams et al. studied married couples who had been married from one to eight years and who had participated in a premarital education program. Part of the research project included asking participants to rate the content areas that they believed were most helpful to their marriage. The research indicated that couples found the content areas of communication, conflict resolution, commitment, children, and religious

or spiritual matters to be most beneficial to the sustaining of their marriage relationship (Williams et al. 1999, 280).

Stanley identifies communication and managing conflict as the two areas of content with the most promise for having lasting effects on the couple relationship. He gives an important qualification for this, however, and asserts that the instruction for these content areas must go beyond the mere exchange of information from the provider to the couple. The premarital education process must allow ample opportunity for the couple to practice the skills that they are acquiring. Beyond communication and conflict management, Stanley also extols the importance of expectations, commitment, roles, core beliefs, and protection of the friendship and asserts that “both Scripture and research point to very specific, negative relational patterns that will destroy any relationship, e.g., escalation, invalidation, withdrawal, and negative interpretations” (Stanley 1997, 55-56). Writing 4 years later, Stanley identified the need to prevent negative interaction and dysfunctional attitudes within the marriage relationship (Stanley 2001, 276).

The need to address negative interactions has also been stated by Gottman, who has identified what he calls the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.” According to Gottman, these negative interactions during conflict predict marital instability and dissatisfaction. Gottman has identified these interactions as complaining/criticizing, defensiveness, contemptuousness and stonewalling (Gottman 1994, 110-11). “Gottman suggests marital therapy based on gentleness, softened start-up by the wife, willingness of husband to accept influence by his wife and positive, rather than negative, emotional responses of both partners during conflict” (Groom 2001, 53).

Another proponent of the skills training approach is Kim Halford. She identified three strengths of this approach, which focuses on issues such as positive communication, conflict management, positive expression of affection, and building partner empathy. Among the reasons that Halford supports this approach is that it focuses on variables that predict relationship outcomes as there is substantial evidence that this approach is efficacious in changing targeted skills (Halford 2004, 560). Claude Guldner also noted the importance of a skills-based approach. He asserted that the process of premarital education should be an active one that is “designed to provide processes and skills that can be applicable to the varied problems which emerge in the course of a marriage” (Guldner 1977, 252-53).

Writing his doctoral dissertation in 1979, David Fournier investigated 10 articles and books and compiled a listing of 16 problem areas in marriage that could provide important content for a premarital education program. His list included personality, personal habits and health, incompatible backgrounds, interests and values, expectations, idealization, communication, sex, commitment, marital roles, arguments, relatives, friends, children, money, and work (Fournier 1979).

McGeorge and Carlson conducted a review in 2006 of existing premarital education curriculums as well as a review of the literature base. Their desire was to develop an intervention curriculum for their study. To accomplish this “a team of educators reviewed the existing empirical literature on premarital program effectiveness, relationship topics that participants or other sources identified as the most helpful components of premarital education, and premarital education meta-analysis.” Their review led to the creation of a program that consisted of eight sessions during which the

topics of relationship history, concept of marriage, individual and couple expectations for marriage, family of origin, communication and conflict resolution, marital roles and expectations about those roles and the division of labor within the relationship, finances, intimacy, personality, expression of love and anger, holidays, rituals, and tradition were all addressed (McGeorge and Carlson 2006, 174).

Risch, Riley, and Lawler identified 10 of the most common problematic issues for young married couples. These issues include balancing time, sexual issues, financial issues, extended family issues, role expectations, communication and conflict resolution, children, compatibility issues, relationship quality, and health issues (including mental health) (Risch, Riley, and Lawler 2003, 262). The authors assert “The importance of dealing with problematic issues in marriage preparation and marriage enrichment programs cannot be over-emphasized” (Risch, Riley, and Lawler 2003, 265).

Adler-Baeder et al. identified three categories containing areas of focus that impact marital quality. These areas are interactional process elements, contextual conditions or issues, and enduring personal and couple traits (Adler-Baeder et al. 2004, 538). Acknowledging that the areas of contextual issues or conditions and enduring personal and couple traits must not be ignored, this group honed in on interactional process elements as the most effective approach to increase marital stability and satisfaction. Their research indicated three topics for marriage education prevention programs. The first topic is that of positivity. This is a protective factor that describes the importance of positive emotions and affect, affectionate behaviors, supportive behaviors, time together, relational identity, as well as expressivity and self-disclosure. The second topic is that of negativity. This is a risk factor that describes the corrosive nature of

negative affect, emotions, and feelings, overt negative behaviors, withdrawing, nonresponsive, or dismissive behaviors, as well as the demand-withdraw pattern. The third topic identified by Adler-Baeder et al. is that of cognitions. This is a protective factor that describes the helpfulness of realistic beliefs and perceptions of expectations. It also highlights the benefit of knowledge and understanding about one another, consensus, perceived equality/fairness, as well as positive attributions and biases (Adler-Baeder 204, 539-40).

Stahmann writes that “it is important that counselors are aware of a range of topics such as marriage quality and stability, family-of-origin influences, finance/budgeting, communication, decision-making, intimacy, parenting, (and) sexuality. . .”. (Stahmann 2000, 112). Bagarozzi and Bagarozzi identified the areas of marital roles and tasks, finances and financial decision making, sexual relations, in-laws, friends, recreation, religion, and children as content areas for premarital education (Baharozzi and Bagarozzi 1982, 53). Writing from a pastoral perspective in 1972 Oates asserts that content for premarital education should include(1) roles; (2) the allocation of time and its effects on the relationship; (3) work and vocation; (4) finances and money management; (5) parents-in-law; (6) religious differences; (7) children; (8) family medical care; (9) marriage and the law (Oates 1972, 54-63). In addition to these items of curricular content, Oates also asserts the need for the pastor to fulfill the role of preacher and to teach biblical principles of human marriage relationships (Oates 1972, 45-48).

Content of current programs. Given that a plethora of premarital education programs exist, the current section will provide an overview of the curricular content of a

few of these programs. This section will consider both programs that include a premarital assessment questionnaire as well as those that do not.

Stahmann asserts that “the use of a comprehensive premarital assessment instrument is a valuable component of the premarital counseling process and contributes to it” (Stahmann 2000, 112). Likewise, in their review of three premarital assessment questionnaires Larson et al. noted that “an important component of premarital counseling is assessment” (Larson et al. 2002, 233). In 1995 Larson et al. reviewed five premarital assessment questionnaires. In their 2002 review, Larson et al. noted that they chose to review only three of the five premarital assessment questionnaires, dropping two of them “because of their relative lack of easy availability to test administrators, age (of the instrument), and no published evidence of predictive validity” (Larson et al. 2002, 233). Their 2002 review included the PREmarital Preparation and Relationship Enhancement (PREPARE) questionnaire, the Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study (FOCCUS) questionnaire, and the RELATionship Evaluation (RELATE).

It should be noted here that in 2002 Larson et al. reviewed the PREPARE version that was updated and published in 1996. This was known as Version 2000. A revised edition, known as Customized Version, was subsequently produced and published in 2008 (Olson and Larson 2008, 12-13). The Customized Version of PREPARE contains ten core scales, a relationship dynamics scale, a stress scale, couple and family map, personality scale, as well as a scale to identify idealistic distortion. The core scales include communication, conflict resolution, partner style and habits, family and friends, financial management, leisure activities, sexual expectations, spiritual beliefs,

relationship expectations, and character traits (Olson and Larson 2008, 18-22). The relationship dynamics scales measure assertiveness, self-confidence, avoidance, and partner dominance (Olson and Larson 2008, 23). The couple and family map scales report couple flexibility, couple closeness, family-of-origin closeness, and family-of-origin flexibility (Olson and Larson 2008, 25-26). The personality scales report five areas: (1) social - reflects and interest in people and social activities; (2) change - reflects openness to change, personal flexibility, and interest in new experiences; (3) organized - reflects how organized and persistent a person is in his or her daily life, work, and pursuit of goals; (4) pleasing - reflects how considerate and cooperative a person is in his or her interactions with others; (5) emotionally steady - reflects the tendency to stay relaxed and calm even when faced with stressful situations (Olson and Larson 2008, 26-27). The scales contained with PREPARE provide the content areas for the program.

FOCCUS is a 156-question instrument that measures 4 major content areas with 19 separate scales (Larson et al. 2002, 236-37). The 19 scales comprising the FOCCUS inventory are lifestyle expectations, friends and interests, personality match, personal issues, communication, problem solving, religion and values, parenting, extended family, sexuality, finances, marriage readiness, marriage covenant, key problem indicators, family of origin, dual careers, interfaith marriages (if applicable), remarriages (if applicable), and cohabitating couples (if applicable) (foccusinc.com/foccus-inventory.aspx).

RELATE is a 271-question instrument that measures factors in 4 broad categories: (1) personality characteristics; (2) similarity of values; (3) family background; (4) relationship experiences. Within the category of personality characteristics 8 factors

are measured, including sociability, calmness, organization, flexibility, emotional maturity, happiness, and self-esteem. The general values section measures a couple's perceptions of marriage roles, employment, sexuality, children, and religiosity. The family background section considers family processes, parental marital satisfaction, relationship with father, relationship with mother, family stressors, and parents and couple conflict resolution styles. Finally, the area of relationship experiences considers couple communication style, conflict resolution styles, as well as relationship satisfaction and stability (Larson et al. 2002, 237).

In addition to premarital education programs that are centered on the use of a premarital assessment questionnaire, numerous premarital education programs exist which are not dependent upon, or do not utilize a premarital assessment questionnaire. These programs typically offer a manual or other structured curriculum to assist those in the premarital phase of their relationship. H. Norman Wright and Wes Roberts have written into their premarital education curriculum chapters on the defining of marriage, recognizing and accepting the uniqueness of your partner, the primacy of biblical love in the marriage, marital expectations, needs fulfillment, roles and decision making, in-laws, communication, conflict resolution, finances, sex, and spiritual life (Wright and Roberts 1997). Similarly Wayne A. Mack has included chapters on understanding one another, the biblical basis for marriage, spiritual intimacy, communication, conflict resolution, roles, finances, as well as sex (Mack 1986). Published in 2010, *Marriage 101: Back to the Basics* covers 8 sessions with emphases on marital expectations, communication and emotional intimacy, personality differences, conflict resolution, spiritual intimacy, and finances (Vaughn and Strother 2010). Finally, Dennis Rainey's curriculum, *Preparing*

for Marriage, includes sections on the history of the relationship, God’s view of marriage and oneness, communication, roles and responsibilities, money, and sex (Rainey, 2010).

Content analysis. Leedy and Ormrod define content analysis as “a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases” (Leedy and Ormrod 2005, 142). For the purpose of this project the researcher reviewed the literature base on premarital education programs as well as a sampling of secular and religious programs and books that prescribe a curricular course for premarital education. In total, 18 sources were analyzed for content recommendations on the subject of recommended curricular topics in premarital education. Eleven of the sources were journal articles and 7 were premarital education programs. Each of these sources was discussed in the previous two sub-sections.

The content analysis identified an aggregate of 197 recommendations for premarital education content areas. The 197 aggregate recommendations for premarital education topics were reviewed by an expert panel and divided into slightly broader categories based upon the expert opinions of the panel. These broad categories will be listed below in Table 1. Appendix 1 reports the aggregate recommendations for premarital education content as revealed by the content analysis. Appendix 1 consists of three columns. Column A names the author/researcher who recommends or utilizes the content area. Column B lists the content area recommended or utilized. If a topic was present in a current premarital education program or resource it was counted as a recommended topic. Column C lists the broader category to which the researcher, with guidance from the expert panel, assigned the recommended or utilized content area.

Table 1
 Tabulation and percentage of occurrences of broader content topics

Column A	Column B	Column C
Broad Topics	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Authors/Resources Recommending the Topic
communication	15	83%
intimacy	15	83%
conflict resolution	14	78%
roles and responsibilities	10	56%
sex	10	56%
family	10	56%
money	10	56%
expectations	10	56%
religion/faith	9	50%
definition of marriage	8	44%
Children	8	44%
personality	6	33%
compatibility	6	33%
interactional processes	5	28%
traits of a healthy marriage	5	28%
relationship perception	5	28%
work	5	28%
time	4	22%
common problems	3	17%
friends	3	17%
personal history	2	11%
relationship history	2	11%
relationship assessment	2	11%
health	2	11%
compatibility	1	6%
remarriage	1	6%
cohabitation	1	6%

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

The purpose of this study was to provide an analysis of the attitudes and practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward marital preparation.

Research Question Synopsis

The following five research questions guided this study:

1. What are the attitudes of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education?
2. What are the practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee as they relate to premarital education?
3. What are the curricular content components in premarital education models as practiced by Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee?
4. What similarities or differences, if any, exist between the identified curricular content components of premarital education models and the components present in the premarital education practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee?
5. What relationship, if any, exists between the attitudes and practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education and the demographic characteristics of the pastors?

Design Overview

The current research consisted of a mixed method study using research questions to guide discovery and analysis of data. The study was designed to analyze the

attitudes and practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education and to compare these practices with those recommended in the secular and religious literature. In order to accomplish this, a content analysis was completed in chapter two that provided a basis for comparison between the recommended practices for premarital education and the practices reported by the sample. A research tool was created and sent to the pastors of 1070 Southern Baptist churches that were selected from all Southern Baptist churches in Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Once the surveys were completed and returned the data was entered onto an electronic spreadsheet where descriptive statistics were utilized to describe the sample population with reference to demographic data as well as attitudes toward premarital education. The data obtained reporting the practices of pastors toward premarital education was also tabulated onto an electronic spreadsheet and was compared to the recommended practices found in the secular and religious literature base utilizing the chi-square statistical procedure. The researcher reports his findings and conclusions in chapter 4 of this document.

Population

For the purpose of this research, the population studied was a randomly selected group of pastors from 1070 Southern Baptist churches in Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, and Kentucky. According to Southern Baptist Directory Services there are 8699 aggregate Southern Baptist Congregations in these Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee.

Delimitations

The researcher obtained maps from each state convention depicting the location of each association (groups of Southern Baptist churches freely affiliating and cooperating with one another within a particular geographical area) within the state. Utilizing these maps, the states to be studied were divided into 4 quadrants. This was accomplished by the researcher adding the number of associations in each state. The number of associations was then divided by 4, indicating the number of associations to be assigned to each quadrant of the state. The researcher then assigned each association to a quadrant based upon its nearest proximity to the geographical designation of northeast, northwest, southwest, southeast. Because of the shape of the state of Kentucky, the counties in Kentucky were assigned by the researcher based upon their nearest proximity to the geographical designations of north, southwest, south-central, and southeast.

Next, 6 associations were randomly selected from all of the associations within each quadrant. Ninety-six associations total, 24 per state were randomly selected. Third, 11 churches were randomly selected from each of the associations. Theoretically, this procedure would have totaled 66 churches per quadrant, 264 churches per state, and 1056 churches identified in the multi-stage random sampling procedure. However, in some cases randomly selected associations did not contain 11 churches. As a result, the number of churches selected from the random sampling portion of the multi-stage approach was 1022.

In order to ensure the randomness of the procedure, each association within a particular quadrant was assigned a number between 1 and the total number of associations within that particular quadrant. A computerized random number generator

was utilized to randomly select 26 numbers which corresponded to associations within the quadrant. Likewise, all of the churches within a randomly selected association were assigned a number between 1 and the total number of churches within that association. A random number generator was utilized to randomly select 11 numbers which corresponded to up to 11 churches which were then selected to be included in the study. In addition to these 1022 churches, 48 churches were purposively identified and included in the study. To obtain these churches, the researcher contacted the state associations and asked for the names of 12 larger churches within the state. The total number of churches included in the study was 1070.

Limitations of Generalization

The current research may not necessarily generalize to all ministerial staff beyond the role of senior pastor or associate pastor. The senior pastor is an ordained man who possesses the primary leadership responsibilities for the general spiritual development and growth of a local congregation. An associate pastor is identified as an individual serving on the ministerial staff of a church who possesses leadership responsibilities for a specific area or areas within the spiritual life of a local congregation. For the purpose of this study the associate pastor represented multiple possibilities of specific areas of leadership including, but not necessarily limited to, education, students, college students, administration, preschool, worship/music, missions, evangelism, or any combination thereof.

The current research may not necessarily generalize to pastors outside of the Southern Baptist Convention. The current research may not necessarily generalize to

pastors outside of the Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee studied (Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee).

Instrumentation

The current research required the creation, validation, and use of a survey instrument. The final instrument contains three sections, each focusing on a distinct area of inquiry. Section 1 includes questions designed to elicit demographic information about the respondent. This demographic information includes, but is not limited to age, tenure, position, education (formal and informal), church size, and location. Section 2 consists of multiple items designed to describe the respondent's attitude toward premarital education. Section 3 includes items designed to describe the practices of the respondent toward premarital education. The questions included in the research tool were strategically planned and designed specifically for this study. Once the survey had been developed the researcher enlisted an expert panel to assist in establishing the validity and the reliability of the instrument. Appendix 2 contains the final research tool in its entirety.

Validity is defined as the extent to which the instrument measures what it is actually intended to measure (Leedy and Ormrod 2005, 92). Reliability is defined as the extent to which the instrument yields consistent results when the characteristic being measured has not changed (Leedy and Ormrod 2005 93). The expert panel testing the validity and reliability of the instrument was composed of pastors, counselors, and academicians with substantial experience in the field of premarital education and who are not in the possible sample population. There were 4 members of the expert panel. One member of the expert panel currently serves a Southern Baptist church in a Southern state

as Associate Pastor to Families. He holds an earned Ph.D. in Psychology and Counseling and has served on the faculty of a seminary. One member of the panel currently serves on the teaching faculty of a religious institution of higher education. He holds an earned Ph.D. in Psychology and Counseling. One member of the panel currently serves as Senior Pastor of a church in a Southwestern state. He holds a M.Div. The final member of the expert panel is a retired pastor and retired Director of Missions. He holds a Th.M.

The research tool includes three major areas of inquiry. The first section of the instrument focuses on demographic data that describe characteristics of the research participants. The second section of the instrument measured the attitudes of the respondents toward premarital education. The third section of the research tool inquired as to the current practices of the respondent as they relate to premarital education.

Procedures

For the purpose of this study, the researcher completed a content analysis of recommended curricular components within the secular and religious literature base. The researcher reviewed 18 sources including academic and professional journals, books, and existing programs for premarital education.

The content analysis identified an aggregate of 197 recommendations for premarital education content areas. The 197 aggregate recommendations for premarital education topics were reviewed and assigned into slightly broader categories by an expert panel. The broader categories were ranked by the researcher in order of the frequency at which they appear within the 18 sources included in the content analysis. For the purpose of the current research, the 11 topics with the highest frequency counts within the

literature base were utilized as a basis for the comparative analysis of the practices of the sample.

The current research required the creation, validation, and use of a survey instrument. The instrument contains three sections, each focusing on a distinct area of inquiry. Section 1 includes questions designed to elicit demographic information about the respondent. This demographic information includes, but is not limited to, age, tenure, position, education (formal and informal), church size, and location. Section 2 consists of multiple items designed to describe the respondent's attitude toward premarital education. Section 3 includes items designed to describe the practices of the respondent toward premarital education. The questions included in the research tool were strategically planned and designed specifically for this study. Once the final research tool had been developed the researcher enlisted an expert panel to assist in establishing the validity and the reliability of the instrument. Appendix 2 contains the research tool in its entirety.

The sample population of the current research was pastors from 1070 Southern Baptist churches in Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, and Kentucky. The 1070 pastors studied were randomly selected utilizing a multistage sampling approach (Leedy and Ormrod 2005, 206-07) in combination with a purposive sample designed to ensure that a sufficient number of larger churches is included in the sample.

In order to identify the sample, the researcher obtained maps from each state convention depicting the location of each association (groups of Southern Baptist churches freely affiliating and cooperating with one another within a particular geographical area) within the state. Utilizing these maps, the states to be studied were

divided into four quadrants. This was accomplished by the researcher adding the number of associations in each state. The number of associations was then divided by 4, indicating the number of associations to be assigned to each quadrant of the state. The researcher then assigned each association to a quadrant based upon its nearest proximity to the geographical designation of northeast, northwest, southwest, southeast. Because of the shape of the state of Kentucky, the counties in Kentucky were assigned by the researcher based upon their nearest proximity to the geographical designations of north, southwest, south-central, and southeast.

Next, using a random number generator, 6 associations were selected from all of the associations within each quadrant. Ninety-six associations total, 24 per state were randomly selected. After this, 11 churches were randomly selected from each of the associations. Theoretically, this procedure would have totaled 66 churches per quadrant, 264 churches per state, and 1056 churches identified in the multi-stage random sampling procedure. However, in some cases randomly selected associations did not contain 11 churches. As a result, the number of churches selected from the random sampling portion of the multi-stage approach was 1022.

In addition to these 1022 churches identified in the multi-stage random sampling procedure, the researcher included a purposive sample intended to ensure that an adequate representation of larger churches is included in the study. This purposive sample was obtained by contacting the state convention of Southern Baptist churches in each of the 4 states studied. The researcher requested that the state convention provide the name of 3 Southern Baptist churches of larger size in each of the quadrants in their

state. These 48 churches (12 from each state included in the study) were then included in the sample population, bringing the total number of churches to 1070.

Each of the 1070 churches was mailed a packet via United States Postal Service on April 29, 2012. The packet was mailed to the church address and was addressed to Pastor. The mailing packet included a cover letter (Appendix 3), a copy of the research tool (Appendix 2), as well as a self-addressed stamped return envelope addressed to the researcher. The cover letter and the research tool both indicated that responses should be returned by May 1, 2012. At the end of the allotted time, 222 valid responses had been received and were included in the study.

Once the surveys were returned, the researcher tabulated the responses and utilized descriptive statistics to describe the sample and then utilized non-parametric statistics to identify and understand any similarities or differences that exist between the respondents' practices toward premarital education and those practices recommended within the secular and religious literature base. Specifically, the chi-square goodness of fit and the chi-square test of independence measures were utilized.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to provide an analysis of the attitudes and practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education and to compare those practices with the practices recommended in the secular and religious literature. This chapter will describe the method and results of the content analysis which was completed in chapter 2 and which revealed the recommended practices. This chapter will also describe the compilation of data obtained through the use of the research tool. Finally, a statistical analysis of the research findings will also be communicated.

Content Analysis

Leedy and Ormrod define content analysis as “a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases” (Leedy and Ormrod 2005, 142). For the purpose of this project the researcher reviewed the literature base on premarital education programs as well as a sampling of secular and religious programs and books that prescribe a curricular course for premarital education. In total, 18 sources were analyzed for content recommendations on the subject of recommended curricular topics in premarital education. Eleven of the sources were journal articles and 7 were premarital education programs. Each of these sources was previously discussed.

The content analysis identified an aggregate of 197 recommendations for premarital education content areas. The 197 aggregate recommendations for premarital education topics were reviewed by an expert panel and divided into slightly broader categories based upon the expert opinions of the panel members. These broad categories are listed above in Table 1. Appendix 1 reports the aggregate recommendations for premarital education content as revealed by the content analysis. Appendix 1 consists of three columns. Column A names the author/researcher who recommends or utilizes the content area. Column B lists the content area recommended or utilized. If a topic was present in a current premarital education program or resource it is counted as a recommended topic. Column C lists the broader category to which the researcher, with guidance from the expert panel, assigned the recommended or utilized content area.

For the purpose of this research, the eleven topics with the highest frequency counts within the literature base were utilized as a basis for the comparative analysis of the practices of the sample.

Compilation of the Research Data

A total of 1070 Southern Baptist churches in Kentucky, Missouri, Illinois, and Tennessee were selected, utilizing a purposive sampling strategy, to be included in the study. Each of the 1070 churches was mailed a packet via United States Postal Service on April 29, 2012. The packet was mailed to the church address and was addressed to Pastor. The mailing packet included a cover letter (Appendix 3), a copy of the research tool (Appendix 2), as well as a self-addressed stamped return envelope addressed to the researcher. The cover letter and the research tool both indicated that responses should be

returned by May 1, 2012. At the end of the allotted time, 222 valid responses had been received and were included in the study.

Much of the data obtained are descriptive in nature; therefore descriptive statistics will be a significant piece of this chapter. In addition, the researcher utilized a chi-square goodness of fit test to compare the self-described practices of the sample at they pertain to premarital education content areas to the top eleven prescribed content areas found in the secular and religious literature base. Furthermore, the researcher utilized a chi-square test of independence to analyze the relationship between key descriptive characteristics of the sample and the prevalence of a particular content area within the premarital education practices of that particular subset of the sample.

Demographic Data

The research tool elicited demographic data about each respondent. Each respondent was asked to provide information about himself or herself and also information about their ministry setting and ministry activities related to officiating weddings. Findings related to personal information will be reported first, followed by findings pertaining to the ministry setting and ministry activity of the sample.

Personal Information

Participants in this study shared multiple pieces of personal information related to their age, marital status, ministry position and experience, and academic accomplishments. This information will be conveyed in this section. The first data to be reported relates to the age of the population. Figure 1 presents a visual description of the age demographic.

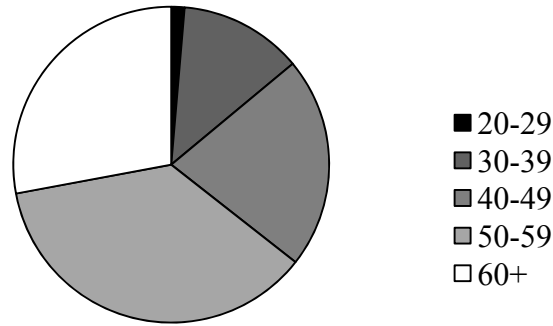


Figure 1: Distribution of age (N=222)

A majority of the research sample consisted of pastors who were at least 40 years of age. In fact, only 19.36% of the research participants were 39 years of age or younger. The research tool included an option for this question for those who were under the age of 20. No research participant indicated such an age. Of the remaining respondents, 1.35% were between the ages of 20 and 29, 12.61% were between the ages of 30 and 39, and 21.62% were between the ages of 40 and 49. The largest portion of the sample (36.49%) was between the ages of 50 and 59. Finally, 27.93% were age 60 or above.

The research tool also inquired about the marital status of the research participants. If they were married, the respondents were then asked to provide information about how long they have been married. Figure 2 presents demographic information related to the marital status of the research participants.

All but one of the participants was married (99.55%). Only 1 of the 222 research participants was not married at the time they completed the research tool (.45%). Among the 221 research participants that were married, the majority had been married for several years. Figure 3 gives a graphic depiction of the data related to years of marriage.

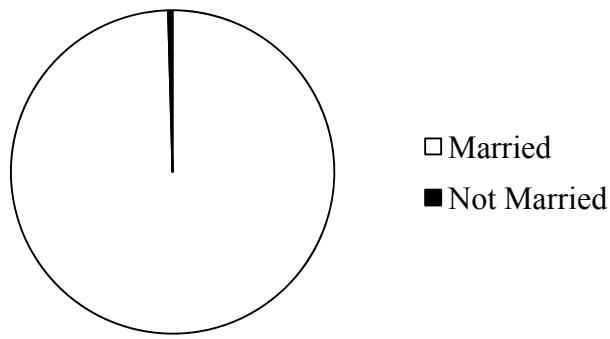


Figure 2. Distribution of marital status (N=222)

Among those who were married, 61.09% had been married for at least 25 years and 85.07% had been married for at least 16 years. Within the middle ranges, 10.86% had been married for 21-25 years, 13.12% had been married 16-20 years, and 7.24% had been married for 11-15 years. Less than 10% of the sample population reported being married for 10 years or less with 3.62% being married for 6-10 years and 4.07% being married for five years or less.

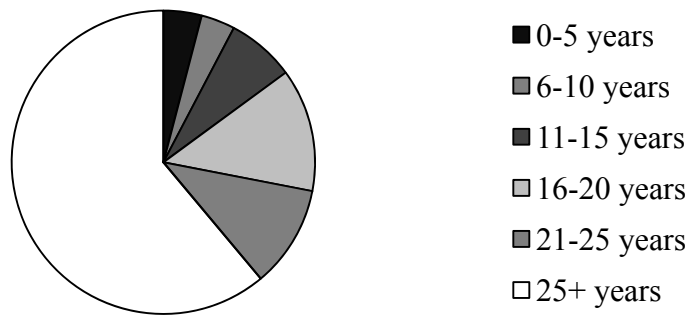


Figure 3. Distribution of years of marriage (N=222)

The research instrument also inquired about the participant's ministry experiences. Specifically, the pastors were asked about their ministry position, the fully

funded versus bi-vocational nature of their position, and their years of pastoral experience. Results related to the ministry position of the participants are depicted in Figure 4.

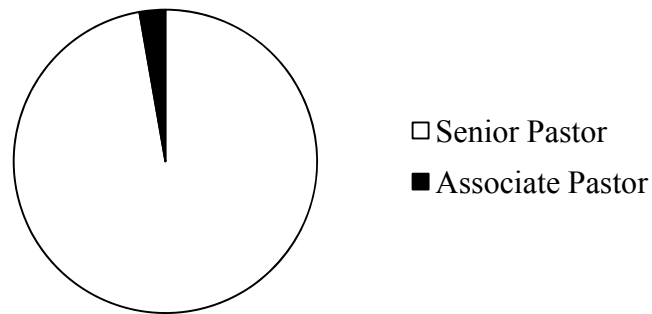


Figure 4. Distribution of ministry position (N=222)

A large majority of the research participants filled the position of senior pastor (97.24%). Only 6 of the research participants served their church in the role of associate pastor (2.76%).

The research tool also asked the research participants to indicate whether the ministry position they currently fill was fully funded by the church or if their position was considered to be bi-vocational. Figure 5 depicts the results of this inquiry.

A majority of the research participants, nearly two-thirds, indicated that they served in a role that was fully funded by their church (66.52%). Still, 33.48% of the sample served in a role that was not fully funded by their church, but that they received income from another occupation. They considered their role at the church to bi-vocational.



Figure 5. Distribution of ministry position funding (N=222)

The third, and final, piece of information that the research tool elicited in relation to the ministry position of the research participants was the length of time (in years) that the respondents have served in a pastoral role. Figure 6 depicts this data.

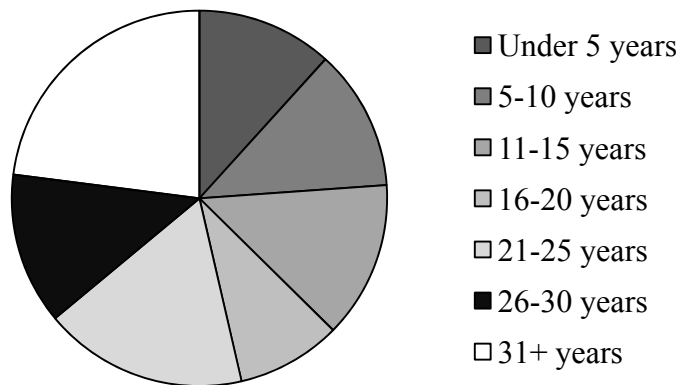


Figure 6. Distribution of years of pastoral service (N=222)

A majority of the participants reported being involved in pastoral ministry for at least 21 years (53.6%); 36.03% has served in a pastoral role for at least 26 years and 22.97% had been in pastoral ministry for at least 31 years. Respondents who had been in

pastoral ministry for between 26 and 30 years comprised 13.06% of sample while 17.57% reported 21-25 years of service. The smallest proportion of the sample (9.01%) reported that they had been in pastoral ministry for 16-20 years. Finally, 13.51% reported pastoral ministry experience of 11-15 years; 12.16% of the research participants had been in pastoral ministry for 5-10 years, and 11.71% of the participants had been in pastoral ministry for 5 years or less.

The research also gathered information from the respondents about their personal experiences related to education. Two spheres were investigated. The first sphere related to formal academic training such as college/seminary degree and formal academic courses where instruction was given on the provision of premarital education services.

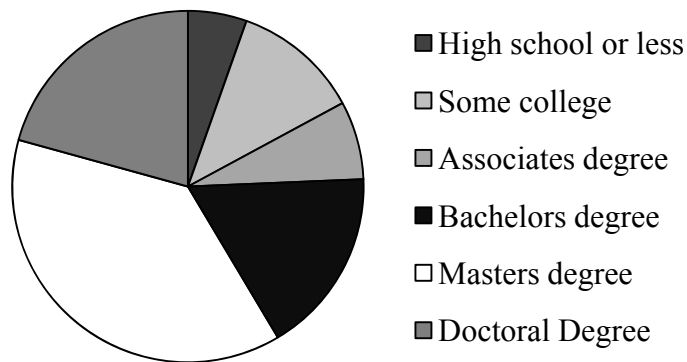


Figure 7. Distribution of education completed (N=222)

The second sphere related to the pastors experiences with non-academic training courses where instruction was given on the provision of premarital education services. Data related to the formal education completed is depicted in Figure 7.

Some formal academic experience beyond high school was reported by 94.59% of the sample. Nearly one-fourth (24.33%) of the sample reported that an

associates or bachelors degree was their highest level of academic accomplishment with 17.12% reporting having earned a Bachelor's degree and 7.21% having earned as Associates degree. A large proportion (58.59%) reported earning an advanced degree with 37.84% possessing a master's degree and 20.72% possessing a doctoral degree. Almost half (45.70%) reported having attended a Southern Baptist seminary. Only 5.41% of the research participants reported their highest level of formal academic training as high school or less.

In addition to the general education accomplishments of the research participants, the current research was also concerned with specific training that served to prepare the respondents for offering premarital education services. The research tool asked two questions to elicit this information. One question was related to formal academic courses that taken that serve to prepare the respondent to offer premarital education. The data obtained through this question is depicted in Figure 8.

As it relates to training on the topic of premarital education, 46.85% report never having any formal academic courses related to premarital education while 35.59% reported experiencing 1 or 2 formal academic courses on this topic.

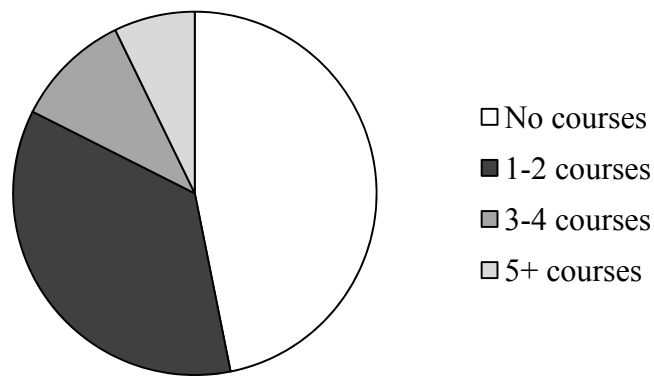


Figure 8. Distribution of formal academic courses (N=222)

Fewer than 8% received 5 or more formal academic courses while 46.85% of the research participants reported receiving no formal academic training in the area of premarital education.

The second question regarding the educational experiences of the respondents that served to prepare them for providing premarital education services was specifically related to training that was received in a non-academic setting. These findings are depicted in Figure 9.

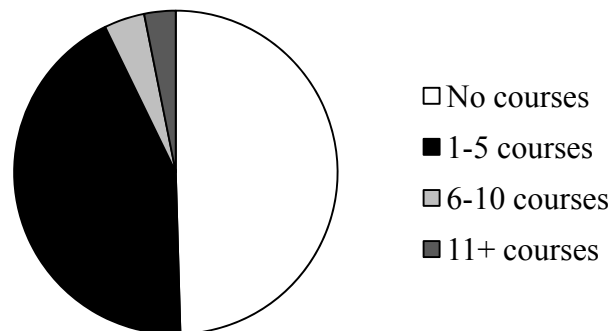


Figure 9. Distribution of other training courses

The findings related to non-academic courses were similar to the findings related to formal academic coursework with 49.55% having never received any non-academic training on the subject of premarital education. A slightly smaller proportion (43.24%) did report experiencing at least 1 non-academic course on the subject of premarital education while 4.05% of the research participants reported receiving training from 6-10 non-academic courses and 3.15% reported 11 or more such course opportunities.

Ministry Information

In addition to personal information, research participants also described their ministry setting and their ministry activities related to officiating weddings. The research tool contained items inquiring about the size of the staff where the pastor was currently serving, the contextual location of the church, the size of the church, as well as the state in which the church was located. The first of these items to be reported will be the size of the church staff. This information is depicted in Figure 10.

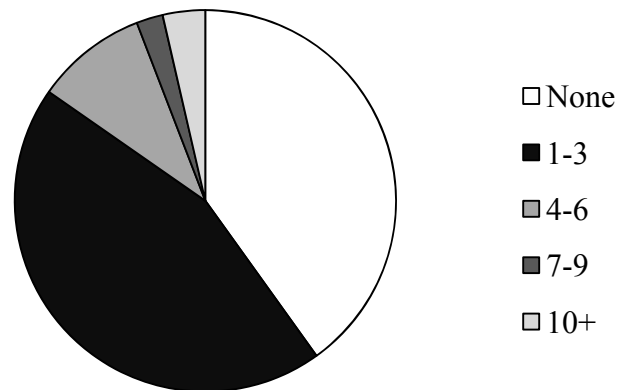


Figure 10. Distribution of staff size (N=222)

The vast majority of the research participants serve in churches with 4 or fewer staff members, including the respondent (84.68%). In fact, 40.09% report that they are the only staff member at their place of ministry; they serve as a solo pastor. A similar proportion of the respondents (44.59%) reported that they serve on a staff with 1 to 3 other ministry staff. Larger staff sizes were less prevalent indicated by 9.46% of the respondents reported serving with 4 to 6 other staff members while 2.25% report serving

with 7 to 9 others. Finally, 3.60% of the research respondents reported that they serve on a church staff with at least 10 other ministers.

The second item included on the research tool that was intended to elicit information about the ministry information of the respondents asked about the context of the church setting. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate whether the church in which they currently serve would be considered to be in an urban, suburban, or rural setting. Figure 11 depicts this data.

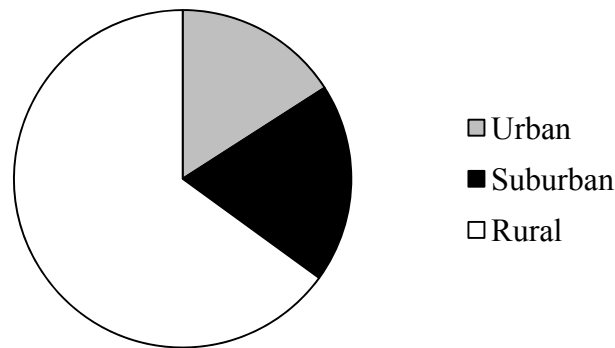


Figure 11. Distribution of church context (N=222)

The largest portion the research participants (65%) described their ministry context as rural. The second largest portion (19.09%) indicated that they consider their ministry context to be suburban. The smallest percentage of the respondents (15.91%) said that they would characterize their church ministry context as urban.

The third question in the area of ministry information that was asked of the research participants was concerned with the size of the church congregation. Specifically, respondents were asked to categorize their typical Sunday morning worship attendance. This data is depicted in Figure 12.

Over one-half (52.25%) of the research participants indicated that the size of their church congregation was less than 100. The next largest percentage (36.04%) was comprised of those who reported that their church typically averaged between 101 and 400 weekly attendees. Markedly fewer (6.76%) reported their congregation size as being between 401 and 700. Fewer still (1.35%) indicated that their church's average weekly attendance was between 701 and 1000. Fewer still (1.35%) indicated that their church's average weekly attendance was between 1001 and 1500. Finally, 5 respondents (2.25%) reported that their average weekly Sunday attendance was in excess of 1501.

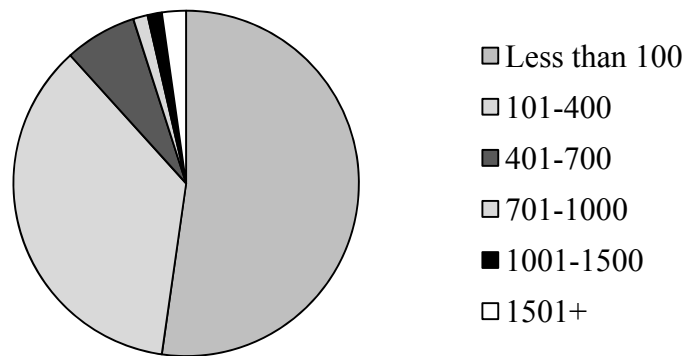


Figure 12. Distribution of church size (N=222)

That same percentage (1.35%) indicated a church size between 1001 and 1500. Finally, 5 respondents (2.25%) reported that their average weekly Sunday attendance was in excess of 1501.

The final item related to ministry context asked the respondents to simply indicate the state in which their church was located. This data is depicted in Figure 13.

Among the research participants, 32.43% indicated that their church was located in the state of Missouri. Nearly one-fourth (24.77%) of the churches were located in Tennessee while 17.12% were located in Kentucky and 25.68% were located in the state of Illinois.

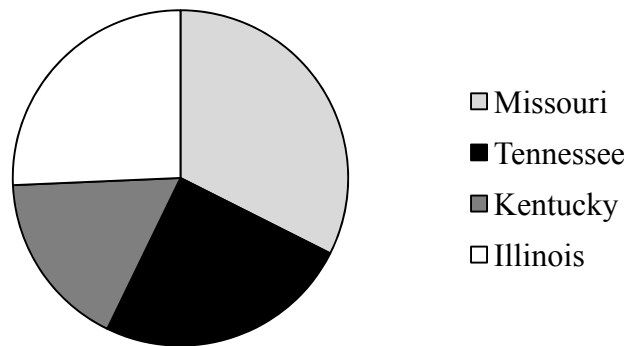


Figure 13. Distribution of church location (N=222)

Three of the research tool items related specifically to ministry activities in the area of weddings and premarital education. Respondents were asked to provide responses to question about the number of weddings over which they officiated as well as the number of couples to whom they provide premarital education services per year. Furthermore, respondents were asked to provide information about the number of premarital education services that they provide when they do provide this service to couples who are engaged to be married. Figure 14 depicts the data elicited from the first of these questions.

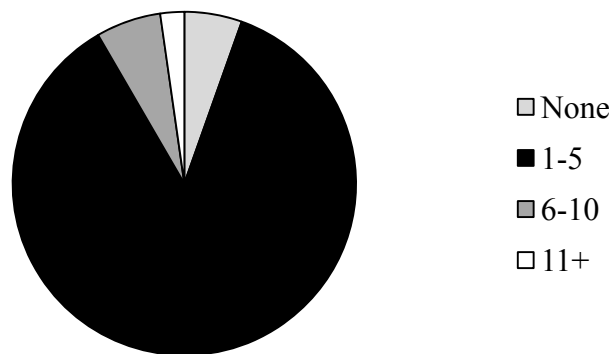


Figure 14. Distribution of weddings officiated (N=222)

Nearly 90% of the research participants (86.04%) reported that they officiate at least one wedding per year. Less than 15% report officiating more than five weddings per year with 6.11% reporting 6 to 10 wedding per year and 2.25% report officiating at least 11 weddings per year. A small portion (5.41%) of the research participants reported that they typically do not officiate any weddings.

Respondents were also asked about the number of couples for whom they provide premarital education services in a typical year. This data is depicted in Figure 15.

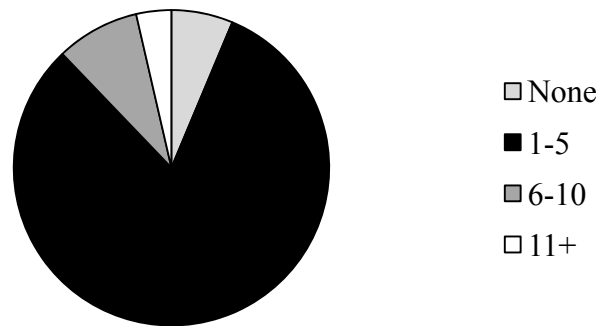


Figure 15. Distribution of premarital education services provided (N=222)

A large portion (93.69%) of the research participants reported providing premarital education services to at least one engaged couple each year. The largest proportion (81.53%) of the respondent reported that they provide these services to anywhere from 1 to 5 couples per year while 8.56% reported that they provide premarital education services to 6 to 10 couples per year and 3.6% of the respondents reportedly provide these services to more than 11 couples in a typical year. Only 6.31% reported that they do not provide premarital education services to couples who are engaged to be married.

The final line of inquiry in the demographic section of the research tool was concerned with discerning how many sessions of premarital education to the research participants provide when they do provide premarital education services to couples who are engaged to be married. The data generated from this question is depicted in Figure 16.

When they do provide premarital education, 72.94% of the research participants reported that they provide 2-5 sessions or premarital education.

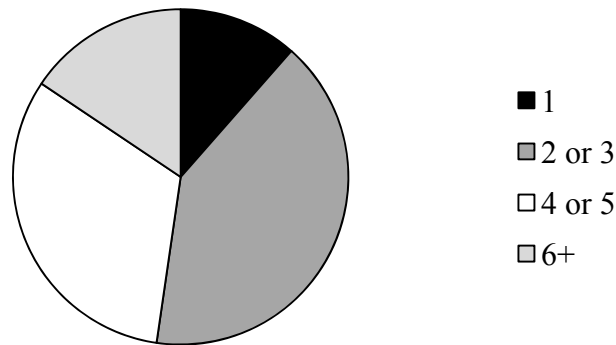


Figure 16. Distribution of number of premarital education sessions (N=222)

The respondents most often (40.83%) reported that they provide 2 or 3 sessions of premarital education when they provide any at all. The next highest frequency (32.11%) reported providing 4 or 5, while 15.60% reported providing 6 or more sessions. Finally, 11.47% of the research participants reported that when they do provide premarital education services to couples who are engaged to be married they typically provide 1 session and no more.

Findings

The current research was designed around 5 research questions. The current section will report the findings of the research. These findings will be organized according to the 5 research questions. Where it is appropriate tables and graphs will be utilized to more effectively communicate the findings.

Question 1

What are the attitudes of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education?

Section 2 of the research tool was designed to elicit the attitudes of the respondents toward premarital education. Respondents were asked to answer seven questions utilizing a Likert scale rating of 1 to 4 for each question. A composite attitudinal score was calculated for each respondent by adding the score of each individual answer. Scores for questions 4, 6, and 7 were inverted to account for the negative perspective from which they were written. The composite scores had a possible range of 7 to 28 with 7 indicating a negative attitude toward premarital education and 28 indicating a positive attitude toward premarital education. Table 2 provides a list of each item on the attitudinal scale and also reveals the mean score for each item.

Overwhelmingly the respondents indicated a positive attitude toward premarital education. Each of the seven items on the attitudinal scale had a possible individual score of 1 to 4, with internal increments of 1. An item score of 1 indicates a negative view of premarital education while an item score of 4 indicates a positive attitude toward premarital education. The mean scores range from 3.48 to 3.65 (n=221).

The composite mean score for all items on the attitudinal scale was calculated to be 3.56 (n=1547).

Based upon the attitudinal scores of each respondent, the researcher assigned each respondent to a category in order to more clearly answer the research question. Respondents whose attitudinal score ranged from 7.00 to 12.25 were designated as having a negative attitude toward premarital education. Respondents whose attitudinal score ranged from 12.26 to 17.25 were designated as having a slightly negative attitude toward premarital education. Respondents whose attitudinal score ranged from 17.26 to 22.75 were designated as having a slightly positive attitude toward premarital education. Finally, respondents whose attitudinal score ranged from 22.76 to 28.00 were designated as having a positive attitude toward premarital education. Table 3 displays the frequency count for each of the 4 attitudinal scale scoring categories.

Nearly all (97%; 214 out of 221) respondents indicated attitudes toward premarital education that were considered to be either slightly positive or positive toward premarital education. The average attitudinal score was 24.89 (n=221). Figure 17 displays the four categories and gives a visual depiction of the category distribution.

The research data show that a strong majority of the population sample possesses a positive attitude toward premarital education. The questions on the research tool measured attitude across two dimensions: value to pastoral ministry and value to the couple. In each instance the responses of the pastors who participated in this study indicated that these pastors held positive or slightly positive attitudes across both dimensions investigated.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation by attitudinal item (N=221)

	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>SD</i>
Marriage preparation is a valuable aspect of my ministry.	.01% (2)	.05% (11)	39.37% (87)	55.75% (121)	3.48	.66
Marriage preparation can be useful in decreasing divorce.	.00% (1)	2.7% (6)	28.05% (62)	68.79% (152)	3.65	.58
Engaged couples should be required to participate in a marriage preparation program	.01% (2)	6.79% (15)	22.17% (49)	70.14% (155)	3.62	.63
I provide marriage preparation for couples only because it is expected of me.*	1.81% (4)	4.52% (10)	38.46% (85)	55.20% (122)	3.47*	.71
Providing marriage preparation is a good investment of my time.	.00% (1)	3.61% (8)	37.1% (82)	58.82% (130)	3.54	.59
Providing marriage preparation is not a valid function for a pastor.*	1.35% (3)	3.61% (8)	29.41% (65)	65.61% (145)	3.59*	.66
Marriage preparation is not useful in increasing marital satisfaction.*	1.35% (3)	5.42% (12)	31.22% (69)	61.99% (137)	3.54*	.62

*The scores for these items were inverted to account for the negative perspective from which they were written.

The pastors in the sample view premarital education as a valuable part of their pastoral ministry. They also believe that the process of premarital education has the potential to increase marital success and satisfaction.

Table 3. Frequency count of attitudinal scale scores (N=221, m=24.89, SD=3.25)

<i>Attitudinal Descriptor</i>	<i>Possible Score Range</i>	<i>Frequency Count</i>
Negative attitude toward premarital education	7.00 - 12.25	1
Slightly negative attitude toward premarital education	12.26 - 17.50	6
Slightly positive attitude toward premarital education	17.51 - 22.75	42
Positive attitude toward premarital education	22.76 - 28.00	172

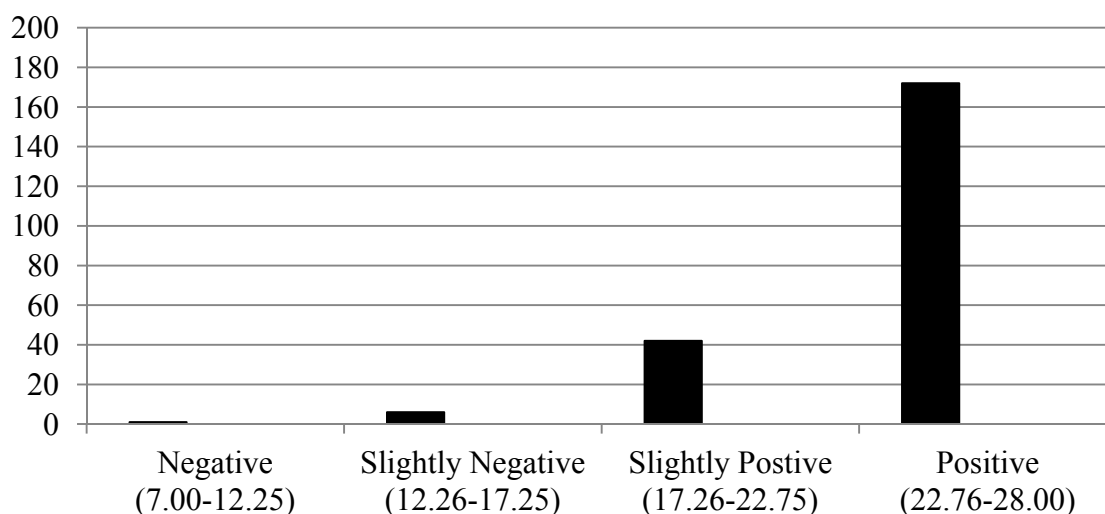


Figure 17. Frequency distribution of composite attitudinal scale scores (N=221, m=24.89, SD=3.25)

Question 2

What are the practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee as they relate to premarital education?

The second research question was designed to describe the practices of the sample as they related to premarital education. Specifically, the findings from part 1, questions 13, 14, and 15 of the research tool will be reported in this segment of the chapter. Furthermore, question 2 from part 3 of the research tool will be reported. The research tool is displayed in Appendix 2.

The research tool inquired about the number of weddings typically officiated by sample as well as the frequency and length of the any premarital education sessions that are typically provided annually

The data show that 94.59% of the respondents officiate an average of at least one wedding annually. The highest frequently of average weddings per year reported by the sample is 1-5 (86.04%, n=222). After this, 8.36% officiate at least six weddings annually and 5.41% of the sample reported averaging no weddings per year. Nearly 90% (87.69%) of the sample further reported that they typically provide premarital education to at least one couple per year. When they do provide premarital education, 40.83% of respondents report providing 2-3 sessions per couple. Finally, 32.11% report typically providing 4-5 sessions per couple. This data is displayed in Table 4.

Another concern of this research question was to ascertain the resources utilized by the sample when they did provide premarital education. The research tool inquired about three types of resources; inventories, instructional videos, and books. Table 5 reports resources (by name) that were reported to be used in premarital education.

The most-often reported resource type utilized by the respondents was books. 141 of the respondents reported employing at least one book in the process of premarital education.

The second most-frequently reported resource type employed by the respondents in premarital education was inventories or standardized tests (104). Finally, 54 respondents reported utilizing instructional videos in their work with pre-married

couples. It is important to note that many respondents reported utilizing more than one resource of a particular type.

Table 4. Number of weddings and provision of premarital education per year (N=222)

<i>Question</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency Count</i>	<i>% of total</i>
13. On average, how many weddings do you officiate each year?	None	12	5.41%
	1-5	191	86.04%
	6-10	14	6.11%
	11 or more	5	2.25%
14. On average, to how many couples do you provide premarital counseling each year?	None	14	6.31%
	1-5	181	81.53%
	6-10	19	8.56%
	11 or more	8	3.60%
15. When you do provide premarital education, how many sessions of premarital counseling do you typically provide?	1	25	11.47%
	2-3	89	40.83%
	4-5	70	32.11%
	6 or more	34	15.60%

The result being that the frequency counts for each type have a maximum potential that is larger than the sample size of 222. Figure 18 displays the distribution of resource types of the number of individual respondents who reported utilizing at least one resource of the type.

The data demonstrate that the research sample typically officiate 1-5 weddings per year and they also provide 2-5 sessions of premarital education to the pre-married couple.

When these sessions are provided, the pastor is very likely to utilize a book in the process. He is somewhat likely to utilize an inventory as a part of his process for providing premarital education services to couples who are engaged to be married. Finally, he is somewhat less likely to utilize an instructional video or video set.

Table 5. Resources regularly utilized in premarital education (N=222)

<i>Inventories Regularly Utilized</i>	<i>Frequency Count</i>	<i>% of total</i>
FOCCUS	7	3.15%
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator	18	8.11%
Prepare	13	5.86%
RELATE	5	2.25%
Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis	14	6.31%
Other	47	21.17%
Books/Workbooks Regularly Utilized		
<i>Books/Workbooks Regularly Utilized</i>	<i>Frequency Count</i>	<i>% of total</i>
Before you Say I do (Wright)	48	21.62%
The Five Love Languages (Chapman)	84	37.84%
Preparing for Marriage (Rainey)	18	8.11%
Making Love Last Forever (Smalley)	25	11.26%
Love for a Lifetime (Dobson)	26	11.71%
Love and Respect (Eggerichs)	23	10.36%
Other	73	32.88%
Videos Regularly Utilized		
<i>Videos Regularly Utilized</i>		
Before you Say I do (Wright)	29	13.06%
Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts (Parrot)	12	5.41%
Marriage 101	8	3.60%
Other	18	8.11%

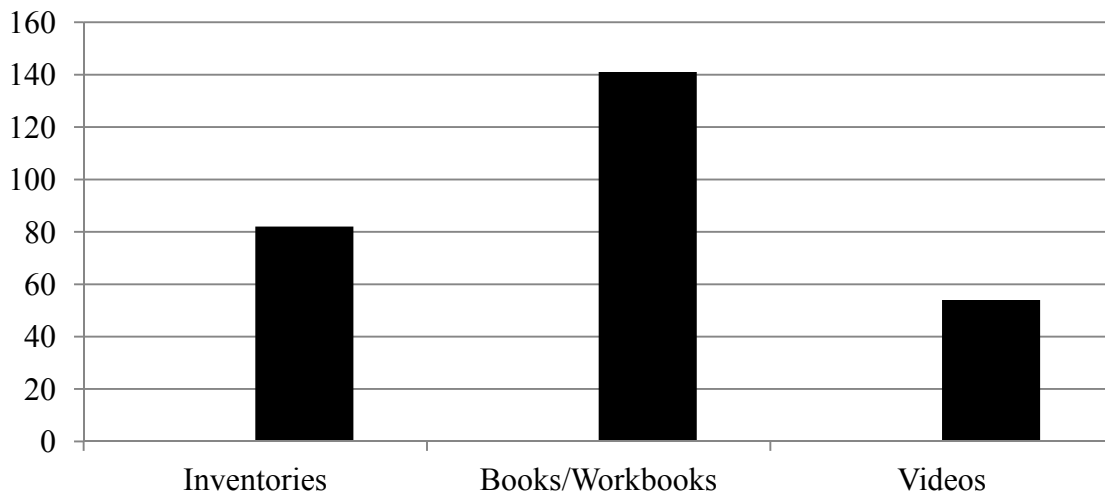


Figure 18. Resources regularly utilized by category (N=222)

Question 3

What are the curricular content components in premarital education models as practiced by Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee?

This section will report the results of part 3, question 1 of the research tool which was designed to understand the curricular content components regularly covered in the premarital education practices of the respondents. Respondents were asked to indicate which, if any, of the top eleven curricular content areas they regularly cover when they provide premarital education services to couples who are engaged to be married. Table 6 shows the frequency count, percentage of total, and rank of the 11 content areas as reportedly covered by the research participants.

More than 90% of respondents indicated that they cover 3 of the top 11 curricular content areas. Six of the top eleven content areas are reportedly covered by at least 80% of respondents. No content area was omitted by at least 50%, though only 52.70% reported covering issues related to family in their work with pre-married couples. The top three areas reportedly covered by the research sample are communication (98.20%), religion/faith (96.85%), and money (91.44%).

The three content areas least often covered by the research participants are family (52.70%), sex (67.12%), and children (72.97%). Figure 19 depicts a graphical representation of the frequency counts of each content area in relation to the others.

In addition to reporting the inclusion of individual content areas in their work with premarital couples, the responses of the research participants also yielded an understanding of the layers of content areas included by the respondents when they provide premarital education sessions to couples.

Table 6. Curricular content components regularly covered (N=222)

<i>Content Area</i>	<i>Frequency Count</i>	<i>% of Total</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Communication	218	98.20%	1
Intimacy	166	74.77%	8
Conflict Resolution	197	88.74%	4
Roles and Responsibilities	186	83.78%	5
Sex	149	67.12%	10
Family	117	52.70%	11
Money	203	91.44%	3
Religion/Faith	215	96.85%	2
Expectations	179	80.63%	6
Definition of Marriage	177	79.73%	7
Children	162	72.97%	9

Table 7 displays the curricular layers, the individual content areas within each layer, as well as the percentage of the sample reporting to cover each area within each layer.

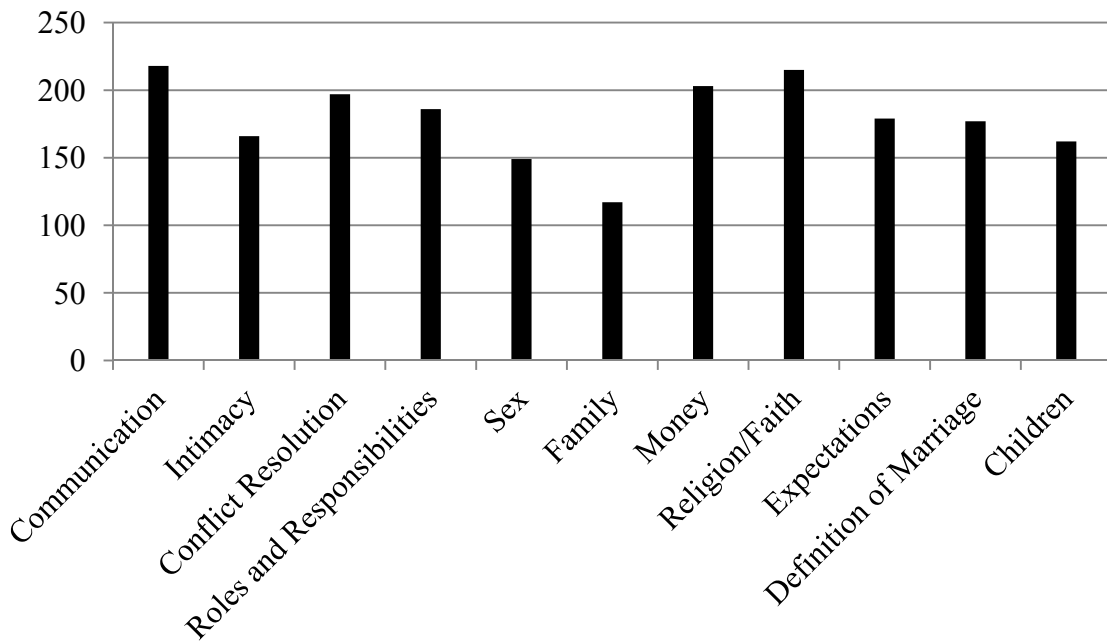


Figure 19. Curricular content components regularly covered (N=222)

Layer 1 includes the content areas of communication, intimacy, and conflict resolution. When they provide premarital education services, 69.82% of respondents reported that they include each of the 3 content areas in this cluster. Layer 2 includes the 3 content areas of level 1 (communication, intimacy, and conflict resolution) as well as roles/responsibilities and sex. When they provide premarital education services, 56.31% of the respondents reported that they include all 5 of the curricular content components in layer 2. Layer 3 includes all 5 levels of layer 2 (communication, intimacy, conflict resolution, roles/responsibilities, and sex) as well as the content areas of family, money, expectations, and religion/faith. All 9 content areas included in layer 3 were reportedly covered by 41.89% of the respondents. Finally, layer 4 includes all 11 content areas included on the research tool (communication, intimacy, conflict resolution, roles/responsibilities, sex, family, money, expectations, religion/faith, definition of marriage, and children). When the respondent's provide premarital education services, 38.29% report that they include each of these 11 content areas in their work with premarital couples (see Table 7).

Question 4

What similarities or differences, if any, exist between the identified curricular content components of premarital education models and the components present in the premarital education practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee?

This section will report the results of a statistical analysis designed to answer research question 4.

Table 7. Curricular content layers and percentage of the sample covering all areas within the layer (N=222)

Content Layer	Curricular Content Areas Included	% of the sample reporting to cover each area within the layer
Layer 1	communication intimacy conflict resolution	69.82%
Layer 2	communication intimacy conflict resolution roles/responsibilities sex	56.31%
Layer 3	communication intimacy conflict resolution roles/responsibilities sex family money expectations religion/faith	41.89%
Layer 4	communication intimacy conflict resolution roles/responsibilities sex family money expectations religion/faith definition of marriage children	38.29%

The researcher utilized the chi-square goodness of fit statistical procedure to compare the curricular content components regularly covered by Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee to the top 11 curricular content components recommended in the secular and religious literature base (see Table 1). The researcher utilized proportional expected frequencies based upon the percentage of

sources that recommends the specific curricular component as demonstrated in the content analysis (see Table 1).

The data show that in every category except family ($\chi^2=.98$, $cv=3.84$) the curricular content components present in the premarital education practices of the sample were significantly different from the recommended curricular content areas discovered in the content analysis. Table 8 shows the results of the chi-square goodness of fit procedure.

In 9 out of the 11 categories the observed frequency counts from the sample were significantly greater than the counts expected. The two exceptions to this were the curricular components of intimacy and family. The results of the chi-square goodness of fit statistical procedure show that the curricular content area of family was not covered by the sample as much as would be expected when compared to the frequency noted in the content analysis. It should be noted that though the frequency count of the sample was less than expected, this was not found to meet the threshold required for statistical significance. For the curricular content area of intimacy, the difference between the frequency expected and the frequency observed was significant ($\chi^2=10.64$, $cv=3.84$). Figure 20 shows a visual representation of the calculated chi-square values in comparison to one another.

The curricular content area with the highest chi-square value was religion/faith ($\chi^2=150.32$, $cv=3.84$, $N=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $df=1$). The second highest calculated chi-square value was observed in relation to the curricular content area of definition of marriage ($\chi^2=115.02$, $cv=3.84$, $N=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $df=1$). The third highest calculated chi-square value

Table 8. Chi-square goodness of fit by curricular content component
(N=222, $\alpha=.05$, $df=1$)

<i>Curricular component</i>	<i>% of resources recommending</i>	<i>Frequency Expected</i>	<i>Frequency Observed</i>	X^2	<i>Critical Value</i>
Communication	83%	184	218	36.34	3.84
Intimacy	83%	184	166	10.64	3.84
Conflict Resolution	78%	173	197	14.92	3.84
Roles and Responsibilities	56%	124	186	69.55	3.84
Sex	56%	124	149	11.65	3.84
Family	56%	124	117	.98	3.84
Money	56%	124	203	113.17	3.84
Religion/Faith	56%	124	215	150.32	3.84
Expectations	50%	111	179	83.32	3.84
Definition of Marriage	44%	98	177	115.02	3.84
Children	44%	98	162	75.63	3.84

was observed in relation to the curricular content area of money ($x^2=113.17$, $cv=3.84$, $N=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $df=1$). After the three highest values, there is a marked drop in magnitude of the calculated chi-square value for the next three curricular content areas. This second tier of scores were observed in the areas of expectations

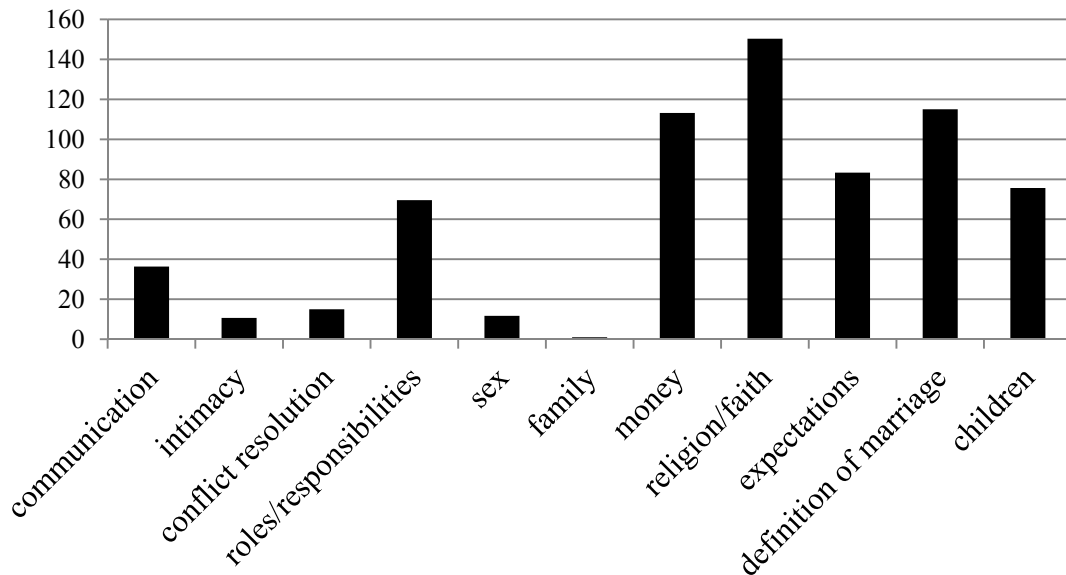


Figure 20. Comparison of calculated chi-square values by curricular content component

($x^2=83.32$, $cv=3.84$, $N=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $df=1$), children ($x^2=75.63$, $cv=3.84$, $N=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $df=1$), and roles/responsibilities ($x^2=69.55$, $cv=3.84$, $N=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $df=1$). The four lowest calculated chi-square values were observed in relation to the areas of family ($x^2=0.98$, $cv=3.84$, $N=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $df=1$), intimacy ($x^2=10.64$, $cv=3.84$, $N=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $df=1$), sex ($x^2=11.65$, $cv=3.84$, $N=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $df=1$), and conflict resolution ($x^2=14.92$, $cv=3.84$, $N=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $df=1$).

Question 5

What relationship, if any, exists between the attitudes and practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education and the demographic characteristics of the pastors?

This section will report the results of a statistical analysis designed to answer research question 5. Utilizing the 4 layers of curricular content areas identified earlier in the current chapter (see Table 12), the researcher applied a chi-square test of independence statistical procedure in order to investigate the potential relationship between the demographic and ministry context characteristics of the sample and their practices toward premarital education. Specifically the researcher purposed to understand whether particular demographic and ministry context characteristics of the sample were statistically related to whether or not the pastors covered each of the curricular content areas found within the particular layer being examined. Where a relationship between variables was detected, a contingency coefficient was computed utilizing Cramer's Phi to determine the strength of the association.

The results of the analysis revealed multiple associations that were found to be statistically significant. In relationship to layer 1, whether or not the respondent reported

receiving training for premarital education in a non-academic setting was associated with the respondent covering all three areas of layer 1 when they provide premarital education sessions to couples. The completion of other (non-academic) courses by the respondent was positively associated with the provision of the layer 1 content areas ($\chi^2=12.91$, $n=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=7.82$). While this association was statistically significant, it was weak ($\Phi_c=.241$). It is important to differentiate this variable from the variable for college courses taken that offered training for premarital education. No significant association was identified between the coverage of layer 1 content areas and whether or not the pastor received formal academic training in the area of premarital education.

Two other variables were found to be significantly related to layer 1. A significant but weak positive association was found to be present between the pastor's status being fully funded versus part-time or bi-vocational and whether or not they covered the layer 1 content areas in premarital education ($\chi^2=9.51$, $n=221$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=3.84$, $\Phi_c=.207$). Finally an even weaker ($\Phi_c=.173$), though statistically significant, association was identified between the ministry setting of the respondent and whether they covered they layer 1 areas. Respondents who identified their ministry settings as rural, instead of urban or suburban were less likely to cover the 3 content areas within layer 1 ($\chi^2=6.25$, $n=220$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=5.99$). Table 9 shows the results of the chi-square test of independence for demographic and ministry context variables and covering all content areas contained within layer 1.

In relationship to layer 2, the variable of full-time, 4 variables were identified as having a positive relationship. 3 of these variables were also positively associated with layer 1. These 3 variables positively associated with both layer 1 and layer 2

Table 9. Chi-square test of independence of pastoral demographics and ministry context of regularly covering layer 1 content areas is premarital education ($\alpha=.05$)

<i>Demographic Characteristic</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>x²</i>	<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	<i>Critical Value</i>
Age	222	9.11	5	11.07
Fully funded position	222	9.51	1	3.84
Attend SBC seminary	221	0.12	1	3.84
Education level	222	10.41	5	11.06
Years pastoral experience	222	2.82	6	12.59
Staff size	222	0.88	4	11.07
State	222	0.61	3	7.82
College courses	222	0.21	3	7.82
Other courses	222	12.91	3	7.82
Location	220	6.25	2	5.99
Church size	222	3.20	5	11.06

include the completion of other courses ($x^2=10.99$, $n=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=7.82$, $\Phi_c=.222$), location of ministry setting ($x^2=12.60$, $n=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=5.99$, $\Phi_c=.239$), and fully funded ministry status ($x^2=9.74$, $n=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=3.84$, $\Phi_c=.209$). In addition to the 3 variables found in relation to layer 1 and layer 2, the variable of age was noted as having a positive relationship with the provision of premarital education services that included all the content areas of layer 2. The association was weak ($\Phi_c=.226$) but significant ($x^2=11.31$, $n=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=11.07$). Table 10 shows the results of the chi-square test of independence for demographic and ministry context variables and covering all content areas contained within layer 2.

In relationship to layer 3, four variables were positively associated. 3 of these variables were also related to the coverage of each content area in layer and layer 2. Respondents who serve in full-time and fully funded ministry positions were more likely to cover all the content areas contained in layer 3, which includes all areas contained in

Table 10. Chi-square test of independence of pastoral demographics and ministry context of regularly covering layer 2 content areas is premarital education ($\alpha=.05$)

<i>Demographic Characteristic</i>	<i>n</i>	χ^2	<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	<i>Critical Value</i>
Age	222	11.31	5	11.07
Fully funded position	222	9.74	1	3.84
Attend SBC seminary	221	1.11	1	3.84
Education level	222	4.86	5	11.06
Years pastoral experience	222	6.62	6	12.59
Staff size	222	1.85	4	11.07
State	222	0.96	3	7.82
College courses	222	1.24	3	7.82
Other courses	222	10.99	3	7.82
Location	220	12.60	2	5.99
Church size	222	3.83	5	11.06

levels 1 and 2 ($\chi^2=12.29$, $n=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=3.84$, $\Phi_c=.235$). Furthermore, respondents who received some training for premarital education through other (non-academic) courses ($\chi^2=17.03$, $n=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=7.82$, $\Phi_c=.277$) or who reported serving in a rural area ($\chi^2=6.42$, $n=220$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=5.99$, $\Phi_c=.171$) were more likely to cover all areas included in layer 3. Finally, those who attended a Southern Baptist seminary were more likely to cover each area included in layer 3 ($\chi^2=5.40$, $n=221$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=3.84$, $\Phi_c=.156$). Table 11 shows the results of the chi-square test of independence for demographic and ministry context variables and covering all content areas contained within layer 3.

In relation to layer 4, which includes all 11 content areas identified in the content analysis, three variables were positively associated with pastors covering each of the areas when they provide premarital education to couples. The strongest association ($\Phi_c=.225$) was education level. Pastor's who have earned at least a master's degree were more likely to cover all 11 content areas in their premarital education with engaged couples ($\chi^2=11.27$, $n=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=11.06$). Two other variables were positively related

Table 11. Chi-square test of independence of pastoral demographics and ministry context of regularly covering layer 3 content areas is premarital education ($\alpha=.05$)

<i>Demographic Characteristic</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>x²</i>	<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	<i>Critical Value</i>
Age	222	7.08	5	11.07
Fully funded position	222	12.29	1	3.84
Attend SBC seminary	221	5.40	1	3.84
Education level	222	9.06	5	11.06
Years pastoral experience	222	6.54	6	12.59
Staff size	222	3.57	4	11.07
State	222	0.26	3	7.82
College courses	222	3.98	3	7.82
Other courses	222	17.03	3	7.82
Location	220	6.42	2	5.99
Church size	222	5.95	5	11.06

to layer 4 content areas and both areas have been positively associated with all 4 layers.

These variables are full-time and fully funded pastors ($x^2=7.68$, $n=222$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=3.84$,

$\Phi_c=.186$) and rural location of ministry context ($x^2=6.88$, $n=220$, $\alpha=.05$, $cv=5.99$,

$\Phi_c=.176$). Table 12 shows the results of the chi-square test of independence for

demographic and ministry context variables and covering all content areas contained

within layer 4.

Table 12. Chi-square test of independence of pastoral demographics and ministry context of regularly covering layer 4 content areas in premarital education ($\alpha=.05$)

<i>Demographic Characteristic</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>x²</i>	<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	<i>Critical Value</i>
Age	222	8.95	5	11.07
Fully funded position	222	7.68	1	3.84
Attend SBC seminary	221	2.92	1	3.84
Education level	222	11.27	5	11.06
Years pastoral experience	222	8.72	6	12.59
Staff size	222	2.14	4	11.07
State	222	1.50	3	7.82
College courses	222	3.53	3	7.82
Other courses	222	2.67	3	7.82
Location	220	6.88	2	5.99
Church size	222	5.22	5	11.06

It is important to note here that the demographic variables of ministry position (fully funded or bi-vocational) and church location (rural, suburban, or urban) were related to whether a pastor covered each of the content areas at every level. In other words these two variables were statistically related to whether the pastors covered layer 1 areas, layer 2 areas, layer 3 areas, and layer 4 areas. While the variable of receiving training for premarital education in a non-academic setting through other courses was related to three of the content layers, no other variable was related to each of the four individual layers.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This research project was designed to analyze the attitudes and practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education. Five research questions were utilized to analyze and interpret the research data which was presented in chapter 4. This chapter will clarify the research-generated data and discuss its implications in relation to current and future pastoral ministry practice. The training, formal and otherwise, of pastors in the area of premarital education will also be discussed in light of the research findings. The limitations of the currently research will also be discussed. Finally, this chapter will conclude with suggestions for future research that may expand upon or clarify the findings of this study.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to analyze the attitudes and practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education.

Research Questions

The following 5 research questions were utilized to guide this study:

1. What are the attitudes of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education?

2. What are the practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee as they relate to premarital education?
3. What are the curricular content components in premarital education models as practiced by Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee?
4. What similarities or differences, if any, exist between the identified curricular content components of premarital education models and the components present in the premarital education practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee?
5. What relationship, if any, exists between the attitudes and practices of Southern Baptist pastors in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee toward premarital education and the demographic characteristics of the pastors?

Research Implications

In this section implications will be drawn from the research data so that the reader can more fully understand the meaning of the findings. Implications will be presented for each of the 5 research questions addressed in the study.

Research Question 1

The first research question addressed the issue of pastoral attitudes toward premarital education. In order to answer the question the researcher enlisted the help of an expert panel in the creation of an attitudinal scale. The researcher was concerned with understanding whether pastors value premarital education as a valid part of their ministry and also whether they value premarital education as an effective and helpful means for decreasing divorce and marital discord.

Overwhelmingly, pastors scored very high on the attitudinal scale. The composite mean of the attitudinal scores was high (3.56 out of 4.0), indicating a positive attitude toward premarital education in general. Furthermore, the mean score for each

individual item on the 7-item scale was also high (no individual question mean score was less than 3.47 out of 4.0) indicating that the pastors value premarital education as a valid aspect of their ministry as well as a valid means for increasing marital satisfaction and success. Individually, nearly 78% of the pastors participating in the study indicated a positive attitude toward premarital education. Nearly 97% indicated a slightly positive or positive attitude toward premarital education.

These findings should be encouraging to all interested in the provision of premarital education services. Because nearly 75% of marriages occur within a religious organization (Stanley et al. 2001, 67) and because 90% of couples who receive premarital education do so in a religious setting (Wilmoth 2006, 21) and because premarital education participants have rated clergy as the most helpful providers of a premarital education program (Williams et al. 1999, 275) these findings have enormous import. Stated conversely, if the Southern Baptist pastors included in this study had indicated through their responses a weaker attitude toward premarital education then the implications would be dire.

Pastors who do not place a high value on premarital education would not concern themselves with including the provision of such services as part of their pastoral ministries. The result would be a dramatic decrease in first-line providers of this service. The subsequent dearth of qualified providers of premarital education programs would translate into an increase in marital dissatisfaction and discord would. As long as pastors maintain a high view of the purpose and benefits of premarital education the rate of divorce can be held in check and, eventually, curtailed.

The widespread nature of the positive attitudes toward premarital education also provides an important and necessary basis for further research into developing comprehensive strategies and curricular materials for pastors to utilize in the process of providing premarital education. The Biblical record of God's design for marriage requires that faithful pastors concern themselves with the healthy development of marriage in society. As such, pastors' positive attitudes toward premarital education are not likely to disappear. These attitudes may, however, diminish as frustrations grow over a lack of excellent resources to assist pastors in the provisions of these services. Wilmouth (2005, 139) notes that the highest rated hindrances to clergy providing premarital education services include lack of training and being unaware of available resources. This research demonstrated that merely 41.89% of the respondent's cover 6 of the top 11 curricular content areas. The research further demonstrates that gains can be achieved in the breadth of curricular content areas that are covered. Now is the time for Christian educators, researchers, and publishers to respond to the positive attitudes of pastors toward premarital education by developing excellent resources and delivering these in non-academic settings.

This aspect of pastoral ministry cannot be ignored by Christian educators, researchers, and publishers. Premarital education is valued by pastors and continues to be an integral part of current pastoral ministry. As in all areas of import to pastors, quality resources are needed to enhance ministry effectiveness. Providing the proper tools and support is an integral part of ensuring long-term positive attitudes which lead to successful ministry practice.

Research Question 2

The second research question addressed the area of pastoral practices in the area of premarital education. The research tool was designed to elicit responses to answer this question on two levels. The first level dealt with how frequently the pastors provided premarital education to couples as well as, when they do provide this service, how many sessions do they typically provide. The second level focused on what resources the pastors utilized in their premarital education services when they did provide them.

The data showed that the pastors surveyed typically do provide premarital education services to couples. Furthermore, when the pastors provide this service the majority of them provide anywhere from 2-5 sessions per couple. This means that providing premarital education services to pre-married couples is a ministry practice that is quite familiar to most of the pastors participating in this research. Depending upon the number of couples that each pastor is working with on a yearly basis, a significant number of ministry hours is being invested in preparing couples for marriage. The number of total hours invested annually in preparing couples for marriage aside, the number of hours invested per couple must be increased for maximum results. The current research identified the top 11 curricular content components recommended within the religious and secular literature base. Pastors who invest 5 sessions per couple would need to cover at least two of these content areas per session. This is simply not enough opportunity to adequately cover each of the curriculum areas.

The pastors participating in this research indicated that when they provide premarital education services they regularly utilize a vast array of resources to assist

them. When pastors reported using a resource in their provision of premarital education services, they most frequently reported utilizing books or workbooks. The books that were most frequently identified as being used by the pastors in this study were *The Five Love Languages* (Chapman 1992), and *Before you Say I Do* (Wright 1977). Less frequently reported, but certainly present in the practices of many of the pastors, was the usage of a premarital assessment questionnaire or teaching videos. When teaching videos were utilized, the most oft reported video was *Before You Say I Do* (Wright 1977). The most often reported assessment instrument or inventory was the Myers-Brigg Type Indicator (Myers et al. 1985) and the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis (Taylor et al. 1984).

Three observations emerge from these findings. The first observation relates to those who did not report utilizing a resource. Most, but not all, pastors utilize an inventory, book/workbook, or teaching video/video series in their premarital education practices. For those who did not report utilizing an inventory, book/workbook, or teaching video/video series, the question should be raised about what guides their curriculum content choices and what strategies do they employ to deliver the content. This study was not concerned with how competently the pastors provided premarital education services, however the question of competence is an important one and should be considered by future researchers in light of the resources utilized (or not utilized) by the pastors in this study.

The second observation which emerges from the findings related to research question 2 is that no resource appears to be utilized in a widespread manner. That is to say that there is no single resource that was reportedly utilized by even a slight majority

of the pastors. Because pastors have different personalities with varying educational and experiential backgrounds, as well as varying abilities to deliver educational content one of the few ways to ensure that pre-married couples have a similar experience in the premarital education process is the utilization of standardized resources. What the data shows here, however, is that such a standardized curriculum has not been identified or adopted by the pastors who participated in this study. This also points to the need for the development of excellent resources with widespread application.

Finally, resources most commonly chosen and utilized by the pastors in premarital education have limitations to their comprehensiveness. This observation is important because more comprehensive tools are available to pastors. Small numbers of the sample reported utilizing these more comprehensive resources. This is most important in the category of inventories. As previously noted, the most often reported assessment instrument or inventory was the Myers-Brigg Type Indicator (Myers et al 1985) and the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis (Taylor, et al 1984). While both of these resources have been utilized in the processes of both marital therapy and premarital education for many years, they are built to focus primarily on personality similarities and differences. Their strengths most likely can be found in their application toward helping couples identify and improve interactional processes between their own personality and that of their partner. In other words, for what they are intended to show they are helpful and effective, but they are limited. In contrast, premarital assessment questionnaires such as PREPARE (Olsen 1996), FOCCUS (Markey, Micheletto, and Becker 1997), and RELATE (Holman et al. 1997) contain a personality assessment and much more. Each of these also offer insight into how the couples resolve conflict, how

they handle financial matters, how they address faith, impact of family-of-origin on current relationship, and many other practical topics. In addition to a much more robust inventory that goes well beyond personality, they also contain a prescribed content delivery plan with practical activities designed to assist the couple in the areas of emphasis. Pastors in this study were likely to use a resource in their premarital education, but it must be asked if they are using the best available resources.

Research Question 3

The third research question was concerned with the curricular content areas reportedly covered by the sample when they provide premarital education services to couples preparing for marriage. The results of a content analysis revealed the 11 premarital education curricular content areas most often recommend within the literature base. In order of their prevalence in the literature base these content areas were communication, intimacy, conflict resolution, roles and responsibilities, sex, family, money, religion/faith, expectations, definition of marriage, and children. The Research respondents were asked to indicate which (if any) of these 11 content areas that they regularly cover when they provide premarital education services to engaged couples.

Remarkably, every content area was covered by at least half of the sample. The most frequently recommended content area found in the literature base was the content area of communication. The content area of communication was also the most oft-covered content area reported by the pastors in the research. In fact, 98% of the sample reportedly covers the content area of communication when they provide premarital education services to couples who are preparing for marriage. Furthermore, 9 of the 11 content areas were reportedly covered by at least 70% of the sample. Six of the

11 were covered by at least 80% of the sample. The least covered curricular content area reportedly covered by the sample was family. Only 52% of the pastors who participated in the study reported that they regularly cover this content area of family with couples preparing for marriage. Even so, this still represents more than half of the research participants. The high percentages of pastors who cover the content areas show that when the sample pastors provide premarital education services to pre-married couples they are more likely than not to cover the curricular content areas recommended in the literature base.

In one sense this is very encouraging and demonstrates that the pastors in this study are on the right track. “Strong evidence” has been noted that “skills-based relationship education helps couples acquire and maintain relationship skills” (Halford et al 2003, 391). It has also been noted that a “program focusing on effective communication and problem-solving skills” yield demonstrably higher levels of marital adjustment and communication (Hahlweg et al. 1998, 552). These facts indicate that when the pastors in this study provide premarital education services they are focused on the most effective and helpful areas of content: communication and conflict resolution. It is disappointing, however, that the content area of family was only covered by 52% of the research participants. As noted in Chapter 2, “the love that exists between a husband and a wife gives shape to and is shaped by the larger set of familial obligations that characterize the marriage bond” (Anderson 2008, 31). In fact, the theological, societal, and practical import of families demands that this topic receive more attention from pastors providing premarital education. These findings are curious in that the Bible contains so many references to healthy families.

In an effort to gain additional clarity and to more fully answer research question 3, the researcher looked beyond whether or not the research participants covered individual curricular content areas. The 11 content areas identified in the content analysis were subdivided into layers. The 3 areas most often recommended in the literature base (communication, intimacy, and conflict resolution) comprised layer 1. Layer 2 included all the content areas included in layer 1 as well as the 4th and 5th most often recommended content areas (roles and responsibilities and sex). Layer 3 included all the content areas included in layers 1 and 2 as well as family, money, religion/faith, and expectations. These are the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th most often recommended content areas identified within the literature base. Finally, layer 4 included all of the 11 content areas, including the areas of definition of marriage and children. These are the 10th and 11th most often recommended content areas from the literature base (see Table 7).

Nearly 70% of the sample reported covering each of the layer 1 content areas. This high percentage indicates that when the research participants provide premarital education services to engage couples they are likely to cover communication, intimacy, and conflict resolution which are the 3 content areas most often recommended in the literature base. At layer 2, however, the percentage of the participants reportedly covering these topics markedly decreases (56.31%). Less than 40% reported covering each of the top 11 issues. These results indicate that the most often recommended content areas for premarital education are typically being covered. The content areas of communication, intimacy, and conflict resolution are regularly covered in premarital education by the pastors in this study. More than half of the participants cover communication, intimacy, conflict resolution, roles/responsibilities, and sex. Pastors in

the sample, however, were not nearly as likely to cover the bottom 7 content areas of family, money, expectations, religion/faith, definition of marriage, and children.

Investigating layers, or sets, of curricular component areas yielded an important insight. Though individual areas of curricular content are being covered in varying degrees by the research participants a comprehensive set of curricular content areas that is broad in scope is not being employed by a majority of the pastors. This appears to be a significant weakness in the practices of the research participants when they provide premarital education to couples preparing for marriage. In other words, the premarital education content areas regularly covered by the sample are not as broad or inclusive as they should be to gain maximum effectiveness and value to the couple. Intentional or otherwise, important individual areas are regularly being left out of the process. More troubling is the finding that layers 3 and 4 are not being covered regularly, exposing couples to greater risk of marital dissatisfaction and discord by the omission of these curricular content components.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 was concerned with identifying any potential similarities or differences between the curricular content components covered by the sample and the curricular content components recommended in the literature base. The data analyzed while answering this research question revealed that in 9 of the 11 recommended content areas, the pastors in the sample were significantly more likely to cover the individual content area than was expected. This was true even of those content areas where a smaller percentage of the sample reported covering the content area. The areas with the

greatest distance between the expected and observed frequencies were religion/faith and definition of marriage.

Given that this study was concerned with the attitudes and practices of pastors toward premarital education there is little surprise that the research participants covered the content area of religion/faith more often than was statistically expected.

Religion/faith is central to the mission and the practices of the pastors. This finding was expected. Initially, however, the finding that the research participants covered the content area of definition of marriage at a significantly higher rate than was expected is intriguing.

For Southern Baptist pastors the definition of marriage does not arise out of cultural inquiry or sociological understanding but rather from the teaching of the Old and New Testaments. In this way, the content areas of religion/faith and definition of marriage are closely related. What is noteworthy here is not that the research participants cover the area of definition of marriage at a significantly higher frequency than is statistically expected, but that merely 44% of the resources investigated in the content analysis recommended the content area of definition of marriage. With only 44% of the resources recommending this content area, the frequency threshold for statistical significance is lowered. Coupling this with the aforementioned concern of pastors for a biblical understanding of marriage it can be plainly seen why the χ^2 value for this content area was so high ($\chi^2=115.02$, $cv=3.84$). One must wonder why so few writers concerned with premarital education see this area as important. It appears that, at least in regards to this content area, pastors understand the importance of constructing a healthy view of

marriage for marital success and satisfaction more than a majority of those writers whose works were included in the content analysis.

The two content areas that were not covered by the pastors at a statistically significant greater frequency were the issues of intimacy and family. On the issue of family, respondents reported covering this content area more frequently than was expected, however this was not found to be statistically significant. On the issue of intimacy, the research participants were significantly less likely to cover the issue than was expected. The results of both of these content areas present curiosities. The issue of family is presumably of concern to pastors yet this content area had the lowest frequency count of those studied. The finding that it was 1 of only 2 areas not covered at a statistically higher frequency than was expected is surprising.

The content areas of family and intimacy are related in that they both could be perceived as belonging more to the psychological counseling realm than to the spiritual realm. It may be that pastors are much less comfortable dealing with issues such as family-of-origin, step-families, or other such areas that would fall under the broader category of family. Likewise, it may be that pastors do not sense that they are equipped to instruct couples who are preparing for marriage on the topic of intimacy, or emotional closeness. Whatever the reason or explanation, the omission of these two areas from the premarital counseling content of many of the pastors is important and unacceptable.

Despite the curiosities related to the content areas of family and intimacy, the pastors who participated in this research are regularly covering 9 of the 11 the recommended curricular content areas at a rate that is higher than would normally be expected. In other words, based upon the recommendations in the literature base, most of

the pastors in the sample are covering the appropriate individual content areas when they provide premarital education services.

Research Question 5

Research question 5 was written to guide an inquiry into the potential relationship between the attitudes and practices of the sample and certain characteristics of the sample. Specifically, this inquiry investigated the relationship between the demographics and ministry context variables of the sample and whether or not these variables predicted the coverage of any of 4 layers of content areas. To accomplish this, the 11 content areas identified in the content analysis were subdivided into layers. The 3 areas most often recommended in the literature base (communication, intimacy, and conflict resolution) comprised layer 1. Layer 2 included all the content areas included in layer 1 as well as the 4th and 5th most often recommended content areas (roles and responsibilities and sex). Layer 3 included all the content areas included in layers 1 and 2 as well as family, money, religion/faith, and expectations. These are the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th most often recommended content areas identified within the literature base. Finally, layer 4 included all of the 11 content areas, including the areas of definition of marriage and children. These are the 10th and 11th most often recommended content areas from the literature base (see Table 7).

The research data indicate 3 variables that were significantly related to whether or not the research participants covered the cluster of content areas in layer 1 (communication, intimacy, and conflict resolution). Four variables were related to whether or not a pastor covered the cluster of content areas included in layer 2 (communication, intimacy, conflict resolution, roles/responsibilities, and sex). The same

number of variables (4) were related to whether or not a pastor covered the content areas in layer 3 (communication, intimacy, conflict resolution, roles/responsibilities, sex, family, money, expectations, and religion/faith). Finally, 3 variables were significantly related to whether or not the research participants covered the content areas included in layer 4 (communication, intimacy, conflict resolution, roles/responsibilities, sex, family, money, expectations, religion/faith, definition of marriage, and children).

Layer 4, which is the most comprehensive of the layers as it contains each of the top 11 content areas recommended in the literature base, was specifically found to be related to the position of the pastor as fully funded versus bi-vocational, the education level of the pastor, as well as the ministry location of the pastor (urban, suburban, or rural). These three variables begin to provide a profile of the characteristics of the pastors who were less likely to cover each of the 11 content areas. Pastors whose position was fully funded, who had obtained higher levels of education, and who served outside of a rural ministry location were more likely to cover each of the 11 content areas.

A review of the variables related to the first three layers adds some additional clarity to the emerging profile. Most notably, the variables of fully funded versus bi-vocational ministry position and ministry location held across each of the four layers. In each case, these 2 variables were statistically related to whether or not the pastors covered the content areas within the layer. As such, these two variables may be the most telling when it comes to predicting whether or not pastors cover each of the top 11 curricular content areas recommended in the literature base.

Inexplicably, one variable was consistent in its relationship to layers 1, 2, and 3, but not related to layer 4. This is the area of other (non-academic) courses taken by the pastor. Pastors who reported receiving training for premarital education through non-academic courses were more likely to cover each of the content areas in layers 1, 2, and 3. These three layers include 9 of the top 11 content areas recommended in the literature base. This finding could be of great importance for increasing the effective provision of premarital education services by pastors.

As noted above, the variables of ministry position (fully funded or bi-vocational) and ministry location (urban, suburban, or rural) are related to whether or not a pastor covers each of the 11 curricular content areas when they provide premarital education services. Unfortunately, these two characteristics are mostly static. It is not practical to expect that a change would be made in ministry position status or church location. It is very reasonable, however, to deliver non-academic training to bi-vocational pastors in rural settings in a manner that is accessible and helpful. Of course this presupposes the creation and/or the identification of a program of premarital education that has appeal to a broad range of ministry settings. Once such a program has been identified or created a delivery method must be implemented making the program accessible on multiple levels. First, it must be geographically accessible. Research must be completed to ascertain how far a pastor would travel to attend the training. Second, the training must be financially accessible. Wilmoth notes church finances as one of the highest rated hindrances to clergy involvement in the provision of premarital education services (2005, 139). Third, the training must be intellectually accessible. It must be based upon solid research, but communicated in a manner that can be understood and

applied by pastors with varying degrees of academic ability and to engaged couples with varying degrees of academic ability. Finally, the training must be occasionally accessible. Since one of the target populations would be bi-vocational pastors the training must be available during off-peak work hours. Insufficient time has been noted as a highly rated hindrance to pastoral involvement in the provision of premarital education services (Wilmouth 2005, 139). While fully funded pastors may be able to attend the training during office hours as part of their work day, bi-vocational pastors are not likely to have such a luxury.

Research Applications

In this section the researcher will offer manners in which the research findings can be applied to ministry practice. The primary arenas for application will be in the areas of denominational leadership, the scholarly community of pastoral and ministry educators, as well as pastors of local churches.

Foundationally, denominational leaders in Southern Baptist life, pastoral and ministry educators, as well as pastors should be encouraged by many of the findings of this study. The pastors studied possessed a very high view of the value of premarital education. These pastors continue to see premarital education as a valid pastoral function and also see practical value for the marital success and satisfaction for the engaged couple. Most importantly, they typically provide at least some premarital counseling sessions to couples for whom they are officiating weddings. The results of this study seem to indicate that there is no cause for concern of pastors not valuing the practice of premarital education. Denominational leaders, seminary instructors, nor pastors need to invest significant time or resources raising awareness of the value of premarital education

or teaching for attitude change in this area. Finally, when the pastors do provide premarital education services they, as a whole, often cover many or most of the curricular content areas recommend within the literature base. All of this seems to be encouraging news for all concerned.

Denominational Leadership

This research provides some noteworthy points for denominational leaders on the national, state, and associational levels. The finding that pastors serving in rural locations are less likely to cover a more comprehensive curriculum coupled with the finding that bi-vocational pastors are also less likely to cover a more comprehensive curriculum when providing premarital education services points to an opportunity for those in denominational leadership to provide occasions for training that targets bi-vocational pastors serving in more rural areas. These training opportunities should focus on curricular content and ministry practice, rather than on ministry philosophy. The finding that pastors who had received other non-academic training for premarital education were more likely to provide a more comprehensive curriculum explains why denominational leadership should accept the primacy of this responsibility instead of Christian institutions of higher learning. It is noteworthy, however, that Christian universities and seminaries have much to contribute in this area and can work closely with denominational leadership to develop and deploy the training opportunities to those in the field.

Pastoral and Ministry Educators

The research findings suggest that those involved in the formal academic training of pastors and ministers have an important and multi-faceted role to play in this area. First, these institutions should continue to instruct students in the practice of premarital education. In doing so they will likely assist in maintaining the high value pastors hold in this area of ministry practice. Second, institutions of higher learning should invest resources and encourage appropriate professors and departments to explore a uniform curriculum for pastors to utilize when providing premarital counseling services. The findings of this research indicate that the pastors who participated were very likely to employ a wide variety of tools such as premarital assessment questionnaires, videos, and books in the process of premarital education. While no single curriculum is likely to be embraced in every Southern Baptist context, standardizing guidelines, curricular content, and best practices could give clarity to pastors who are seeking excellent resources in this process. This research has identified the top 11 recommended curricular content areas within the literature base. Pastors should be trained in the successful and effective methods to prepare engaged couples in each of these 11 areas. Furthermore, pastors should be trained to provide premarital education services that focus on skills and interactional processes. Finally, pastors should be introduced to resources that are comprehensive and user-friendly. The research nature of academic institutions make this the appropriate venue for the exploration and creation of such resources that are not marketed because of their popular appeal, but because of their ministry effectiveness across various ministry contexts.

Pastors of Local Churches

While denominational leaders as well as Christian institutions of higher education can add much to this topic in the area of training and preparation for pastors, the onus remains on the pastors to invest in the training and to carry out its teachings in their own ministry context. The practice of premarital education, while not a primary ministry function such as preaching and evangelism is nonetheless a worthy and important function. Pastors should look for opportunities to increase their understanding and effectiveness in this area.

Research Limitations

The current research findings are limited in their application by multiple factors. These findings will only generalize to the populations in Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, and Tennessee. The findings may not generalize to North America but could assist pastors of churches in the southeastern or middle United States. The results may not generalize to churches outside the Southern Baptist Convention. The results may not generalize to the populations outside the Christian evangelical faith or outside of the church community.

Further Research

Based upon the research findings and a discussion of the potential application of the findings multiple suggestions for additional research should be considered by those who desire to further explore or expand upon the current research. Subsequent lines of inquiry have the potential to clarify, expound upon, or challenge the findings of the current research. Studies that replicate the current research may increase the generalizability of the current findings.

There are multiple areas of important inquiry surrounding the topic of premarital education that were not addressed within the current research. First, in this study pastors were asked to answer questions about the specific content areas that they cover when they provide premarital education services. They were not asked how competent they felt about their provision of premarital education services or why they chose to cover (or not cover) the curricular content areas that they cover (or do not cover). This line of inquiry could reveal important insight into the motives of the pastors and could potentially pinpoint primary areas of concern for the development and delivery of training opportunities. Second, the current research was not concerned with why some pastors may not provide premarital counseling services. Asking pastors about their fears or concerns may yield important understanding about the roadblocks that some pastors may or may not experience when they are confronted with an opportunity to provide premarital education services to an engaged couple.

Looking further into the practices of pastors would be a valuable way to add depth of understanding. Future researchers may seek to understand specifically what information is conveyed to pre-married couples when a pastor covers a particular content area. For example, there is a qualitative difference between asking a pastor if he covers the curricular content area of communication and asking that same pastor to explain the manner in which he covers that particular content area.

Another manner in which to expand upon the current research is to choose a different geographical region to study so that the region included in the current study can be compared to another region or regions. The current research population consisted of Southern Baptist pastors in four Midwestern states (Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, and

Illinois). Subsequent research may focus on a similar design intended to investigate any potential similarities or differences between pastors in the Midwest and pastors in other parts of the United States. Similarly, future researchers may choose to sample a different denomination or denominations in an effort to provide a comparative analysis.

As the variables of ministry location and bi-vocational ministry position were related to the coverage of a more comprehensive curriculum future research may be centered on understanding why bi-vocational pastors in rural areas are less likely to cover a more comprehensive curriculum than their full-time counterparts in urban or sub-urban areas.

Future research may address the issue of a more standardized curriculum for pastors in particular ministry settings and situations. It may also be designed around the task of understanding current availability of non-academic training courses and why the experience of having completed such a course appears to be related to whether or not a pastor provides a more comprehensive curriculum for premarital education.

Research has demonstrated the potential positive effect of premarital education on married couples. In recent history pastors have accepted the responsibility to provide such services to couples who are engaged to be married. The current research has demonstrated that Southern Baptist pastors in Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, and Kentucky continue to see the provision of these services as a valid function of their pastoral ministry. Most Southern Baptist pastors in these states provide premarital education services to couples who are engaged to be married and, when they do provide such services, they touch on a broad range of topics that are closely related to the topics recommended in the literature base. The current research has demonstrated a few

important relationships related to demographic and ministry context variables and the coverage of a more comprehensive curriculum for premarital education. This research should serve as a basis for future research and improvements in ministry practice with the chief aim to be the glory of God through marriages that rightly reflect His purposes and His priorities.

APPENDIX 1

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREMARITAL EDUCATION CONTENT

Column A	Column B	Column C
Hawkins et al. (2004)	interactional processes communication patterns problem-solving behaviors common problems awareness of effort required in marriage institutional and societal features of marriage commitment, generosity, justice, loyalty	interactional processes communication conflict resolution common problems expectations definition of marriage traits of a healthy marriage
Williams et al. (1999)	communication conflict resolution children religious or spiritual matters	communication conflict resolution children religion/faith
Stanley (2001)	communication managing conflict expectations commitment roles core beliefs protection of the friendship negative relational patterns dysfunctional attitudes	communication conflict resolution expectations traits of a healthy marriage role and responsibilities definition of marriage Intimacy interactional processes traits of a healthy marriage
Halford (2004)	positive communication conflict management positive expression of affection building partner empathy	communication conflict resolution intimacy interactional processes

Fournier (1979)	<p>personality personal habits and health incompatible backgrounds interests and values idealization</p> <p>communication sex commitment</p> <p>marital roles arguments relatives friends children money work</p>	<p>personality compatibility personal history personality relationship perception AND expectations communication sex AND intimacy traits of a healthy marriage roles and responsibilities conflict resolution family friends children money work</p>
McGeorge and Carlson (2006)	<p>relationship history concept of marriage individual and couple expectations family of origin communication conflict resolution marital roles expectations about roles division of labor finances intimacy personality expression of love and anger holidays, rituals, and tradition</p>	<p>relationship history definition of marriage expectations family communication conflict resolution roles and responsibilities expectations work money intimacy personality interactional processes personal history</p>
Risch, Riley, and Lawler (2003)	<p>balancing time sexual issues extended family issues role expectations communication conflict resolution children compatibility issues relationship quality</p>	<p>time sex AND intimacy family roles and responsibilities communication conflict resolution children compatibility relationship assessment</p>

	health issues	health
Adler-Baeder, et at (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> positive emotions and affect affectionate behaviors supportive behaviors time together relational identity expressivity self-disclosure negative affect negative emotions negative behaviors withdrawal nonresponsiveness demand-withdrawal pattern dismissive behaviors realistic beliefs perceptions of expectations understanding one another relational equity positive attributions and biases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> interactional processes interactional processes interactional processes time relationship assessment interactional processes interactional processes interactional processes interactional processes interactional processes interactional processes interactional processes interactional processes interactional processes relationship perception expectations interactional processes roles and responsibilities interactional processes
Stahlman (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> marriage quality and stability family of origin finances/budgeting communication decision making Intimacy parenting sexuality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> traits of a healthy marriage family money communication conflict resolution intimacy children sex AND intimacy
Bagarozzi and Bagarozzi (1982)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sexual relations in-laws friends religion children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sex AND intimacy family Friends religion/faith children
Oates (1972)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> roles allocation of time work and vocation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> roles and responsibilities time work

	finances and money management parents in-law	money family
	religious differences	religion/faith AND compatibility
	children family medical care marriage and the law	children health definition of marriage
Olson and Larson (2008)	communication conflict resolution partner style and habits family and friends financial management leisure activities sexual expectations spiritual beliefs relationship expectations character traits assertiveness self-confidence avoidance partner dominance flexibility closeness flexibility (family of origin) closeness (family of origin) personality idealization	communication conflict resolution compatibility family AND friends money time sex AND intimacy religion/faith Expectations personality personality personality personality personality interactional processes interactional processes family family personality relationship perception AND expectations
FOCCUS (Markey, Micheletto, and Becker, 1997)	lifestyle expectations friends and interests personality match personal issues Communication problem solving religion and values Parenting extended family sexuality	expectations friends AND compatability personality personal history Communication conflict resolution religion/faith children family sex AND intimacy

	finances marriage readiness marriage covenant key problem indicators family of origin dual careers interfaith marriage remarriages cohabitating couples	money relationship perception definition of marriage common problems family work religion/faith AND compatibility remarriage cohabitation
RELATE (Holman et al. 1997)	sociability calmness organization flexibility emotional maturity happiness self-esteem roles employment sexuality children religiosity family processes parental marital satisfaction relationship with father relationship with mother family stressors parents conflict resolution style couple conflict resolution style couple communication style relationship satisfaction and stability	personality personality personality personality personality personality personality roles and responsibility work sex AND intimacy children religion/faith Family family family family common problems family AND conflict resolution conflict resolution communication relationship perception
Wright and Roberts (1997)	defining marriage recognizing and accepting the uniqueness of your partner primacy of biblical love marital expectations needs fulfillment roles	definition of marriage compatibility definition of marriage expectations traits of a healthy marriage roles and responsibilities

	<p>decision making in-laws communication conflict resolution finances sex spiritual life</p>	<p>conflict resolution family communication conflict resolution money sex AND intimacy religion/faith</p>
Mack (1986)	<p>biblical basis for marriage spiritual intimacy communication conflict resolution roles finances sex</p>	<p>definition of marriage religion/faith Communication conflict resolution roles and responsibilities money sex AND intimacy</p>
Marriage 101 (Vaughn and Strother 2010)	<p>marital expectations Communication emotional intimacy</p> <p>personality differences conflict resolution spiritual intimacy finances</p>	<p>expectations communication intimacy personality AND compatibility conflict resolution religion/faith money</p>
Rainey (2010)	<p>relationship history God's view of marriage communication roles and responsibilities money sex</p>	<p>relationship history definition of marriage communication roles and responsibilities money sex AND intimacy</p>

APPENDIX 2
RESEARCH TOOL

Part 1: Demographic Information

Please help us understand the following general characteristics about yourself and your ministry.

1. What is your age (in years)?
 - A. Under 20
 - B. 20-29
 - C. 30-39
 - D. 40-49
 - E. 50-59
 - F. 60 or above

2. How many years have you served as a pastor?
 - A. Under 5
 - B. 5-10
 - C. 11-15
 - D. 16-20
 - E. 21-25
 - F. 26-30
 - G. 31 or more

3. What is your current ministry position?
 - A. Sr. Pastor
 - B. Associate Pastor
 - C. Other _____

4. Is your current ministry position fully funded or bi-vocational?
 - A. Fully funded
 - B. Bi-vocational

5. Besides the pastor how many additional ministry staff are employed by your church?
 - A. None
 - B. 1-3
 - C. 4-6
 - D. 7-9
 - E. 10 or more

6. Which word best describes the location of your church?
 - A. Rural
 - B. Urban
 - C. Suburban

7. Approximately how many people (all ages) typically attend services at your church?
 - A. Less than 100
 - B. 101-400
 - C. 401-700
 - D. 701-1000
 - E. 1001-1500
 - F. 1501 or more

8. In which state is your church located?
 - A. Missouri
 - B. Tennessee
 - C. Kentucky
 - D. Illinois

9. What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?
 - A. High school or less
 - B. Some college
 - C. Associate's degree
 - D. Bachelor's degree
 - E. Master's degree
 - F. Doctoral degree

10. Did you earn a degree at a Southern Baptist seminary?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No

11. How many college or seminary courses have you taken that intended to train you in premarital education or marital preparation?
- A. None
 - B. 1-2
 - C. 3-4
 - D. 5 or more
12. Approximately how many continuing education opportunities (seminars, etc.) related to premarital education or marital preparation have you attended?
- A. None
 - B. 1-5
 - C. 6-10
 - D. 11 or more
13. On average, how many weddings do you officiate each year?
- A. None
 - B. 1-5
 - C. 6-10
 - D. 11 or more
14. On average, to how many couples do you provide premarital counseling each year?
- a. None
 - b. 1-5
 - c. 6-10
 - d. 11 or more
15. When you do provide premarital education, how many sessions of premarital counseling do you typically provide?
- a. 1
 - b. 2-3
 - c. 4-5
 - d. 6 or more
16. Are you currently married?
- A. Yes
 - B. No

17. If married, how many years?

- A. 0-5 years
- B. 6-10 years
- C. 11-15 years
- D. 16-20 years
- E. 21-25 years
- F. More than 25 years

Part 2: Attitudes toward Premarital Education

Please circle the number that best conveys your attitude toward each of the following statements.

Stongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	Marriage preparation is a valuable aspect of my ministry.
1	2	3	4	Marriage preparation can be useful in decreasing divorce.
1	2	3	4	Engaged couples should be required to participate in a marriage preparation program.
1	2	3	4	I provide marriage preparation for couples only because it is expected of me.
1	2	3	4	Providing marriage preparation is a good investment of my time.
1	2	3	4	Providing marital preparation is not a valid function for a Pastor
1	2	3	4	Marriage preparation is not useful in increasing martial satisfaction

Part 3: Practices in Premarital Education

Please help us to understand your practices in providing premarital education.

1. Place a check on the line beside the topics that you regularly cover when you provide marital preparation.

- Communication
- Intimacy
- Conflict Resolution
- Roles and responsibilities
- Sex
- Family of origin
- Money
- Religion/Faith
- Expectations
- Definition of Marriage

2. Place a check on the line next to each resource that you regularly utilize when you provide marital preparation.

Inventories

- FOCCUS*
- Myers-Brigg Type Indicator*
- PREPARE*
- RELATE*
- Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis*
- Other: _____
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Videos

- Before You Say "I do" (Wright)*
- Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts (Parrot and Parrot)*
- Marriage 101*
- Other: _____
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Books and Workbooks

- Before You Say "I do" (Wright)*
- The Five Love Languages (Chapman)*
- Preparing for Marriage (Rainey)*
- Making Love Last Forever (Smalley)*
- Love for a Lifetime (Dobson)*
- Love and Respect (Eggerichs)*
- Other: _____

APPENDIX 3

LETTER TO SAMPLE

April 1, 2012

Dear Pastor,

All of us would agree marriages are under attack; especially those within our churches. You can help make a difference by completing the enclosed survey. The survey is part of a study designed to understand the attitudes and practices of pastors as they relate to premarital couples. Your response has the potential to yield important insights for church leadership development and for improving the overall health of marriages.

The researcher for this study is Kevin Coffee. Kevin serves at Lynwood Baptist Church as our Pastor of Discipleship. He is working on his doctoral dissertation in order to earn the Doctor of Education (Ed.D) degree from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Kevin is also a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) and has extensive experience in counseling. He has been a great asset to me, our church, and our community. I believe his research will prove to be invaluable and aid every church with Bible-centered premarital counseling.

Please take a few minutes and complete the survey. Your investment of time and information will reap eternal dividends.

Once you have completed the survey, please place it in the postage-paid envelope and return it before May 1, 2012. These surveys have been sent to Southern Baptist pastors in four states. Every response is critical to the research. Thank you for your participation!

Blessings,

Mark Anderson
Senior Pastor

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ABSTRACT

AN ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES OF SOUTHERN BAPTIST PASTORS TOWARD PREMARITAL EDUCATION

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012
Chairperson: Dr. Larry J. Purcell

The purpose of this study was to analyze the attitudes and practices of Southern Baptist pastors in four Midwestern states toward premarital education. The researcher utilized a multi-stage sampling procedure to randomly select 1070 churches in Missouri, Tennessee, Illinois, and Kentucky. A research tool was created to record demographic information about the research participants and also to record the attitudes and practices of the sample toward premarital education.

A content analysis was conducted which identified the top 11 recommendations from the literature base for premarital education curricular content areas. The curricular content components reportedly present in the practices of the sample were compared against the curricular content areas in the literature base. Finally, the researcher investigated the relationship between the presence of certain curricular content components of present in the practices of the sample and certain demographic characteristics of the sample.

KEYWORDS: Premarital Education, Marital Preparation, Pastoral Ministry, Pastoral Counseling, Pastoral Practices, Pastoral Attitudes

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