

IN GOOD COMMUNICATION AND IN BAD: A STUDY OF PREMARITAL
COUNSELING AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS
IN NEWLYWED COUPLES

Karen Norvell, B.S.

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APPROVED:

Brian K. Richardson, Major Professor
Karen Anderson, Committee Member
Zouming Wang, Committee Member
John M. Allison, Chair of the Department of
Communication Studies
Michael Monticino, Interim Dean of the Robert B.
Toulouse School of Graduate Studies

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This study examined the effects of premarital counseling on newlywed communication. It was predicted that individuals who had participated in premarital counseling would have lower levels of demand/withdrawal communication and higher levels of spousal support. The effects of the format of the counseling were also examined. Individuals who had been married less than two years completed a survey measuring their marital satisfaction, levels of demand/withdraw, and perceived spousal support. Social learning theory was used as a theoretical lens. Results suggested that participating in premarital counseling has no affect on newlywed communication. Newlyweds who had been exposed to a group format during their counseling had higher marital satisfaction than those who had just participated in a one-on-one format with a counselor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Traditional marriage in the United States is declining, leading marriage advocates to call for marriage reform and training (Groom, 2001; Larson & Holman, 1994; Russell & Lyster, 1992; Williams, Riley, Risch & Van Dyke, 1999). Of the 111.1 million households in the US, only 49.7% are comprised of married couples, (New York Times, 2006) making marriage a new minority. On average, marriages in America last only seven years, leading to over half of couples in America being remarried or re-coupled (Stepfamily Foundation, n.d.). Families where one spouse has previously been married now constitute over 40% of households (Ten Kate, 1996). Furthermore, attitudes about marriage appear to be declining. A third of all adults do not view being married as more beneficial than being single (The Institute for American Values, 1995). People who have been previously married, married young, whose parents are divorced, who have lived together prior to marriage or had children before marriage are less likely to maintain their marriages (White, 1990). Remaining in poor marriages makes a person at higher risk for health problems in the future (Hitti, 2006). While these facts may be startling, the true state of marriage can be seen in divorce statistics.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, divorce rates range from 40% to 60% in the majority of US states, with nearly half of all marriages ending in divorce (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d). These can be traced back to the early 1980s, where only 73% of women who married reached their 10th wedding anniversary, compared to 90 % in the late 1940s (Hampson & Peterson, 2004). Divorce costs American taxpayers over \$112 billion dollars a year in lost tax revenue and government programs at all levels of government (Crary, 2008), making these trends detrimental for people outside of the broken family. As the

foundation of marriage faces increasing challenges, clergy, parishioners, and scholars search for new ways to combat divorce and strengthen marriages.

Causes of divorce can often be traced back to communication problems between the married couple, making poor communication a common thread among divorced couples (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Stanley, Markman & Whitton, 2002). The abilities to resolve conflict and communicate effectively are critical to marital success (Mace, 1986).

Communication problems are one of the sources of highest conflict for couples (Schapp, Buunk, & Kerkstra, 1988), making it the most commonly reported problem by couples seeking professional help (Broderick, 1981). Still, divorce can sometimes be necessary. Dysfunctional characteristics in marriages, such as domestic violence (Logan, Walker, Horvarth, & Leukefeld, 2003) or substance abuse (Collins, Ellickson, & Klein, 2007), necessitate putting the safety and well being of the parties involved first, often leaving divorce as the only option. Still, many divorces might be prevented through counseling or communication training, which may prevent some of the negative consequences of divorce.

The consequences of divorce extend beyond former spouses and affect women, children, and future marital partners. Of the children born in the 1980s, between 40% and 50% will see their parents divorced before they are 18 (Fine, Moreland & Schwebel, 1983). Children living in single parent homes are twice as likely to never finish high school (Hetherington, Bridges & Insabella, 1998). Women whose parents have divorced have a 60% higher divorce rate than women whose parents have remained married. Among men, the same pattern gives them a 35% higher chance of divorce (Glenn & Shelton, 1983). According to the 2003 US Census Bureau, people with children from a previous marriage who choose to remarry have greater chances of separation, leading to over half of all remarried couples with children divorcing. After divorce,

women and children become economically disadvantaged (Holden & Smock, 1991), as single adults are less likely to have access to health care and pensions (Wilmoth & Koso, 2002). Not only does divorce inhibit the functionality of future relationships for all parties involved, it also creates a new set of communication problems.

The effects of divorce lead to communication problems in future relationships for remarriages, step-families, and children. When they are adults, children of divorce have less confidence and belief in lifelong relationships (Segrin & Taylor, 2006). If they decide to marry, research shows they experience communication problems in their relationships. Engaged couples, where the female partner's parents were divorced, experience more negative verbal and nonverbal behaviors and have low rates of positive problem-focused behaviors (Sanders, Halford & Behrens, 1999). Couples who remarry show less positive communication and engage in communication withdrawal more frequently than first marriage couples (Halford, Nicholson & Sanders, 2007), leading to low feelings of relationship satisfaction (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). Before becoming adults, 30% of children will spend time living in a step-parent household (Bumpass, Raley & Sweet, 1995), causing them to re-negotiate the communication rules learned in their parent's first marriage. Children who live in homes where parents practice negative communication behaviors are more likely to have behavioral and emotional problems (Cummings & Davies, 2002). Afifi (2003) noted this occurrence, researching how children of divorce feel torn between their parent and step-parent and for adults to feel torn between their children and spouse, thus creating dialectical tensions between loyalty-disloyalty and revealment-concealment. With divorce having such a harmful influence on the people involved, finding ways to prevent divorce deserves priority attention from scholars. Markman, Floyd, Stanley and Storaasli (1988) argue that instead of treating the problems of divorce, researchers

and therapists should instead focus on preventing marital distress while the couple is still happy. This study investigates the effectiveness of intervening in the engagement stage of the relationship via premarital training.

One way to combat rising divorce rates and negative effects of divorce on future relationships is to teach engaged couples marriage skills through premarital counseling (PMC) and marriage education. Premarital counseling programs offer an alternative and preventative approach for couples to help anticipate the risk factors that come with marital distress and dissolution (Valiente, Belanger & Estrada, 2002). They are designed for participants to increase their knowledge about the marriage relationship with practical applications, while learning about themselves in a formatted environment with specific information (Stahmann & Salts, 1993). Proactive therapy is designed to not only help the couple prepare for the lifelong commitment of marriage, but also to create a stable foundation for the entire family (Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley & Clements, 1993). The purpose of PMC is to teach skills that help to maintain marital quality and satisfaction throughout the marriage life span. Common topic areas addressed in premarital counseling include communication skills, conflict resolution and decision-making skills (Stahmann & Salts, 1993). Stanley and Markman (1997), while not examining communication-related variables, found that couples who take premarital counseling are less likely to consider divorce and express more confidence in their futures. The skills and benefits provided by PMC provide hope that by teaching marital preparation to engaged couples, they might have a stronger chance of avoiding marital dissolution.

In order for PMC to be effective in teaching communication skills, it should address factors, derived from communication research, as important in maintaining marital satisfaction. The goals and aspirations of PMC are futile if they do not focus specifically on skills that

facilitate functional communication in marriages and potential problem areas in communication. Kaslow and Hammerschmidt (1992) created their list of eight “essential ingredients” for long term marriages, including strong problem solving and coping skills as well as open and honest communication. Research on marital communication has revealed two areas pertinent to functional marital communication that this study seeks to analyze in PMC: demand/withdrawal and supportive behaviors/spousal support.

Within a relationship, demand occurs when one partner pushes for change from the other, while the other partner withdraws or avoids the situation or problem (Gottman, 1999). Spouses who engage in frequent demand/withdrawal patterns and like behaviors have less marital satisfaction (Christensen, 1987). Over time, demand/withdrawal patterns cause partners to drift apart, leading to possible marital dissolution (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). Negative associations between demand/withdrawal behaviors and patterns and marital satisfaction have been found in studies conducted in Brazil, Italy, and Taiwan (Christensen & Eldridge, 2005).

Researchers have yet to find a reason why demand/withdrawal behavior occurs (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 1999; Vogel, Murphy, Werner-Wilson, Cutrona & Seeman, 2007). However, recognizing the damaging effects of this behavior is important preparation for engaged couples. If they can recognize these patterns when they are occurring, they can take steps to block the damage it can inflict. Without education and training, couples might be unable to recognize demand/withdrawal and fall victim to its consequences. Therefore, it is imperative that counseling effectively train couples about demand/withdrawal. This study seeks to determine if couples who take premarital counseling have higher or lower levels of demand/withdrawal than couples who do not participate in counseling.

Social support is also vital to marital relationships (Acitelli, 1996). Supportive

communication includes interactions that improve the feelings and state of a distraught or anxious person by helping that person reevaluate their situation (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1996). The value of social support stems from the idea that certain kinds of communicative interactions between partners relieve stress and help troubled partners feel better (Edwards, 2006). Xu and Burleson (2001) state that “spouses expect their partners to ‘be there’ for them, helping them overcome problems that lack a solution” (pg. 536). Providing social support to one’s spouse means learning how to verbally and non-verbally communicate messages of, and expressing them in a way that a spouse receives the message and feels support. Partners who are satisfied within their marriages claim higher levels of support from their spouse (Julien & Markman, 1991).

There is no doubt that marriages have both periods of bliss and of trial. During these times, partners can experience these feelings together or separate. For example, a husband may be experiencing a trial because he was passed over for a job promotion at work; during such a time, support from his wife will be vital. Despite the length of the premarital relationship, once two people have married, they experience trials in a different way, causing them to have to adjust their support techniques and actions to suit both the issue and the new relationship (Acitelli, 1996). Without education on this process, it is difficult for a partner to know how to support his/her spouse within the context of marriage. For this reason, and similar to demand/withdrawal, it is essential that premarital counseling and education teach social support skills to engaged couples. Similar to the goals regarding demand/withdrawal, this study seeks to determine if couples who take premarital counseling have higher or lower levels of social support than couples who did not take premarital counseling.

Martin and Martin (1984) claim there is a need for premarital counseling and

communication programs for engaged couples to improve their relationships and increase their chances for marital satisfaction. They state that seeking counseling services and professional help for marriage preparation has become more acceptable for young adults. In fact, many high school and college students plan to attend some kind of marital education before wedding (Silliman & Schumm 2004). This call for marriage reform and training extends beyond the scope of academia into our state and national governments. In Oklahoma, Governor Frank Keating created a program requiring churches to mandate premarital counseling for all couples seeking religious marriages (Schaffer, 2002). Almost a decade ago, Michigan representatives introduced a bill requiring premarital counseling for couples seeking marriage, and Austin, Texas joined 37 other cities in the US to adopt a community marriage policy (Decker, 1996). President Bush supports these politicians' efforts, and presented a plan in 2002 to spend \$300 million to promote marriage and strong families (Schaffer, 2002). If the government is seeking to improve marriage across our country, then scholars have an obligation to share existing knowledge and fill in the gaps where research has failed to make discoveries.

This study seeks to shrink those gaps by examining differences in demand/withdrawal and spousal support between couples who did and did not participate in PMC. By examining these variables, the goal of this study is to determine if counseling programs currently offered to engaged couples teach communication skills that will assist them in avoiding demand/withdrawal and encouraging spousal support, two skill sets linked to higher levels of marital satisfaction. In the second chapter, the literature review introduces social learning theory as the theoretical premise for this study. Research on aspects of premarital counseling and a survey of commonly used premarital counseling questionnaires is offered to inform the reader on what research has already contributed to this field of study. In addition, the literature review

examines demand/withdrawal and spousal support, and proposes three research questions and two hypotheses to be determined in the survey. The third chapter describes the method and analysis used to test the hypotheses and research questions. Chapter four describes the statistical outcomes of the research questions and hypotheses. This is followed by a review of the conclusions and implications of these findings in the discussion section.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the previous chapter, the problem of the declining state of marriage and the links between divorce and poor communication were presented. This study suggests many divorces can be traced back to poor communication between spouses, and argues teaching communication skills in premarital counseling and marriage education can help combat the rising divorce rates. Research shows that strong marital satisfaction is associated with low levels of demand/withdrawal behavior and high levels of supportive behaviors from one's spouse. The goal of this study is to determine whether premarital counseling makes a difference in teaching couples how to avoid demand/withdrawal and increase spousal support. First, the following chapter introduces social learning theory to determine if it can be applied to settings, such as premarital education. Then, I review literature concerning premarital counseling, demand/withdrawal and spousal support in order to familiarize the reader with what research has already contributed to this field of study. Research questions and hypotheses are also presented throughout the literature review.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory (SLT) (Bandura, 1977, 1997) suggests that people can learn through observation. When observing another person, usually a role model, exhibiting certain behaviors, individuals have the opportunity to learn and use those behaviors in their own lives. Role models tend to be people involved in interpersonal relationships with the learner or an admired character in the mass media (Bandura, 1994). The process of social learning is also characterized by the learner analyzing the consequences of those behaviors for the role model. If

the learner sees benefits from the behavior, then it is positively reinforced for the learner.

Behaviors are negatively emphasized for the learner if negative consequences for the role model are observed (Bandura, 1994). When broken down, learning by observation has four steps:

1) attention 2) retention 3) motor reproduction 4) and motivation (Demirbas & Yagbasan, 2006).

Vaughn and Rogers (2000) suggest that this type of observation serves as the “trial and error” stage for the learner. By watching the role model, the learner determines which behaviors are beneficial and learns to avoid the ones that can be detrimental. In order to intervene and prevent negative behaviors, SLT suggests designing tactics where one can relearn conventional behaviors (Reisig, Holtfreter & Morash, 2006).

Research on SLT spans across all academic disciplines. Scholars have used SLT to study how media characters influence the behaviors of their viewers. Soap opera characters were successful in influencing their audience about proper family planning (Vaughn & Rogers, 2000), characters in the television program *Cheers* helped naturalize the process of drinking beer and conveyed mixed messages as to the effects and safety of beer (Hundley, 1995), and children’s television commercials influenced the way children learned about gender roles in society (Smith, 1994). Social learning theory has also been shown to play a role in substance abuse problems among college students (Bosari & Kate, 2006; Ramos & Perkins, 2006). Demirbas and Yagbasan (2006) claim that SLT is useful in education. By becoming good role models for their students, teachers can reach beyond academics and teach problem-solving skills, creativity and study skills. In their study, SLT was effective in re-teaching attitudes towards science to seventh grade students.

This study aims to examine social learning theory by applying its principals to a controlled environment, such as premarital counseling. Couples participating in premarital

counseling have the opportunity to learn behaviors from a respected role model. As the counselor explains and demonstrates certain behaviors to the couples, the participants have the opportunity to observe the behaviors, see the positive or negative outcomes, and determine for themselves if that behavior is something they wish to incorporate or dismiss from their relationships. Group counseling increases the occasion for social learning. According to Gleason and Prescott (1977), group counseling affords the opportunity for couples to compare and contrast their relationships to one another, providing chances for couples to adopt certain behaviors they see as beneficial to other couples. Groups allow for feedback from other participants and occasions for couples to watch their partner interacting with other individuals. Participants may also watch other couples make behavioral decisions, which may reinforce certain behaviors as beneficial to relationships. All of these occurrences create an environment in group counseling where the chance for the anticipated outcomes of social learning theory to occur increase.

Research Question (RQ) 1: Will participants of group PMC report higher levels of marital satisfaction than those who engaged in one-on-one PMC sessions?

Modern Premarital Counseling

Much of the research on premarital counseling (PMC) seeks either to evaluate premarital assessment questionnaires (PAQs) (Cobb, Larson & Watson, 2003; Holman, Larson & Harmer, 1994; Huber, 1987; Larson, Holman, Klein, Busby, Stahmann & Peterson, 1995; Larson, Newell, Topham & Nichols, 2002; Rowden, Harris & Stahmann, 2006; Watts, 1997) or assess session and client characteristics (Murray, 2004; Schumm, Silliman, & Bell, 2000; Sullivan, Pasch, Cornelius & Cirigliano, 2004). Reviewing commonly used PAQs benefits this study by looking closely at programs already used in order to understand how some PMC sessions are taught and the marital aspects they address. Analyzing session and client literature provides a

theoretical and research-based foundation for determining how the current study will contribute to the body of knowledge. In this portion of the literature review, research on commonly utilized premarital assessment questionnaires is discussed with a focus on what communication variables they include, followed by an overview of the current research studies that examine premarital counseling sessions.

Premarital Assessment Questionnaires

A premarital assessment survey is designed primarily for assessing the current state of the premarital relationship and for gathering data relevant to future counseling topics and issues (Larson et al., 1995). Many scholars examining these tools assess their effectiveness, strengths and weaknesses, and usefulness in other areas of counseling (Holman et al., 1994; Huber, 1987; Larson et al., 1995; Larson et al., 2002; Watts, 1997). Researchers recognize four different PAQs as highly effective and widely used: the Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study (FOCCUS), the Cleveland Diocese Evaluation for Marriage (CDEM), the Preparation for Marriage (PREP-M), and the Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation (PREPARE); PAQs have been intensely studied (Cobb et al., 2003; Holman et al., 1994; Huber, 1987; Larson et al., 1995; Larson et al., 2002; Watts, 1997). Although this study does not directly assess or compare these surveys, it is informative to know what areas and topics they address. Each will be discussed next, along with their communication components.

The Facilitating Open Couple Communication (FOCCUS) questionnaire emphasizes traditional values and morals of sacramental marriage (Larson et al., 1995). It includes four main content areas: matching personality and lifestyles, communication and problem-solving skills, bonders and integrators, and summary categories such as family-of-origin and key problem

indicators. FOCCUS is available in four editions, each emphasizing values from different religion. This allows FOCCUS to reach a large population of engaged couples, including those from different religious backgrounds (Larson et al., 2002). At the end of the premarital counseling sessions, the FOCCUS is followed by FOCCUS for the Future, which encourages engaged couples to work on trouble areas that FOCCUS revealed. A weakness of FOCCUS is its lack of assessing premarital factors that predict future marital quality (Larson et al., 1995). FOCCUS does include communication skills, coupled with problem solving, as one of the four major content areas measured within its 19 different scales (Larson et al., 2002); however, no research exists that describes the communication skills and habits it seeks to measure.

The Cleveland Diocese Evaluation for Marriage (CDEM) aids counselors by assessing engaged couples readiness for marriage by evaluating 10 areas related to marriage traditionally held by Catholics (Larson et al., 1995). The CDEM originally served as a tool for Catholic counselors, but is currently being used by counselors in all religions and establishments. The validity scales in the CDEM enable researchers to determine if the respondent is answering truthfully or simply giving the optimal response for the question. The questionnaire includes a variety of critical statements, which measure important beliefs, feelings and attitudes regarding marriage principals and issues, and allows the CDEM to comprehensively assess these values among couples, something other PAQs fail to do (Larson et al., 1995). The CDEM is designed to be administered prior to PMC or marriage education as a tool for measuring couple compatibility; therefore, it does not teach marriage or communication skills. If couples score a high compatibility rates on the CDEM, they may be led to believe they do not need marriage education, which could potentially influence their decision about participating in PMC. Despite a couple's compatibility, learning marriage, communication, and problem solving skills is

important to their marital success.

Of all the PAQs, the Preparation for Marriage (PREP-M) also referred to as the Relationship Evaluation (RELATE) appears as the most comprehensive tool, measuring items in five categories: couple unity in values and beliefs, personal readiness for marriage, partner readiness for marriage, couple readiness for marriage, and background and family-of-origin factors. The usability of this questionnaire extends from engaged couples to friendships and other non-romantic couples as well as into the classroom for teaching purposes (Larson et al., 1995). The PREP-M requires no assistance or input from the administrator and retains one of the lowest costs to administer, which makes it user friendly to both the couple and the counselor (Larson et al., 2002). Reliability of the questionnaire ranges from “adequate” to “very good” in all of its parts and concepts, and higher PREP-M scores have been linked to higher marital satisfaction (Holman et al., 1994).

Communication is addressed on the PREP-M in the personal readiness scale with 36 items and the partner readiness scale with 30 items. Both of these scales include items addressing empathetic and open communication behaviors and self-disclosure (Holman et al., 1994), making the PREP-M the only PAQ that reports the aspects of communication it seeks to teach and analyze. Couples who took the PREP-M strengthened their communication and conflict management skills and were less likely to dissolve their marriages or experience significant marital distress 3 to 5 years later (Markman et al., 1993), thus demonstrating the effectiveness of the PREP-M scales.

The PREP-M accompanies the PREPARE questionnaire as the two most widely studied and tested premarital counseling questionnaires (Larson et al., 1995). The PREPARE program helps identify the areas of strength in the premarital relationship and the areas that need work

before the marriage commences (Huber, 1987; Larson et al., 2002). PREPARE assesses these relationship areas in 11 categories, including realistic expectations, personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationship, children and parenting, family and friends, equality of roles and religious values. In addition to these 11 categories, PREPARE assesses four personality traits related to couple dynamics including assertiveness, self-confidence, avoidance, and partner dominance (Larson et al., 2002). The PREPARE receives much use due to its short length, ease of administration, complete comprehensiveness, simple interpretation and valuable supplemental materials (Larson et al., 1995).

PREPARE appears to be the only PAQ that has the potential to assist couples in their preparation for marriage by showing them their relationship strengths and weaknesses. Of the 11 marital categories PREPARE assesses, two are directly related to communication. In addition, all four personality traits it analyzes are strongly correlated to couple communication. PREPARE shows much promise for revealing to engaged couples where their communication skills need work. Couples can take this information to a marriage educator to learn how to strengthen skills.

In order for these PAQs to be effective, they must provide ease in administration and interpretation for both the counselor and the couple, prove reliable, and remain valid and applicable to a wide variety of demographics (Larson et al., 1995). Researchers also discovered PAQs usefulness in group settings as well as with individual couples (Rowden et al., 2006). Critiquing PAQs allows administrators to better select which instrument best fits couples' needs; however, the study of these instruments fails to go any further in examining how they might benefit the couple after the counseling sessions end and if couples actually learn from them. This study adds to the field of research by determining whether participating premarital

counseling and learning communication skills influences marital satisfaction in couples married less than two years.

Studies on Premarital Counseling

As stated earlier, a couples interactions and patterns during the premarital relationship have great impact on the success of marriage (Cate & Lloyd, 1988). Stanley (2001) provides four reasons why engaging in premarital counseling can be beneficial for couples. The first reason states that counseling encourages couples to slow down and deliberate about their impending marriage. Second, premarital education helps send the message that “marriage matters” and is not a decision to be made hastily. Third, Stanley expresses that premarital education helps inform couples of options for help later in their lives should they ever need to seek counseling for marital problems. Lastly, premarital education lowers the risk for marital distress or divorce for some couples later in life. Despite these reasons, the availability of the PAQs discussed above and other premarital education opportunities, Valiente et al. (2002) discovered many couples do not take advantage of premarital counseling programs. Couples chose not to partake in counseling because they fear discussing “secrets” or information with a counselor that would harm the relationship, alluding to the idea that partners may not have discussed all of their relationship history and may be afraid of one another’s undisclosed past. Couples also fear that exploring some issues in counseling will decrease their stability, leading the couple to end their relationship (Valiente et al., 2002). Even though couples experience these fears, participating in premarital counseling sends positive messages to the couple.

Stanley (2001) states that with proper premarital education and preparation, couples learn that their marriage is important, should be carefully considered, and has long term consequences.

Marriage education communicates that not only does a person's marriage hold significance to them and their family, but also to the larger community around them; from the start of the marriage, their attitudes and actions set the tone for its quality in the future. The majority of premarital counseling sessions focus on the five C's: communication, commitment, conflict resolution, children, and church (Decker, 1996; Williams et al., 1999). While each of these concepts is important, communication plays an important role in framing how partners relate to one another and thrive in their marriages. Comprehending their levels of commitment, how to resolve conflict or their opinions about family and religion is difficult if they do not first understand how to effectively communicate with one another. Without assistance in learning communication skills, engaged couples enter their marriages defenseless against the inevitable conflicts that lie in the future. Couples engaging in premarital counseling, however, begin their marriage with tools for success. By analyzing communication skills taught in premarital counseling and studying how newlywed couples take these skills into the first years of marriage, counselors and administrators receive the opportunity to strengthen their counseling sessions and the communication skills they teach, and to determine whether the things taught in their sessions are useful or effective.

Research shows that couples have different motivations for seeking premarital counseling. Those who perceive susceptibility to marital problems in the future, the potential of divorce, and those recommended for counseling by a respected other are most likely to seek counseling before marriage (Sullivan et al., 2004). Couples who choose to participate in premarital therapy are more likely to seek counseling or therapy for marital problems before they become severe (Schumm et al., 2000). While a modern wave of PMC focuses on the benefits of group counseling (Gleason & Prescott, 1977), Williams et al. (1999) found that private

premarital counseling sessions with a clergy person structured around discussing upcoming marital issues with one's partner are favored by couples seeking counseling. Clients who benefit the most from premarital counseling have certain background characteristics in common, such as a history of aggression, currently experiencing an immediate crisis, acting destructively towards each other, and couples who find each other's families as supportive (Murray, 2004). Many studies have sought to determine client satisfaction and value. Overall, couples feel positively about their experiences in premarital counseling, with those in their first year of marriage continuing to reap the most benefits (Russell & Lyster, 1992; Williams, Riley, Risch & Van Dyke, 1999). The knowledge about handling issues created by families-of-origin, managing finances (Russell & Lyster, 1992; Williams et al., 1999), and communication and problem solving skills (Valiente et al., 2002) were reported as the most valuable skills learned in the counseling sessions. Understanding client characteristics and satisfaction is important because it helps counselors, administrators, and authors of premarital counseling material better understand and address the pre-existing needs of their audience. By knowing what clients most appreciated in their counseling, counselors can spend extra time addressing those issues and preparing new ways to teach them. It is in light of this research that I pose the following research question:

RQ2: Why do people choose to participate in premarital counseling and how do they analyze the value of counseling?

RQ3: Why do people choose not to participate in premarital counseling?

Evaluating premarital counseling from a participant perspective provides unique insight as to the skills and strategies they retained from the counseling. However, PMC is lacking if it does not address specific issues that research has found important for strong marital communication, despite how much the engaged couple enjoyed what they are learning. If premarital education fails to address these issues, then all other marriage preparation may be

futile. This study seeks to evaluate how counseling addresses those necessary components to strong marital communication and if clients improve in these areas after the counseling sessions have ended.

Communication Behaviors in Marriages

Demand/Withdrawal

Demand/withdrawal behaviors in marriage are associated with balances of power and violence (Sagrestand, Heavey & Christensen, 1999), as well as desires for closeness and independence, gender roles, labor division, and issues of femininity-masculinity (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002). Demand/withdrawal behaviors in interpersonal relationships are mutually exclusive; one always is found with the other (Klinetob & Smith, 1996). Due to the nature of this behavior, Caughlin and Huston (2002) claim that demand/withdrawal exhibits “interbehavioral dependence” stating that “demand/withdrawal pattern of marital communication is a systemic property of the dyad, not merely a reflection of either individual’s behavior” (pg. 96), meaning that demand/withdrawal behaviors are expected properties of the relationship between the couple. They work systematically to influence one another as well as other marital behaviors and satisfaction. This is significant because it highlights the fact that both partners are involved in the pattern. Demand/withdrawal is not a behavior brought to a relationship by one or the other partner; it exists as the result of an interpersonal relationship. Understanding how demand/withdrawal behaviors interact with one another allows researchers the opportunity to tailor counseling programs to assist couples in learning to avoid and work through these patterns when they arise.

Much of the demand/withdrawal research is focused around gender roles in married

couples. Traditionally, research has revealed that women most often want and seek change in relationships (Kluwer, Heesink, & Van de Vilert, 2000), suggesting that women exhibit more demanding behaviors and men more withdrawal behaviors (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Other researchers suggest that demand/withdrawal is driven less by gender and more by which partner is seeking change in the relationship (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). Recently, scholars have begun to study demand/withdrawal from the conflict structure view or social structure view, both of which suggest there is more to demand/withdrawal behaviors than gender. The social structure hypothesis suggests that demand/withdrawal behaviors are related to imbalances of power and resource inequalities in marriages (Kluwer et al., 2000). The spouse who has less power is more likely to express demand behaviors, while the spouse with more power is likely to withdraw (Vogel et al., 2007).

The conflict structure view of demand/withdrawal communication theorizes that the role of demander and withdrawer depends on which spouse, in this particular case, wants the change and who has to actually make the changes (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). To study this theory, Eldridge, Sevier, Jones, Atkins and Christensen (2007) studied the way couples in different levels of distress exhibited this behavior, concluding that distress levels and marriage length also play a role in determining which spouse demands and withdraws. They found that distressed couples are “rigidly locked” into the gender role of wife demand/husband withdrawal pattern and resisted straying from it even when the discussion wavered between which spouse wanted change. Those couples classified as “severely distressed” with longer marriages were completely unable to move out of the gender specific roles of demand/withdrawal. Kluwer et al. (1997) found that couples with traditional marriages are more likely to disrupt the gender specific roles of demand/withdrawal, with husbands practicing more demanding behavior and wives

withdrawing more, perhaps in an effort to avoid conflict within their traditional marriages. This study supported the idea that gender has less influence on the behavior than originally believed.

Because social learning theory claims that people learn from observing, I expect that couples who have participated in group premarital counseling will have learned and practiced effective relationship communication in their PMC. Therefore, they will exhibit lower levels of demand/withdrawal than those who did not participate in PMC. As noted in the literature review above, demand/withdrawal is a frequent problem in relationships; therefore, the counselor should understand the importance of addressing it in their premarital counseling sessions. We would expect individuals who have participated in PMC and completed PAQs to learn enough about conflict management marital communication to utilize fewer demand/withdrawal behaviors than those who did not participate in PMC. While the counselor or administrator may not be a person within the couple's personal network, he or she is a role model. Counselors are considered knowledgeable, wise and are respected among the general public as someone who can help with a person's problems. Therefore, I expect the couples to admire and respect the behaviors he or she exhibits and incorporate them into their own lives. Based on these conclusions, this study's first hypothesis is:

H1: Individuals who participate in premarital counseling/marriage education will have lower rates of demand/withdrawal behavior than couples who did not participate.

Spousal Social Support

Most people who are married view their spouse as their key source of support (Carles & Baucom, 1999). Dehle, Larson and Landers (2001) recognize two categories of supportive behaviors. Received support is the "number or quality of support behaviors received in marital interactions" (pg. 309). Examples include verbal behaviors, such as expressions of love or

understanding, or nonverbal behaviors, such as hug or supportive embrace. Perceived support is “the perception of spouses as to the availability or adequacy of support provided by the partner” (pg. 309). Often, a spouse can feel supported simply by knowing that their partner will be available to provide the support needed in times of distress. The adequacy of perceived social support is related to positive marital functioning and quality (Dehele et al., 2001). Strong ratings of social support reduce depression symptoms, make life stressors more predictable and controllable, improve responses to medical interventions, lower rates of illness and improve psychological status (Dehle et al., 2001). On the other hand, if a partner does not feel support from their spouse, they will most likely seek that support from someone else in their social network.

Social support in marriage is expressed in a variety of forms, including emotional support, esteem support, network support, tangible support and informational support (Xu & Burleson, 2001), all of which deal with verbal and nonverbal expressions or behaviors. Of these support types, emotional support is the most studied, which includes expressions of love, care and understanding. High levels of emotional support are a strong predictor of marital satisfaction (Xu & Burleson, 2001). Spouses often feel like they are meeting their partner’s needs for social support, but self-reports reveal that the actual received support from their spouse is inadequate (Levinger & Breedlove, 1966).

While men and women share similar views on how social support influence their marital satisfaction (Xu & Burleson, 2001), gender differences play a role in the way spouses evaluate social support in their marriage. The support gap hypothesis suggests that wives desire more support from their husbands than husband’s desire from their wives; however, certain studies have not been able to find this theory conclusive (Xu & Burleson, 2001). Women view

supportive behaviors as more important to their relationships than men (Barbee, Cunningham, Winstead, Derlega, Gulley, Yankeelov & Duren, 1993). Egalitarian family roles offer less marital quality and emotional spousal support for women (Mickelson, Claffey & Williams, 2006). When these supportive behaviors are absent or unequal, wives become more distressed than their husbands (Spreecher, 1992). Male perceptions of support from their wives are influenced by marital satisfaction levels and the presence of depression (Cutrona & Suhr, 1994); however, wives report higher marital satisfaction when perceived support levels are high. For men, the relationship between marital satisfaction and perceived support is not as strong (Julien & Markman, 1991).

I expect couples who have participated in premarital counseling to have high levels of actual support from their partner. With a counselor emphasizing the importance of the first few years of marriage in counseling programs, the emphasis on supportive behaviors should be strong, and according to social learning theory, couples will observe and learn that behavior for their counselor and other participating in their PMC session. The second hypothesis for this study is as follows:

H2: Individuals who have participated in premarital counseling will have higher amounts of expected support from their partners than couples who did not participate.

The strongest defense against marital dissolution and divorce is learning how to communicate with one's spouse, and, as evidenced from the research above, one of the keys to marital success is strong communication skills. From the research above, it is easy to see that the skills to avoid demand/withdrawal and increase spousal support are vital for couples to learn as they begin their marriages. Not only do the gaps in research suggest the need to study exactly which communication skills are being taught in premarital counseling, but scholars also recognize the need for marital reform, calling for action to strengthen marriages (Stanley, 2001)

and for research to study the nature and prevention of marital distress (Bradburry, 1998) It is because of these facts that teaching engaged couples the benefits of strong communication and equipping them with good communication skills deserves concentrated research among scholars. With increasing emphasis on preventing divorce and promoting marriage, importance lies in evaluating the effectiveness and long term significance of the efforts in creating these establishments, which mainly happens in premarital counseling sessions. As the sanctity of marriage takes on new definitions, a new era of research needs to concentrate on what counselors are teaching engaged couples to inform and prepare them about the statutes of the marriage relationship, specifically focusing on strong communication skills.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

Participants were individuals married less than two years, including those who did and did not receive counseling ($N=157$). Being married for less than two years provided greater reassurance that participants would remember their reasons for choosing or not choosing to participate in premarital counseling (PMC). Additionally, while there are other types of relationships that experience communication problems (ie: cohabitations, homosexual couples) this study focuses on communication problems in marriage, therefore only legally married, heterosexual individuals participated.

Most participants were obtained through a snowball sampling method and were asked to complete an online survey on www.surveymonkey.com. Snowball sampling occurs when an author or researcher contacts a small number of participants and asks them in turn to contact others they might know who fit the same participant criteria (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). For this study, I composed a mass email that was sent to family members, friends and co workers requesting participation from those who qualified with a link to the online survey. Email recipients were encouraged to forward the link to others they knew that fit the participant description. Snowball sampling yielded about 95 participants. In addition to the snowball sampling method, local churches and counseling centers were asked to provide the link to the online survey to individuals who had been married less than two years. Two churches, one Baptist and one non-denominational, located in North Texas and one counseling center agreed to participate. These organizations dispersed the survey Website link through weekly mass email newsletters and personal emails to their clients.

As a final effort to gather participants, I posted advertisements about the study on marriage discussion Websites and on the online “classified advertisement” Website www.craigslist.com. These tactics resulted in securing an additional 62 participants. After reviewing the responses, 5 surveys had to be discarded because the participant did not answer enough questions to be included in data analysis. To continue the pattern started with snowball sampling, an individual email account was created specifically for those interested in the study to contact, protecting the identity of the author and the integrity of the study. An email template was created to respond to participants who answered online ads. This template was updated and changed as questions from participants arose. This email also encouraged participants to forward the link to anyone they knew who fit the study’s demographics. Church and counseling center leaders were first contacted by email and then by phone to discuss the details of the study. The only participants who were contacted face-to-face were those in my immediate social circle, specifically co-workers, classmates, family members, and friends. Participants and survey responses were collected for three months.

Research Design

Respondents generally required between 20 and 30 minutes to complete the online survey. The survey primarily assessed three variables: marital satisfaction, perceived social support adequacy, and amount of demand/withdrawal behavior. An introductory page to the survey briefly explained the study’s purpose and encouraged participants to fully complete the survey. In order to protect against survey fatigue, the order of measures were switched mid way through data collection to ensure opportunities for each section to receive equal time and input from participants. Participants were also unable to complete the survey from a single computer

more than once. If both spouses wished to participate, they each had to finish the survey on a different computer. While this may have decreased the sample size, it protected the results by minimizing the opportunity for a single person to complete the survey more than once. A drawing for several gift certificates to restaurants and home décor stores was offered as an incentive for participation. Participants were given the option to refrain from being entered into the drawing.

Predictor Measures

To determine participants experience with premarital counseling, two questions were included in the survey to elicit this information. One question, formatted with a yes/no response, asked if respondents had participated in any form of premarital counseling or marriage education prior to getting married. If participants had taken PMC, they were instructed to answer a second question, asking whether their PMC was one-on-one with a counselor or included group training.

Dependent Measures

Three measures were used to assess the dependent variables in the study: marital satisfaction, perceived support adequacy, and amount of demand/withdrawal behavior.

Marriage Satisfaction

To measure marriage satisfaction, the Quality Marriage Index (QMI) (Norton, 1983) was used. The QMI “restricts itself to hybrid norms reflecting an essential ‘goodness of relationship gestalt’” (pg. 143) and determines marital satisfaction by evaluating the relationship as a whole (Norton, 1983). The QMI is a Likert-type scale with 6 items. Five of the items have a 7 point

answering scale ranging from *very strongly disagree* to *very strongly agree* and one item has a 10 point answering scale ranging from *very unhappy* to *very happy*. Previous reliability on the QMI has been reported as $\alpha = .94$ (Merolla, 2008).

Demand/Withdrawal Behavior

To measure demand/withdrawal between spouses, Christensen and Sullaway's (1984) Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ) (short form) was used. This survey asks couples to report how often certain communication behaviors and patterns occur during discussion and rate the occurrences on a nine dimension Likert scale. Choices range from 1, *very unlikely*, to 9, *very likely*. In addition to demand/withdrawal, the original CPQ tested participants for constructive communication patterns and mutual avoidance and withholding during discussions. Because this study is only concerned with demand/withdrawal, only the subscales measuring demand/withdrawal and constructive communication are used. This created a twelve item scale for measuring demand/withdrawal.

It is important to note that when the CPQ was obtained from Christensen, he asserted that the measure is still under development. While it has been used in past research and is currently being used in present research projects, Christensen and Sullaway plan to continue to research, develop, and revise the current subscales as more is learned about the data. Reliability of the scale in past studies has been strong, with a Cronbachs alpha score of .90 (Hughes & Dickson, 2005).

Spousal Social Support

To measure perceived social support adequacy, the 48 item Support in Intimate

Relationships Rating Scale (SIRRS) was used. Created by Dehle et al. (2001), the SIRRS is superior to other support measures because it “assesses support across a wide range of supportive behaviors, focuses on support from spouses/partners, emphasizes the perceived adequacy of support, and is anchored in behaviorally specific indicators assessed over time”(pg. 312). Using the dimensions and subtypes proposed by Cutrona and Suhr (1992, 1994), the SIRRS assesses behaviorally specific and observable indicators of support. It requires participants to record both the preferred and actual number of supportive behaviors from their spouse. The discrepancy between the actual and the preferred number of supportive behaviors calculates the perceived support adequacy. The SIRRS is designed to indicate the relationship between preferred and actual received supportive behaviors and is not a scale developed to measure the rate of supportive behaviors (Dehele et. al, 2001). In previous studies, reliability has been reported as $\alpha = .97$ (Dehle et al., 2001).

The SIRRS was designed to be taken daily, with the participant recalling supportive behaviors on a daily basis and entering them at the end of each day. For the purposes of this study, participants will answer the survey once while reflecting on a week’s worth of time which is the time limit recommended by Dehele et. al, (2001).

Research Question Measures

Research Questions (RQs) 2 and 3 sought to determine the reasons people choose to take PMC and the reasons they refrained, respectively. To answer RQ2, three open ended questions were included in the survey. The questions asked the respondents to identify the most valuable part of their PMC experience, whether or not they felt it made a difference in their marriage, and if PMC was involuntary, whether they would choose to participate again in retrospect. To answer

RQ3, respondents who did not take PMC were asked to respond to one question which asked them to identify the reasons they did not take PMC.

Analysis

An independent samples *t*-test comparing the marital satisfaction scores between those who had group counseling vs. individual counseling was used to answer RQ1. A *t*-test comparing demand/withdrawal scores between those who did and did not participate in PMC was used to test Hypothesis 1. To measure Hypothesis 2, a *t*-test comparing levels of expected support scores between those who did and did not take PMC was used. Finally, thematic analysis based on grounded theory principles was conducted for RQs 2 and 3. Grounded theory strives to build theory by drawing from qualitative data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Responses to each question were read and then assigned key words and phrases to describe its theme. After all the responses had been read, the themes were grouped into like categories, creating eight themes to help answer the question. In the next chapter, results of the analyses are described.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Participant Demographics

Survey participants were 81% ($n = 104$) female and 20% ($n = 25$) male. The average age was 27; the youngest participant was 21 and the oldest was 67. Most participants were Caucasian (88%; $n = 115$) with the remaining being Hispanic (5%; $n = 7$), African-American (2%; $n = 3$), Asian (2%; $n = 2$) or another race (4%; $n = 5$). Eighty-four percent ($n = 102$) of participants represented themselves as Protestant/Christian, 8% ($n = 10$) were Catholic, less than 2% ($n = 2$) acknowledged another religious preference, and 7% ($n = 8$) did not claim any religious affiliation. In reference to political ideology, 64% ($n = 81$) of participants classified themselves as conservative, 20% ($n = 25$) as liberal, and 17% ($n = 21$) represented other ideologies. The average length of marriage among participants was 12 months, with the shortest being one month and the longest being 24. The average length of engagement among participants was 9 months, with the shortest engagement less than one month and the longest 48 months.

For 89% ($n = 113$) of the participants, this was their first marriage, while 11% ($n = 14$) were married before. Only 24% ($n = 31$) of participant's cohabitated with their spouse prior to marriage, and only 3% ($n = 4$) had children with their spouse prior to marriage. Sixty-eight percent ($n = 88$) of the participants had participated in some sort of premarital counseling (PMC), and of those participants, 49% ($n = 43$) claimed that their PMC was mandatory and 56% ($n = 49$) claimed it was voluntary. Ninety-four percent of participants ($n = 83$) who took PMC participated in a form of church based counseling, while 6% ($n = 5$) claimed their counseling was independent from a religious institution. Counseling one-on-one with an administrator was the most popular structure among participants who took PMC, accounting for 70% ($n = 64$) of participants

counseling. Nine percent ($n = 8$) of participants were involved in group PMC, and 21% ($n = 19$) of participants had both one-on-one and group formats during their PMC experience. Many of the participants encountered a PMC questionnaire discussed above. The majority of participants (77%; $n = 44$) used a questionnaire in their counseling, but could not recall the name of the program. Of those that did remember their questionnaire, seven reported using the Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study (FOCCUS), seven used the Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation (PREPARE) and two used the Preparation for Marriage (PREP-M).

Reliability and Descriptives of Measures

The Quality Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983) was used to assess marital satisfaction. Cronbach coefficient alpha estimates for the QMI ($N = 136$) was .93, ($M = 6.05$; $SD = 1.19$). Cronbach coefficient alpha estimates for the Support in Intimate Relationships Rating Scale (SIRRS; $N = 91$) was .72, ($M = 5.49$; $SD = 26.26$). Responses to the SIRRS items ranged from 1 to 150. These responses were recoded into one to six Likert type scale with 1 representing 25 or less support behaviors and 6 representing 126 to 150 support behaviors. The Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ) was used to assess demand/withdraw. A principle component factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted in order to examine the factorial structure of the CPQ. Based upon the recommendation of Reinard (2006) if the eigenvalue was over 1 then the factor was interpreted. While the scale was developed to measure three dimensions of demand/withdraw for the present study, two factors emerged and were labeled “negative valence” (eigenvalue = 3.825) and “cooperation” (eigenvalue = 1.808). Cronbach coefficient

alpha estimates of negative valence ($N = 100$) and cooperation ($N = 95$) were .82, ($M = 2.16$; $SD = 1.16$) and .63, ($M = 2.06$; $SD=.95$), respectively.

Based upon these two new factors, H1a and H1b were revised:

H1a: Individuals who participated in PMC or marriage education will have lower rates of negative valence behavior than those who did not participate in PMC.

H1b: Individuals who participated in PMC or marriage education will have higher rates of cooperation behavior than those who did not participate in PMC.

Quantitative Results

The first research question asked if individuals who had participated in PMC in group settings would have higher marital satisfaction than those who had taken it one-on-one. Twenty-six participants indicated their PMC sessions included group training. To answer RQ1 an independent samples t -test was conducted comparing the QMI scores of individuals who had participated in group PMC session and individuals who had participated in one-on-one PMC sessions. Because Levines test for equality of variances indicated the variances for the two groups were substantially different and the sample sizes were unequal, the t value where equal variances were not assumed was reported. The test was significant, $t(60) = -2.507$, $p = .015$, indicating that there was a difference between the two groups (See Table 1). Individuals who had participated in one-on-one PMC ($M = 5.70$; $SD = 1.43$) on the average had lower QMI scores than those who had participated in group PMC ($M = 6.40$; $SD = .97$).

To test Hypothesis 1a and 1b, two independent sample t -tests were conducted comparing the negative valence and cooperation scores of those who had participated in PMC to those who did not. It was anticipated that those who had participated in PMC would have lower rates of negative valence communication and higher rates of cooperation communication. H1a was not

supported. The test was not significant, $t(87) = -.241, p = .810$. There was no difference between participants in the PMC group ($M = 2.13; SD = 1.06$) and the non PMC group ($M = 2.2; SD = 1.19$). H1b was not supported. The test was not significant, $t(82) = -.633, p = .528$. There was no difference between the participants in the PMC group ($M = 1.99; SD = .897$) and those in the non PMC group ($M = 2.13; SD = .956$). See Table 2 for these results.

For H2, an independent samples t test was conducted comparing the rates of perceived social support of those who had participated in PMC vs. those who did not. Hypothesis 2 was not supported (See Table 3). The test was not significant, $t(87) = .066, p = .947$. There was no difference between the participants in the PMC group ($M = 5.70; SD = 30.96$) and those in the non PMC group ($M = 5.29; SD = 11.70$).

Post Hoc Analysis

Additional analysis was conducted in two areas. Because of concerns that the SIRRS scale was unwieldy, the raw scores were converted to a 1-5 Likert type scale using the mean ($M = 26.2$) and standard deviation ($SD = 5.4$) of the raw numbers. Scores that were coded as follows: two standard deviations below the mean were coded 1, one standard deviation below the mean were coded 2, within the standard deviation of the mean were coded 3, one standard deviation above the mean were coded 4, and within two standard deviations of the mean were coded 5. Scores greater than 6 were eliminated as outliers. An independent samples t -test was conducted to retest the SIRRS hypothesis (H2). The test was not significant $t(66) = .916, p = .363$.

A hierarchal linear regression analysis was conducted on a number of variables (age, gender and political ideology) controlling for other marriage factors (length of marriage, if this

was the couples first or second marriage, if the cohabitated before they married) and whether or not they had one-on-one counseling, group counseling, and whether their counseling was mandatory or voluntary. There was no significant difference on marriage satisfaction, demand/withdrawal or social support between couples who had one-on-one training or group training or couples who had mandatory or voluntary training. The difference between couples who had mandatory training or voluntary training and total demand/withdrawal was approaching significance, suggesting that couples who engage in PMC voluntarily may be more open minded to the idea of change in their relationship or to learning new communication skills.

Qualitative Results

Research Question 2

To answer RQ 2, which asked why people participated in counseling and how they analyzed its value, three open ended items were included in the survey. The first question asked respondents who had participated in PMC to identify the most valuable part of the experience. Eight themes emerged from this item. These themes were open communication leading to a deeper understanding of partner, learning from examples, religious influence, talking about taboo subjects, revamping expectations, conversations about intimacy, obtaining new knowledge, and questionnaires. These themes are briefly described below.

- Open communication leading to a deeper understanding of partner: This theme had the highest number of responses, with 31. Many participants expressed that counseling allowed them the opportunity to discuss more complex issues with their partner which enabled them to get to know their partner on a deeper level. Discussing sensitive subjects openly with the help of the counselor and in the controlled environment counseling provided appears to have enabled

participants to be completely open and honest with their partners, which in turn made their relationship stronger. Some participants responded to this question by simply answering, “getting to know each other” or “learning about my spouse.” Others were able to use the environment in counseling for more specific purposes. One participant was able to pinpoint the source of problems in their relationship. She answered:

The most valuable thing for me, which is a somewhat different circumstance, was discovering the source of my husband’s depression/anxiety problem. They (sic) extended from his family and mother, who has borderline personality disorder. This made our marriage tougher now but he is committed to changing and has already made many positive changes.

Counseling afforded this wife a chance to learn about her husband’s issues, which is something that may not have occurred if they did not participate in PMC.

- Learning from examples: Fifteen participants indicated the most valuable part of counseling was the chance to learn from individuals, including their counselors and mentor couples with long, established marriages and who had been through the types of difficulties newlyweds face. Learning from individuals in successful marriages and watching and listening to their advice and interactions afforded participants an opportunity to learn from these examples. Respondents reported feeling a sense of relief knowing that other people had survived the uneasy first years of marriage. One participant reflected on this time by saying the most valuable part of counseling was “seeing good marriages in action, in our pastor and his wife’s marriage, and in my husband’s parent’s marriage.” Another participant said the most valuable part of PMC was “talking through our expectations and hearing from someone who has been married for many years give advice,” revealing that the chance to talk through the advice the couples provided was also valuable.

These responses comprised the second largest theme found in the open ended questions,

and provide evidence of social learning theory taking place during PMC.

- Religious influence: As another valuable part of PMC, participants wrote about the religious influence and reinforcement they received from their counselors and the PMC experience. Participants reported that the most valuable aspect of counseling was “Biblical teaching,” “learning to put God at the center of our marriage,” and “learning together what marriage means, in God’s eyes.” One participant appreciated this part of counseling because it helped reaffirm the commitment her husband had towards her, claiming that the most valuable part of counseling was “getting to know my husband’s faith beliefs and to see that he truly will stay by me no matter what.”

- Talking about taboo subjects: Several participants considered the practical aspects of counseling where they discussed issues they had not considered discussing before or were apprehensive to discuss because of their sensitive nature. These topics included finances, commitment, time management, parenting, personal backgrounds and conflict. Respondents who wrote about specific topics said the most valuable part of PMC was “getting out into the open what we’d do for Christmas and other holidays and discussing the differences in our up-bringing and its potential impacts on our marriage.” Another stated:

The couple that did our counseling provided a list of questions pertaining to handling the everyday chores or activities that a couple will encounter. It was very helpful to show us how we needed to prioritize and split these activities.

- Revamping expectations: Understanding one another’s expectations in a relationship is an important part of a functional marriage, and numerous respondents felt that revamping their expectations was the most valuable part of PMC. For example, one participant wrote:

(The most valuable aspect of PMC was) couples being honest about the pitfalls in marriage and the fact that you will have days when you just think, “I cannot stand this person!” It was nice to hear those things so that when those days arise, you don’t think, “my marriage is terrible and doomed!”

This response portrays how the individual was afraid that they will always have to feel positive about their spouse, and hearing other couples talk about this fear helped her realize that that expectation was unrealistic. Others shared that PMC allowed them to “assess how idealistic we thought marriage would be and then how unrealistic our expectations could possibly be.”

- Conversations about intimacy: Several respondents reported conversations discussing intimacy were the most valuable part of PMC. Some answers in this theme specifically mentioned discussing sex, stating that “(The most valuable part of PMC was the) discussion on sex...it really helped prepare us for our honeymoon and beyond.” Another answered “talking about sex was very helpful, too. I talked individually with the pastor’s wife about her point of view about sex and gained a lot of knowledge.” Other participants learned to express their love for their spouse in different ways, and even saw the counseling experience as a time to increase their intimacy. One participant claimed the most valuable part of counseling was “learning how to express love to one another in a way that they understand...” For some individuals, simply spending time together allowed them to increase their intimacy, claiming that the most valuable part of PMC was “being together during the weekend and spending that time on just us and where our marriage was going to be headed.” Other respondents agreed, stating that counseling allowed them to “take time to appreciate each other and our future.”

- Obtaining new knowledge: This theme included six responses that talked about specific topics individuals learned about in counseling. It differed from other themes because the answers addressed more general topics to all relationships rather than knowledge gained specifically about their personal relationship or partner. For example, one participant said that the most valuable part of PMC was “learning about different personalities, love languages, and differences between the way men process life and the way women process life.” Another learned

about how to express his/her feelings, saying “I came from a family who didn’t talk much about feelings, so counseling taught me it was ok. I still struggle big time, but I think I am making some progress.”

- Questionnaire: The final theme that evolved included responses from participants who valued the information they gained from using different questionnaires and PMC programs. The questionnaires allowed them to determine areas in their lives where they were strong or where they needed work. One participant stated that the most valuable part of PMC was “taking the PREPARE and Enrich test and seeing the results. We were highly compatible. It was encouraging to see that we were on the same page in so many areas.”

Another answered:

We took a questionnaire based on what we thought our partner would say about themselves and also what we would say about ourselves and compared them. It was interesting to find out things we thought about our partners were completely different than how they thought about themselves.

These statements provide at least cursory evidence that using questionnaires can aid couples in their PMC.

The second open ended item, which asked if PMC made a difference in the participant’s relationship, also aided in answering RQ2. The majority of participants answered positively to PMC making a difference. Reasons for the positive differences paralleled the eight themes found as the most valuable part of PMC. For example, one participant said that “premarital counseling gave us an understanding of each other that we would likely not have had on our own.” Another said that “going through marital counseling helped us channel our relationship from dating and engagement to be more marriage minded.” Fifteen participants reported that PMC did not make a difference in their relationship. These participants felt that PMC didn’t help solve their issues or claimed to have already discussed many of the topics covered in counseling.

The final question that helps answer RQ2 asked those couples whose PMC was involuntary if they would attend again in retrospect. Almost 90% of participants who had involuntary attended PMC said they would have taken it again in retrospect.

Research Question 3

Two open ended questions were included in the survey to answer RQ3, which asked why participants decided to not engage in PMC. The first question asked couples who did not participate in PMC to identify the reasons behind their decision. Six themes emerged from this question: satisfaction with relationship, time, life stage, lack of awareness, money, and convenience. These themes are discussed briefly below.

- Satisfaction with relationship: This theme had the most responses ($n = 11$). These participants felt that their relationships were stable enough to begin marriage without any counseling. Their lack of “issues” and long dating relationships gave them confidence that they could avoid marital distress. One participant sums up these feelings by saying “We felt confident in our communication skills with one another and no topic of conversation remained off limits or untouched for that matter. This may seem short-sighted, but the premarital counseling route did not appeal to us.”

While confidence in your relationships is a strong quality, overconfidence may lead to feelings of invincibility that could bring about a different set of issues for couples to face. If couples feel that they are safe from any kind of hardship, when a problem does occur, they could feel blindsided and ill equipped to handle the situation. Open communication about all topics is also a strong quality, but these individuals may not understand how their partner communicates about these topics, or even why they communicate the way they do. PMC could help them learn

the reasons behind their partner's communication habits and how to decipher the true message mixed into the emotions. In addition, the differences between dating and marital relationships, such as children, parenting, or families of origin, create new issues that PMC would have helped these couples prepare for.

- Time: Finding time during a busy period of engagement prevented many individuals from participating in counseling. Work schedules, distance, and convenience all played a role in preventing these participants from taking PMC. Evidence of these situations can be found in the response from one individual, stating that "Our relationship was long-distance and our schedules ruled out any weekend-long activities together. We usually saw each other once every two to four weeks, typically on weekends between his day long shifts."

One possible way to combat these situations is for churches or counseling centers to offer alternative ways to participate in PMC, such as on-line counseling or counseling via video or phone conferencing. Couples who face time constraints yet desire to participate in PMC would be able to benefit from programs offered online that would fit their busy schedules. Through video conferencing, couples who live apart would still have the opportunity to engage in PMC and have the benefit of working one-on-one with a counselor.

- Life stage: Age, previous marriages and life stages were a factor for some respondents not attending PMC. Getting married later in life or having been married before gave these people assurance that they could handle marriage without counseling. Often these individuals had been through counseling during their first marriages and felt the information they had gained from that life experience would suffice for their second marriage. One respondent commented:

We got married at the Justice of the Peace and we have both been married before in a church and went through the counseling with our first marriage. We feel that our first

marriages were education enough on how to treat your spouse in order to have a happy, healthy marriage.

Divorce rates for second marriages are equally as high as divorce rates for first marriages. Thirty four percent of second marriages divorce after ten years. For women under the age of 25, the percentage increases to 47 (Bramlett & Mosher, 2001). Considering the divorce rates for second marriages, couples who feel that their age, life stage, or previous relationship has prepared them for their current marriage might reconsider participating in PMC. Making their counselor aware of these demographics may help them tailor the PMC program to fit their specific needs.

- Lack of awareness: The responses in this theme spoke about being unaware of counseling services or programs. Participants never discussed the idea of counseling or were ignorant to its existence. Participants who acknowledged being unaware of PMC answered the question by stating “we didn’t know where to find counseling” or simply said “didn’t know we should.”

These responses indicate that there is a lack of awareness about PMC or where it might be available. Counseling centers or churches could increase this awareness through basic advertising principles, such as placing advertisements on wedding or engagement websites, having printed information available to couples when they book a church or reception hall for their event or at the court house when they obtain their marriage license. By increasing awareness, more couples will be able to benefit from the advantages of PMC, particularly those who may need it the most.

- Money: A small number of respondents claimed to not participate in PMC for financial reasons. During a time when wedding preparations are being made, extra financial obligations, such as counseling, were avoided by these individuals.

The second open ended item that answers RQ3 asked participants who had not

participated in PMC if they felt it would have helped them with their marriages now. Responses were split evenly between individuals claiming it would have helped and those who said it would not. Several individuals had neutral responses, claiming that their relationship is strong enough that it would be hard to determine if PMC would have helped their marriage.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Summary of Study

The goals of this study were to determine if participating in premarital counseling had an effect on communication behaviors, specifically demand/withdraw and social support, during the first two years of marriage. Couples married less than two year completed a survey that asked them about their premarital counseling (PMC) experiences and measured their levels of demand/withdraw and social support. The mixed method results determined that PMC had no effect on demand/withdraw or social support, but did provide a positive and significant experience for the individuals involved.

The first four chapters introduced the problem of divorce, reviewed current literature on PMC, demand/withdraw and social support, discussed the mixed method, and reported the survey results. Chapter five includes a discussion of the quantitative results, which indicate that PMC has no effect on demand/withdraw or social support, and the qualitative results, which indicate that despite its limited effect, PMC does play some role in preparing couples for marriage. The rest of chapter 5 includes four sections. First, theoretical implications examine how this study supported or negated social learning theory. Next, practical implications discuss what the results of this study mean and how we can use them to expand on PMC research. Finally, limitations and directions for future research explains some of the shortcomings of this study and make recommendations for other scholars who wish to continue PMC research.

Theoretical Implications

The significant results of Research Question (RQ) 1 support the presence of social

learning theory during group sessions of PMC. Because individuals whose PMC included group counseling had higher levels of marital satisfaction than those who only had one-on-one counseling, it can be concluded that the group sessions fostered an environment for SLT to take place. Participants who were involved in PMC that included group sessions had more opportunities to be exposed to role models. Being around different counseling administrators, mentor couples, and other engaged couples increases the chances of finding someone to learn from and whose behaviors you want to adopt.

Partial evidence for the existence of social learning theory during PMC is also apparent from the responses in the theme learning from examples. These responses indicate that individuals had an opportunity to learn from a positive example of marriage demonstrated by their counseling administrator or mentor couple. These results reveal that couples witnessed characteristics about marriage from the role models who participated in the administration of the counseling. After viewing these skills, the participants had an occasion to decide whether or not to use those characteristics in their own marriage. By observing these skills during their counseling, couples were learning about them from role models and people they trusted. Social learning theory suggests that those learning the behavior conclude whether or not to adopt it into their own life by observing the consequences of that behavior (Bandura, 1994). Because the responses to RQ2 reported that many participants of PMC valued most the opportunity to learn from these couples, it can be concluded that some of those participants chose to implement certain behaviors exhibited by the administrator or mentor couple into their own marriage. The behaviors portrayed by the role models had led those couples to successful marriages; therefore adopting these behaviors into their own marriages would also enable the participants to be successful.

Learning scenarios outside the realm of communication have been studied using SLT and produced similar results. Learning from role models was helpful for students learning to become midwives (Armstrong, 2008). It also explains why some people are able to overcome substance abuse. Moos (2007) found that people who were able to commit and complete substance abuse rehab plans were more successful if they had friends involved in the program as well. Moos (2007) suggested that because these friends demonstrated the positive effects of recovering from substance abuse, they became role models to others who decided to adopt this behavior into their own lives.

However, the presence of social learning theory (SLT) during PMC was not supported by the results of Hypotheses 1 and 2. These hypotheses suggested that individuals who participated in PMC would have lower levels of demand/withdraw and higher rates of social support. Because there was no difference found in the levels demand/withdraw and social support between those who did and did not take counseling, it can be concluded that social learning did not take place. If SLT had been present, then there would be a difference between the two groups; those who did take PMC would have had the opportunity to learn from role models and adopt their demand/withdraw and social support behaviors, thus creating a different outcome than those who did not participate in PMC.

A possible explanation for this outcome can be found by looking at the different learning domains. Bloom's taxonomy (1956) states that there are three different domains or stages to learning: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. The cognitive domain involves the learner receiving and recalling facts, patterns or processes. The affective domain (Krathwoh, Bloom, & Masia, 1973), involves the learner developing emotions towards what they have learned, whether it is belief in a fact or system, respect for other opinions, or internalizing the new knowledge, so

that they can respond to it. Finally, the psychomotor domain (Simpson, 1972) involves a person acting on what they have learned. Perhaps PMC only reaches the cognitive or affective domain of learning and fails to reach the psychomotor level. The participants receive the knowledge and understand it, and in some instances develop emotions towards the knowledge, but are not stimulated enough to apply it in their relationship. The possibility of reaching all learning domains has the potential to increase in group PMC sessions. Odhabi (2007) states that the “development of these (psychomotor) skills requires practice and is measured in terms of speed, precision, distance, procedures, or techniques in execution” (pg. 1127). In one-on-one PMC, couples have fewer opportunities to interact with each other and other couples to practice and develop these skills. Studying the depth of learning reached in PMC would help determine reasons why it may not be making a difference in newlywed relationships.

Practical Implications

The goal of this study was to examine the effects of PMC on newlywed individuals who did and did not participate in any type of marriage training. Individuals who had participated in PMC were expected to have lower levels of demand/withdraw and higher levels of social support. In this study, it was determined that training resulted in no differences on these variables between couples who had been married less than two years. These findings suggest that in their first two years of marriage, regardless of their participation in PMC, couples will have similar levels of demand/withdraw and similar levels of social support. While this was not the intended result of the study, it is nonetheless important. It proposes that research that claims that PMC has an effect on the early stages of marriage (Russell & Lyster, 1992; Williams et al., 1999) may be called into question. It is possible that PMC is not having its intended effect. Considering the

purpose of PMC is to teach skills to increase marital quality (Stahmann & Salts, 1993) and the results from this study indicate that PMC has no affect on marital quality in the first two years of marriage, a number of issues and questions are raised.

The goal of PMC is to prepare couples for marriage, but based on the current studies results, it is possible the PMC is discussing the wrong issues and teaching the wrong skills. Past research has called the teaching of PMC the five c's: communication, commitment, conflict resolution, children, and church (Decker, 1996; Williams et al., 1999). The five C's are umbrella terms for many different issues and problems that arise. Perhaps the solution to this challenge is to spend more time with the engaged couple to determine what issues they are currently plagued with. If they have strong communication skills, then teaching them about communication is not beneficial. If there is a current issue or argument they face daily, then having the counselor help diagnose the problem and teach them how to solve it could be more helpful to the couple than discussing multiple conflict resolution tactics. As is evident from some of the open ended item responses, individuals appreciated learning specific things about one another and about their relationships.

Another possibility to consider is that newlywed couples are already proficient in their communication skills. The increase in couple cohabitation could possibly explain this. Over half of all marriages since the early 1990s began with cohabitation, and 50% of first time cohabitating couples marry (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2007). With so many couples living in an environment resembling marriage, where they share a home and responsibilities, it is possible they have already been faced with challenges that PMC tries to prepare them for. During the time that they have been living together, they have been faced with the problems married individuals are faced with, including finances and, in some cases, children,

and forced to work them out in order to maintain harmony in the home. Considering that there is an under representation of cohabitating couples in PMC (Halford, O'Donnel, Lizzio & Wilson, 2006) the possibility of this suggestion increases. Couples time living together may have strengthened their communication to a point where they don't feel they need PMC. Research on cohabitation and communication could help determine this possibility.

Based on the higher marital satisfaction scores of those who took group PMC, recommendations can be made for counselors to include more group sessions during PMC. The lack of group sessions may also prove to be one of the reasons PMC isn't having its desired effect. The feedback received in group PMC and the opportunities to compare and contrast relationships (Gleason & Prescott, 1977) can be a valuable source of information for couples. Many of the participants in this study cited feedback from mentor couples as the most valuable part of PMC. Part of this feedback could also come from other couples in their PMC session, which in turn could elevate the experience of PMC and foster an environment for all learning domains to take place. Examining these connections will better help scholars and PMC administrators determine if increasing group PMC sessions will help PMC have its desired effect on couples.

While quantitative analysis resulted in no differences between PMC couples and non-PMC couples, qualitative results indicated PMC as being helpful for many participants. These results both related to and conflicted with past research on PMC and marital satisfaction. Past research revealed that many couples felt the most valuable part of PMC was the knowledge they gained about handling family of origin issues, finances (Russel & Lyster, 1992), communication and problem solving skills (Valiente et al., 2002). These were many of the same topics couples said they valued in the theme talking about taboo subjects, suggesting that PMC offers an

opportunity for individuals to learn about and discuss issues that affect all marriages. Since many marital problems and divorces can be traced back to poor communication, conflict, and problem solving skills (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Mace, 1986; Stanley et al., 2002), having an opportunity to learn about and discuss these topics before they become a marital issues could help many couples avoid divorce.

Responses from participants citing the value of religious influence of PMC supports research that connects faith to high marital satisfaction. Some research suggests couples who practice religion together have higher levels of marital quality (Call & Heaton, 1997). Woflinger and Wilcox (2008) point out that much of the past research has pointed to an “indirect” effect between religion and marriage. Practicing religion encourages psychological well-being, positive social norms and spousal support (Amato & Booth, 1997). If couples choose to take PMC from a religious institution, this influence may lead them in a direction where they can practice religion together, which would in turn affect their marital satisfaction. This correlation between faith and marital satisfaction has the potential to compel many engaged couples to participate in PMC.

The reasons why couples chose not to take premarital counseling differed from those of past research. Valiente et al. (2002) stated that couples refrained from premarital counseling out of fear. They felt if they took counseling, they would be forced to talk about issues that could potentially cause harm to their relationship. In the current study, reasons for not engaging in PMC were much more tangible, such as time, money, and relationship satisfaction. Fear of communication was not mentioned by any of the participants. In fact, the most identified reason couples valued PMC was because of the opportunity to talk about important and deep issues that they may not discuss in the absence of counseling. The discrepancy between these two studies can possibly be explained by the length of their relationship. Couples who are already married,

such as those in the current study, can examine their relationship history and see how they have grown to overcome the issues they may have been afraid to discuss if they had taken PMC. In retrospect, the fears they may have felt about marriage are difficult to remember during their newlywed bliss. When explaining to someone why they did not participate in counseling, their previous fears cease to be a reason. Engaged couples may currently be experiencing those fears. Their impending marriages have aroused feelings they are reluctant to discuss in counseling, and therefore can be an even bigger reason for not wanting to participate in PMC.

Many of the participants who did not take premarital counseling felt that their first marriages or life experience had taught them enough about relationships and communication that they didn't need PMC. In other words, they felt that PMC would be teaching them things they already knew from their first marriages. This is an interesting dynamic considering the different kinds of issues and problems second marriages can create, particularly if children are involved. About 75% of divorced individuals remarry, and of those remarriages, 65% include the introduction of stepchildren (Bumpass, Sweet, & Martin, 1990). The reasons for second marriage divorces range from the introduction of stepchildren, communication, finances (Kheshgi-Genovese & Genovese, 1997), and the impact of the previous spouse on the new relationship (Ahrns, 1994). Because many of these problems are unique to second marriages, the notion that life experience or previous relationships can equip someone for success in a second marriage is a fallacy. Individuals may have learned important things about how they personally communicate or react during conflict from a previous marriage, but a second marriage involves a new partner who will communicate and engage in conflict differently than their previous partner; therefore, engaging in some kind of marriage training would seem like a valuable and important choice for second marriage couples. Choosing not to participate in marriage training places second

marriage couples at a disadvantage for overcoming the statistics of divorce among remarriages.

Discussing the results of this study allows scholars to see some areas of improvement for PMC and make recommendations for changes. Because so many people valued learning more about their partners and talking about difficult subjects, counseling administrators may strive to include more time for couples to discuss their personal relationship with their counselor. To accompany this, the counselors could benefit from setting aside specific time, whether during the counseling session or outside of it, to get to know the couple on a more personal level. By doing so, they will have more opportunities to discover the particular issues and characteristics of the relationship. Based on the increased marital satisfaction scores of those who had group PMC sessions, counselors may also aim to include more group sessions during PMC. These sessions allow couples to learn from each other or from the mentor couple and receive valuable feedback. Because this study revealed that there was no difference in social support and demand/withdraw levels, PMC may want to include specific lessons about these skills. Research has shown that these issues can lead to higher or lower marital satisfaction (Acitelli, 1996; Gottman & Levenson, 2000), so taking explicit time to cover these issues and skills has the potential to increase the marital satisfaction of the PMC participants.

Limitations

Several limitations existed in this study. First, I was unable to use the SIRRS the way it was intended. When the Support in Intimate Relationships Rating Scale (SIRRS) was first published, participants were asked to keep a daily record of the social support behaviors they encountered from their spouse, and at the end of each day use that information to complete the scale (Dehle et al., 2001). This pattern was to continue for a week, allowing the participant to record behaviors each day and enhance the stability of the scale. For this study, I was unable to

secure participants who could commit to completing the scale for an entire week. Therefore, participants were asked to reflect on a week's time while completing the survey. This may have caused responses to be biased or skewed to reflect the participant's desired support, rather than the support they actually received, thus interfering with obtaining true results. In addition, many participants did not complete the SIRRS entirely, creating an incomplete data set. In several instances participants' recorded odd or inflated responses, which also proves problematic in maintaining legitimate data. To avoid these problems in the future, a shortened version of the SIRRs could be used, or using a different social support scale.

The sample size for this study was adequate, but ideally, more participants would be desirable for creating stronger quantitative results. When sample sizes are small, it is more difficult to find differences in variables, thus reducing the chance for relationships to be identified (Reinard, 2001). Many of the variables, including male participants, those who did not participate in PMC, and those who participated in group counseling, were under-represented, causing the sample size to be a limitation. When variable sizes are small, the same limitations are placed on the generalizability of results as when the overall sample size is small. In this case, the study was not able to identify strong relationships in male communication or those who did not participate in PMC. While individuals who participated in group counseling did have higher marital satisfaction than those who just had one-on-one counseling, perhaps the results would have been different if a larger group counseling sample size had been used.

Limiting the participants to those who had only been married less than two years could also prove to be a limitation to the study. While it was necessary to make this distinction in order for participants to recall their PMC experiences, many of the participants are still in the stages of marital bliss. Early on in a marriage, couples are less likely to have experienced problems caused

by communication or could be unwilling to admit their mistakes, even to an anonymous survey. This could have produced biased results or prevented some couples who had been married longer than two years and had been experiencing problems related to demand/withdraw and social support from participating in the study.

The effectiveness of the counseling administrator may also prove to be a limitation of this study. While most of the participants reported being satisfied with their PMC experience, those who were not satisfied may have been under an ineffective administrator. If a counselor or mentor couple is unprepared for the counseling session, has poor delivery or teaching methods, or is inexperienced, it can affect the way participant receive and process the information. In the current study, there were enough satisfied participants to assume that each counselor was affective, but for those few who were disappointed with their PMC, the administrator's lack of effectiveness may be the cause. Because no data was collected to establish if participants were satisfied with their administrator, it is difficult to determine if administrator competence was a variable in the study.

Directions for Future Research

Future study of PMC and its effects on married individuals can profit from a few suggestions. First, it would be beneficial to study couples rather than individuals. Marriage is a system, and primarily involves communication with one's spouse, so developing a study and survey that spouses could take together would be beneficial. While this study examines marriage, the unit of analysis was individuals. Studying couples communication habits with their spouse will help scholars understand how to coach and counsel couples with communication issues.

Longitudinal studying of couples and PMC also deserves a closer look. This could include examining couples before and after counseling or following certain couples further into

their marriages to see if these skills increase or decrease over time. This would provide stronger data about the success of counseling programs and provide understanding about the reasons that PMC is or is not effective. Researchers could also conduct a study similar to the current one but change the sample to include couples who have been married longer than two years (i.e. five to seven). Past research says that couples within the first years of their marriage reap the most benefits from counseling (Russell & Lyster, 1992; Williams et al., 1999). By studying longer marriages, scholars can examine if the benefits couples learned from counseling and applied during that first year continue to be used later in life.

Studying the different types of PMC to determine their effectiveness would also be beneficial. There is conflicting research about whether group counseling or one-on-one counseling is more favored by participants (Gleason & Prescott, 1977; Williams et al., 1999). Taking this research a step further to examine which is more effective will help counseling administrators, authors of PMC questionnaires, and counseling centers adjust their programs for maximum benefit. In addition, making changes to programs helps them stay current with the changing issues couples face brought on by technology, religion, and worldview. Surveying future participants of PMC to see what issues they would most like to discuss could aid in making these changes.

This study examined communication behaviors and skills individuals reportedly used in their marriages. Perhaps this study was premature in examining communication skills and should have instead focused on actual behaviors or issues within marriages that beckon for these skills to be used. Future research could examine other factors, such as division of household labor, parenting and child rearing, families of origin, time spend with friends, or finances where spouses are forced to communicate and where these skills might be begin to be utilized. By first

looking at these behaviors, research may be able to determine what kinds of subjects or issues trigger responses that increase levels of demand withdraw or lower levels of spousal support. Starting at the beginning of these communication habits by examining the behavior patterns will increase our knowledge of these skills and teach scholars how to better overcome them.

Table 1

QMI Scores of One-on-One PMC and Group PMC

Variable	One-on-one PMC Mean (SD)	Group PMC Mean (SD)	<i>p</i>
Quality of Marriage Index (QMI)	5.70 (1.43)	6.40 (.97)	.015

Table 2

CPQ Scores between PMC and Non PMC Groups

	H1a		H1b		<i>p</i>
	PMC Mean (SD)	Non PMC Mean (SD)	PMC Mean (SD)	Non PMC Mean (SD)	
Negative Valence	2.13(1.06)	2.2 (1.19)			.810
Cooperation			1.99 (.897)	2.13 (.956)	.528

Table 3

SIRRS Scores between PMC and Non PMC Groups

	PMC Mean (SD)	Non PMC Mean (SD)	<i>p</i>
SIRRS	5.70 (3.93)	5.29 (11.70)	.947

Table 4

Factor Analysis of Demand/Withdraw

Factors	1	2	Eigen Value	% of Variance	Alpha
Factor 1-Negative Valence			3.825	31.873	.821
The husband criticizes while the woman defends herself (<i>M</i> = 2.26)	.884	.026			
Both members blame, accuse, and criticize each other (<i>M</i> = 2.28)	.810	.137			
Both members threaten each other with negative consequences (<i>M</i> = 1.54)	.743	.132			
The wife criticizes while the husband defends himself (<i>M</i> = 2.59)	.735	.054			
The husband nags and demands while the wife withdraws, becomes silent, or refuses to discuss the matter (<i>M</i> = 2.11)	.678	.206			
Factor 2-Cooperation			1.808	15.069	.628
Both members try to discuss the problem (<i>M</i> = 2.25)	.144	.683			
Both members suggest possible solutions and compromises (<i>M</i> = 2.06)	.159	.681			
Both members express their feelings to each other (<i>M</i> = 1.85)	.009	.676			
Both members avoid discussing the problem (<i>M</i> = 2.05)	.043	.628			

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