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# The Influence of Premarital Counseling on Marital Satisfaction for African-American Couples

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## ABSTRACT

Many factors influence marital satisfaction (Ayub, 2010). Some couples prepare themselves with premarital counseling and try to help increase the likelihood of marital satisfaction. When looking at African-American couples, should researchers assume that some African-American couples take premarital education to increase their marital satisfaction? Prior literature has stated that premarital counseling has decreased marital discord and increased marital satisfaction (Parker, 2007). This study will be a qualitative study using phenomenological design. The researcher collected data from seven participants. Once the interviews were completed, the researcher was able to analyze the data by identifying common themes as well as capturing the essence of the participants' narratives. Using this design helped the researcher to understand how premarital counseling creates the meaning of marital satisfaction for African-American couples.

The Influence of Premarital Counseling on Marital Satisfaction for African-American  
Couples

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of Department of Marriage and Family Studies  
Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Marriage and Family Therapy

By

Christian Brown

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Master of Marriage and Family Therapy



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First, I want to dedicate my work to God. He is the reason that I am here and the reason why I am working on my thesis. He knew the plan for my life, and all I had to do was come into agreement with His will. Thank you, Lord.

*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11*

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Marital satisfaction can be defined as the process of adaptation of both partners in such a way as to avoid or resolve conflicts sufficiently so that the mates feel satisfied with the marriage and each other (Locke, 1968). Since marital satisfaction is important to some couples, some couples have the tendency to be creative to be satisfied. Can ethnicity be a factor in what marital satisfaction means for some couples? According to Durodoye (1997), African-American values are different from European values, and she explains how those values have the tendency to influence marital satisfaction. Looking at the premarital counseling tool, PrepareEnrich (P/E), one gets a general idea of what most couples consider as components of marital satisfaction (Fowers & Olson, 1986).

PrepareEnrich is a computerized test that helps those that are preparing for marriage as well as those that are married. P/E focuses on specific topics such as communication, personality issues, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activity, sexual relationship, children and parenting, family and friends, role relationship, spiritual beliefs, couple closeness, couple flexibility, family closeness, family flexibility, self-confidence, assertiveness, avoidance, and partner dominance (Shen, 2001).

Marital satisfaction can have areas that are more important to each individual. African-American couples may focus on different areas of marital satisfaction compared to most ethnicities. Even though African-American couples may view marital satisfaction differently, researchers can say that marital satisfaction is a key component of a

successful marriage. The questions this thesis considers include: can these components be as important in every culture if they believe differently compared to the P/E scale? Do African-American couples agree with the areas that are included in marital satisfaction?

It has been shown that premarital counseling helps married couples to be successful in their marriage (Knutson & Olson, 2003). Premarital counseling gives couples the tools to help guide them in the right direction toward a successful marriage. In some communities, premarital counseling may seem to be unnecessary for couples. Some couples are preparing for the wedding and prefer not to complicate the situation with another resource that could take away from their savings for the wedding. Looking at previous literature, African Americans are less likely to come to counseling. Research literature has supported the idea that some African Americans perceive therapy only for the mentally ill and that they should go to the community or to the church to help solve their problems (Sanders-Thompson, Bazile, & Akbar, 2004; Vaterlus, Skogard, & Chaney, 2015). Taking this into consideration, therapists must understand that African-American couples will not come to premarital counseling if they only see therapy as for the mentally ill. Investigating this can bring clarity on how some African-American couples view premarital counseling.

These concerns are important for African-American couples. Understanding what makes a standard European couple satisfied can be quite different compared to the African-American community. Even though there is some literature in the field about this topic, very few look at the African-American community. Considering the different variables, the research question for this study is how does premarital counseling create meaning for African-American couples' marital satisfaction?

CHAPTER II  
LITERATURE REVIEW

**Introduction**

Marriage is a union when two individuals come together to be as one to live until death do they part. What happens prior to the big day? Coming together before the wedding day is an important part that most couples should consider. Most couples prefer to do premarital counseling to become prepared for this great union, but there are others that prefer not to go (Stanley, 2001). “The key issue here is not merely whether couples seek most marriage intervention more often, but whether they seek it before reaching high levels of distress, which often mitigate against easy or rapid recovery from marital problems” (Schumm, Silliman, & Bell, 2000, p.178). When couples think about what makes them happy in their marriage, they begin to think about some components that are on the marital satisfaction scale such as problem-solving, sexual satisfaction, time together, and communication (Whisman, Snyder, & Beach, 2009). Prior literature has stated that some African-Americans couples indicate that education, socioeconomic status, marital status, and parental status may influence marital satisfaction (Broman, 1998; Durodoye, 1997). Taking these ideas into consideration, researchers should investigate why African-Americans’ marital satisfaction is different from the common components of marital satisfaction.

Couples want to be satisfied in their marriage. In one study, the researcher found that “greater similarities between partners were associated with higher levels of marital

satisfaction and lower levels of negative affect” (Gaunt, 2006, p. 1416). Marital satisfaction can also be enhanced if mate selection is based on compatibility (Burpee & Langer, 2005; see also Bruch & Skovholt, 1985). Does marital satisfaction always look the same in every couple or in every ethnicity? Can culture make a difference regarding who you will marry and have a satisfied marriage? There are studies that express those similar personalities can have a great impact on marital satisfaction. Some couples that have more similarities tend to have less conflict and engage in fewer arguments (Caspi & Herbener, 1990). In the mindfulness and marital satisfaction study, the researcher found that “there was no relationship found among marital satisfaction and perceived personality and behavior similarity” (Burpee & Langer, 2005, p. 50). According to Burpee & Langer (2005), spouses who are mentally engaged, open to new experiences, and aware of new contexts enjoy a more satisfying and fulfilling marital relationship. Marital satisfaction is a factor that influences both the quality and stability of marriages (Sternberg & Hojjat, 1997).

Ethnicity is an important piece to investigate because of the concealed and growing cultural diversity in the world (Bryant, Taylor, Lincoln, Chatters, & Jackson, 2008). In some cultures, spirituality can be a deal breaker for some couples. If the couple’s spirituality is not the same, then some individuals will not even entertain the thought of dating. The scripture 2 Corinthians 6:14 states:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers [do not make mismatched alliances with them or come under a different yoke with them, inconsistent with your faith] (Amplified). For what partnership has right living and right standing with God

with iniquity and lawlessness? Or how can light have fellowship with darkness?  
(Zondervan, 1987)

Different ethnicities have different beliefs concerning marriage and spirituality. The research will focus more on African-American married couples and the influence of premarital counseling and spirituality on marital satisfaction.

### **African-American Marriages**

African-American marriages are less common compared to most ethnicities (Johnson & Loscocco, 2014). Discussions about African-American marriages tend to concentrate on negative aspects. For instance, the recent decline in marriage and increase in divorce among African Americans obscures the fact that most black couples had been married before the 1970s (McAdoo, 2007). Some black women and men who want to have a strong, happy, long-lasting marriage face the reality that is unlikely to be possible (Marks & et al., 2008). Nevertheless, it is a testament to the strength of the marital “pull” that many African Americans still value and desire to marry even in contexts (e.g., inner-city areas) where living examples of strong, happy, enduring marriage are not common (Chaney, 2014). Even though marriage is a tradition that many ethnicities celebrate, marriage for African-American couples could mean that the couple is not only unified but are willing to work it out together. Understanding the culture’s traditions for marriage is to understand the culture as a whole. This research showed “Black couples who have a stronger role sharing [or egalitarian] orientation . . . are more stable than those who have a weaker role sharing orientation” (Veroff, Douvan, & Hatchett, 1995, p. 158). Even though the statistics for black couples are lower for marriage, there are some black married couples that are willing to work on their marriage to have marital satisfaction.

## **Premarital Counseling/Education**

Premarital counseling is a way to prepare for marriage. There are specific topics that help the couples to learn new things about each other. Typically, couples expressed that premarital counseling helped improve their marital satisfaction as well as helped them to seek guidance for future problems in their marriage. According to Stanley, Amato, Johnson, and Markman (2006), premarital education programs show initial promise to improve communication between couples and to prevent deterioration in the relationship. In one article, an education class called Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program, PREP, focuses on problem-solving skills to increase satisfaction in the marriage. PREP research has shown that couples who participated in this prevention strategy experience significantly higher marital satisfaction levels and are less likely to divorce because it focuses on managing conflict, forgiveness, speaker/listener skills (Kepler, 2015).

Premarital education can serve as a gateway to helping couples later in their relationship by making them aware of and comfortable looking for services (Williamson, Trail, Bradbury, & Karney, 2014). Thompson et al. (2004) found that African-American men and women considered psychotherapy to be the best treatment for treatment for people with severe mental illness, but women saw it as a violation of a perceived historical requirement to be the family's strength or anchor. Another possible reason why some African-Americans may participate in premarital counseling could be due to not trusting an outside source to help them with marital issues. Trust seems to directly influence whether African-American couples seek help from outside as well as from the people to whom they turn (Vaterlaus, Skogrand, Chaney, 2015). This can be a

generational mindset. There are some African Americans that are willing to go to therapy because they understand that they can benefit from it. The next section will focus on how education can be a factor for African-American couples going to therapy or counseling.

### **Education**

A common theme for the black community is to have black couples attend premarital counseling with a therapist or a spiritual leader. Research shows that some black couples that have a college degree are more willing to seek counseling compared to those that have not received a college degree. They see it as an opportunity to seek help for a problem that they no longer can fix. African Americans may also see counseling as a form of getting new ideas or a new perception about a specific issue that can lead them to function normally. Despite most studies, one study showed individuals without a college degree that have received premarital counseling are more willing to attend to future counseling sessions (Williamson, Trail, Bradbury, & Karney, 2014). Some individuals may believe if they need counseling, they will talk to an older family member, a friend, or a religious leader to receive clarity regarding their relationship.

### **Therapists versus Religious Leaders**

Another reason that African Americans may not attend counseling sessions is that it is not customary for them to seek counseling with outsiders unless it is from the church or next of kin (Vaterlus, Skogrand, & Chaney, 2015). African Americans are known to work through their problems compared to going to counseling for additional help (Vaterlus, Skogrand, & Chaney, 2015). There could be historical reasons why African Americans are more prone to go to the church or work the problem out by themselves. According to Davey & Watson 2008, many African Americans feel uncomfortable with



the current mental health system because the health system has perceived and treated African Americans as different and “less than” for 400 years. As indicated by numerous researchers, African Americans built up their very own social rules for associating with the larger society, including the mental healthcare institutions, in order to adapt to their apparent economic wellbeing and regularly day by day encounters of an absence of social affectability and racial bias (Davey & Watson, 2008). Typically, a religious leader such as the couple’s pastor knows the couple. The pastor will ask a question that is more intrusive, but the couple has an expectation and acceptance to allow the pastor to ask the intimate questions compared to a therapist that they barely know. Even though most pastors look toward their sacred text or scriptures to prove specific points in premarital counseling, do they talk about all the main topics for premarital counseling? There are some pastors who have taken the initiative to become certified for premarital counseling and are more qualified to do premarital counseling. One issue that could affect premarital counseling is visiting a younger pastor that is single and not certified. This can become a problem because the couple may want true feedback, and the pastor may only have general information and not really in-depth questions that can have the couple to think about concerning their future together. Even though there are different opinions regarding who will conduct premarital counseling, will African-American couples feel more comfortable with religious leaders or therapists?

### **Income**

Research has shown that African Americans are unpredictable when it comes to being assisted with mental healthcare facilities. One study stated that it could be due to economic issues (Sanders-Thompson, Bazile, & Akbar, 2004). The lack of access to

health insurance would require the use of public programs by African Americans interested in mental health services (Muntaner & Parsons, 1996). Unfortunately, due to historical reasons, African Americans' income does not mirror other ethnic groups' income. Mutchler and Burr (1991) noted that wealth can be a factor when it comes to using of mental health services and racial differences. Income can be a great factor when it comes to seeking a therapist. Are therapists willing to accommodate to do premarital counseling for new couples that are not financially stable? This can be challenging for a therapist as well as for the couple to make a sacrifice to help better a marriage. There are some couples that may be willing to budget for sessions, but others might save that money for their wedding. When clients think of their marriage, they see it as an investment that they want to have for the rest of their lives. If African-American couples had the income to support counseling, would they be willing to go to premarital counseling to help them to prepare for a healthier marriage?

### **Marital Satisfaction**

Marital satisfaction is a personal assessment of the quality of a couple's marriage (Li & Fung, 2011). Most individuals want to enjoy their mate. They look for similarities and believe those similarities is what will keep them satisfied through the rest of their life. Marital satisfaction is enhanced by choice because couples that have little in common have a higher chance of marital conflict (Bruch & Skovholt, 1985). With this study it showed what makes a marriage satisfying, do African Americans agree with the studies? Is there more to marriage for African Americans than just them being satisfied? Typically, African-American marriages are built on strength to survive through rough spots and the good times. For those who did not participate in either factor, what helped

them through the rough spots and have good times? Can marital satisfaction look differently for African-American couples?

### **Divorce**

Marital dissatisfaction can be a major factor contributing to divorce. There are several reasons why divorce can be an option for some couples. According to Belgrave & Allison (2005), African Americans are more willing to separate rather than to get a divorce. Prior research has shown that the divorce rates for African Americans are higher than any other ethnicity (Molina, 2000). A common factor for divorce for African-American couples is socioeconomics. “Many socioeconomic characteristics and family formation experiences have been associated theoretically and/or empirically with the risk of marital disruption” (Clarkwest, 2006, p. 363). Even though African Americans’ divorce rate is higher than other ethnicities, there are some African-American couples that continue to stay married. There are couples that refuse to divorce regardless of the situation. When society hears about these couples, society begins to wonder how their marriage became successful. When a couple is not satisfied in their marriage, what do they do to avoid the idea of divorce? Overcoming the idea of divorce can be a challenge, but what happens to the marriage afterward?

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### **Participants**

As the study focuses on African-American married couples, the researcher recruited seven heterosexual African-Americans that have been married for at least one year. Their current marriage must be their first marriage, and they must not be considering divorce. Also, they need to be 18 years of age and older. The researcher recruited the participants by using flyers on social media and at the Marriage and Family Institute at Abilene Christian University. The flyer in the Marriage and Family Institute and on social media contained detailed contact information for the investigator so that the researcher was able to distribute the SurveyMonkey link to the ENRICH marital satisfaction scale to the couple. Participants that have a raw score of 30 and higher on the ENRICH will be further contacted to set up an appointment for a face-to-face interview. When looking at the scoring for the ENRICH scale (Appendices B & C), the raw scores begin at 16 and end at 50. If a participant scores a 30 on the ENRICH scale, it puts the individual at being 50% satisfied in their marriage.

Seven participants were interviewed including five women and two men. Of the seven participants, there were two married couples, and three females whose spouses chose not to be interviewed. The length of time married ranged from three years to forty-three years. Out of the seven participants only five had taken premarital counseling from

a pastor. The other two participants did not have the information needed to do premarital counseling. All participants acknowledged and signed the consent form, both for the survey (ENRICH scale) and the interview. Six out of the seven participants raw score from the ENRICH scale ranged from 29-47. The average raw score for the participants was 36.5. With this average, the participants are at least 75% satisfied in their marriage. One participant had a raw score of 29, and the researcher included the data to gather more of the essence of their experience.

### **Measures**

The participants completed a demographic survey that assessed their race, gender, and length of time being married. This survey included a question about premarital counseling. Attached to the premarital counseling question was an additional questionnaire (Appendix D) for the individuals that chose not to participate in the premarital counseling. Some of the additional questions are: Why did you choose not to do premarital counseling; How has your experience changed your perception about marital satisfaction; and How would premarital counseling change your experience for marital satisfaction? Having this information will allow the researcher to see the participants' statistical data.

The measure that the researcher used for marital satisfaction was the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (Fowers & Olson, 1993). The ENRICH scale is a multidimensional marital satisfaction inventory that includes 12 category scales (Fowers & Olson, 1993). This ENRICH scale measures idealistic distortion with questions such as “My partner and I understand each other perfectly” and “I have never regretted my relationship with my partner, not even a moment” (Fowers & Olson, 1993). The scale

also measures marital satisfaction with questions such as “I am not pleased with the personality characteristics and personal habits of my partner” and “I am very happy with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together” (Fowers & Olson, 1993). The answer choices are set up by using the Likert Scale with 1-strongly disagree, 2-moderately disagree, 3-neither agree or disagree, 4-moderately agree, and 5-strongly agree. Using these types of questions allow the researcher to gain accurate results on what the researcher is trying to investigate.

### **Procedure**

The researcher sent out a social media post on Facebook with a flyer (Appendix E) showing participants needed for the study. The post gave a description of the type of participants that the researcher was seeking as well as the information about the study that the researcher was conducting. The same flyer was distributed in a university counseling clinic. The flyer had information regarding the study that the researcher is needing as well as the type participants that the researcher needs. If the participants qualified, then they were able to get in contact with the researcher via email. The researcher sent a link to their email that will take them to the ENRICH marital satisfaction survey. In both flyers, the researcher expressed to the participants that their information will be anonymous. Before they started their surveys, each person completed the consent form. Once they agreed, then the participant proceeded with the survey. Couples or individuals that had a raw score of 30 or higher were selected for the interview. One participant scored a 29 on the ENRICH scale. The investigator included the participant’s information because the participant’s spouse scored higher and the average put them above the raw score of 30.

The interview included three grand tour questions: “Describe what your first year of marriage was like for you,” “How has premarital counseling supported you during the first year of marriage?” and “If you didn’t have premarital counseling, how would you have perceived this experience differently?” Interviews ranged in length from 15 to 36 minutes. Participants were interviewed individually, even if their spouse participated in the study as well. Each session was audio recorded and transcribed with Otter app. Each person’s information had a numerical identifier as well and was kept on a thumb drive. This thumb drive was stored behind double locks in order to preserve the confidentiality of the participants.

### **Research Design**

In order to answer the research question, the research was set up as a qualitative approach focusing on a phenomenological design. This design is relevant to see the application of premarital counseling with African-American couples and how it may or may not affect their marital satisfaction.

Martin Heidegger was Edmund Husserl’s assistant when the phenomenological movement began. Heidegger argued that Husserl’s idea of phenomenology was mainly descriptive and embraces the essential structures of consciousness (Horrigan-Kelley, Millar, & Dowling, 2016). Heidegger, therefore, advocated the ideals of his own phenomenology as interpreting experience and explaining, the meaning of being (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, & Dowling, 2016). Heidegger explained the concept of the key principles of phenomenological philosophy which were the concept of being, being in the world, encounters with entities in the world, being with, temporality, spatiality, and the care structure (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, & Dowling, 2016). Transcendental or eidetic

phenomenology focuses on the essence of the perceived narrative of the individual's experience (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). In this study, the researcher used the concept of both the descriptive and transcendental (essence) phenomenology to analyze the data. Using this method allowed the researcher to collect African-American couples' experience as well as capturing the essence of their narrative that may have applied or have not applied premarital counseling for their marital satisfaction.

### **Data Analysis**

When using a phenomenological approach, the data analysis is comprised of textual analysis and structural analysis. Textual analysis is the description of the interview, while the structural analysis is focused on how it was expressed (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). In this study, all the interviews were transcribed with the Otter app transcribing tool, then the researcher printed and looked over every interview several times to gather common themes. The researcher was able to identify themes/categories of the interviews by reading and rereading for common descriptive words. The researcher was able to review each transcript with the participants during the interview to verify that the investigator was able to capture what they were explaining during the interview. The researcher was able to go back to the transcripts to re-identify any themes that were not captured. Once the researcher had gathered common themes, then the researcher coded all data into the appropriate theme cluster. Some clusters may be important themes, but there may also be less important themes. Both will be captured for this study. After forming the theme cluster, the researcher formed statements that captured everyone's experience regarding African Americans' marital satisfaction. All interviews and data analysis were kept on a thumb drive with a numerical identifier behind double locks.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### **Current Study**

This study focused on the primary research question of how does premarital counseling create meaning for African-American couples' marital satisfaction? In this study, participants that were interested participated in a preliminary survey that scored their marital satisfaction. Once participants completed the survey, the investigator did a follow-up interview with the questions shown in Appendix D. Due to the nature of the study following a phenomenological approach, the researcher will elaborate about the phenomenological analysis.

#### **Researcher's Experience**

“The reason for the researcher's experience is to portray my involvement with recognizing any decisions that could influence my analysis” (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). As a researcher conducting the study, there were times when the researcher had preconceived beliefs about premarital counseling and marital satisfactions. There were times when the researcher had agreed with previous literature, that each person should have a higher marital satisfaction score specifically after premarital counseling. The researcher also believed that marital satisfaction was going to be based on how much the individual loved their spouse. The researcher had to learn how to be open with each interview that the researcher conducted. It was hard to transition from one interview to next with an

open mind. Eventually, the researcher was able to succumb to the idea that each person has their personal experience and that the researcher was seeking to find the meaning behind their experience.

### **Horizontalization**

Horizontalization is a process that consists of listing the significant quotes from the research and giving it equal value with regards to the study (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). The first question that the researcher asked everyone was to describe their first year of marriage. One participant stated, "It was a learning experience and fun." Some participants described how they enjoyed the quality time and bonding. One participant focused on the idea of it being more "spiritual and understanding the new covenant that they have." This participant also stated that "it was more of a realization that I have a wife now, and that my goal is to take care of her." It seems like for this specific question, there were some common quotes of new learning experience, fun, bonding, connection, and a new awareness.

Another question that the researcher asked was, "How would you describe your marital satisfaction?" One participant stated, "Being able to communicate-a good flow of communication." Learning how to work together seemed to be a unanimous attitude. There was one participant that felt that distance from his wife had lowered his marital satisfaction. Overall, some participants considered respecting each other, acceptance, forgiveness, security, trust, and supporting each other were common quotes for the description of marital satisfaction.

The researcher's last primary questions focused on how the participant's marital satisfaction would have changed if they did or did not do premarital counseling. Out of

the seven participants, four participants stated that premarital counseling did not change their marital satisfaction. Of the four participants three of them had completed premarital counseling and one did not complete premarital counseling. They felt that their situation would have stayed the same. As one participant stated, “My spouse’s outlook on life doesn’t change, it’s set.” The other three participants felt that premarital counseling would have given them new insight, taught them another level of commitment, and given them wisdom. In this study, the researcher started out with ninety codes. Then the codes were formed into fourteen themes.

### **Cluster of Themes**

Cluster of themes is when significant quotes are arranged into themes of meaning. As the researcher looked over the themes from this study, three common themes that were used to describe marital satisfaction. Common clusters for marital satisfaction were emotional connection, acceptance, and support. The common clusters seemed to reflect the themes for the participants. The last question was, “How has premarital counseling supported your first year of marriage?” The common clusters that emerged were advice/insight from pastors and commitment.

### **Textual and Structural Description**

Looking at the textual analysis, the researcher was able to identify topics that related to marital satisfaction as well as premarital counseling. Participants were able to express how communication, connection, respecting, and acceptance were key to marital satisfaction. The participants agreed with the idea of seeking premarital counseling so that they could get a different perspective for their marriage. One participant said, “I

think it was something to look forward to. Seeing what other aspects maybe we haven't thought about.”

In the structural analysis, the researcher was able to capture the tougher responses. When it came down to processing the harder topics, such as frustrations and intimacy, the researcher noticed that the participants' verbiage changed. Most of the participants seemed to struggle with the uncomfortable answers. The participants preferred to express the better times and contemplated how to express how they felt without thinking that they were being judged

### **Essence of the Phenomenon**

Emotional connection, acceptance, and support were very important with this group. According to this study, these common clusters are what keeps a marriage satisfied. Even when considering premarital counseling, common clusters such as seeking advice and learning about commitment are what keeps a satisfied marriage. When the researcher includes the textual and structural together, the essence of the phenomenon is built on trust. Once a participant has gained that trust from their spouse, the other themes discussed will be present. As one participant stated, “The most important points of our first year were building trust and learning how to balance medical school with a new marriage.”

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### **Discussion**

In the results section, there were central themes that emerged from this study. The research question was how does premarital counseling create meaning for African-American couples' marital satisfaction? Using a phenomenological approach brought forth the conclusion that a deeper meaning that has to be established before an individual could have marital satisfaction. Even though previous literature has shown how premarital counseling has many components that can influence marital satisfaction, it seems that trust must be established first in order for the other components to be effective for marital satisfaction. In other words, premarital counseling could help create meaning for African-American couples' marital satisfaction if trust is built into the counseling sessions. There were many themes such as emotional connection, support, and acceptance that reflect this phenomenon. When the textual and structural analysis were analyzed, it seemed that the spouses had a difficult time trying to express the challenging aspect of marriage. It seems that they do not want that trust to be broken with their spouse because that has been established over time. This could also be the reason why most of the participants were invested in that quality time in that first year of marriage. It is a different level of trust and security because the couple is trying to build a foundation. In this study, the researcher was able to reach saturation with the number of participants that

aligned with the essence of the phenomenon that trust is the component that helps increase marital satisfaction. As therapists are working with African-American couples in premarital counseling, trust should be a component that is worked on thoroughly to help increase their marital satisfaction.

### **Limitations**

Even though the researcher was able to reach saturation, there were some of limitations that hindered the research.

### **Sample Size**

The first limitation is that the study focused on primarily African-American couples, so location was a major issue. In Abilene, Texas, there are not as many African-Americans couples coming into the Marriage and Family Therapy Clinic. This research may have had more participants if the researcher was in different area or possibly added a reward for participating the research.

### **Distribution**

Even though there was a post on Facebook regarding the study, the researcher only received the seven participants. Perhaps the researcher thinks the research may have been more expansive if the researcher would have reached out to black churches, more counseling centers, and maybe to some of the local marriage events or groups about the research.

### **Further Research**

This study used a phenomenological approach. The research question could have had a different outcome with qualitative data analysis. Another study that could come from this study is to see if gender could change the essence of the phenomenon. One of

the participants expressed how her spouse did not grieve his first marriage. To do a study on how broken trust from a previous marriage can affect a marital satisfaction for one or both individuals in marriage could be very effective for individuals that have been through multiple marriages.

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APPENDIX A  
IRB Approval Letter

**ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**  
*Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World*  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103  
325-674-2885



October 1, 2018

Christian Brown  
Department of Marriage and Family Studies  
Box 29409, Abilene Christian University

Dear Christian,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "The Influence of Premarital Counseling and spirituality on marital satisfaction for African American Couples"

was approved by expedited review (Category 7 ) on 10/1/2018 (IRB # 18-073 ). Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

*Megan Roth*

Megan Roth, Ph.D.  
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Our Promise: ACU is a vibrant, innovative, Christ-centered community that engages students in authentic spiritual and intellectual growth, equipping them to make a real difference in the world.

## APPENDIX B

### ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale Items

Response choices

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

(+) 1. My partner and I understand each other perfectly.

(-) 2. I am not pleased with the personality characteristics and personal habits of my partner.

(+) 3. I am very happy with how we handle role responsibilities in our marriage.

(+) 4. My partner completely understands and sympathizes with my every mood.

(-) 5. I am not happy about our communication and feel my partner does not understand me.

(+) 6. Our relationship is a perfect success.

(+) 7. I am very happy about how we make decisions and resolve conflicts.

(-) 8. I am unhappy about our financial position and the way we make financial practice decisions.

(-) 9. I have some needs that are not being met by our relationship.

(+) 10. I am very happy with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together.

(+) 11. I am very pleased about how we express affection and relate sexually.

(-) 12. I am not satisfied with the way we each handle our responsibilities as parents.

(+) 13. I have never regretted my relationship with my partner, not even for a moment.

(-) 14. I am dissatisfied about our relationship with my parents, in-laws, and/or friends.

(+) 15. I feel very good about how we each practice our religious beliefs and values.



## APPENDIX C

### ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS) Scale Scoring Procedures

1. The positive and negative signs to the left of each item indicate whether the item should be scored in a positive or negative direction. Items scored in a negative direction would be reverse-scored (i.e., if it is marked 5, it would be scored 1; if it is marked 4, it would be scored 2; a 3 remains unchanged).
2. Items 1, 4, 6, 9, and 13 constitute the Idealistic Distortion scale. The remaining items are in the Marital Satisfaction scale.
3. Individual raw scores for the Marital Satisfaction and Idealistic Distortion scales are calculated by first reverse-scoring the negative items and then summing the appropriate items for each scale. After obtaining the raw scores, one finds the percentile scores in the norm table (found in Appendix C) for use in the next step.
4. Individual EMS scores are obtained by revising Marital Satisfaction scores to correct for Idealistic Distortion scores with the following formula in which PCT = percentile score for individual Marital Satisfaction scale and ID = percentile score for individual Idealistic Distortion scale:

$$\text{EMS score} = \text{PCT} - [(.40 \times \text{PCT})(\text{ID} \times .01)].$$

The following two examples illustrate the EMS scoring procedure.

Example 1. A respondent has raw Marital Satisfaction score of 46 and a raw score of 21 on the Idealistic Distortion scale. The norm table shows that the percentile

score for Marital Satisfaction is 98 and that for Idealistic Distortion is 96. Inserting these scores into the formula yields the following:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{EMS score} &= 98 - [(.40 \times 98)(87 \times .01)] \\ &= 98 - [(39.2)(.96)] \\ &= 98 - (37.6) \\ &= 60.37 \\ &= 60.0\end{aligned}$$

Example 2. A respondent has a raw Marital Satisfaction score of 32 and a raw score of 19 on the Idealistic Distortion is 87. Inserting these scores into the formula yields the following:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{EMS score} &= 58 - [(.40 \times 58)(87 \times .01)] \\ &= 58 - [(23.3)(.87)] \\ &= 58 - (20.18) \\ &= 37.82 \\ &= 38.0\end{aligned}$$

Note that the first constant (.40) used in this formula to revise Marital Satisfaction scores downward is based on the correlation between the Marital Satisfaction scale and the Idealistic Distortion scale. The correlation between these scales is .63 and the common variance is therefore .40. Thus, the respondent's score is revised downward by the proportion of his or her percentile scores on the Marital Satisfaction scale attributable to idealistic distortion and 1% of his or her Idealistic Distortion scale score.

5. The positive couple agreement (PCA) score for the marital satisfaction portion of the scale is the percentage of Marital Satisfaction scale items on which both partners agree that the area is a strength for them. An item is scored as a PCA item when both partners mark a 4 or a 5 on positively scored items or a 1 or 2 on negatively scored items.

For example, if the husband marked a 4 and the wife marked a 5 on Item 3, this would be a PCA item. For a negatively scored item such as Item 2, if the husband filled in 1 and the wife indicated 2, this would also be a PCA item. If a husband and wife had 7 PCA items, their PCA score would be 70. If a couple had 3 PCA items, their PCA score would be 30, etc.

National Norms for the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction and Idealistic Distortion Scales  
( $n=2,112$  couples)

Marital Satisfaction		Marital Satisfaction		Idealistic Distortion	
Raw score	Percentile Score	Raw Score	Percentile Score	Raw Score	Percentile Score
50	99	32	58	25	100
49	99	31	53	24	99
48	99	30	50	23	99
47	99	29	46	22	99
46	98	28	41	21	96
45	98	27	39	20	93
44	96	26	36	19	87
43	95	25	28	18	79
42	93	24	26	17	74
41	90	23	24	16	67
40	88	22	18	15	56
39	84	21	15	14	45
38	80	20	14	13	37
37	75	19	11	12	28
36	71	18	10	11	19
35	68	17	10	10	10
34	64	16	10	9	00
33	60				

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Questions

#### **Questions for Everyone**

1. Describe what the first year of marriage was like for you.
2. How has premarital counseling supported you in the first year of marriage?
3. If you didn't have premarital counseling, how would you have perceived this experience differently?

#### **If the couple didn't take premarital education**

1. Why did you choose not to participate in premarital counseling?
2. How has your experience changed their perception about marital satisfaction?
3. How would premarital counseling change your experience for marital satisfaction?

## APPENDIX E

### Research Flyer



#### **Married African Americans Needed**

**I am conducting a research about married African Americans and their marital satisfaction with each other. My study will focus on premarital education and how it may affect an individual's satisfaction in their marriage. If you're interested in the participating in the study, please see if you qualify to become a participant.**

#### **Type of Participant:**

Looking for heterosexual married African American couples.

- 18 years of age and older
- Married for at least a year
- First marriage and not on the verge of being divorce
- Have access to the internet to complete the survey

If you're interested and you do meet the criteria, please contact Christian Brown at [cab17d@acu.edu](mailto:cab17d@acu.edu). I will send out a survey for you to complete. The surveys will be less than 10 minutes. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email.