PREMARITAL COUNSELING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree Master of Science

by
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1981

Approved by

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Dr. Patrick C. McKenry, for his enduring support, encouragement, expertise, and advice.

To Dr. Kent G. Hamdorf, for his consistent belief in me as a graduate student and for his invaluable advice.

To the instructors of The Ohio State University, who graciously permitted me to come into their classrooms to administer my instrument to their students.

To the undergraduate students of The Ohio State University, for their voluntary cooperation in the study.

To my loving family, for their continuous love, support, and encouragement throughout my educational years.

To my typist, Jacqueline Mueck, whose patience and speed made this study come to print.
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INTRODUCTION

The amount and depth of marital discontent far exceed what one might expect from an institution that makes such a contribution to human pleasure (Casler, 1974). The divorce rate in the United States, one divorce for every 3.6 marriages, does not give an accurate estimate of the amount of marital unhappiness (Casler, 1974); such figures do not take into account the many annulments, desertions, and separations that are divorces in everything but name. Two popular surveys support that notion that many marriages in our society are not happy ones. Hamilton (1929) found that fewer than 45% of the women interviewed were happily married. The Bossard and Boll (1958) study indicates that between one-third and one-fourth of all marriages are unsatisfying. Marital dissatisfaction, as evidenced by the divorce rate, is increasing and thus indicating that the emotional needs of people change (Groves, 1945). As America approached the middle of the 20th century, Ogburn and Nimkoff (1955) asked 18 eminent family experts to list the most profound changes in the American family. The group reported a total of 63 changes, but only one change, the increasing divorce rate was reported by all.

Since statistics were first collected, the divorce rate in the United States has increased on the average of three percent a year (Benson, 1971). Marriage in the United States, as well as family life and courting customs, are in a process of rapid change. Over the past several decades, American marriages and families have had to adjust to a great number of social and economic changes in our society such as wars, rapid urbanization and industrialization, and economic fluctuations.
Dating and courtship patterns have also been altered as a result of intense changes that have manifested in our society. These economic and social trends have provided some understanding of why marriage is changing and why the divorce rate has steadily increased.

The changes in marriage, like the changes in courting customs, reflect the rural to urban transition in America. In earlier times, marriage was an institutional structure, primarily arranged by the parents and was based upon the financial and social standing of the families of the young people. In contrast, today the concept of companionship is held as the basis of marriage (Eshleman, 1978).

The economic basis of modern marriage today is vastly different from that of the past. In the rural community of the past, marriage was certainly related to the family as an economic enterprise. This drastic change in the concept of marriage did not just happen overnight. It reflected the rational outgrowth of the changes in our society from a rural to urban civilization and the increasing equality and education of women.

Marriage is no longer a state or institution. It is a stage in a long process of dyadic development. The development of the relationship between two people does not cease with the marriage ceremony. It only enters into a new and more significant phase, the bond between the couple faces the test of constant companionship. In meeting daily routines, the stress of childbirth, illness, unemployment, and other challenges, the companionship will either be strengthened or weakened.

Modern marriage has a dynamic quality. The mating of two well-developed personalities makes for success in marriage (Burgess, 1954; Mace, 1972; Wright, 1977). Moreover, a successful marriage furthers
the personality development of the husband and wife. There are many factors in the relationship between a husband and wife which are considered salient for success or failure in modern marriage. Some of these factors include love and display of affection, sex, common interests, adaptability and cooperation in decision making (Burgess, 1954; Rutledge, 1966; Wright, 1978).

Scholars do not fully understand why marriage so often fails to foster individual happiness. Many investigators have suggested that marriage can restrict the growth of one or more spouses (Casler, 1974). Happiness is broadly accepted today as an appropriate goal for individuals in marriage. This widespread desire for marital happiness together with the failure of many individuals to gratify this desire has brought marriage under increasing inspection in modern America. Articles, textbooks, newspaper columns, and other forms of mass media offer advice on how individuals may attain marital happiness. Thus, it is no wonder that people are concerned about marriage today. However, regardless of the incidence of divorce and the frequency of marital conflicts, people are still getting married and remarried in record numbers. The popularity of various types of marital enrichment programs further reflects the concern of many Americans about marital success (Guerney, 1977; Olson, 1976). Therefore, because of this increasing interest in enhancing marital relationships, an increasing number of institutions, agencies, and professionals are developing programs toward this end (Van Zoost, 1973).

It has long been acceptable to seek professional help from a counselor, physician, social worker, or other family life practitioner
when problems arise in a marriage. Professional marriage counseling has developed from various disciplines interested in human development. It was more than 100 years ago that the first systematic attempt to provide such help came from private welfare agencies as part of the social welfare movement of the era (Schumm & Denton, 1979). From a review of pertinent literature, it is evident that marriage counseling has found a permanent place in our society (Curtis & Miller, 1976; Guldner, 1971; Kilgo, 1975; Olson, 1970).

**Brief History of Premarital Counseling**

In recent years, the focus of marriage counseling has shifted from crisis intervention to prevention of various types of marital problems before they become too serious (Rutledge, 1966; Wright, 1977). This concern has resulted in premarital education and counseling. Goller describes the need for premarital counseling in the following excerpts: "Many newlyweds have had little or no experience in practical matters. . .";

"Important among these are the reality of the marriage compared with the premarital fantasy. . ." (Goller, 1971, p. 23).

The fundamental point is that each individual brings to the relationship his or her own needs, desires, and expectations. Correction of erroneous information concerning the marital relationship (i.e., the communication process, finances, in-laws, and other related issues) is the main goal of premarital counseling (Stahman & Hiebert, 1980).

Although there is much less in the literature about the historical development of premarital counseling in contrast to marital counseling, Stahman and Hiebert (1980) have developed an historical exploration of premarital counseling. From 1900 until the beginning of World War II
psychology developed as a science and a discipline with the medical model as the prevalent paradigm. Because of this medical model, therapy was basically individual and intrapsychic in nature (Stahman & Hiebert, 1980). Thus, prior to World War II, premarital counseling per se was hardly in evidence. In a similar vein, pre-wedding sessions of clergy prior to World War II were geared toward the role of Christianity in marriage.

In the 1940s and 1950s family professionals became more interested in premarital counseling as a result of a new focus. Family scholars began to focus on the nature of various inter- and intrapersonal relationships as they acknowledged that the marital relationship actually began prior to the wedding. However, premarital counseling facilitated by professionals was still relatively uncommon even in the 1960s.

Members of the clergy began to look at the premarital relationship differently by focusing on psychology as a means of understanding the ministry; this grew into what is now known as pastoral counseling. However, these pioneering clergy-persons were still committed to a psychoanalytic mode with the focus on pathological behavior and the medical model. Robert Laidlow (1980) has indicated that at that time "the role of the clergy was to serve as screening agents and assess the health of the couple moving toward the wedding" (p. 9).

The role of the minister as a screening agent becomes more evident in the literature of pastoral counseling and premarital counseling specifically in the 1950s and the 1960s. Johnson (1953), Rutledge (1966), and Stewart (1970) saw the role of the pastor as that of exploring emotional maturity and readiness for marriage. Olson (1976)
contends that premarital counseling for both clergy as well as non-clergy had had a repair approach and pathological focus up to that point in time.

Various psychologists and marital and family therapists have had this same pathological orientation to premarital counseling. Ellis (1961) contended that premarital counseling is a time to explore the roots of deepseated emotional problems of the couple. Karpf (1952) also believed that premarital counseling should entail intense psychotherapy.

In recent years, the trend in premarital counseling has been geared towards an educational and skills orientation. Butterfield (1956) has drawn attention to the fact that just as persons develop competences in social life, so they must develop skills in family life and in healthy functioning in the marital relationship. Butterfield also believes that the problem stems from the fact that young people bring with them very few skills needed to sustain a close, intimate, and lasting relationship itself. Furthermore, it is assumed that persons entering into such a bond will automatically know how to adapt to this new lifestyle. Following this same line of thought, Rutledge (1966) wrote that people need to be realistically aware of the responsibilities of the marital relationship before saying their "I do's." Moreover, he pointed out three fundamental factors in which premarital couples should be prepared--before taking their marital vows: exploration of selfhood, continued growth as an individual, and possession of communication and problem solving skills. Rutledge reasoned that if professionals would dedicate one-fourth of their time to premarital counseling, they could make a stronger impact on the
health of the nation than through their remaining three-fourths time devoted to other therapeutic activities. More currently, Mace (1972) dared marriage counselors to move out of the corrective domain and to focus their energies on marriage preparation and enrichment. Stahman and Hiebert (1980) strongly support as well as advocate such notions in regard to premarital counseling. Although marriage counseling has been around for quite some time, premarital counseling is really just beginning to make a name for itself.

Presently there appears to be two main approaches to premarital counseling. One of which focuses on the exploration of specific issues that arise in a marriage. Wright (1966) takes this "issues" approach to premarital counseling in that he has the couples address issues such as finances, in-laws, family planning, and sexual relations. This approach is also used by Gangsei (1971), Mace (1972), Rutledge (1966), and Stewart (1970). This second basic approach is one in which the emphasis is communication and the acquisition of conflict-negotiation skills. Guerney (1979); Miller, Nunnaly, and Wackman (1976); and Stahman and Hiebert (1980) focus on these matters. Although both of these approaches overlap to some extent, it is apparent that a clear distinction indeed exists.

Unfortunately, very little has been done in terms of evaluative research. It is still questionable that premarital counseling is effective in terms of facilitating marital adjustment. A Baptist pastor in Oregon conducted his own follow-up study of couples who had completed five sessions of premarital counseling. In 1973, he stated that he had followed up these couples and learned that only six had divorced out of 200 (Wright, 1977). In the winter of 1976, a research
study was conducted concerning types, extent, and results of premarital counseling done in over 1,000 churches (Wright, 1977). The results basically support the notion that premarital counseling is effective in fostering marital adjustment (Wright, 1977). There have been other studies, although few could be considered scientific and/or evaluative in nature. However, others do exist and will thus be reviewed in Chapter II.

These existing studies do indeed indicate that premarital counseling is desired, which makes the undertaking of evaluative research more crucial. Moreover, these studies indicate that premarital counseling is urgently needed for a number of reasons. Communication and effective problem solving skills can lead to more satisfying marital relations (Mace, 1972; Olson, 1976). It is also critical for those contemplating marriage to realistically look at the requirements of a marital relationship in general and of the individual needs, desires, and expectations of the intended marital relationship (Groves, 1949; Rutledge, 1966; Wright, 1977). Mace (1972), p. 23) firmly advocates the old Boy Scout motto "Be Prepared."

This same existing research does indeed indicate that premarital counseling is beneficial to those intending to marry in pointing out crucial issues to be aware of and to be worked through, increasing positive communication patterns, and facilitating the acquisition of constructive conflict resolution skills that will facilitate a meaningful and satisfying marital relationship. Thus, premarital counseling is seen to be desired as well as beneficial (Bader, Micoys, Sinclair, Willet, & Conway, 1980; Burgess, 1939; Guerney, 1979; Mace, 1972).
However, because of the lack of research on this topic, family life educators do not know exactly what premarital couples desire out of premarital counseling in regard to communication skill building and/or issues awareness. Development of any successful program is contingent on an assessment of the needs of the population to be served. There has only been one such study which delves into this issue of the determination of needs of engaged persons (i.e., Meadows & Taplin). However, this investigation was conducted after a marriage preparation course was completed. About one month after the completion of such a program, Meadows and Taplin (1970) mailed each participant an evaluation form which was returned and completed by 11 of the 12 participants. They found that the presence of an objective third party was considered the one most helpful aspect of the experience with the second most helpful aspect being the increased insight obtained with respect to the attitudes and feelings of both self and fiance. The clients felt that both the issues and the communication aspects were helpful with about half advocating either approach (Meadows & Taplin, 1980). This has been the only study in which needs of engaged couples were assessed, although this assessment occurred after the counseling sessions.

**Rationale for Needs Assessment Study**

The efficient utilization of needs assessment methods has helped family life practitioners determine and prioritize the needs of premarital couples. According to Warheit, Bell, and Schwab (1977) needs assessments have always been perceived as research and planning activities developed to examine the service needs of the community. A needs assessment of premarital counseling has helped to determine what the most effective approach (issues versus communication skills) is to
premarital counseling. Very few researchers have attempted to approach premarital counseling in this way although a number of specific approaches do exist. The assumption has been that premarital counseling is needed for adequate marital adjustment; however, it has not been known precisely what aspects of premarital counseling were deemed worthy by the target population. A needs assessment has made such information available so that program development may be planned for maximum effectiveness. If family life practitioners would use a needs assessment first in order to determine the needs of engaged persons, then it will be more probable that such programs will meet the set goals.

Problem Statement

Purpose

Because of the infancy of the field of premarital counseling and the dearth of evaluative research, it seems plausible to perform a needs assessment of a target population of engaged couples. An assessment of the most urgent needs of this population could be very helpful in developing various premarital counseling programs. Thus, the purpose of this study was to assess the premarital counseling needs (both issues and communication skills) as perceived by engaged couples. A related purpose was to compare these needs of those intending to marry with the needs of those who have already been married. The results of this study will be helpful to family life practitioners in offering beneficial premarital counseling services, in supporting the notion that premarital counseling is indeed perceived as beneficial, and in stimulating interested individuals toward more research on the topic. Once it is known exactly what couples desire, then premarital counseling
programs can begin to develop these services and researchers can investigate the effects of these services.

Assumptions

Assumptions underlying this study were:

1. The engaged participants in the study desire a premarital counseling experience.

2. The married participants would have liked to have participated in a premarital counseling counseling experience prior to their marriage.

3. Premarital counseling is perceived as a beneficial experience.

4. Premarital counseling is perceived as a needed experience (Mace, 1972; Rutledge, 1966; Wright, 1977).

Research Questions

1. What were the premarital counseling needs of the engaged couples?

2. How were these needs prioritized?

3. What would have been the premarital counseling needs of those that were newly married, in retrospect?

4. How were these needs prioritized?

5. How did the needs and priorities differ in regard to the males as compared to the females in each group (i.e., married versus engaged).

(This variable of sex has been included because in a study conducted by Pace [1940], there appeared to be differences in topics over which husbands and wives frequently disagree.)

Independent Variables

1. Premarital Counseling: an educational and awareness program for engaged couples which aids in their preparation for marriage.
2. **Premarital Couple**: an engaged couple who has made a commitment to marry.

3. **Family Life Practitioner**: a counselor, teacher, physician, social worker, pastor, or therapist interested in conducting premarital counseling programs.

4. **Needs Assessment**: an inquiry and organizing activity intended to define service or educational needs and usage patterns (Warheit, et al., 1977).

5. **Newly Married Couple**: a couple married three years or less.

6. **Premarital Counseling Needs**: the content of premarital counseling sessions in terms of issues (sexuality, in-laws, finances, religious practice, roles, family planning and child rearing) and in terms of communication skills (the ability to express feelings openly and honestly, to resolve conflicts in a constructive manner, to actively listen and respond to the partner express his/her thoughts and feelings, to recognize non-verbal communication, to become more sensitive to partner's needs and feelings). Most premarital counseling focuses on either specific issues (Rutledge, 1966; Wright, 1977) or on communication skills (Miller, et al, 1976; Stahman & Hiebert, 1980). Thus, it was practical to explore these aspects in a needs assessment study.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the last ten to fifteen years much of the marriage and family literature has focused on premarital education and counseling (Wright, 1977). This may be due to a number of factors such as the climbing divorce rate, an increase in adolescent marriages, and the general trend in the counseling profession toward prevention and enhancement. Whatever the reasons may be, it is clear that professionals will be observing an increase in literature on premarital counseling and education programs.

The literature to be reviewed in the present chapter is quite diverse in that some of it entails an issues approach to premarital counseling and some of it entails a communications approach to premarital counseling. Rutledge (1966) and Wright (1977) take an issues approach in that their counseling sessions focus on the exploration and discussion of topics such as finances, sexuality, in-laws, and religious practices. Ginsberg and Vogelson (1977), Stahman and Hiebert (1980), and Van Zoost (1973) advocate the communication skills approach which primarily focuses on teaching couples such skills as addressing one another in an open and honest manner and expression of feelings. There is also a sparse selection of research on premarital counseling (e.g., Ginsberg and Vogelson, 1977; Meadows and Taplin, 1970; and Van Zoost, 1973).

Issues Approaches

Wright (1977) examines specifically what a counseling session should entail. For Wright reading is a pertinent part of the counseling session. Both males and females are asked to read specific books,
as well as reading the same book. Because the couples are asked to read many other books on their own, the actual counseling much take place well ahead of the wedding.

Wright's major goal is to assist the couple in attaining a realistic conception of what a healthy marital relationship is. According to his approach, the couple needs to relativistically learn about the issues that typically come up in an intimate relationship. Moreover, the couple needs to develop an understanding of how they will handle such issues as they arise in the relationship. By being aware of the issues and how they can affect the relationship, the couple will be better prepared to discuss these issues with each other and the counselor and then jointly decide how they will handle a particular situation when it arises. For example, discussing how finances will be handled prior to the marriage will facilitate that particular adjustment later in the relationship as the couple will already be socialized for it. Thus, prior preparation in dealing with particular issues may lead to a more satisfying relationship later in the marriage. Thus, it is important for the couple to have a firm understanding of the types of things that typically arise in a marital relationship--thus the emphasis on reading on the various subjects. Another purpose for reading of pertinent literature is to foster the realization that both individuals in a marriage should be emotionally stable and mature. In addition to the reading, there are also various instruments that are helpful in making the couple aware of the issues and promote discussion.

The issues approach also makes use of a variety of assessment tools to measure aspects of the relationship such as communication, sexual knowledge, and role attitudes. These premarital counseling
measures provide important information and thus facilitate the counseling process. One such test is the Sex Knowledge Inventory, which has been used to help a couple and their counselor define the couple's level of sexual knowledge (Wright, 1966).

The major test used in premarital counseling according to Wright is the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis (T-JTA), cited by Phillips (1973) as indispensable. The profile obtained is easily understandable for professionals as well as for laypersons. Since many emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, low self-image, or uncontrolled anger are at the core of many marital problems, it is critical to take a close examination of this area for each person. This is the purpose of the counseling sessions.

The first premarital counseling session is spent getting acquainted, answering questions, and discussing the definition of marriage. The couple's individual family background is the next topic area to be explored. Another topic is dating background of the couple such as how long they have been together and the type of activities in which they usually engage. The next area to be discussed is a sensitive one--sexual involvement and the attitude the couple has toward this important aspect of their relationship. The first homework assignment is given at this time; this assignment like the others to follow is individually completed. The counselor explains Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and the couple is asked to bring in written answers of assigned questions to the third session.

During the second session, consisting of two meetings with each individual, the results of the T-JTA are discussed. The third session
is spent examining the T-JTA profiles, noting the similarities and differences between the individuals and discussing the results of the 
*Marriage Prediction Schedule*. The homework discussion follows with a discussion of sexuality, the honeymoon, children, in-laws, and parents. The homework assignment is to listen to tapes on the topics of marital roles and responsibilities and to prepare a detailed budget.

The next session is basically devoted to discussing different aspects of marital adjustment, the budget, and the homework assignment. The wedding plans are also discussed during this session. Plans are made for the post-marital counseling session, and the counselor addresses any further concerns of the couple.

In sum, Wright (1977) believes that there is an obvious and urgent need for premarital preparation. Findings have shown that premarital counseling is a valuable means of offering primary prevention about common problems and facilitating overall marital satisfaction. This is a time to assist the couple in making their final decision to marry. They may not come to counseling with such indecision, but engagement is not necessarily final either. In fact, research shows that between 35%-45% of all engagements in the United States are terminated (Wright, 1977). Very little research has been conducted in the outcomes of premarital counseling using an issues approach.

Benson (1971) addresses the issues of courtship in general and engagement in particular in regard to premarital programs. It is his opinion that a couple anticipating marriage needs to be aware of their reasons for desiring such a bond in order to facilitate marital adjustment. A counselor may be helpful in aiding exploration of their mutual
reasons in terms of three fundamental theories of the mate selection process. The theories are the ecological/propinquity theory, the homogamy theory, and the complimentary needs theory. He utilizes these theories in his model of premarital counseling. For example, a couple who is from the same geographical location are similar in terms of religion, nationality, social class, and education and do not have great opposing needs will be more likely to have a higher level of marital adjustment than those couples not fulfilling these requirements. This is not to say that these homogeneous couples could not benefit by premarital counseling. It is that those couples who are more heterogeneous may need to work through greater obstacles.

Elkin (1977), the Director of Family Counseling Services Conciliation Court of the Supreme Court, Los Angeles County, presents a description of California's revolutionary premarital counseling law for minors, which went into effect on November 23, 1970. This law was developed as a result of California's high divorce rate. The law, referred to as 4101, requires counseling for minors as one of the requirements for obtaining a marriage license. The purposes of premarital counseling for minors were to help the couple assess their financial, psychological, and social readiness for marriage; to provide them with the opportunity to further evaluate the decision to marry at this particular time; and to rouse a system of communication which will enhance a couple's ability to establish the kind of marital relationship that will facilitate their growth as individuals as well as families. The following content areas are explored with the couples participating in this program: employment, living arrangements, finances, interpersonal
compatibility, educational plans, and child care. Each couple is
counseled in at least four sessions that are "reality oriented."

Moreover, the sessions typically last from one to two hours depending
on the couple's needs. During the first session, the couple is told by
the counselor that at the conclusion of the sessions the court will be
notified through a letter that the counseling took place.

In 1975, the Los Angeles Conciliation Court reevaluated its
procedures and approach to couples coming within the jurisdiction of
4101. A reevaluation of the approach to applications for marriage of
minors was deemed necessary in view of the low denial rate since the
law went into effect (from 1970-1974, the denial rate averaged 5.1%).
The concern over a low denial rate grew from the reality of high risk
factors involved in marriages for minors as well as from the court's
traditional role of protecting the minors' best interests. In 1975,
the court developed "Suggested Criteria for Premarital Judicial Con-
sent." The assumption of the Criteria is based on research (Elkin,
1977, p. 440) that a girl under 16 and a boy under 18 are usually not
prepared for marriage. Thus, when a minor is granted consent, the
court is considering this an exception and privilege. The following
factors are used in determining readiness for marriage: education,
length of courtship, employment, history of asocial behavior, parental
attitudes, living arrangements, and family planning. Pregnancy in and
of itself is not grounds for automatic consent. These criteria have
resulted in a 20.5% denial rate in 1975. Although there is not yet
sufficient research data that indicates whether 4101 has in fact
achieved its goal of increasing the chances of success and happiness
in marriage, Elkin (1977) and his colleagues feel they have enough experience with 4101 to conclude tentatively that it is a good law. They further believe that if 4101 does nothing else but promote acceptance of the idea of obtaining counseling after marriage if problems occur, then it is a good law. However, before any criticisms are made, follow-up evaluation of this program is needed.

In *Premarital Counseling for Teenagers* (Stewart, 1970), the premise is that premarital counseling is critical to successful marriage. Stewart contends that marriage is an important milestone in anyone's life and requires much more preparation than is generally realized. Much of the book deals with the explicit and varied duties of husbands and of wives to make role expectations become apparent to the reader. Stewart is basically stating that issues that arise in a marriage (economic insecurity, health problems, cultural gaps, differences in the pattern of life, sexual ignorance, lack of respect, and individual temperaments) should be thought about, discussed, and understood prior to the event. These issues are especially critical to young marriages. Although Stewart does not address a specific counseling modality, he does bring up issues which should be dealt with in some way by the counselor and the couple.

The *Manual for Group Premarital Counseling* (Gangsei, 1971) is an edited book of essays. The subject matter of these essays is marriage and its related issues. Counseling sessions are not dealt with per se; however, the essays are designed to provide counselors with salient topics to be discussed in counseling session. The essays cover topics such as "The Meaning of Marriage," "Sex Before Marriage," and "Changing
Role Patterns for Husband/Wife." These essays are written by widely known professionals in the field of marriage and the family. Ernest Burgess, Robert Winch, Albert Ellis, and Reuben Hill are contributors, reflecting a diversity of opinion on various issues.

A specific counseling plan is generally addressed in the introductory chapter of *Manual for Group Premarital Counseling* (Gansei, 1971). A nine-session schedule is suggested. At the first session, introductions are made and copies of the manual are distributed. If personal information is desired by the counselor, a simple, but concise form developed by Rutledge, "Individual and Marriage Counseling Inventory" (Gansei, 1971, p. 23) is used. A diary of feelings may be a homework assignment in which a record of feelings is kept by each individual.

The session format is flexible, but it is recommended that each session should be approximately 90 minutes long. This allows time for discussion, summary, and assignments. Although each individual therapist may want to cover different topic areas, the issues arising from the essays may serve as a guide.

In Rutledge's (1966) book, *Premarital Counseling*, premarital counseling is approached indirectly. Rather than describing the mechanics of individual counseling sessions, Rutledge chooses to write about the roles, responsibilities, and expenses of marriage in general. The topics chosen are pragmatic ones that serve as broad topic areas for counseling sessions. The topics include communication, conflict, marital readiness, beginning a new family, sexuality, and prerequisite knowledge and resources.

The 1964 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Marriage
Counselors, devoted to premarital counseling, noted that other than a few university-based counselors, very little formal premarital counseling was being done except with the seriously disturbed (Rutledge, 1966). It has been the experience of Rutledge that once adequate premarital counseling is made available on university campuses, couples are very likely to take advantage of it. However, in most other populations, this is not the case. Since most professionals have exhibited favorable results not only in preventing divorces, but in enhancing the lives of couples through premarital education and counseling (Rutledge, 1966), the task of making premarital counseling available and educating the public to accept it seems crucial.

Peterson (1968) approached the topic of premarital relations from the perspective of training family practitioners in premarital counseling. He contends that a basic need is to train family life practitioners about premarital counseling and how to design a premarital counseling program. Without these trained professionals, couples cannot be guided and interested students cannot be trained.

According to Garrett, Skidmore, and Skidmore (1956) "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" (p. 23). To them, the basic aim of premarital counseling is to enable the prospective mates to gain a better understanding of themselves, of each other, and of what marriage entails. They believe that there is no "best" method to follow for premarital interviews since each case is unique. Thus, the procedural plan should be individually based on a thorough diagnosis involving emotional, social, and psychological factors. The nature of the problem, the couple's competency in communicating with each other and the
counselor, the time limitations, and economic considerations are some of the elements determining the process.

According to Garrett et al., the overriding purpose of premarital counseling is a mature preparation for marriage in which understanding one another plays a major role. The emphasis is on preventing marital discord. The authors feel that this can be accomplished in a number of ways such as providing an opportunity for prospective marriage partners to confer about concerns regarding their approaching matrimony, giving factual information to the couple, and by assisting the couple to build and strengthen a positive attitude toward marriage.

Another issues approach to premarital counseling is that taken by Wood (1969). He feels that it is important to first discuss with the couple the meaning of marriage as they perceive it to be. A second area of exploration is asking the individual why they feel their intended spouse is the right person for them. The third major area of exploration involves specific issues (family relationships, finances, religion, etc.). The closing sessions are used for Wood to give the couple feedback on how he sees them as individuals, as a couple, and as a family. He does this by pointing out their strengths as well as weaknesses. This is one of the few cases in which the counselor actually is direct and confronting. Furthermore, Wood does not advocate instructing the couple to read on the subject since specific aspects of a relationship are personal and unique and cannot be evaluated by rearing on marriage in general. This view has been previously espoused by Garrett et al. (1956).
Communication Skills Approaches

Miller, Nunnally, and Wackman (1976) describe a program which attempts to teach couples how to have meaningful and productive relationships. This has been one of the few programs with an evaluative component built in. The major evaluative finding was that 14 out of 16 couples become more adept in their communication styles compared to only 8 of the control couples (Miller et al., 1976). Thus, the program had a positive effect on couples' interaction patterns which may later transfer to the interaction patterns in married life.

Stahman and Hiebert (1980) take an interactional perspective that is geared to group counseling. Of special interest to them is the use of and choice of assessment devices. Recommendations of specific assessment tools are given so the proper selection can thus be made. The authors' premarital packet is based on an interactional/communication premise. The emphasis of this approach is on communication, especially in regard to six major goals. These goals are: (1) discovering and clarifying the basic identity of each partner; (2) discovering and articulating the other's identity; (3) making sense of and understanding behavior; (4) developing communication skills; (5) opening up significant areas for communication; and (6) teaching conflict-resolution skills.

Mace (1972) has written an unusual book that alleviates the problem of motivation, feasibility, and accessibility. His plan is to meet this dilemma by putting as much as possible of the marital preparation process into book form and urging parents and peers to give it to engaged couples. Thus, from a non-threatening distance, the couples
can involve themselves in the process of examining themselves as individuals and as a couple just as they would if they were face-to-face with a counselor. Henceforth, Mace attempts to reach couples directly so they can adequately prepare themselves for marriage. According to Mace (1972), the first task is for the individual to do some soul-searching about himself or herself. The best way to go about the self-assessment process is to understand the forces that have shaped the individual's personality through a personal history device. This method of self-evaluation is to determine individual marriage-ability through an examination of nine areas. The areas are: family background, social adjustment, intellectual development, vocational development, spare time interests, spiritual development, sexual experiences, love relationships, and physical and mental health. It is hoped that eventually, the individuals will share their personal backgrounds after they have self-examined them.

The next step is for the individuals to look at themselves as a couple to examine compatibility. The couple needs to determine their similarities as well as differences. Issues to keep in mind are: education, background, religion, temperament, and tolerance level. The couple needs to determine where they are now as a couple. These are aspects that need to be examined, understood, and resolved to enable a meaningful and satisfying relationship to develop.

The final task is for the couple to examine their marital expectations individually and together. Goals and plans for the marriage should be discussed. The areas that cause disagreement can be used to put into practice the art of conflict resolution. Thus, communication
and cooperation are seen as the keys to achieving a good marriage. The author's expectation is that most of the couples who take the book seriously and do their homework will have the potential for a successful and happy marriage.

Ellis (1971) usually sees clients for premarital counseling for reasons that are of a more specific nature. Examples of presenting concerns that are typical are: "Is my fiancee the right person for me" and "Should I be having premarital sexual relations?" These and other similar concerns usually involve deep-rooted personality or emotional problems.

According to Ellis's rational emotive approach, the majority of premarital counselees are needlessly apprehensive and/or angry. They are terribly afraid of rejection, incompetence, or wrongdoing. According to Ellis,

"... my psychotherapeutic approach to most premarital counselees is to show them as quickly as possible how to rid themselves of their fear and hostility, and thereby to solve their present and future courtship and marital difficulties." (Ellis, 1971, p. 250) Ellis' approach is to quickly show the counselees how to rid themselves of these irrational concerns and thereby lead a more enjoyable life.

The main theoretical concept of Ellis' rational emotive technique is the A-B-C theory of personality. The main idea is that the stimulus/situation, A, rarely causes a human emotional reaction, C, but it is almost always B, the individual's system of beliefs regarding attitudes toward or perceptions of A which in reality leads to the reaction, C. Through a rational didactic approach, Ellis shows the
client how he/she catastrophizes the situation which leads to self-defeating behavior and thought. For example, a woman may complain that her fiancee does not always listen to her when she talks to him. This is the situation, A. Naturally, her reaction is that of anger and hurt, C. However, it is her notion that he does not think she has anything important to say, B, that actually causes the distress. Thus, Ellis would help her change her irrational perception (given that the fiancee has confirmed that it is indeed a misperception). He would get the woman to believe that it is not a judgment of her worth as a person, but perhaps, that her fiancee is peroccupied with his own concerns at the moment and that it is not such a terrible thing.

In sum, the basic aspects of rational therapy include the client's being "taught" that it is not awful for him/her to fail in his/her sexual or love experiences. Another fundamental notion is to teach the person that his/her extreme unhappiness stems from his/her own self-perpetuated nonsense rather than his/her partner's attitudes or actions. Ellis directly forces the client to accept reality in his/her relations with the partner, thus resulting in rational therapy.

Ginsberg and Vogelsong (1977) describe the utilization of relationship enhancement skills with premarital couples via the PRIMES method. The main goal of the PRIMES program is to enable premarital couples to express their feelings more openly, to respond more empathically to one another, and to improve various aspects of the quality of their relationship.

Van Zoot (1973) takes a skills approach to premarital education. Various writers have commented on the effectiveness of such an approach
(Clark, 1970; Hinkle & Moore, 1971). She also makes use of videotaping interactions since this too has been found very effective (Perlmutter, Gumpert, Higbie, Loeb, & O'Hara, 1967). These techniques allow the participants to become more aware of their verbal as well as nonverbal behavior, both of which can affect their communication style and quality of relationships (Ard & Ard, 1969; Liberman, 1970). Van Zoost examined a five-session group communication skills program involving six dating or engaged university students. The explicit use of videotaped models, videotaped feedback, and behavioral rehearsal was used. Correlated t-tests indicated that the scores on Jourard's Self-Disclosure Questionnaire changed significantly as did those for the Communication Knowledge Test. All participants stated that the program had a positive effect on their relationships in that they interacted with and communicated with their partners in a more constructive manner after completing the program. The program examined by Van Zoost is one of the few programs which used such videotape techniques. Thus, more evaluation is necessary to conclusively concur that the program is effective.

Hinkle and Moore (1971) describe a relationship enhancement program which focuses on the communication approach. More specifically, the focus is on teaching the couples how to express affection and fight productively. Their basic assumption is that couples must continuously work as a team to maintain a meaningful relationship. Twenty-eight married and engaged couples participated in the program. The participants were divided into six groups; two groups consisted of married couples, two groups consisted of engaged couples, and two groups
consisted of a mixture of married and engaged couples. The basic format included exercises, discussion, and feedback. The Relationship Goals Rating Scale (Moore & Hinkle, 1970) was used to evaluate the experience. All participants perceived that the sessions were beneficial. The most sessions perceived most beneficial were those on feedback, constructive fighting, and non-verbal communication.

Meadows and Taplin (1970) describe a premarital counseling model at a university setting which somewhat followed the approach espoused by Rutledge (1966). The focus is on the requirement of each partner deeply understanding the emotional aspects of the self and the intended partner, the salience of the perception regarding appropriate marital roles, the importance of communication skills in marital adjustment, and the need to develop appropriate problem-solving skills. The counseling method was "somewhat directive and cognitive." (Meadows & Taplin, 1970, p. 517) The attempt was made to have each couple confront one another on particular key issues that Meadows and Taplin (1970) perceive to be critical in terms of marital adjustment. An example of one such question is "How do we feel about the exercise of authority in our married life?" (Meadows & Taplin, 1970, p. 517) However, the emphasis was not on the particular problem per se, but on how the couple approached problem solving. As problems arose, the couple and the counselor made an effort to assess how the couple approached problem solving and what the quality of communication was in resolving differences.

Approximately one month after the premarital counseling was completed, each client was mailed an evaluation form. Included in this
form were questions concerning the needs of the clients. The program was positively evaluated. However, the assessment of needs occurred after the program rather than occurring before it.

In *Do Marriage Preparation Programs Really Work?*, Bader, Microys, Sinclair, Willet and Conway (1980) report on the development, utilization, and evaluation of a marriage preparation program. The program used a small discussion-group format and focused on communication skills and conflict resolution. It was hypothesized that (1) spouses who took part in such a program would be less likely to engaged in destructive conflict with each other than those who had not taken part; and (2) spouses who took part in the program would seek assistance in solving either individual or marital problems more readily than those who did not take part. The authors' emphasis reflects their belief in the importance of communication skills in marriage and in critical methods of relationship conflict resolution skills. This was the assumption underlining their research.

Over the course of Bader's et al (1980) research, 229 interviews were conducted, 94 (60 experimental and 34 control) prior to marriage, 72 (43 experimental and 24 control) six months after marriage, and 63 (41 experimental and 22 control) after one year of marriage. The data supported both hypotheses, and the program was thus viewed as a success. The two major strengths of the design were that control couples were used and follow-up testing conducted such research strengths have not been typical of most studies.

Knox and Patrick (1971) espouse a behavioral approach to premarital counseling. The basic assumption is that what an individual does
is more revealing about him/her than any other factor. A behavioral analysis was taken of 170 (steadily dating to engaged) students enrolled in a marriage preparation course at a university. All students perceived that the behavioral analysis was worthwhile in that they got to know themselves and their future mates much better than they had heretofore.

Although the research on premarital counseling has been scarce, the general consensus appears to be that premarital counseling is desired, necessary, and beneficial. There are many different approaches used in preparing couples for marriage. However, it is still unclear what would be the most beneficial aspects to cover in a premarital counseling program. The needs of these individuals has yet to be systematically assessed. Meadows and Taplin (1980) have briefly touched upon the matter, but their needs assessment occurred after the preparation. The evaluation of particular premarital counseling programs is certainly important, but it is critical that the needs of premarital couples be first assessed. An assessment of needs is important so that criteria can be established for future evaluations of premarital counseling programs. Once it is known what the needs are, then programs can thus be developed, carried out, and evaluated. Thus, a needs assessment of premarital counseling is the first step in development of effective premarital counseling programs.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this study was to assess the premarital counseling needs (issues versus communication skills) of engaged and newly married undergraduate students. It was also of interest to determine whether or not there were differences in these issues versus communication skills needs as a function of gender. The investigator devised a questionnaire in order to measure premarital counseling needs related to specific issues and premarital counseling needs related to communication skills. Specifically, the engaged subjects were required to project their thoughts on the topics into the future while the newly married subjects were required to base their responses on retrospective opinions.

The questionnaire was administered to students in purposely selected classrooms at The Ohio State University. The instructors were contacted in advance by telephone. The purpose of the telephone contact was to invite their students to voluntarily participate in the study. Those instructors not contacted by telephone were approached five to ten minutes prior to the class meeting in order to gain permission to administer the questionnaire. The investigator emphasized the strictly confidential and voluntary nature of the participation to the students.

Subjects

The population was defined as engaged and married persons attending The Ohio State University. Thus, the sample was selected from engaged and newly married undergraduate students at The Ohio State University. The sample consisted of 15 white, middle-class males and
15 white, middle-class females for the two areas of interest (engaged and newly married) making a total of 60 participants (30 males and 30 females).

Several variables were kept constant in that only subjects who conformed to specific demographic criteria were used in the analysis of data. Only subjects who were currently engaged or who had been married three years or less were invited to participate. Age was also controlled in that the engaged persons were required to be between the ages of 24-29. Also, only white, middle-class students were used. The Two Factor Index of Social Position was used to control social class (Hollingshead, 1957). Data that did not conform to these demographic criteria were not used in this study. The mean age of the engaged persons was 21.1. The mean age of the married persons was 25.4. The married subjects had been married an average of 16.7 months (males, 15.1 months and females, 18.3 months).

Selection of Subjects

The investigator invited students in various purposely selected undergraduate classes at The Ohio State University to participate in a study of the assessment of premarital counseling needs. A stipulation was that only engaged or newly married (married three years or less) students were invited to participate. The investigator purposely selected the classrooms in such a way that various disciplines were represented.

Procedures and Instrumentation

Participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire developed by the investigator (See Appendix A). Pertinent demographic information
requested included age, marital status (engaged or married and number of years married), sex, father's occupational status and educational levels, and race. The questionnaire also requested the participants to rank on a scale of 1-10 areas they felt would be most crucial to cover in a premarital preparation course in terms of issues and communication skills.

Upon entering the classrooms, the investigator introduced herself and explained that she was working on her thesis and needed volunteers. The purpose of the investigation was briefly explained. The cover letter (Appendix B), consent form (Appendix C), and questionnaire (Appendix A) were then given to those students who volunteered to participate.

Data Analysis

The basic means of data analysis involved 21 t-tests. These t-tests were used to analyze all combinations of Marital Status versus Sex versus the two general categories of needs (i.e., issues versus communication skills). These two general groups were thus compared with respect to Marital Status and Sex combinations.

A second means of analysis was utilized in order to obtain more specific information regarding the five individual issues needs (finances, sexuality, religious practice, roles, family planning and child rearing) and five individual communication skills needs (ability to express feelings openly and honestly, resolve conflicts in a constructive manner, actively listen and respond to partner's expressed thoughts and feelings, recognize non-verbal communication, become more sensitive to partner's needs and feelings). Rankings of the mean
scores for the 10 needs were calculated for all combinations of Marital Status and Sex. Tables and figures were used to illustrate these mean rankings. In this analysis, the 10 needs were ranked and the mean independently calculated. Thus, the ranking of one need did not affect the ranking of another need. The questions which measured this on the Premarital Counseling Needs Assessment Questionnaire were B-F and H-L (See Appendix A).

A third analysis was used to also obtain more specific data regarding the 10 needs. The rankings of the mean scores for the ten needs were calculated for all combinations of Marital Status and Sex. Tables and figures were used to illustrate these relationships. In this analysis, the 10 needs were ranked and the means calculated relative to one another. Thus, the ranking of one need affected the rankings of all the other needs. The questions which measured this on the Premarital Counseling Needs Assessment Questionnaire were M-V (See Appendix A).
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, data are presented and findings analyzed in the order of the research questions presented in Chapter I. Twenty-one t-tests were used to determine if there were any significant differences in importance of needs as a function of Marital Status and Sex. A probability level of .05 was used to test for significance.

To obtain more precise information regarding the individual issues and communication skills needs as a function of Marital Status and Sex combinations, means were calculated. These findings are represented in tables and figures. The topics of interest here were: the five issues needs (finances, sexuality, roles, religious practice, family planning and child rearing) and the five communication skills needs (ability to express feelings openly and honestly, resolve conflicts in a constructive manner, actively listen and respond to partner's expressed thoughts and feelings, and recognize non-verbal communication, become more sensitive to partner's needs and feelings). Questions B-F and H-L represent these data on the Premarital Counseling Needs Assessment Questionnaire (See Appendix A).

The Premarital Counseling Needs Assessment Questionnaire (See Appendix A) also measured the 10 individual issues and communication skills needs as they were ranked relative to one another as a function of Marital Status and Sex combinations. Means were calculated and a rank ordering made. Questions M-V on the Premarital Counseling Needs Assessment Questionnaire (See Appendix A) reflects these data.
The questionnaire ranking was done on a 1-10 scale with 1 being the most important and 10 being the least important. Thus, a low mean score would indicate that the need was perceived as being very important to cover in a premarital counseling program and a high mean score would indicate that the need was perceived as not as important as a function of the Marital Status and Sex combinations.

Analyses

Research Question 1: What were the premarital counseling needs of the engaged couples?

Table I shows the mean rankings in regard to the Premarital Counseling Needs Assessment Questionnaire topics B-F (specific issues needs: finances, sexuality, roles, religious practice, family planning and child rearing) and topics H-L (specific communication skills needs: ability to express feelings openly and honestly, resolve conflicts in a constructive manner, actively listen and respond to partner's expressed thoughts and feelings, recognize non-verbal communication, become more sensitive to partner's needs and feelings). Topic J., "actively listen and respond to partner's expressed thoughts and feelings," had the lowest mean score ($\bar{x} = 1.9$), which meant that this need was seen as most important. Topic E., "religious practice," had the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 4.8$), which meant that the 30 engaged subjects perceived it as least important. The 15 engaged males gave topic L., "become more sensitive to partner's needs and feelings," the lowest mean score ($\bar{x} = 2.3$) ranking this need most important while ranking topic E., "religious practice," ($\bar{x} = 5.3$) least important. The 15 engaged females ranked need J., "actively listen and respond to partner's expressed thoughts
and feelings," with a mean score ($\bar{x} = 1.7$) indicating that they perceived this need to be most important while they too ranked E., "religious practice," as least important with the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 4.4$). Both engaged males and engaged females ranked need E., "religious practice," (an issues topic) to be the least important ($\bar{x} = 5.3$ and $\bar{x} = 4.4$ respectively). Both engaged males and engaged females ranked a communication need as being most important with engaged males choosing need L, "become more sensitive to partner's needs and feelings," as most important ($\bar{x} = 2.3$) and engaged females choosing need J., "actively listen and respond to partner's expressed thoughts and feelings" ($\bar{x} = 4.4$) as most important.

**Research Question 2:** How were these needs prioritized?

Figure 1 shows the mean rankings in regard to the Premarital Counseling Needs Assessment Questionnaire topics M-V (individual issues needs and individual communication skills needs ranked relative to one another). These 10 needs were: recognize non-verbal communication, religious practice, finances, ability to express feelings openly and honestly, resolve conflicts in a constructive manner, actively listen and respond to partner's expressed thoughts and feelings, sexuality, roles, become more sensitive to partner's needs and feelings, and family planning and child rearing.

Need P., "ability to express feelings opening and honestly" (a communication skills need) was ranked by the 30 engaged subjects as the most important ($\bar{x} = 6.83$). The least important need was need N., "religious practice" (an issues need) ($\bar{x} = 8.0$). The 15 engaged males also ranked need P., "ability to express feelings openly and honestly,"
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**Communication Skill Needs**

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as being the most important ($\bar{x} = 3.8$) and they too ranked need N., "religious practice," as being the least important ($\bar{x} = 7.8$). The 15 engaged females ranked need R., "actively listen and respond to partner's expressed thoughts and feelings," (a communication skills need) as the most important ($\bar{x} = 3.73$) and ranked need S., "sexuality," (an issues need) as the least important ($\bar{x} = 8.0$). In all three cases (engaged, engaged males, and engaged females), a communication skill need was ranked as the most important although males differed from females; males ranked--"ability to express feelings openly and honestly," and females ranked "actively listen and respond to partner's expressed thoughts and feelings." Moreover, in all three cases, an issues need was ranked as the least important although males differed from females; by males and females ranking as the least important "religious practice and sexuality" respectively.

**Research Question 3:** What would have been the premarital counseling needs of those that were newly married, in retrospect?

Table 2 shows the mean rankings in regard to the Premarital Counseling Needs Assessment Questionnaire topics B-F (individual issue needs) and H-L (individual communication skills needs). Topic H., "ability to express feelings openly and honestly" had the lowest mean score ($\bar{x} = 1.8$) which meant that this need was perceived to be most important to cover in a premarital educational program by the 30 married subjects. The need E., "religious practice" had the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 5.9$) which meant that the 30 married subjects did not feel that this was very important to cover in a premarital education program. The 15 married males ranked the need H., "ability to express
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<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Listen &amp; Respond</td>
<td>2.7</td>
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**Issue Needs**

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<th>Married Males N=15</th>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Married Females N=15</th>
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**Communication Skill Needs**

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<th>Need</th>
<th>Married Females N=15</th>
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<td>2.3</td>
<td>Resolve conflicts</td>
<td>1.2</td>
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<td>Resolve conflicts</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Express thoughts openly</td>
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<td>Become more sensitive</td>
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<td>Become more sensitive</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Become more sensitive</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen &amp; Respond</td>
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<td>Listen &amp; Respond</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Listen &amp; Respond</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize non-verbals</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Recognize non-verbals</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Recognize non-verbals</td>
<td>2.7</td>
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FIGURE II
Married Subjects
Topics M-V
Relative Rankings
feelings openly and honestly" as most important (\( \bar{x} = 2.3 \)) and needs C., "sexuality" and E., "religious practice" as least important, both (\( \bar{x} = 4.7 \)). The 15 married females perceived need I., "resolve conflicts in a constructive manner to be most important (\( \bar{x} = 1.2 \)) where as they perceived need E., "religious practice" to be least important (\( \bar{x} = 6.2 \)). Both married males and married females believed that a communication need was most important although they differed in the exact need ranked as most important. The also chose an issues need (both choosing "religious practice") as least important.

Research Question 4: How were these needs prioritized?

Figure 2 shows the mean rankings in regard to premarital Counseling Needs Assessment Questionnaire topics M-V (individual issues and individual communication skills ranked relative to one another). These 10 needs were: recognize non-verbal communication, religious practice, finances, ability to express feelings openly and honestly, resolve conflicts in a constructive manner, actively listen and respond to partner's thoughts and feelings, sexuality, roles, become more sensitive to partner's needs and feelings, and family planning and child rearing.

Need Q., "resolve conflicts in a constructive manner" (a communication skills need) was ranked by the 30 married subjects as the most important need (\( \bar{x} = 3.23 \)). The least important need was need N., "religious practice" (an issues need) (\( \bar{x} = 7.83 \)). The 15 married males ranked need R., "actively listen and respond to partner's expressed thoughts and feelings," (communication skills need) as the most important (\( \bar{x} = 3.73 \)) and ranked need T., "roles," (an issues need) as the least important (\( \bar{x} = 7.66 \)). The 15 married females ranked need Q., "resolve conflicts in a constructive manner" (communication skills need)
as the most important ($\bar{x} = 2.6$) and ranked need N., "religious practice" (an issues need) as being the least important ($\bar{x} = 9.06$). In all three cases (married, married males, and married females) a communication skills need was ranked the most important although males and females differed in their highest ranking of specific communication skills need with males ranking "actively listen and respond to partner's expressed thoughts and feelings" and females ranking "resolve conflicts in a constructive manner" as the most important. Moreover, in all three cases, an issues need was ranked as least important although married males differed from married females in the specific issue ranked as least important with the males ranking "roles" and the females ranking "religious practice" as the least important.

Research Question 5: How did the needs and priorities differ in regard to the males as compared to the females in each group--married versus engaged?

In order to answer the question 21 t-tests were used in all Marital Status and Sex Combinations with respect to issues needs (need A. on the Premarital Counseling Needs Assessment Questionnaire) and to communication skills needs (need G. on the Premarital Counseling Needs Assessment Questionnaire) compared individually, as well as together. There were four significant differences ($p < .05$).

(1) Married females and engaged females significantly differed in their perception of the importance of the general category of issues in a premarital counseling program $t = 2.442$, $p < .05$. Married females had a mean score of 4.67 and engaged females had a mean score of 2.33. Thus, engaged females perceived that covering issues in a premarital
counseling course was significantly more important than married females perceived it to be.

(2) Married subjects significantly differed in their perception of the important of issues versus communication skills needs were \( t = 3.221, p < .05 \). The mean score for the general issues needs, A, was 3.87, whereas the mean score for the general communication skills needs, G, was 2.1. Thus, married persons perceived that communication skills was significantly more important to cover in a premarital counseling program than issues needs.

(3) Females significantly differed in their perception of the importance of issues versus communication skills needs in a premarital preparation program. The mean score for the issues need was 3.5, whereas the mean score for the communication skills need was 2.07. Therefore, the exploration of communication skills was considered to be significantly more important than the need of issues.

(4) Married females significantly differed in their perception of the importance of issues versus communication skills needs in a pre-marital preparation program \( t = 2.547, p < .05 \). The general issues category was given a mean score of 4.67, whereas the general communication skills category received a mean score of 2.0. Thus, married females perceived education in the general category of communication skills to be needed more than the education of the general category of issues needs.

**Summary of Major Findings**

Analyses of the four significant t-tests indicated differences in importance of needs. Engaged females perceived the general issues
approach to be significantly more important than married females perceived them to be. Married females perceived the communication skills approach to be significantly more important than the issues approach. Females in both engaged and married states also perceived the communication skills approach to be significantly more important than the issues approach. Lastly, married subjects (both males and females) perceived the communication skills approach as being significantly more important than the issues approach. Analyses of the t-tests for all the other Marital Status and Sex subgroupings were not significant. Thus, there were no differences in the importance of needs as a function of combinations and categories as a result of t-tests.

In regard to the descriptive analyses, comparing the individual topics separately and relatively, the same basic differences exist. The mean scores and rankings indicated that both engaged and married subjects perceived the communication topics to be more important than the issues topics. However, when the topics were compared relative to one another, some other differences were apparent. The issues topics were more important to engaged females than married females. The communication approach was more important to married subjects than the issues approach. All females preferred the communication skills approach in comparison to the issues approach, and married females preferred the communication skills approach more than the issues approach. Overall, it seemed that the communication skills approach was more important than the issues approach to premarital counseling.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Introduction

The present study was made to provide information concerning premarital counseling needs. The study was limited to engaged or newly married undergraduate students at The Ohio State University. Data was obtained in order to answer the five research questions outlined in Chapter 1.

Conclusions

The results of the analyses utilizing the t-tests as well as the descriptive statistics indicated that the communication skills approach was perceived as more important than the issues approach. This relationship was statistically significant for females, married females, and married subjects in general. However, this is not to suggest that the issues approach was perceived as not important. The issues approach was merely perceived as less important than the communication skills approach. The mean scores for the issues approach (with the exception of religious practice) were not sufficiently high to conclude that issues needs' were lacking in importance.

These 60 subjects did not indicate that education in the issues approach would be totally useless; in fact, the engaged males perceived issues needs to be more important than communication skills needs. Furthermore, all subjects indicated that the issues of family planning and child rearing and finances would be important to cover in a premarital counseling experience according to the mean scores and relative rankings. The remaining issues of roles, sexuality, and
religious practice were seen to be less important than most communication issues to cover in a premarital counseling course.

The 60 subjects were in basic agreement about what communication skills were perceived as being the most helpful to focus on during a premarital preparation experience. Basically, all four of the communication skills were seen as more important than the issue needs, also there was little variance among the mean scores for these needs. The need, recognize non-verbal communication was perceived as being the least important of the communication skills; however, the mean scores were not so high as to indicate unimportance.

These findings should be helpful to family life practitioners interested in providing premarital counseling services. The purpose of this research was to identify the most urgent needs of the target population in order to provide adequate and beneficial services to those that desire them. Without a needs assessment and the subsequent information, family life educators may not know what it is that premarital couples desire in a premarital preparation program. Thus, the possibility could exist that family life practitioners could be providing services that the participants would not benefit from.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study is that the subjects were no randomly chosen. They were included in the study if they agreed to participate and met the marital status and age criterion. The extent to which the findings can be generalized to the population from which the subjects were drawn are thus limited.

Another limitation is the instrumentation; a non-standardized questionnaire developed by the investigator was used. Thus, the
reliability and validity components of the investigation is questionable as the study did not address such methodological problems associated with questionnaire construction. However, it was assumed that the device was adequate for an exploratory and descriptive needs assessment to at least shed some light on the topic.

Another limitation was that the engaged couples were asked to do some hypothetical thinking and the married couples were asked to do some retrospective as well as hypothetical thinking in order to determine their needs. The reliability and validity of such procedures is often questionable.

Implications

Although the findings of this research are somewhat limited, they are useful as a starting point in development premarital counseling programs. Family life educators should develop their programs with these findings in mind. Thus, based on the findings of this study premarital preparation programs should emphasize the communication skills approach. The couples participating in such programs should have the opportunity, both within and outside, the counseling setting to practice the communication skills conducive to marital success. Furthermore, specific attentions should be directed to the communication skills needs deemed most important such as: become more sensitive to partner's thoughts and feelings, ability to express feelings openly and honestly, resolving conflicts, and listening and responding to the partner's thoughts and feelings. Indeed such topics are being addressed in programs of Perlmutter (1976) and Van Zoost (1973).

In developing such programs, family life practitioners should
include some sessions involving the issues approach since they are ranked as somewhat important. The issues needs that were rated the most important were family planning, child rearing, and finances; thus, family life practitioners will need to guide the couples in such things as preparing detailed budgets, setting priorities for spending money, deciding on how many (if any) children to have and how they will be spaced, and discussing both individual's philosophies on child rearing practices. Rutledge (1966) and Wright (1977) focus on such topics in their programs.

In development premarital preparation programs, an either-or approach (issues or communication skills) appears counter productive. Issues needs were not perceived as unimportant, merely less important than communication skill needs in this study. Also, the perceived importance of these needs may increase with time.

Further research is needed in premarital counseling. This small-scale needs assessment is not enough to warrant strong conclusions, although it is a beginning. Researchers should conduct larger scale premarital counseling needs assessment investigations and otherwise become more active in premarital counseling.

Once it is known conclusively what premarital counseling needs are, the next logical step would be an evaluation of premarital counseling programs using different populations. It will be interesting to know if various programs are meeting the needs of the participants. Moreover, it will be interesting to know if participants in such programs view the programs as being very helpful. Perhaps some type of follow-up can be done after couples have been married a certain
amount of time. It would be useful to know if the premarital education has been conducive to future marital happiness, marital adjustment, and marital satisfaction.

Regardless of the direction future research takes, it is important that research continues to be an important component of premarital counseling programs. Today, with the climbing divorce rates, economic and social stresses, changing lifestyles, and emphasis on the affectual components of marriage, programs both prior to and during marriage are likely to grow. It is important to have some scientific understanding of the needs of participants in such programs as well before money, time, and energy are spent in their development.

Research Summary

In conclusion, the research shows that both the issues approach and the communication skills approach would most adequately meet the needs of premarital couples. However, the focus of such programs should be on the communication skills approach since subjects indicated this approach to be most needed based on the significant t-tests, mean scores, and relative rankings.
APPENDIX A

Premarital Needs Assessment Questionnaire

Age: 

Sex: 

Race: 

Marital Status: engaged married

How many years married: 

Highest educational level of father: 

Father's Occupation: 

Your educational level: freshman sophomore junior senior graduate student

Please rank on a scale from 1 (most helpful) to 10 (least helpful) how important you feel the topic would be in a premarital counseling experience.

a. Focus on specific issues in a marital relationship such as finances, sexuality, roles, religious practice, and family planning and child rearing.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   most helpful least helpful

   How would you rank each individual topic from a scale of 1 (most helpful) to 10 (least helpful).

b. Finances
   c. Sexuality
   d. Roles
   e. Religious Practice
   f. Family planning and child rearing

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   most helpful least helpful

g. Focus on communication aspects in the marital relationship such as the ability to express feelings openly and honestly, to resolve conflicts in a constructive manner, to actively listen and respond to the partner express thoughts and feelings, to recognize non-verbal communication, and to become more sensitive to partner's needs and feelings.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   most helpful least helpful
Premarital Needs Assessment Questionnaire

How would you rank each individual communication skill on a scale of 1 (most helpful) to 10 (least helpful).

h. The ability to express feelings openly and honestly
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

i. To resolve conflicts in a constructive manner
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

j. To actively listen and respond to the partner express thoughts and feelings
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

k. To recognize non-verbal communication
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

l. To become more sensitive to partner's needs and feelings
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Now, I would like you to rank these items from 1 (most helpful) to 10 (least helpful) in terms of what you would like to see in a premarital education program. Each item should have a different number from 1-10.

m. To recognize non-verbal communication
   

n. Religious practice-discussing how religion will be practiced in the home
   

o. Finances-discussing who will pay the bills, who will deal out the money, how money will be spent
   

p. The ability to express feelings openly and honestly
   

q. To resolve conflicts in a constructive manner
   

r. To actively listen and respond to the partner express thoughts and feelings
   

s. Sexuality-who will be responsible for birth control; who will initiate sexual encounters
   

t. Roles-who will have various responsibilities in the home
   

u. To become more sensitive to partner's needs and feelings
   

v. Family planning and child rearing
   

APPENDIX B

Cover Letter

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student in the Department of Family Relations and Human Development interested in investigating the topic of premarital counseling. I am most interested in what engaged couples would view as helpful if they had the opportunity to participate in a premarital counseling experience and what married couples would view as helpful if they had had the opportunity to participate in a premarital counseling experience prior to marriage. This information will greatly help me in my research and hopefully help family life educators and counselors in planning premarital education programs which will adequately meet the needs of participants. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential. Please read all questions carefully and answer them as accurately and honestly as possible. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Myra R. Block

Myra R. Block

Dr. Patrick C. McKenney
APPENDIX C

Consent Form

I consent to participating in a study entitled Premarital Needs Assessment. Myra R. Block has explained the purpose of the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Further, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without any prejudice to me. The information obtained from me will remain confidential and anonymous unless I specifically agree otherwise.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I have signed it freely and voluntarily and understand a copy is available upon request.

Date: ___________ Signed: __________________

[Signature]

Principal Investigators
REFERENCES


________. The first credit course in preparation for family living. *Marriage and Family Living*, 1941, 3, 67-68.


