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### The relationship between premarital sexual behaviors and the state of the marriage

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PREMARITAL SEXUAL  
BEHAVIORS AND THE STATE OF THE MARRIAGE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science

in

The School of Human Ecology

By  
Allison Claire Rayburn  
B.S., Louisiana State University, 2005  
May 2007

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“Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory,  
for the sake of Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness!”  
Psalms 115:1

First and foremost, I thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for guiding me and teaching me in my experience. Without Him, I would be lost and doomed for eternity, but for some reason He loved me. I’m not sure why He has brought me here, but I pray that what I have learned will be used for His glory in preaching the message of His cross throughout the world. I also thank my wonderful and supportive husband, Justin, who through all of my stress and frustration remained patient and encouraging. Thank you for loving me as you do and demonstrating for me a life founded on Christ.

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## ABSTRACT

The current study examined the possible relationship between premarital sexual behaviors and the state of the marriage as reported by women. Participants were recruited from local Southern Baptist churches and were sent an anonymous mail-out questionnaire; 36 women returned questionnaires that were usable for analyses. Bivariate correlations for the variables that were considered demonstrated that the number of premarital sexual intercourse partners for the participant and her husband were strongly and negatively correlated to marital satisfaction, marital stability, low divorce thoughts, and feelings about the marriage. An analysis of variance showed that the women who experienced premarital sex (intercourse or oral sex) with at least one noncommitted partner had lower marital satisfaction than the women who did not experience premarital sex with a noncommitted partner.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The occurrence of premarital sexual behaviors for adolescents and adults alike has become increasingly more accepted in today's society (Garrison, Smith, & Besharov, 1994). With 69% of female adolescents and 64% of male adolescents aged 18-19 having had experienced sexual intercourse although never married (Abma, Martinez, Mosher, & Dawson, 2004), specific concerns for unmarried sexually active individuals are apparent. If unwed individuals are not taking advantage of the various forms of contraception, the risk of an unwanted pregnancy is present. The four leading STDs in the U.S., which account for 14.5 million new STD cases each year, are Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), Trichomoniasis, Chlamydia, and Genital Herpes; these four STDs are transmitted by skin-to-skin contact and cannot be prevented by any form of protection available (Louisiana Governor's Program on Abstinence, 2005). The most prevalent STD, HPV (Center for Disease Control, 2005), is the cause of nearly 100% of all cervical cancer worldwide (American Cancer Society [ACA], 2005). Also, the nonuse or misuse of sexual protection may lead to an increase in the rate of other sexually transmitted diseases. Concerns that are not apparent may also be present. Premarital sexual intercourse has also been linked to future marital dissolution (Heaton, 2002; Kahn & London, 1991; Teachman, 2003); however, research on this relationship is scarce.

In addition to the increased rate of premarital sex, the rate of cohabitation outside of the marriage relationship has greatly increased. It is said that only about 8% of the population were involved in cohabiting unions in the 1960's (Bumpass, 1990). In our society today, of the 62% of women under age 44 who have ever been married, approximately 50% of them have cohabited at some point in their lives. In addition to this, 10% of women under age 44 have cohabited but have never been married (Bramlet & Mosher, 2002). Many studies have linked cohabitation to



both future marital trouble and divorce (Amato & Booth, 1997; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Heaton, 2002; Kamp Dush, Cohan, & Amato, 2003; Larson & Holman, 1994; Thomson & Coletta, 1992). It is also been suggested that premarital sexual intercourse has a similar relationship to the future marriage (Kahn & London, 1991; Teachman, 2003; Whyte, 1990); this relationship, however, is not as thoroughly researched as is the relationship between cohabitation and the marriage. The purpose of the current study is to examine the relationship between premarital sexual behaviors, including cohabitation, and the state of the first marriage.

### 1.1 Rationale for the Study

According to Waite and Gallagher (2000), the defining characteristic of the cohabitation relationship that distinguishes it from other non-marital romantic relationships may be the high importance of the sexual relationship between the partners. As a result, cohabitation may be negatively related to marital stability and satisfaction because of the sexual relationship that existed between the cohabiting partners prior to marriage. The study intended to examine the relationship between premarital sexual behaviors and the state of the marriage to clarify the associations that are present within and outside of the occurrence of cohabitation.

The current study also expanded on a previous study conducted by Teachman (2003) that considered the occurrence of premarital sexual relationships and future marital disruption. The study found that when women experienced sexual intercourse prior to marriage with individuals other than her husband, her probability of divorce increased. However, when sexual intercourse was limited to only her future husband, there was little risk of marital disruption. The proposed study will examine the relationship between various heterosexual premarital sexual behaviors and marital satisfaction and stability among women. Similar to Teachman, the study considered the commitment level that the individuals felt toward their sexual partner during the time of the

premarital sexual act and the occurrence of sexual behaviors that were limited to only their husbands.

## 1.2 Definitions

For the purposes of the current study, *marital satisfaction* was defined as the happiness or contentment that an individual feels about the relationship with their spouse. *Marital stability* referred to the bond or commitment within a marriage relationship that is evidenced by the ability of the marriage to endure through time. *Premarital sexual behaviors* referred to the various types of sexual behaviors that involve intentional stimulation of the genital area that occurred before a marriage. Specific sexual behaviors (i.e., oral sex, vaginal intercourse) will be explicitly stated when the terms are referenced.

## 1.3 Assumptions

A major assumption of the current study was that females may show more concern for past sexual relationships than males. This assumption was derived from the sexual double standard that may be present in the U.S. for males and females (Muehlenhard & McCoy, 1991). It was assumed that females may be more concerned about the past sexual relationships of their current husbands because of the emotional connections that they may believe to exist between their husband and past sexual partners. It was also assumed that females would experience greater remorse or guilt for past sexual decisions than males, because premarital sexual experiences may be less socially acceptable for females than for males.

## CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Recent research on the relationship between premarital sexual behaviors and future marital satisfaction is scant, if at all existent. An Internet search in April, 2006, on WebFeat that searched 47 databases on the keywords “premarital sex” and “marital satisfaction” retrieved 277 resources. Of the 277 resources that were found, only 2 were relevant to the relationship between premarital sex and marital satisfaction; both of these articles were published before 1990 (cf. Kelly & Conley, 1987; Shope & Broderick, 1967). There are, however, more recent studies that consider the link between premarital intercourse and marital dissolution (Kahn & London, 1991; Whyte, 1990; Teachman, 2003). A positive association has been suggested between premarital intercourse and the risk of future marital dissolution (Kahn & London, 1991; Teachman, 2003). The positive association, however, may diminish when premarital intercourse is limited to one’s husband (Teachman, 2003). Whyte (1990) found that premarital sex was not positively or negatively associated with marital success. Whyte claimed that neither those who advocate for the advantages of premarital sex or those who advocate for the disadvantages of premarital sex may find support for their position.

Because of the scarcity of literature concerning this topic, the constructs of marital satisfaction and stability and premarital sexual behaviors were examined separately in order to aid in the understanding of the dynamics of the constructs. By examining the data in this way, similarities or dissimilarities that exist between the constructs may be determined.

### 2.1 The State of the Marriage

#### 2.1.1 Marital Stability

In 2005, the marriage rate for the U.S. was 7.5 marriages per 1,000 people of the total population. The divorce rate for the same year was 3.6 divorces per 1,000 people of the total

population (Munson & Sutton, 2006). With the percentage of marriages that end in divorce at about 50%, it may seem that individuals would be discouraged from entering into a marriage union. However, over 90% of emerging adults reported that marriage was their ultimate relationship goal amidst the continuing threat of marital instability (Arnett, 2004).

Many aspects of premarital and marital relationships have been found to predict marital stability or dissolution. Heaton (2002) found that factors such as higher rates of cohabitation, more experiences of premarital sexual behaviors, and heterogamy of demographic variables between partners may be related to higher levels of marital dissolution. One of the most notable predictors, perhaps, is the age at which an individual marries. Researchers have consistently linked a younger age at marriage to future marital dissolution (Booth & Edwards, 1985; Bumpass, Castro-Martin, & Sweet, 1991; Feng, Giarrusso, Bengtson, & Frye, 1999; Heaton, 2002). Booth and Edwards (1985) suggested that the marital instability evidenced in couples who married at a young age was due to a lack of sexual exclusiveness in the marriage and the inadequate performances of marital roles.

The age at the first marriage, however, continues to rise in our society. During the 1950's, the age at the first marriage was lower than at any other time during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the U.S., with men marrying at the average age of 22.7 years and women at the average age of 20.2 years. In 2005, the average age at the first marriage was 27.1 years and 25.3 years for men and women, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Heaton (2002) proposed that the rising age at the time of marriage is responsible for a recent decrease in the divorce rate. Heaton suggested that, as evidenced by the divorce rate that began slowly decreasing in 1980 and has presently leveled out, marital stability in the United States may be increasing rather than decreasing. The perceived effect of the rising age at the time of marriage may counteract the

experiences and characteristics that are thought to lead to higher marital dissolution (Heaton, 2002).

According to Wright (1982), a Christian premarital counselor, particular changes in society posed a threat to marital stability regardless of the increasing age at marriage. One change that could be perceived as a threat to marital stability was the shift of the family's focus away from the extended family and toward the nuclear family; this shift could be believed to reduce the amount of resources available to the husband and wife. Another possible threat to marital stability mentioned by Wright was the independence of the mate selection process among individuals involved. A couple in the year 2006 may not be as likely as a couple in the mid 1900's to consider other's opinions regarding their choice of a mate. Wright also claimed that undefined roles, rather than the fixed male and female roles found in a traditional marriage, may jeopardize marital stability. Lastly, Wright declared that the declining sexual morality of our society could have a negative impact on marital stability (cf. Popenoe, 1996). Overall, Wright blamed societal attitudes and people within the institution of marriage, not the institution itself, for threatening marital stability.

Gottman (1994a), one of the most prominent researchers on the topic of marital stability and divorce, suggested that there are two types of marriages based on interactive behavior of spouses: regulated and nonregulated. Regulated couples are those whose ratio of positive to negative behaviors within interactions was at least five positive behaviors to every one negative behavior; nonregulated couples, however, had a ratio of less than five positive behaviors to a negative behavior (Gottman 1994a, 1994b). Gottman claimed that when a healthy ratio of five to one is not maintained, the couple is at risk for progressing down a cascade of harmful communicative behaviors. The cascade begins with criticism or complaining, which leads to

contempt, which leads to defensiveness, which results in one spouse completely withdrawing or stonewalling. The four harmful behaviors have been called the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Gottman suggested that negative interactions between spouses were not unhealthy, but the use of any of the Four Horsemen was dysfunctional.

### 2.1.2 Marital Satisfaction

Several studies have suggested that marital satisfaction can be predicted by the satisfaction and quality of the premarital relationship of the couple (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989; Markman, Ressick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993). One notable assessment of the premarital relationship is the PREPARE inventory (Fowers & Olson, 1992). Fowers and Olson (1992) used the PREPARE inventory to place couples into one of four typologies: *Vitalized*, *Harmonious*, *Traditional*, and *Conflicted*. Vitalized couples are characterized as being highly satisfied with their romantic relationship. Harmonious couples have a moderate level of relational satisfaction and unrealistic views of marriage. Traditional couples are categorized by slight relational dissatisfaction and realistic views of marriage. Conflicted couples are seen as the most dissatisfied with their relationship and demonstrate high levels of conflict. These four premarital couple types are believed to be predictive of future marital satisfaction (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996).

Greeley (1991) suggested that the congenial character of the spouse, the agreement of values, high levels of communication, and satisfaction with the sex life were adequate predictors of marital happiness. He suggested that the two strongest predictors of marital satisfaction were the kindness and gentleness of the spouse and the feeling of importance to the relationship. Greeley also found a positive relationship between social class and marital happiness; the higher one's income, the more likely they were to report a more satisfying marriage.

Marital satisfaction may contribute to the various advantages experienced by spouses. Happy marriages may improve the physical, psychological, and financial health of spouses. Spouses, especially men, who are satisfied with their marriages, are more likely to abandon unhealthy or harmful behaviors upon marriage, thereby improving their physical health and increasing their longevity of life (Waite, 2002; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Satisfied marriages are negatively related to levels of depression, anxiety, and distress (Waite, 2002). These psychological benefits, however, are only present when the marriage is reportedly happy; unhappy spouses tend to report higher levels of distress than unmarried individuals (Ross, 1995). Although marriages may be generally slightly less satisfying than the 1970's, the majority of researchers agree that marriage improves the emotional well-being of spouses (Waite, 2000).

Marriage also presents a financial advantage to spouses. For wives, particularly, marriage provides a higher household income than women who are single or cohabiting (Waite, 2002). Also, healthy marriages are characterized by the specialization of the financial role, which allows the more financially adept spouse to handle the finances (Seltzer, 2004; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). This improves the financial situation for spouses over the cohabiting and single.

### 2.1.3 Religiosity

Religion has become a topic of increased interest in connection with the marital relationship. Religiosity, which is defined largely by participation in religious activities, has been consistently linked to higher marital stability and satisfaction (Larson & Swyers, 2002; Larson & Goltz, 1989; Vaughn & Heaton, 1997). In addition to religiosity, spirituality or assigning sacred attributes to marriage has been shown to be strongly correlated with marital satisfaction; spiritual significance of the marriage predicts more marital investment, lower levels of conflict, and more cooperation in resolving arguments (Mahoney et al., 1999; Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-

Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003). Some of the aspects of spiritual beliefs among religious couples that may impact the state of the marriage are the anti-divorce or pro-marriage nature of spiritual beliefs, the homogeneity of beliefs among couples, and the marital support that accompanies belief in God (Marks, 2005).

In his Biblical writings, Paul connects the love between the husband and the wife with the love between God and “His church” (cf. Eph. 5: 22-28). Because of spiritual doctrines such as this, the marital relationship may be influenced by the view of God that is held by Christian (or other religious) individuals (Greeley, 1991). Similarly, Dollahite and Lambert (in press) found that the high rates of sexual fidelity in religious couples is reinforced by the spiritual significance of their marriage, the marital commitment made before God, the values derived from religion, and the accountability of a religious standard.

It has been suggested that religious or spiritual individuals have better marital adjustment, find more meaning or significance with their marriage, and are active in improving their marriage, therefore making their marriages more stable and satisfying than the marriages of non-religious or non-spiritual individuals (Larson & Swyers, 2002). Particular religious activities are consistently related to marital stability and satisfaction. These activities may promote familial closeness and bonding (Marks, 2004). For example, it has been shown that the more frequently husbands and wives attend church together, the more committed they were to making their marriage last (Larson & Goltz, 1989). Also, the use of prayer and Bible study during marital problems has been associated with high marital adjustment among Christian couples (Gruner, 1985). Prayer may supply couples with a special love for their spouse and an appropriate way to resolve conflict (Marks, 2005). It is important to note, however, that the positive outcomes associated with religious activities are found for only the spouses who share the same faith; when



spouses differ in their faiths, religious activities may have a deleterious influence on the stability and satisfaction of the marriage (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993).

Greeley (1991) found that of the religious variables considered in his study, joint prayer and agreement of religious values were the most important to the satisfaction of a marriage. Joint prayer was considered to be a strength to marriages, which increased marital stability. Greeley found that 30% of spouses who did not pray together believed that divorce was a possibility, whereas only 11% of spouses who did pray together considered divorce an option. Greeley also reported that spouses who frequently engaged in joint prayer were more likely to be reconciled with their spouse after experiencing serious marital trouble and were more likely to experience increased levels of sexual satisfaction.

#### 2.1.4 Sexuality

Sexual satisfaction is reportedly greatest among monogamous married couples than among cohabiting and dating couples (Christopher & Sprecher, 2000; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). In one study, 48% of husbands reported that sex with their wife was emotionally satisfying, and 50% of husbands found married sex physically satisfying. In the same study, only 37% and 39% of cohabiting men found sex with their partners emotionally satisfying and physically satisfying, respectively. Married women and cohabiting women have reported being similar in their measures of sexual satisfaction; 42% of wives and 39% of cohabiting women have reported emotional satisfaction with their sex lives (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). However, married women were found to be five times more likely to remain monogamous than women who were dating or women who were cohabiting (Forste & Tanfer, 1996). Husbands and wives also reported that sex in marriage continued to improve over time because of the close proximity, the long-term

commitment, the exclusivity, and the emotional bonding that marriage promotes (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Sexual satisfaction may also be linked to marital stability (Greeley, 1991). It has been shown that when spouses find their sex life satisfying, they have a lower likelihood of considering a divorce as an option. Sexual satisfaction, which may be connected to personal values, may also discourage a positive relationship between value disagreement of spouses and marital dissolution (Greeley, 1991). Communication about sex has also been associated with marital sexual satisfaction and marital adjustment. It has been suggested that satisfaction with sexual communication may increase sexual satisfaction, which contributes to the dyadic adjustment in a marriage (Cupach & Comstock, 1990).

## 2.2 Cohabitation

### 2.2.1 The Cohabitation Effect

Couples who cohabit before marriage face greater chances of divorcing than the couples who do not cohabit before marriage (Amato & Booth, 1997; Bumpass et al., 1991; DeMaris & Leslie, 1984; Kamp Dush et al., 2003; Schoen, 1992; Stafford, Kline, & Rankin, 2004; Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). The cohabiters also tend to experience lower marital satisfaction than the noncohabiters (Brown & Booth, 1996; Kamp Dush et al., 2003; Kline et al., 2004; Skinner, Bahr, Crane, & Call, 2002; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). The lower levels of marital stability and satisfaction that are associated with cohabitation are commonly called the *cohabitation effect*. Although it has been suggested that the cohabitation effect may be diminishing as cohabitation becomes more common (Schoen, 1992), the relationship between cohabitation and the cohabitation effect has been consistently replicated in many studies that cover different populations and researcher biases, as evidenced in the selection

of references listed above. The reasons for the cohabitation effect, however, are still being debated.

Many researchers have proposed that the decline in the marital stability and satisfaction that is seen in spouses who cohabit before marriage may be due to selection (Lillard, Brien, & Waite, 1995; Stanley et al., 2004; Woods & Emery, 2002). They suggest that the individuals who choose to cohabit before getting married are qualitatively different than the individuals who choose not to cohabit. The difference in the two groups is what may cause the difference in the levels of marital stability and satisfaction that are seen later. Although many researchers agree that the cohabitation effect may be due to selection, they offer different explanations for the variable that distinguishes cohabiters and noncohabiters.

According to Thomson and Colella (1992), there are at least three ways that selection may influence the cohabitation effect. The first type of selection is that the couples who cohabit may have had poorer relationships than the noncohabiters. Couples may have chosen to cohabit in order to delay marriage because they perceive the threat of poorer relational stability and satisfaction. When these cohabiters eventually married, they may have had an inferior relationship compared to the couples who did not consider cohabitation necessary, causing the decline in marital stability and satisfaction. A second type of selection that was suggested by Thomson and Colella is that the noncohabiters may have been more committed to the institution of marriage than the cohabiters. Because of the lack of commitment to marriage, the cohabiters may have been more likely than noncohabiters to choose to end a marriage that was low in satisfaction. This does not suggest, however, that the cohabiters were less committed to their partners, but that the institution of marriage was defined differently by the two groups. The third possibility that was discussed is that cohabiters may have viewed relationships in “individual”

terms rather than in “couple” terms. If cohabiters viewed themselves as two individuals after a marriage, they may have been more willing to pursue a divorce when either partner was unhappy with their marriage.

An issue not addressed by Thomson and Colella were the values and attitudes concerning cohabitation and marriage, namely those related to religion. For example, religious couples are both less likely to cohabit and more likely to have satisfying and stable marriages. These outcomes may be related to the beliefs and values held by religious affiliations (Mahoney et al., 1999; Mahoney et al., 2003; Roche, 1986; Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2005; Smith & Denton, 2005).

Some researchers suggested that the experience of cohabitation may affect an individual’s attitudes toward marriage and romantic relationships (Axinn & Barber, 1997; Kamp Dush et al., 2003; Magdol, Moffitt, & Caspi, 1998). Kamp Dush and colleagues (2003) claimed that there are certain demographic characteristics that make people more prone to entering into cohabitation, but there are also processes involved with cohabitation that may change the attitudes and the behaviors of people toward marriage. They proposed that the attitudes and the behaviors that may result from cohabitation can damage the levels of marital stability and satisfaction within the relationship. For example, a couple may change the legality of their relationship to marriage but keep the interaction of the relationship the same as when they cohabited.

It has been found that when couples enter cohabitation with the intention of a future marriage, they may escape the negative trends and findings of cohabitation that are commonly reported. The couples who cohabited with the intention to marry tended to show the same general trends and characteristics as the couples who waited until marriage to move in together

(Kline et al., 2004; Skinner et al., 2002). Although the couples who cohabited before an engagement showed the highest risk for relational distress, both cohabiting before and after engagement were still linked to less positive interactions between the couple than waiting until marriage to live together (Kline et al., 2004). It is possible that when a couple cohabited with an expectation of marriage, the relationship was not stigmatized and is accepted as a natural stage of the relationship (Skinner et al., 2002). In this case, cohabitation may have been seen as closer to the institution of marriage than to dating.

### 2.2.2 Attitudes toward Cohabitation

In 2003, approximately half of adolescents reported a positive attitude toward cohabitation, with 27.0% and 22.6% reporting negative attitudes and no opinion, respectively (Martin, Specter, Martin, & Martin, 2003). After 1975, the idea among high school seniors that cohabitation is a good way to understand a romantic partner before getting married increased dramatically over the next 20 years (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Cohabitation is particularly more socially acceptable when the expectation of a future marriage is present, allowing cohabitation to be perceived as a stage of the courtship process (Skinner et al., 2002). Much of the stigma that was associated with cohabitation in previous years may be lifted from the individuals currently engaging in cohabitation (c.f. Yankelovich, 1981).

The blurring of the boundaries between marriage and cohabitation that was predicted to occur as cohabitation became more socially accepted, however, has not occurred. Cohabiting couples tend to make a strict distinction between themselves and a married couple (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). The lines between a dating relationship and cohabitation, however, may be a little more difficult to define. According to Seltzer (2004), it is sometimes difficult for a couple to define themselves as either cohabiting or not cohabiting. The term *semicohabiting* has been

assigned to the relationship status of these types of couples (Arnett, 2004). Semicohabiting describes a relationship when a couple maintains separate residences, but essentially live together at one residence or the other. This ambiguity of relationship status may ease couples into an increasing acceptance of cohabitation.

### 2.2.3 Marriage and Family Values

Those who choose to cohabit are portrayed in the literature as having fewer family-centered values than those who choose not to cohabit. Cohabitors in general tend to be less committed to the institution of marriage (Thomson & Colella, 1992). In addition to a weaker institutional commitment, the cohabiting males, specifically, are shown to have a weaker commitment to their partner than the married males (Nock, 1995; Thomson & Colella, 1992; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). After becoming married, the men who cohabited prior to marriage tend to be less committed to their spouse than the men who did not cohabit prior to marriage (Stanley et al., 2004). This lower commitment level that is seen among the cohabiting males may be partly explained by their rejection of an interdependency with their partner or spouse (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). The cohabiting couples tend to keep their resources separate and promote independence within the relationship. This ideology may be carried into a future marriage and may weaken the beneficial ties of interdependence, reducing the couple's commitment to one another.

### 2.2.4 Relational Communication and Conflict

Research has shown that the couples who cohabited tended to be poorer communicators than the noncohabiters (Thomson & Colella, 1992). Cohan and Kleinbaum (2002) found that cohabitation was statistically related to poorer communication skills in a future marriage. They also found that this trend did not differ between the individuals who experienced multiple

cohabiting unions and those who experienced only one cohabiting union. This phenomenon of poorer communication between the spouses who cohabited may have been due to an increased level of marital problems within the relationship (Amato & Booth, 1997; Booth & Johnson, 1988; DeMaris & Leslie, 1984).

In addition to poorer communication, cohabiters were shown to have a high probability of disagreement and conflict within their relationship (Amato & Booth, 1997; Booth & Johnson, 1988; DeMaris & Leslie, 1984; Kamp Dush et al., 2003; Stanley et al., 2004; Thomson & Colella, 1992). The increased conflict that is present within the cohabiting relationship was not likely to dissipate with a future marriage; however, couples who cohabited before an engagement were more likely than those who waited until engagement to experience distress and conflict within their future marriage (Kline et al., 2004). Stafford and colleagues (2004) found that the high levels of conflict that were present in a cohabiting relationship tended to linger within the relationship until at least the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the marriage. The types of conflicts that were present among cohabiters, if resolved at all (cf. Greeley, 1991), were also less likely to be solved in a positive manner (Amato & Booth, 1997; Booth & Johnson, 1988; DeMaris & Leslie, 1984) and were more likely to be solved through physical aggression (Stafford et al., 2004).

### 2.2.5 Sexuality

The cohabiting couples and the married spouses seem to be somewhat similar in the number of times that they engage in sexual intercourse over a specific amount of time (Stanley et al., 2004; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Even with the similar rates of sexual frequency between cohabiting couples and spouses, there is a discrepancy in the amount of sexual satisfaction that is reported. Cohabiting couples have reported lower levels of sexual satisfaction than married couples, particularly when married couples remained sexually faithful to their spouse (Laumann,

Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; Stanley et al., 2004). The findings of sexual satisfaction, however, differ between the genders. Waite and Gallagher (2000) found that a significantly smaller number of the cohabiting men reported being sexually satisfied than the married men. They also found that the cohabiting women were only slightly more likely to report less sexual satisfaction than the married women. This gender difference may be found because the commitment of a couple is thought to increase sexual satisfaction; the cohabiting women may be more likely to expect the relationship to end in a marriage than the cohabiting men (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Cohabitors are thought to be less likely than married couples to consider their relationship as sexually exclusive (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Many cohabiting couples, particularly couples who are not engaged, may have been unwilling to state that their partner will be the only person with whom they ever experience sex (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). The married women have been found to be five times less likely to cheat on their partners than the cohabiting women (Forste & Tanfer, 1996). Also, the likelihood of a woman being sexually unfaithful in her marriage greatly increased if the woman had cohabited prior to marriage (Forste & Tanfer, 1996).

## 2.3 Premarital Sexual Behaviors

### 2.3.1 Changes in Premarital Sexuality

From about 2000 BC to as late as the 1950's, some world religions, as well as science, believed that a loss of semen and female vaginal fluids was the cause of unexplainable pathologies among individuals. As a result, any type of sexual activity outside of marital intercourse for the purpose of procreation were considered evil and were discouraged (Bullough, 2001). With advances in scientific and medical knowledge, this belief has been contested and disproved; individuals are now free to participate in sexual behaviors without the fear of the



emission of semen or vaginal fluid. As important as the scientific and medical advances concerning sexuality are, they are not commonly thought to be the driving force behind the increased acceptance of premarital sex. It was not until the middle of the Sexual Revolution that spanned from 1948 to 1999, that there was an increase in the prevalence of premarital sex (Powell & Cassidy, 2001). In 1967, the large majority of society (85%) still considered premarital sex as morally wrong; this figure plummeted to 39% about a decade later (Yankelovich, 1981). The changing moralistic views of our society that are associated to the Sexual Revolution are thought to have influenced the changes in premarital sexual behavior.

As a result of the changing morality of society, premarital sexual behavior today may be generally more socially acceptable than premarital sexual behavior during the more conservative times of the early to middle 20<sup>th</sup> century (Garrison et al., 1994). In the 1970's, 28.6% of female adolescents aged 15-19 had experienced sexual intercourse prior to marriage (Division of Vital Statistics, 1991). Conversely, 42.9% of female high school students in 2001 reported having had premarital sexual intercourse at least once, with 14% of male and female students having had experienced intercourse with four or more partners in their lifetime (Granbaum et al., 2002).

The increasing trends of heterosexual premarital sexual intercourse are not only increasing among adolescents, but among adults as well. For the ever-married individuals born before 1910, 60.8% of males and 12.3% of females experienced sexual intercourse before marrying. For those born between 1940 and 1949, 89.5% and 62.5% of ever-married males and females had experienced heterosexual premarital sexual intercourse, respectively (Klassen et al., 1989). For women who were born after 1965, 72% experienced sexual intercourse prior to marriage (Whyte, 1990). This data indicated that individuals are entering into marriage with more premarital sexual experience than in times past.

Although the social acceptance of premarital sex may be increasing, the feelings of guilt and regret for past sexual behaviors may be increasing as well, particularly for women. Greeley (1991) found that for women under age 35, 51% reported feeling guilty for their past premarital sexual encounters, with 20% reporting strong regret. For women over the age of 35, only 30% reported regret for their premarital sexual encounters. Arnett (2004) found that among the emerging adults in his study, over 70% expressed regret for their experience with premarital sex in adolescence. Of those emerging adults who waited for sex until after age 18, however, none reported experiencing regret for their sexual behaviors. With more women experiencing premarital sexual behaviors in adolescence, the feelings of regret may be more likely regardless of the overall social acceptance of premarital sexual behaviors.

According to a study by Christopher and Cate (1984), four general reasons have been given for the decision to engage in premarital sex were (a) positive affect/communication, (b) arousal/receptivity, (c) obligation and pressure, and (d) circumstantial. Among women, positive affect and communication was listed as the most important whereas men listed obligation and pressure as the most salient reason. For individuals who were more sexually experienced, arousal and receptivity were reported as the most important reason for premarital sex (Christopher & Cate, 1984).

### 2.3.2 Oral Sex

In a study sponsored by *Seventeen Magazine* and the Kaiser Family Foundation, 26% of the adolescents surveyed stated that oral sex was always or usually part of a dating relationship, and 23% stated that oral sex was always or usually part of a casual relationship (Kaiser Family Foundation & *Seventeen Magazine*, 2002). According to a national survey of adolescents and young adults, 40% of males and 32% of females aged 15-17 reported participating in

heterosexual oral sex (Hoff, Greene, & Davis, 2003). Twenty-four percent of the adolescents stated they had had oral sex to avoid having sexual intercourse (Hoff et al., 2003). Among young adults aged 18-24, 73% of males and 58% of females reported having had oral sex; the marital status of the young adults, however, was not clearly defined (Hoff et al., 2003). Another study of premarital sexual behavior found that by engagement, 87% of males reported giving and receiving oral sex. Also, 74% of females claimed that they had received oral sex, and 72% of females claimed that they had given oral sex (Roche & Ramsbey, 1993).

### 2.3.3 Religion and Sex

A high level of religiosity, typically defined by the frequency of attendance of religious services or by self-definition, is thought to have a negative relationship with the number of premarital sexual experiences (Barkan, 2006; Mahoney et al., 2003; Roehlkepartain et al., 2005; Smith & Denton, 2005). College students who perceive sexual intercourse as an activity that contains spiritual character and spiritual significance were likely to experience high levels of premarital intercourse. However, college students who reported greater general religiousness experienced lower levels of premarital intercourse (Mahoney et al., 2003). Likewise, highly religious high school students reported choosing to remain sexually abstinent because of religion; the same students reported that their non-religious friends were highly involved in premarital sexual behaviors (Smith & Denton, 2005).

Barkan (2006) found that the belief that premarital sex is wrong accounted for a large portion of the inverse relationship between religiosity and number of premarital sexual partners among never-married adults. Barkan also found that the inverse relationship was consistent between both genders but was not present among African Americans.

Cochran, Chamlin, Beeghley, and Fenwick (2004), however, found weak evidence supporting the hypothesis that the level of religiosity has an inverse relationship with the occurrence of premarital sexual behaviors. According to the study, the premarital sexual behaviors of religious individuals looked similar to the premarital sexual behaviors of non-religious individuals. The researchers did find that for conservative Protestants and Catholics, church attendance and personal identification with religion were inversely related to the prevalence of premarital sex. The negative findings of Cochran et al. may be explained by the measurement criteria for religiosity. Religious affiliation alone is not perceived to be an accurate predictor for premarital sexual involvement; when using religiosity as a predictor variable, it is important to consider the level of active involvement in religion (cf. Marks & Beal, in press).

#### 2.3.4 Sexual Abstinence

The definition of sexual abstinence is debated among abstinence-until-marriage program directors, instructors, and participants. According to program directors, sexual abstinence is usually defined as the complete avoidance or self-denial of sexual behaviors, including oral sex. Abstinence-only instructors and participants tended to define abstinence differently; they tended to define abstinence as the avoidance of sexual intercourse only (Goodson, Suther, Pruitt, & Wilson, 2003). It seems that most researchers agree with the majority of program instructors and participants; most research that has reported on sexual abstinence considered the abstinence of sexual intercourse only.

The 5.5 million male adolescents and 5.2 million female adolescents aged 15-19 who reported never having had sexual intercourse listed religion and morality (31.4% of males; 37.8% of females) and the fear of pregnancy (25.2% of males; 18.7% of females) as the main reasons for their sexual abstinence (Abma et al., 2004). Another study found that individuals

who chose to remain sexually abstinent reported four reasons for their decisions: inadequate love within the relationship, fear of STDs and pregnancy, beliefs supporting sexual abstinence, and feelings of inadequacy or insecurity (Sprecher & Regan, 1996). Other reasons that have been given for remaining sexually abstinent before marriage relate to the quality of the couple's relationship. Avoiding sexual activity before marriage may be believed to assure the couple that their relationship is not based on a primarily physical foundation. Sexual abstinence also may allow a couple to avoid guilt and to avoid comparing or being compared to a previous sexual partner (Wright, 1982).

## 2.4 Summary

There are apparent medical, educational, and financial implications for the increase in premarital sexual behaviors. Studies have also suggested that premarital sexual behaviors are linked to marital dissolution (Heaton, 2002; Kahn & London, 1991; Teachman, 2003). It is possible that low marital satisfaction may coexist with the low marital stability of couples who have experienced premarital sex. This relationship, however, may not have been recently considered in the empirical research.

There is, however, a wealth of literature that claimed that the couples who cohabit before marriage are more likely to experience lower marital satisfaction and are more likely to divorce than the couples who do not cohabit before marriage. According to Waite and Gallagher (2000), the defining characteristic of the cohabitation relationship that distinguishes it from other non-marital romantic relationships could be the high importance of the sexual relationship between the partners. As a result, cohabitation may be negatively related to marital stability and satisfaction because of the sexual relationship that existed between the cohabiting partners prior to marriage.

Within the abundance of literature that examines the marriage, there is still room for additional questions that deserve empirical consideration. There is a shortage of research that is focused on premarital sexual behaviors and the future marriage. In an attempt to reduce this gap in knowledge, the current study further examined premarital sexual behaviors and the relationship that they have with the state of the future marriage.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODS

### 3.1 Participants

The criteria for participation in the reported study included the following: non-pregnant female, over the age of 18, in a first marriage, and married for 7 years or less. Participants were recruited through local Southern Baptist churches in the Baton Rouge area. The pastors of 14 churches from the Baptist Association of Greater Baton Rouge were contacted by the researcher about participation. Five pastors agreed to assist in participant recruitment; Two pastors supplied the U.S. Post Office addresses of members who met the participation criteria and questionnaire packets were mailed to those addresses ( $n = 37$ ). Three pastors agreed to personally distribute the questionnaire packets to their members; two of the three churches mailed the packets ( $n = 144$ ), and one of them handed out the packets before a church service ( $n = 19$ ).

Although all of the surveys were distributed through Southern Baptist churches, 2 of the participants reported that they were Catholic, and 4 reported that they were Non-denominational. All but 1 of the participants were Caucasian; one chose “other” and reported being “French.” The ages ranged from 20 to 34 for the wives and from under 20 to 40 for their husbands. The majority of the participants ( $n = 12$ ) were between the ages of 26 and 28 with the mean age about 26. The mean age for the participants’ husbands was about 29 years.

The researcher assumed that all of the participants were in their first marriages because that was a condition for participation in the study. Only 3 of the participants reported that her husband was not in his first marriage. The number of children (including any stepchildren) ranged from 0 to 3; half of the participants had no children at the time of the survey.

The majority of the participants (91.66%) had at least some college education. Only 8.33% of the participants did not receive education beyond high school. All of the participants’

husbands received education beyond high school. Of the husbands, 8.33% went to a trade or technical school, 16.67% received some college, 55.56% graduated from college, and 19.44% attained a graduate degree.

## 3.2 Procedures

### 3.2.1 Instrument Construction

The purpose of the current study was to examine the relationship between heterosexual premarital sexual behaviors and the state of the current marriage in families of faith. Self-report likert-type questionnaires were developed to measure three constructs: (a) the state of the marriage, (b) heterosexual premarital sexual behaviors, and (c) religiosity.

### 3.2.2 Constructs

3.2.2.1 The State of the Marriage. To measure this construct, questionnaires that used a likert scale that ranged from *1 (strongly disagree)* to *7 (strongly agree)* were adapted from Norton (1983). Questions from Rollins and Feldman (1970) were included and used a likert-type scale that ranged from *never* to *all the time* or *more than once a day*. To measure the companionship and sexual satisfaction of the marriage, questions developed by Burr (1967) were used. These questions used a likert-type scale that ranged from *never* to *very frequently*, from *none* to *a great deal*, or from *very dissatisfied* to *perfectly satisfied*, which varied for the questions. An abbreviated version of the Marital Instability Index (Booth, Johnson, & Edwards, 1983) was also included in the questionnaire to assess the reliability of the positive association found between premarital sexual behaviors and marital dissolution (Kahn & London, 1991; Teachman, 2003). The participants rated their feelings about their marriage using a semantic differential scale. (See Appendix A for the measures of the state of the marriage.)



3.2.2.2 Heterosexual Premarital Sexual Behaviors. The occurrence of various types of heterosexual premarital sexual behaviors (i.e., vaginal intercourse, giving oral sex, receiving oral sex, and cohabitation) was reported by the participants. The participants indicated the number of partners (*1 to 6 or more*) that they had had for each sexual behavior. The participants also indicated the number of sexual partners that they had considered to be within a committed relationship and those within a noncommitted relationship. The participants reported whether their sexual intercourse and cohabitation before marriage were limited only to their husband; they also reported the number of sexual intercourse partners that their husband had before marriage. The participants indicated their feelings about their past sexual behaviors on a semantic differential scale. (See Appendix B for the measures of premarital sexual behaviors.)

3.2.2.3 Religiosity. The religiosity construct was measured by how often the participants and their husbands participated in the following activities individually and as a couple: attending religious services, praying, and reading the Bible. Participants reported how long they and their husbands had attended a Christian church. The participants also indicated the percentage of their income that they gave to faith-based operations. (See Appendix C for the measures of religiosity.)

### 3.2.3 Administration

Although participants were given an opportunity to enter a drawing to win one of three \$50.00 gift certificates to a local book store for a participation incentive, the response rate was relatively low. Questionnaires were mailed to 210 women, and 38 questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 18.57%. Two surveys were eliminated from statistical analysis ( $n = 36$ ) due to missing data on questions that measured a major variable.

## CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Reported Premarital Sexual Behaviors

Among the 36 participants whose data were analyzed, 83.3% engaged in either sexual intercourse or oral sex before marriage. Of those who experienced premarital sexual behaviors, 30.0% performed sexual behaviors with only their husband, and 70.0% performed sexual behaviors with others. Only 16.7% abstained from both sexual intercourse and oral sex before marriage. Of those who had premarital sexual experience, 3.3% experienced only intercourse, 33.3% experienced oral sex only, and 63.3% experienced both intercourse and oral sex (see Table 1).

Table 1  
Distribution of Sexual Behaviors with Sexual Partners for Participants Who Experienced Premarital Sexual Behaviors ( $n = 30$ )

Sexual behaviors	Sexual partners			Total
	Husband only	Husband and others	Others only	
Intercourse only	0 (0.0%)	1 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.3%)
Oral sex only	6 (20.0%)	4 (13.3%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (33.3%)
Both	3 (10.0%)	13 (43.3%)	3 (10.0%)	19 (63.3%)
Total	9 (30.0%)	18 (60.0%)	3 (10.0%)	30 (100.0%)

Twenty-four participants (66.7%) did not cohabit with anyone before marriage. Of the 11 participants (30.6%) who cohabited with one person before marriage, 10 cohabited with their husband and 1 cohabited with someone other than their husband. Only 1 participant cohabited with her husband and someone in addition to her husband.

## 4.2 Construction of Composite Variables

Specific questions that measured the state of the marriage were combined to construct composite variables that measured different aspects of the marriage (see Appendix A). To measure the overall marital satisfaction of the participants, 16 items were added, and the sum was used as the marital satisfaction score. The overall marital stability was measured by the sum of seven items that measured the participant's perception of the stability of the marriage. The participant's general marital sexual satisfaction was measured by the sum of three items that addressed the sex life in the marriage. The items created by Booth, Johnson, and Edwards (1983) were added and the sum was used as the "low divorce thoughts" score; a high score for this variable indicated that the participant had fewer thoughts about getting a divorce. The scores on the semantic differential scale were added and the sum was used to measure the participants' feelings about their marriage.

To measure the premarital sexual experience of the participants, the number of committed and noncommitted partners was added for each individual behavior. Because the giving and receiving of oral sex could have been performed with the same partner, the behaviors were considered separately rather than as one measure of oral sex. Therefore, there are four measures of premarital sexual behaviors: intercourse, receiving oral sex, giving oral sex, and cohabitation. The semantic differential scale scores were added and the sum was used to measure the participants' feelings about their premarital sexual experience. See Appendix B for measures of the premarital sexual behaviors.

To measure the overall level of religiosity, the scores for 6 items that measured faith were added and the sum was used as the religiosity score (see Appendix C). The question,

“Approximately what percentage of your income do you give to faith-based operations?” was eliminated from the religiosity score because of the large number of missing responses.

### 4.3 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, ranges, and bivariate correlations for the composite variables, the number of premarital sexual partners for the husband, and the tithe percentage. Overall, the group scored relatively high on the measures of marital satisfaction, marital stability, and feelings about their marriage. The group also scored high for low divorce thoughts. The score for low divorce thoughts indicated that, in general, the group experienced few, if any, thoughts of getting a divorce. Because the correlations between the four composite variables mentioned here—marital satisfaction, marital stability, feelings about marriage, and low divorce thoughts—were extremely high, it may be that these variables measured the same construct.

The number of premarital intercourse partners was the most reliable predictor for four of the state-of-the-marriage variables. The participants’ number of premarital sexual intercourse partners was highly, but negatively, correlated to marital satisfaction ( $r = -.54, p < .001$ ), marital stability ( $r = -.53, p < .001$ ), low divorce thoughts ( $r = -.52, p < .001$ ), and feelings about their marriage ( $r = -.54, p < .001$ ). The number of premarital oral sex partners showed a negative relationship with only one variable used to measure the state of the marriage; the more partners that the participants had received premarital oral sex from, the less likely they were to have a stable marriage.

The number of intercourse partners that the husband had had before marriage was strongly related to the state of the marriage. The higher the number of reported intercourse partners for the husband, the lower the marital satisfaction ( $r = -.51, p < .002$ ), the lower the

Table 2  
Correlations for Predictor and Outcome Variables ( $n = 36$ )

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	Range	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Marital satisfaction	80.81 (11.90)	45 to 96	.8303***	.6817***	.8579***	.9168***	-.5443***	-.2870	-.1939	-.4090*	.2616	.3663*	-.5103**	.3395
2. Marital stability	46.56 (5.42)	29 to 49		.5789***	.8740***	.9531***	-.5346***	-.3346*	-.2286	-.4396**	.2688	.3062	-.4065*	.3164
3. Sexual satisfaction	11.24 (3.54)	3 to 16			.5425***	.6224***	-.3040	-.2248	-.1009	-.1794	.2625	.2407	-.2293	.0570
4. Low divorce thoughts	5.19 (1.62)	0 to 6				.9118***	-.5219**	-.1996	-.0807	-.3426*	.1898	.3356*	-.4839**	.3215
5. Feelings about marriage	64.33 (9.79)	33 to 70					-.5449***	-.2902	-.1925	-.4051*	.2375	.3665*	-.4728**	.3173
6. Number premarital intercourse partners	1.89 (2.38)	0 to 8						.6621***	.6164***	.5418***	-.5028**	-.5242**	.5251**	-.6635***
7. Number received premarital oral sex from	2.03 (1.96)	0 to 8							.9604***	.2585	-.6148***	-.2298	.1899	-.4232*
8. Number gave premarital oral sex to	1.92 (2.06)	0 to 9								.2575	-.5911***	-.2424	.1459	-.4857**
9. Number of Cohabitation partners	0.36 (0.54)	0 to 2									-.1790	-.3795*	.4712**	-.4827**
10. Feelings about premarital sexual experience	32.42 (16.01)	9 to 63										.0266	-.2037	.1491
11. Religiosity <sup>b</sup>	27.37 (7.97)	9 to 38											-.5621***	.8386***
12. Number husband's premarital sexual partners	2.14 (2.18)	0 to 6												-.5861***
13. Tithe (% of income) <sup>c</sup>	8.17 (4.26)	0 to 15												

<sup>a</sup>One participant reported that they were “not sure” how many partners her husband had intercourse with before marriage, and were eliminated for this variable only ( $n = 35$ ). <sup>b</sup> $n = 35$ . <sup>c</sup> $n = 30$ .

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

marital stability ( $r = -.41, p < .015$ ), the higher the thoughts of divorce ( $r = -.48, p < .003$ ), and the less positive the feelings about the marriage ( $r = -.47, p < .004$ ) as reported by the participant.

The correlations also revealed a cohabitation effect among the participants. Although cohabitation was not prevalent among the participants compared to the general population, the number of partners that the participants cohabitated with was related to lower marital satisfaction, stability, and feelings.

Although the group reported being fairly religious overall and tithing slightly over 8% of their income on average, those who were less religious reported a higher number of premarital sexual partners for intercourse ( $r = -.52, p < .001$  for religiosity;  $r = -.66, p < .001$  for tithe) and cohabitation ( $r = -.38, p < .025$  for religiosity;  $r = -.48, p < .007$  for tithe). The number of premarital oral sex partners was significantly related only to tithe and not to overall religiosity. The higher the number of partners with whom the participant experienced oral sex, the lower the percentage of income they tithed to faith related operations.

#### 4.4 Group Analyses

Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) for the type of premarital sexual partner were performed separately on the measures of marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. The participants were categorized into three groups: (a) those who had no premarital sex ( $n = 6$ ), (b) those who had premarital sex with her husband only ( $n = 9$ ), and (c) those who had premarital sex with her husband and/or others ( $n = 21$ ). No main effect was found for the type of premarital sexual partner.

In an effort to make the number of participants in each group equal, those who had no premarital sex were combined with those who had premarital sex with her husband only. ANOVAs were performed separately on the measures of marital satisfaction and sexual

satisfaction. No main effect was found for the combined groups of the type of premarital sexual partner, that is for no premarital sex with others versus premarital sex with others.

As a post hoc analysis, ANOVAs for the commitment level of premarital sexual partners were performed separately on the measures of marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. The participants were classified into two groups: those who had no noncommitted sexual experience and those who had noncommitted sexual experience. A main effect was found for the commitment level of premarital sexual partners for marital satisfaction ( $F = 5.13, p < .03$ ; no noncommitted sexual partners'  $M = 84.00$ ; noncommitted sexual partners'  $M = 75.15$ ) but not for sexual satisfaction. These results should be cautiously interpreted because of the unequal number of participants in each group.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Discussion

The present study intended to clarify the relationship that may exist between premarital sexual behaviors and the state of the marriage. The results confirmed past research (Kahn & London, 1991; Teachman, 2003) by demonstrating a negative association between premarital sexual experience and the state of the marriage. The present study, however, showed a much stronger correlation than the relationships previously demonstrated in the literature. The results suggest that the more premarital sexual partners with whom women and their husbands experience intercourse, the lower the marital satisfaction, marital stability, and feelings about the marriage and the higher the thoughts of divorce.

An interesting note is that 3 of the participants experienced premarital sexual behaviors with only men other than their husband and not with their husbands. The reason for this is not clear. Two of these women reported that their husbands had experienced no premarital sexual intercourse. Only 1 of the 3 women reported beginning to attend church on a regular basis within the last 5-9 years; the remaining 2 women reported attending church on a regular basis all of their life. All 3 reported that their marital satisfaction, marital stability, low divorce thoughts, and feelings about the marriage were much higher than the group means for each variable. Considering the high religiosity of the 3 women, it may be that the cessation of premarital sexual behaviors was the result of some type of spiritual awakening. Unfortunately, no variable that was considered in the study is able to explain these interesting responses.

For the group of women who participated in the study, analyses suggest that the type of premarital sexual partner (whether husband or someone other than the husband) does not predict the state of the marriage. Teachman (2003) reported that premarital sexual experience with



partners other than the husband was related to higher marital dissolution among women but that the relationship disappeared when premarital sexual experience was limited to the husband. The present study, however, showed no difference between the women who experienced premarital sex with her husband and those who experienced premarital sex with someone other than her husband.

The post hoc analysis seems to suggest that the commitment level of premarital sexual experience is predictive of the state of the marriage. The women who experienced premarital sex within relationships that they considered noncommitted reported lower marital satisfaction than those women who did not experience premarital sex within noncommitted relationships. Although the results should be considered carefully because of the small sample size, the unequal size of groups, and the particulars of the participants, they warrant future empirical thought and research.

## 5.2 Limitations

Because sexuality and marital satisfaction may be a sensitive topic for an individual to discuss, it is possible that participants either under- or over-stated their reality. For example, with an under-report of promiscuous premarital sexual behaviors and an over-report of marital satisfaction, the true relationship may be distorted. In addition, data collection took place through Southern Baptist churches within the Baton Rouge area. Participants may have felt obligated to report responses that are socially acceptable to the church's beliefs. If this occurred, data may have misrepresented the true relationship between the variables. For the premarital sexual behaviors, however, the social acceptability of the responses did not seem to be a factor for the women, as their reported premarital sexual experience was higher than expected.

Religiosity, defined largely by participation (Larson & Swyers, 2002), and spirituality, defined as assigning sacred attributes to marriage (Mahoney et al., 1999), has been shown to be strongly correlated with marital satisfaction. The high level of religiosity of the women may have buffered any effect of the type of premarital sexual partner (husband or other). Religious individuals also tend to report higher levels of abstinence and lower levels of premarital sexual experience. The strong correlations between the number of premarital sexual intercourse partners and the state of the marriage may be due to the uncharacteristically high level for conservative Baptists of sexual experience that was reported by the women. Because the women's religious beliefs may disagree with their premarital sexual experience, the inner struggle may work to decrease the state of the marriage.

Due also to the high reported religiosity of the group, as well as the small sample size, the results of the study are not generalizable to the larger population. Conclusions made from the results may be applied only to Baptist women in the Baton Rouge area. The diffusion of the results across region and background must be determined by subsequent studies.

Data was collected from wives only, excluding the experiences of the husbands. By including only wives, the marital satisfaction of the married couple and the premarital sexual behaviors experienced by the husband may be inaccurately reported.

### 5.3 Directions for Future Research

Because religious individuals tend to report lower levels of participation in premarital sex and are more likely than non-religious individuals to be sexually abstinent (Mahoney et al., 2003; Roche, 1986; Roehlkepartain et al., 2005; Smith & Denton, 2005), the high level of participation in premarital sex for the women in the study was surprising. It is important, however, for future researchers to consider the definition of sexual abstinence. When including oral sex as a sexual

behavior, the women in the study reported levels of premarital sexual experience that was higher than expected. If oral sex is excluded as a sexual behavior, the percentage of women who were sexually abstinent is much higher than the general population.

The present study showed a strong negative statistical relationship between the number of premarital sexual partners and the state of the marriage. It may be important in future studies to consider the commitment level of premarital sexual partners, as it demonstrated predictive ability in the present study. Although no sweeping conclusions can be made from the results, the current study demonstrates the need for further research on the outcomes and mediators of premarital sexual experience on the state of the marriage. Unfortunately, the relationship is lacking from the empirical literature. Empirical study in this area will give researchers, counselors, therapists, and educators a clearer picture of the possible consequences of premarital sexual experience on a marriage.

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## APPENDIX A: MEASURES OF THE STATE OF THE MARRIAGE

### A.1 Measures Adapted from Norton (1983)

Questions
We have a good marriage. <sup>a</sup>
My relationship with my husband is stable. <sup>b</sup>
Our marriage is strong. <sup>b</sup>
My relationship with my husband makes me happy. <sup>a</sup>
I really feel like a <i>part of a team</i> with my husband. <sup>a</sup>
I have seriously considered ending my marriage with my husband. <sup>b</sup>
I wish I had not married my husband. <sup>b</sup>
My husband and I are similar in our attitudes towards most things. <sup>a</sup>
My husband and I will probably still be together in 10 years. <sup>b</sup>
My husband and I engage in many outside interests together. <sup>a</sup>
I am committed to making our marriage last. <sup>b</sup>
My husband is committed to making our marriage last. <sup>b</sup>
<sup>a</sup> The sum of these measures were combined with measures from Rollins and Feldman (1970) and Burr (1967) and used as the marital satisfaction score. <sup>b</sup> These measures were added and the sum was used as the marital stability score.

### A.2 Measures Adapted from Rollins and Feldman (1970)

Questions
In general, how often do you think that things between you and your husband are going well? <sup>a</sup>
How often do you feel resentful in your marriage? <sup>a</sup>
How often do you not feel needed in your marriage? <sup>a</sup>
How often do you feel misunderstood in your marriage? <sup>a</sup>

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### Questions

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How often do you and your husband laugh together?<sup>a</sup>

How often do you and your husband calmly discuss something together?<sup>a</sup>

How often do you and your husband have a stimulating exchange of ideas?<sup>a</sup>

How often do you and your husband work together on a project?<sup>a</sup>

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<sup>a</sup>These measures were combined with measures from Norton (1983) and Burr (1967) and the sum was used as the marital satisfaction score.

### A.3 Measures Adapted from Burr (1967)

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### Questions

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How often do you get mad at something in regard to the companionship of your marriage?<sup>a</sup>

How much improvement could there be in the companionship of your marriage?<sup>a</sup>

In regard to the companionship of my marriage, I am...<sup>a</sup>

How often do you get mad or angry at something related to sex in your marriage?<sup>c</sup>

How much improvement could there be in your marital sex life?<sup>c</sup>

How satisfied are you with sex in your marriage?<sup>c</sup>

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<sup>a</sup>These measures were combined with Norton (1983) and Rollins and Feldman (1970) and the sum was used as the marital satisfaction score. <sup>c</sup>These measures were summed and used as the sexual satisfaction score.

### A.4 Measures Adapted from Booth, Johnson, and Edwards (1983)

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### Questions

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Even people who get along quite well with their spouse sometimes wonder whether their marriage is working out. Have you ever thought your marriage might be in trouble?<sup>d</sup>

Has the thought of getting a divorce or separation crossed your mind since you've married?<sup>d</sup>

Have you or your husband ever seriously suggested the idea of divorce since you've married?<sup>d</sup>

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## Questions

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Have you ever discussed divorce or separation with a close friend?<sup>d</sup>

Have you ever talked about consulting a divorce attorney with a friend?<sup>d</sup>

Have you ever talked about consulting a divorce attorney with your spouse?<sup>d</sup>

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<sup>d</sup>Measures were summed and used as the low divorce thoughts score.

### A.5 The Semantic Differential Scale

The scores for each word pair were summed and used as the feelings about the marriage score.

Good :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Bad

Comfortable :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Uncomfortable

Beautiful :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Ugly

Pleasant :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Unpleasant

Unfair :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Fair

Honest :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Dishonest

Valuable :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Worthless

Negative :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Positive

Wise Decision :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Foolish Decision

Relaxed :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Tense

## APPENDIX B: MEASURES OF PREMARITAL SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

### B.1 Premarital Sexual Experience

The following were used to measure the premarital sexual behaviors:

How many *committed* partners did you experience premarital *sexual intercourse* with?

How many *non-committed* partners did you experience premarital *sexual intercourse* with?

How many *committed* partners did you *receive oral sex* from?

How many *non-committed* partners did you *receive oral sex* from?

How many *committed* partners did you *give oral sex* to?

How many *non-committed* partners did you *give oral sex* to?

Did your premarital sexual partners include your husband?

Were your premarital sexual experiences limited to only your husband?

Did you cohabitate with your husband before marriage?

How many partners did you cohabitate with other than your husband?

To your knowledge, how many partners, including yourself, did your husband have  
intercourse with prior to marriage?

### B.2 The Semantic Differential Scale

The scores for each word pair were summed and used as the feelings about premarital sexual experience score.

Good :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Bad

Proud :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Ashamed

Beautiful :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Ugly

Pleasant :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Unpleasant

Unfair :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Fair

Valuable :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Worthless

Negative :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Positive

Wise :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Foolish

Clean :\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_: Dirty

## APPENDIX C: MEASURES OF RELIGIOSITY

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### Questions

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Please circle the answer that best indicates how often you attend religious services (worship services, corporate Bible studies, Cell groups, etc.) at this time.<sup>e</sup>

Please circle the answer that best indicates how often your husband attends religious services (worship services, corporate Bible studies, Cell groups, etc.) at this time.<sup>e</sup>

Approximately what percentage of your income do you give to faith-based operations (church, organizations, missions, etc.)?

How often do you pray alone?<sup>e</sup>

How often do you and your husband pray together?<sup>e</sup>

How often do you study the Bible alone?<sup>e</sup>

How often do you and your husband study the Bible together?<sup>e</sup>

How long have you attended a Christian church on a regular basis?

How long has your husband attended a Christian church on a regular basis?

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<sup>e</sup>These measures were summed and used as the religiosity score.



## VITA

Allison Claire Rayburn was born to Alan and Clara Berry in Pride, Louisiana, on December 20, 1983. Her parents moved her and her sister, Denise Berry, and brother, Bryan Berry, to Watson, Louisiana, when she was 13 years old. She attended Live Oak High School where she met her husband whom she married on August 13, 2005. She attended Louisiana State University and received her Bachelor of Science degree in family, child, and consumer science in May of 2005. She then went on to graduate school in the School of Human Ecology to attain a Master of Science degree in family, child, and consumer science. She and her husband plan to serve overseas as career missionaries, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ to all who will listen.