

EXPLORING THE ATTITUDES, BELIEFS, PREPARATION, AND PRACTICES OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY IN PREMARITAL COUNSELING

By

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By

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Elder I. L. Wootson, a man whose legacy of wisdom, humility and love for all continues to inspire and encourage me.

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The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and beliefs of African American clergy concerning premarital counseling. Using the Black Clergy Premarital Counseling Survey, African American clergy reported their thoughts about the necessity, importance, and value of premarital counseling; their training experiences in premarital counseling; their interest for further training in premarital counseling; their degree of confidence in implementing certain aspects of premarital counseling and finally their assessment of the relative importance of certain topics in premarital counseling.

This study also explored the current practices of African American clergy in providing premarital counseling. Black clergy reported their recommended number of sessions, their recommended length of sessions, their use of inventories, their role in the counseling process and their particular style of conducting premarital counseling.

There were 247 respondents ages ranging from 19 to 86 years with the average age being 49.5 years. The age representing the median and mode is 51 years and 50 years respectively. Males comprised 84.9% of the sample and females made up 15.1%

The findings from this study demonstrate that Black clergy desire more knowledge and training regarding premarital counseling. More than half of the Black clergy in this study do not have specialized training in premarital counseling. Over 85% of the clergy reported a desire for additional specialized training in premarital counseling. Results also indicated that the Black clergy who had specialized training in premarital counseling reported significantly higher confidence than those clergy who did not have specialized training.

Findings from this study also revealed the topics considered by Black clergy to be most important in premarital counseling. Couple communication, couple commitment to the marriage, and conflict resolution respectively were rated most important by Black clergy.

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations for further research are discussed. The findings suggest that attention be given to the development and implementation of training and preparatory programs assisting African American clergy in establishing stronger premarital programs for the African American community.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a fundamental and enduring social institution that has developed in all cultures and societies. Every society possesses some form of marriage (Saxton, 1996). A recent study reveals that 93% of Americans rate having a happy marriage as one of their most important goals (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). Studies show that successful marriages promote mental, physical, and family health (Carroll & Doherty, 2003).

However, high divorce rates of approximately 50% and increasing reports of illicit domestic violence elicit a significant amount of alarm and apprehension in a great number of couples, religious leaders, political leaders, persons in the media, and public policy advocates. Stanley and Markman (1997) assert that the after-shocks of marital distress and divorce affect us all. Researchers assert that conflicted and unstable marriages undermine well-being and incur large social and financial costs for communities (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). Stanley (2001) reports that marital distress negatively affects physical health, mental health, and work productivity. One way politicians and researchers are addressing these concerns is through prevention via premarital counseling (Murray, 2004).

Increased attention is being given to helping couples prevent marital distress and divorce. The divorce and separation rates, and concerns about the future of marriage and family life have inspired a marriage movement that is gaining momentum in the United States (Stanley, 2001). Private organizations like the Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment, the Institute for American Values, and the Family Life Educator initiative of the National Council on Family Relations were formed to protect and enhance marriage. These organizations are active in sounding an alarm about marriage and family processes and dynamics (Stanley, 2001). Religious leaders are also becoming more concerned about strengthening and protecting the

family. Many religious leaders are noticing the negative effects of marital distress on members in their local congregations.

Like never before, state and federal governments are advocating strengthening and maintaining marriages. In Florida, the Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act of 1998 was designed to promote premarital education. This act subtracts \$32.50 from the cost of marriage licenses for couples who attend at least four hours of premarital counseling from an approved provider (mostly licensed mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, psychologists, social workers and approved religious leaders). The state of Florida identifies specific topics for premarital counseling including conflict management, financial management, communication, and children and parenting responsibilities. The Florida Bar has published a family law handbook that addresses all aspects of the law pertaining to marriage and families; it is available to couples from the clerk of the circuit court upon application for a marriage license (Smart Marriages, 1996).

Very few of the studies or literature regarding premarital counseling addresses the unique factors of non-White people, particularly African American people. Most of the studies of premarital counseling focus on the characteristics of middle class Caucasians. Carroll and Doherty (2003) confirm this in their meta-analytic review of outcome research looking at 13 prevention programs; they discovered that the samples in the research are almost exclusively young, European American, middle class couples, a discovery that led them to caution providers against generalizing from this information to diverse populations. This lack of sample diversity in research calls for remediation now that ethnic groups make up a third of the United States population (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). Silliman and Schumm (1999) note that little research has been done assessing the needs of non-white audiences or offered programming from a

multicultural perspective. The authors call for research that considers the needs of non-white clients, a population whose needs remain unclear to majority practitioners (Silliman & Schumm, 1999).

The differences between cultures can no longer be ignored. David K. Shipler, in his book, *A Country of Strangers: Blacks and Whites in America* (1997), demonstrates how the lives of African Americans and Caucasians in America are different in communication styles, language use, economic status, family structure, and lifestyle. In many ways they are strangers to each other. How they behave, and how their language about their experiences often appears alien, strange, and extraordinary for the other group. This phenomenon is apparent even among African Americans and Caucasians who work at the same company or attend school at the same institution.

Because premarital counseling prepares clients to live as couples in the society in which they reside, it is imperative that premarital counseling address cultural differences that may influence how couples construct their marriage. What is ideal for White couples may not be ideal for Black couples. And, what is dysfunctional for White couples and families may be normal and functional for Black couples and families. Ooms and Wilson (2004) assert that because African Americans live life differently than Caucasian Americans, African American couples need programs and inventories that are designed for them, programs that take into account differences in communication/ language, socioeconomic status, family structure, and lifestyle.

For example, African Americans significantly differ from Caucasian in the number of single-family households, marriage rates, separation rates, and divorce rates. Sue and Sue (1999) report that 82% of Blacks have no live-in father in the home compared to 43% of Whites, and

that 47% of black males are single, divorced, or widowed compared to 28% of White males. Saxton (1996) notes that African Americans have higher rates of separation and divorce than any other ethnic group in the United States. He also observed that two-thirds of Black children, compared to one in five White children, are born out of wedlock, and that 39% of Black children live with both parents compared to 76% of White children. Ooms and Wilson (2004), in their article, "*The Challenges of Offering Relationship and Marriage Education to Low income Populations,*" report that in 1950, 64% of Blacks and 68% of Whites were married. In 2002 however 44% of Blacks and 59% of Whites were married. Not only are African Americans marrying less frequently than Caucasian, a higher percentage of them are divorcing and separating (Ooms & Wilson, 2004). Ooms and Wilson (2004) attribute these differences to such adverse circumstances among African Americans as high mortality, high incarceration, high joblessness and high rates of out-of-wedlock childbirth.

These trends suggest that modern marriages need help, and African American couples need specialized attention. Premarital counseling is one solution. Research suggests (Silliman & Schumm 1999; Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997) that approximately 75% of premarital counseling is provided by clergy, many of whom have no training. Premarital counseling/preparation is not covered in a great number of seminaries, and a significant number of African American clergy never attended seminary. Nonetheless, counseling services are provided.

Given little training, one is left to wonder what are the beliefs, attitudes, and current practices of African American pastors in premarital counseling. Sullivan and Bradbury (1997) assert that many clergy feel ambivalent about their preparation for premarital counseling. They call for therapists to work with churches to improve the programs to African American couples at Black churches by African American Clergy.

Sue and Sue (1999) observed that if counselors are to provide meaningful help to a culturally diverse population, they must develop new culturally effective helping approaches. Premarital counseling is more effective when it is contextually and culturally sensitive. To accomplish this goal, we must work with African American pastors to develop evidence-based programs that address the special issues and needs of their congregation. Douglas and Hopson (2001) quote W.E.B. Dubois in stating that the “Negro” church is the social center of African American life in the United States. Therefore the Black church is an excellent place in which to serve black couples who want to get married. Helping African American pastors explore and clarify their attitudes, beliefs, values, and current practices in conducting premarital counseling is essential.

Theoretical Background

Albee and Ryan (1998) define prevention as (1) doing something now to forestall or prevent something undesirable from happening in the future, and (2) doing something now that will increase desirable outcomes in the future. L’Abate defines prevention as any approach, method, or procedure designed to improve interpersonal competence and functioning for people as individuals, partners, and parents (Berger & Hannah, 1999). Prevention has typically focused on assessing self and other awareness, providing knowledge for decision-making, and enhancing interpersonal skill (Stanley & Markman, 1997). Prevention historically has been the province of public health. Leaders in public health assert that it is more feasible to keep the population healthy rather than to repair health that has deteriorated. We see prevention in action today in promoting flu shots and nutrition, for example, as effective deterrents from diseases. Public health policy is organized around three prevention strategies: First, identifying the noxious agent and attempting to remove it or neutralize it; second, strengthening the host to resist the noxious

agent; and third, preventing transmission of the noxious agent to the host (Albee and Ryan, 1999). These strategies are now being applied to mental health policies.

Stanley and Markman (1997) note that little attention has been given to prevention of marital distress in the form of premarital preparation until the past two decades. As experts began to understand the magnitude and implications of our society's marital problems, they adopted prevention strategies such as premarital counseling. Prevention theory suggests that interventions be made before problems begin or before problems become bigger problems. Premarital education helps couples to more effectively facilitate or manage developmental transitions, conflict resolution and decision-making, responding to life crisis, and engaging social support systems (Stanley & Markman, 1997).

Effective preventive interventions will address factors that are associated with increased risk in ways designed to lower those risks. Research in premarital counseling (Stanley & Markman, 1997) helps couples anticipate problems to avoid and confirms efficacious skills that enhance relationships. Prevention not only prevents dysfunction but also promotes wellness. Stanley and Markman (1997) assert that premarital prevention efforts seek to raise protective factors and minimize risk factors. They explain that increasing protective factors enhances the chances of a couple doing well over time. These factors include enhancing such things as friendship in the marital relationship, interpersonal support and mutual dedication. They cite risk factors as negative factors clearly associated with greater risk of marital failure; lowering these factors is crucial in prevention. Risk factors include negative interactive patterns and dysfunctional relationship beliefs (Stanley & Markman, 1997).

The prevention strategy chosen depends on the timing of the intervention. The Institute of Medicine differentiates three types: “universal” or “primary” prevention, “selective” or “secondary” prevention, and “indicated” or “tertiary” prevention (Berger & Hannah, 1999).

Primary prevention is said to be proactive in that it deals with problems and issues before they arise (Albee & Ryan, 1998). Primary prevention is what L’Abate called true prevention because the intervention occurs before problems happen, that is, for example, before couples have difficulties (Berger & Hannah, 1999). Primary prevention consists of proactive efforts to reduce emotional and behavioral deficits or disorders in order to maintain and enhance healthy functioning (Stanley & Markman, 1997).

Secondary prevention occurs after the onset of a problem. It seeks to prevent further problems and the loss of desirable relationship characteristics with at-risk couples who are experiencing some difficulty and dissatisfaction. L’Abate describes this as intervening with couples before they get worse (Berger & Hannah, 1999). Stanley and Markman (1997) agree, noting that secondary prevention consists of early identification, diagnosis and treatment of deficits in order to avert more serious breakdown and to re-establish healthy functioning. Berger and Hannah (1998) note that there is overlap between primary and secondary intervention and most premarital programs use both.

Tertiary prevention aims to keep serious couple problems from destroying the relationship and the marriage; it is what L’Abate calls intervening before it is too late (Berger & Hannah, 1999). Tertiary prevention addresses chronic problems that threaten to drive married couples toward divorce.

There are economic and psychological benefits in adopting preventive approaches. Preventive approaches are less expensive than remediation and are less psychologically

exhausting and draining than remedial approaches. But to win the benefits, two barriers have to be overcome. Motivation is a barrier when couples see no need for a counselor if there are no obvious difficulties. The second barrier is that couples may not want to admit to strangers that they are having problems before they marry (Berger & Hannah, 1999).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes, preparation, and current practices of African American Clergy in regards to premarital counseling. Barlow (1999) asserts that the church has a responsibility to prepare couples to build strong marriages from the very beginning so that divorce is not an option. And a survey by Murray (2004) reveals that approximately 75% of premarital counseling in Florida is currently provided by clergy, indicating that many churches take their responsibility seriously. By contrast, Stahmann (2000) notes that premarital counseling has not been identified as a regular part of the clinical practice of most of today's marriage and family therapists.

This study examined the attitudes and beliefs of African American clergy concerning premarital counseling. African American clergy's thoughts about the necessity, importance, and value of premarital counseling for the members of their local congregations and denominations were surveyed. In addition clergy were asked what extent premarital counseling is mandatory or optional and if so, what criteria, bylaws, or ordinances are observed within their congregations and denominations concerning premarital counseling.

This study also focused on the training experience that African American pastors may have received that prepared them to engage in premarital counseling. These training experiences included the following: A seminary class, training by a marriage education group (i.e., Prep, Prepare, RE, etc.), special seminars or workshops, extensive reading or personal experience. The study will also examine to what degree African American clergy feel they are adequately

prepared to provide premarital counseling, the degree of confidence of the clergy doing certain aspects of premarital counseling, what interest they may have for training in premarital counseling, and to what degree they are willing to collaborate with mental health professionals in regard to premarital counseling.

Thirdly, this study surveyed the current practices of African American Clergy in providing premarital counseling. Researchers (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Risch, Riley & Lawler, 2003; Stahmann & Hiebert, 1987; Stanley & Markman, 1997) in premarital counseling agree on the issues to be addressed in premarital counseling: conflict resolution, communication, finances, parenting, family, friends, leisure, commitment, family of origin, and gender roles within the marriage. Are these topics covered by African American clergy who provide premarital education? This study examined the number of sessions, length of sessions, inventories used, style of the clergy (instructive vs. interactive), clergy's role (determine if the couple is ready for marriage or just assist in helping the couple prepare for marriage), and fees and other procedures, rules and requirements for premarital counseling.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

- What are the background characteristics (Length of time as pastors providing premarital counseling, religious affiliation/denomination, gender, age, congregation size, church location (i.e., rural, suburb, or city), and educational background) of African American Clergy?
- What topics do AAC feel are most and least important in premarital counseling?
- What is the level of confidence of AAC teaching and/or discussing certain topics in premarital counseling?
- What are AAC's attitudes and beliefs about premarital counseling and their preparation to do premarital counseling?
- Are there differences in AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling based on AAC demographics (whether or not the AAC has received

specialized training in PMC, age, church size, level of education/training, and church denomination)?

- What is the relationship between AAC's assessment of importance of aspects of premarital counseling and their confidence providing counseling in those particular aspects?
- What is the relationship between AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling and AAC attitudes assessed in the BCPCS (would like more training, support more clergy and family counselors working together, feeling adequately prepared to provide premarital counseling and welcoming a PMC manual or program created for black clergy)?

Definition of Terms

- African American may be also referred to as Black also inclusive of Jamaican Americans and Haitian Americans, who are similar to African Americans in racial features.
- Black Church also known as African American church is a group of people, mostly African American together with an African American pastor who worships God together in the same place as an organized group or institution. Douglas (2001) describes the Black Church as a multitudinous community of churches that are diversified by origin, denomination, doctrine, worshipping culture, spiritual expression, class, size, and other less-obvious factors. He explains that although black churches may seem disparate, they share a special history, culture, and role in black life, all of which attest to their collective identity as the Black church.
- Clergy also used synonymously with Pastors, the leaders of a church congregation.
- Denomination term used to distinguish and classify churches into large groups by belief and type of organization. Three common denominations surveyed in this study will be Church of God in Christ, African Methodist Episcopal, and Baptist.
- Premarital counseling synonymous with marriage education and marriage preparation. Stahmann (2000) defines premarital counseling as a process that enhances and enriches premarital relationships in order to promote more satisfactory and stable marriages and less divorce. The goals of premarital counseling include easing the transition from single to married life, increasing couple stability and satisfaction, increasing friendship and commitment to the relationship, increasing couple intimacy, and enhancing problem solving and decision making skills (Stahmann, 2000). Russell and Lyster (1992) concur noting that marriage preparation provide couples with the opportunity to examine important aspects of their relationship and to develop skills necessary for communication and negotiation around areas critical to the development of intimacy.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 contains a review of relevant literature. Chapter 3 contains the methodology of this study including the research design sampling procedures, instrumentation, data collecting procedures, research questions and hypotheses and procedures data analysis. Chapter 4 contains the data analysis. Lastly chapter 5 discussed the findings of this study, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The negative affects of marital distress and divorce reverberate throughout society, touching the lives of everyone in some way. Stanley and Markman (1997) assert that marital distress and divorce has placed American children at great risk for poverty, alienation, antisocial behavior, and mental and physical problems. Conflicts at home lead to decreased work productivity for adults in their place of employment and for children in their schools. High divorce rates (now above 50% for first-time marriages), and increased reports of domestic violence elicit cries of alarm and apprehension in a great number of couples, religious leaders, political leaders, persons in the media, and public policy advocates.

Preparation for marriage or premarital counseling has been suggested as one form of divorce prevention (Fowers & Olson, 1986). Increased attention is being given to helping couples prevent marital distress and divorce. Historically, little attention has been given to premarital preparation until the past two decades (Stahmann, 2000). Support for prevention is growing because people are increasingly getting clarity on the magnitude and implications of our society's marital problems. Fraenkel, Markman, and Stanley (1997) assert that the rationale for prevention is to provide couples with core skills and concepts for handling the inevitable disagreements and problems of married life as they arise. They further propose that prevention helps couples avoid the high emotional costs that accrue from unresolved, repetitive, and often increasingly harsh arguments, and the significant loss of time and money spent in marital therapy trying to restore an unhealthy marriage. Stahmann (2000) asserts that premarital counseling can enhance and enrich premarital relationships thereby helping couples lead more satisfactory and stable marriages.

Premarital counseling/marriage preparation strategies have evolved and developed over time as researchers continue to conduct studies examining various issues regarding the procedures and effectiveness of premarital counseling, including the stage of engagement in which sessions take place, length of counseling sessions, number of sessions, role of the provider, provider training, use of assessments, and content discussed. This chapter provides a historical review of the premarital counseling literature in order to establish a rationale for this study.

A Historical Review of Premarital Therapy

Before the 1900's

The literature before 1900 contains rare gems on premarital counseling and marriage preparation. Around 80 A.D. the Apostle Paul wrote instructions about marriage to Christians in Corinth and Ephesus and it is probable that these words have been shared with premarital couples ever since (See I Corinthians and Ephesians in the New Testament). Stahmann and Hiebert (1987) report that as early as 1164 marriage was an established sacrament in the church and clergy had a special role to play in the lives of premarital couples. Clergy spoke of the significance of marriage as a sacred union of a man and a woman, initiating a new relationship with God as well as each other. It is interesting to note that clergy were counseling couples numerous years before psychology and family therapy were established as professional disciplines.

Between 1900 and the 1950's

Stahmann and Hiebert (1987) state that in the early 1900s premarital counseling by the clergy consisted of teachings about the Christian nature of marriage, the place of religion in the home, and rehearsal of the wedding rite. Before the 1950's psychologists would not have met with those who suffered difficulties about the nature of their interpersonal relationship. Instead

they would havemet each person individually because problems were viewed as stemming from neurotic or psychotic individuals in the relationship. The first mention of premarital counseling as something of value in emotional and physical health was in an article in *The Journal of Obstetristics and Gynecology* in 1928. From that time to the mid 1950's, literature in premarital counseling addressed physicians and made suggestions about what to include in the premarital physical exam (Stahmann and Hiebert, 1987).

Stahmann and Hiebert (1987) report that the first course titled *Preparation for Marriage and Family Living* was offered at Boston University instructed by Ernest R. Groves in 1924 and Teachers College at Columbia University offered a similar class in 1929.

The first premarital program was developed at Merrill Palmer institute in 1932 (Carroll & Daugherty, 2003). The Philadelphia Marriage Council was the first to establish a standardized program in 1941 that sought to help young couples understand what companionship in married life involves (Carroll & Doherty, 2003).

The 1950's and 1960's

Stahmann and Hiebert (1987) note that the challenges of World War Two had a great impact on the growth of the field of psychology, particularly in advancing theories of human interaction and personality. The search for explanations of schizophrenia led psychotherapists to examine the family contexts of schizophrenic clients. They attended carefully to communication patterns among family members, parents in particular, and learned that the health of marital relationships did not solely rest on the mental health of the individuals in the marriage.

Therapists also began to see that the quality of the marital relationship was critical to the health of families. However it was still a rarity for mental health professionals to conduct premarital counseling.

Nonetheless, conversations about premarital counseling expanded in the 1950's and 1960's, with some writers asserting that premarital counseling is a vital informational and educational service to couples, while others promoted premarital counseling as fostering skill development (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1987). For example, Butterfield asserted that persons must develop skills that enable them to function well in marital and family relationships just as they do to function effectively in social relationships (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1987). Butterfield suggested that young people are disappointed and develop problems in marriage because they lack the skills to have a successful marriage. Stahmann and Hiebert (1987) also cite Ellis who argued that ignorance about the nature of marriage is a cause of marital failure; that "it is assumed that persons entering the marriage will automatically know how to adapt themselves to it, when in fact this is often not the case" (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1987). Rutledge saw marriage as requiring a maturing process that nurtures adult growth and responsibility, and suggested three basic factors in preparing for marriage: discovery of selfhood, continued growth as an individual, and possession of communication and problem solving skills.

The birth of family therapy attracted clergy members who thought training in this area would be beneficial for ministry to the families in their congregation. Stahmann and Hiebert (1987) cite researchers Stewart and Rutledge who recognized the expanding role of clergy in the 1940's and 1950's in examining and addressing the emotional readiness and maturity of the couple for marriage (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1987).

The 1970's

Olson asserts that up until the 1970's premarital counseling for clergy and non-clergy alike had a repair orientation and a pathological focus (Stahmann and Hiebert: 1987). In the 1970's there was an elevated interest by both clergy and marriage professionals in preparing couples for marriage. Spanier and Lewis (1980) emphasized the importance of the relationship between

premarital factors and marital quality as crucial to later quality and stability in marriage. The first of four factors crucial to later marital satisfaction and stability is the variable of homogamy, which asserts that the greater the homogamy or similarity in social and demographic factors, the higher the marital qualities. The second of four factors relates to the similarity of emotional and personal resources, such as interpersonal skills, emotional health, positive self concept, high educational level, an older age at first marriage, high social class, physical health and a high degree of acquaintance before marriage. The third factor said to produce higher marital satisfaction for a couple involves positive parental models and includes: high marital quality in family of origin, high level of happiness in one's childhood, and a positive relationship with his or her parents. The fourth and final factor references support from significant others, including parent approval of the future mate, each partner liking the future in-laws, and the support of friends. Spanier and Lewis (1980) add that premarital pregnancy, premarital sexual history, and motivation for marriage should be considered and are moderated by the four factors (Stahmann and Hiebert, 1987).

Premarital Counseling in Present

Premarital counseling has grown and expanded since the 1970's, and numerous, manuals, programs, outcome research reports, inventories, publicity, and incentives promote premarital counseling. The high divorce and separation rates and the social importance of stable families is inspiring a marriage movement that is gaining momentum in the United States (Stanley, 2001). Stanley (2001) states that there are private organizations like the Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment, the Institute for American Values, and the Family Life Educator initiative of the National Council on Family Relations that are active in protecting and enhancing marriage and family processes and dynamics (Stanley, 2001). Religious leaders are also becoming more

concerned about the strength and protection of the family as they notice the negative effects of marital distress on members in their local congregations.

Like never before, state and federal governments are advocating for strengthening and maintaining marriages. In Florida, the Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act of 1998 promotes premarital education. This act subtracts \$32.50 from the cost of marriage licenses for couples who attend at least four hours of premarital counseling from an approved provider (i.e., licensed mental health counselors, marriage and family therapist, psychologists, clinical social workers and religious leaders who have registered with the state). The state of Florida developed a list of topics that are recommended during the premarital sessions including conflict management, financial management, communication, and children and parenting responsibilities. The Florida Bar also wrote a family law handbook addressing all aspects of the law pertaining to marriage and families; it is available to couples from the clerk of the circuit court upon application for a marriage license (Smart Marriages, 1996).

Predicting Marital Success

Larson and Holman (1994) report that predicting marital success has been an interest of family scholars and researchers for over half a century. The authors cite major studies with premarital prediction components (i.e. Adams, 1946; Burgess & Cottrell, 1939; Burgess & Wallin, 1953; Terman & Oden, 1947). Although marital prediction research in its beginnings was atheoretical in nature, marital prediction research has evolved today with theoretical developments and advances in methodologies. Studies show that the quality of interaction between the couple is highly predictive of future outcomes (Stanley & Markman, 1997)

John Gottman (1999) and associates have been conducting longitudinal research regarding marriage prediction for over ten years. Gottman (1999) studied over 700 couples in evaluating what contributes to their marital success and failure. In an article Gottman co-authored with his

wife, it says that it is possible to predict divorce and marital satisfaction with over 90% accuracy using three predictors: emotional behavior, cognition and perception, and physiology (Gottman & Gottman, 1999).

In regards to emotional behavior, Gottman and Gottman (1999) assert that there are four negative interactional patterns that are most predictive of divorce. Gottman termed these patterns as “the four horsemen of the apocalypse”. These patterns are criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. By contrast they look for a 5 to 1 positive to negative ratio of interactions in predicting marital satisfaction.

In using cognition and perception as predictors, they look at whether the couple views their marital problems as severe, whether they experience loneliness and arrange parallel lives to avoid each other, and whether they believe there is no point in trying to work things out because the partner won't change. Gottman and Gottman (1999) assert that such cognitions and perceptions are predictive of divorce.

Gottman (1999) asserts that physiological responses can also be a predictor of divorce. When people are upset and or stressed, their heart rate rises. When one's heart rate reaches 95 to 100 beats per minute, their body secretes epinephrine that diffuses physiological arousal. Gottman and Gottman (1999) posit that persistent diffuse physiological arousal is predictive of divorce.

Stanley & Markman (1997) base predicting marital success on the presence of risk factors vs. protective factors. Risk factors are negative factors clearly associated with greater risk of marital failure. Examples of risk factors include negative interactive patterns and dysfunctional relationship beliefs. Protective factors are those that add to the chances of a couple doing well over time and are therefore targets in preventive efforts. Examples of marital protective factors

include enhancing friendship, interpersonal support, and mutual dedication (Stanley & Markman, 1997).

Stanley & Markman (1997) write that factors shown to increase the risk of marital dissolution include wives' employment and income, neuroticism, premarital cohabitation, difficulties in the areas of leisure activities and sexual relations, physiological arousal prior to problem-solving discussions, parental divorce, negative communication and problem-solving, religious dissimilarity, differing levels of communication, and having dissimilar attitudes. Strong signs of marital distress include negative reciprocity, poor affect management, and withdrawal during problem conversations.

The Effectiveness of Premarital Counseling

Researchers, counselors, and family life educators are faced with the question of the long-term effectiveness of premarital counseling. Because little longitudinal research has been conducted evaluating marital satisfaction among those who received premarital counseling. However, there is evidence of effectiveness in premarital counseling in some studies, notably the landmark meta-analysis by Giblin, Sprinkle, and Sheehan, in 1985.

Giblin, Sprenkle, and Sheehan (1985) conducted a meta-analysis of 85 programs of premarital, marital, and family interventions. This study, representing 3,886 couples, serves as a foundational study supporting the effectiveness of marriage preparation/premarital counseling. The study yielded an average effect size of .44 with a 95% confidence interval. When measuring the premarital area alone the effect size was .53. The authors summarize the conclusion of their study by stating:

The findings of the present study provide the most comprehensive data base for existing enrichment research. Based on the 85 studies included in this meta-analysis, enrichment produces an average affect size of .44. This number is a standard deviation unit, which is equivalent to a Z-score. By referring to a Z-table, this figure represents

an area of normal distribution curve of 67%, which is the difference between treatment and control means. Thus, the average person participating in enrichment is better off than 67% of persons who do not. If enrichment was not effective, there would be an effect size of 0 (Giblin, Sprenkle, and Sheehan, 1985)

Carroll and Doherty (2003) conducted another meta-analysis, reporting favorable results about the effectiveness of premarital counseling. The authors' results revealed a .80 mean effect size for premarital counseling meaning that the average person who participates in a premarital counseling program is significantly better off than 79% of people who do not participate in a premarital program. Cole and Cole (1999) assert that the greatest hope for helping couples achieve the satisfying marriages they want lies in prevention programs and strength based therapy programs. Stahmann (2000) writes that no studies have shown a negative affect in participating in marital preparation programs. Stanley and Markman (1997) at Creighton University, report on premarital preparation in the Catholic Church. These researchers found that within the first four years of marriage 80% of those surveyed reported training as valuable. Sullivan and Bradbury (1997) found that 90% of couples that had taken premarital counseling would do so again.

Guerney and Maxson (1990) agree that enrichment programs are effective. The researchers asserted that in regards to marriage enrichment programs, the field is entirely legitimate, and no more research needs to be done regarding the issue.

Premarital Counseling Providers

Silliman and Schumm (1999) observe that premarital counseling is provided by clergy, professional counselors, paraprofessionals, and counseling trainees. Premarital counseling research and literature (Barlow, 1999; Murray, 2004; Stanley & Markman, 1997) continually reports that clergy provide 75 to 80% of the premarital counseling offered. Silliman, Schumm, and Jurich's (1992) study reported that most people desire clergy as a premarital counseling

provider. Stahmann (2000) lends support, noting that premarital counseling has not been identified as a regular part of the clinical practice of today's family therapists.

Silliman, Schumm, and Jurich (1992) write that premarital counseling provider traits most valued by consumers are that the provider be well trained and respectful. On the contrary the least desirable traits of providers are lack of openness and probing into the private lives of the couple. Silliman and Schumm (1999) add that providers should be open, warm, professionally competent, and able to provide confidentiality. The authors stress the importance of professional competence over the providers' marital status.

Time of Counseling, Number of Sessions, and Length of Sessions.

Russell and Lyster (1992) assert that the timing of counseling has an impact on the satisfaction levels. Couples whose wedding date was close to the counseling received reported less satisfaction. The authors report that couples receiving counseling less than two months before the wedding took fewer risks in talking about troublesome issues and learning new skills than those receiving counseling more than two months before their wedding date. Silliman and Schumm (1999) suggest that premarital counseling should take place four to twelve months before the wedding, stating that new learning may pose a threat to wedding plans or established relationship patterns. They believe that couples can benefit from premarital counseling in all stages of their relationship; however, they should be advised of the risks of last minute training.

There are a variety of assertions in premarital counseling research about the length and number of premarital counseling sessions. Duncan, Box, & Silliman (1996), in their study of Black and White college students, report that consumers prefer one to six hours of counseling. Williams, Riley, Risch, and Dyke (2000) conducted a study and found that eight to nine sessions are ideal. Silliman, Schumm, and Jurich (1992) conducted a study of 185 undergraduates that

reveals that 3-4 hours in premarital counseling is preferred and options involving more than six hours produced significantly lower mean scores for desirability.

Silliman and Schumm (1999) report that there are differences in the length and amount of sessions, depending on the type of premarital counseling program. The authors state that church based programs are usually shorter, rarely exceeding six hours. They also note that school or community programs are longer than church based programs, often requiring more than eight hours. Finally, Silliman and Schumm (1999) state that research-based programs are the longest, usually ranging from 10 to 30 hours of training. The authors add that weekend formats work well. The authors report the same for short sessions that occur over several weeks.

Content of Premarital Counseling

Premarital counseling content is one of the most researched and published aspects of premarital counseling. Various authors write about the content of premarital counseling. Risch, Riley, and Lawler (2003) note that content areas for PMC include: communication, conflict resolution, marital expectations, role differentiation, sexuality, finances, parents and in-laws, parenting, leisure, and religion. Stahmann (2000) asserts that important topics include marriage quality/stability, family of origin influences, finance/budgeting, communication, decision-making, intimacy, parenting, and sexuality. Stanley and Markman (1997) report a survey study by the Center for Marriage and Family noting that the top three content areas for PMC in rank order are communication, commitment and conflict resolution. The Center for Marriage and Family also reports research that asserts the role of religion, values and children are important topics for children.

Stanley and Markman's (1997) research points toward the importance of targeting such content areas as communication (interactional patterns), conflict management, attitudes and beliefs, and core beliefs pertaining to marriage. Russell and Lyster (1992) agree, noting that

aspects of couple relationships include, but are not limited to, parenting, economic management, relations with friends and family, ways of managing conflict, and communication styles.

Valiente, Belanger, and Estrada (2002) give further support with their study. These researchers asked 56 individuals to identify three interventions that would help their relationship and report that communication and problem solving are the aspects of premarital counseling that people find most helpful. Duncan, Box, & Silliman, (1996) mention parenting skills, resolving differences, and effective listening as the most desirable topics in premarital counseling. The authors also reference research by Koval et al. (1992) that found that the most cited topics desired in marriage preparation are communication skills, problem solving strategies, having children, preventing violence, and identifying strengths and weaknesses in the relationship.

African American Families and Premarital Counseling

Silliman and Schumm (1999) report that little attention is paid in premarital counseling research to the needs of premarital counseling clients and what they want to obtain from premarital counseling. This is especially true of research that assesses the needs of non-white audiences. The vast majority of the studies in premarital counseling are based on middle class Caucasians. Carroll and Doherty's (2003) meta-analytic review of outcome research looking at 13 prevention programs revealed that the samples in the research are almost exclusively young, European-American, middle-class couples. So, the authors caution providers against generalizing this information to diverse populations. This lack of sample diversity is one of the most glaring issues of research in premarital counseling because non-white groups make up a third of the US population (Carroll & Doherty, 2003).

Duncan, Box and Silliman, (1996) in a study of Black and White college students, found that Blacks reported a greater need than Whites for marriage preparation. Strikingly, the authors also discovered that Blacks have less awareness of marriage preparation programs in general and

the norms surrounding them in particular. Ooms and Wilson (2004) write that because African Americans live life differently than Caucasian Americans, African American couples need programs and inventories that are designed for them and about them or at least with them in mind.

African American family dynamics and structure differ from Caucasian in the number of single-family households, marriage rates, separation rates, and divorce rates. Shipler (1997) illustrates that the lives of African Americans and Caucasians in America are different. Sue and Sue (1999) write that 82% of Blacks have no live-in father in the home compared to 43% Whites, and 47% of black males are single, divorced, or widowed compared to 28% White males. Saxton (1996) notes that Blacks have higher rates of separation and divorce rates than any other ethnic groups in the United States. He continues by noting about two-thirds of black children compared to one in five white children are born out of wedlock. Saxton (1996) further writes that 39% of black children live with both parents compared to 76% of white children. Ooms and Wilson (2004) present more findings in their article *The Challenges of Offering Relationship and Marriage Education to Low Income Populations*, noting in particular that in 1950, 64% of Blacks and 68% of whites were married compared with 59% Whites and 44% Black in 2002. Not only are African Americans marrying less frequently but more who do marry are divorcing and separating than do Caucasians who marry (Ooms & Wilson, 2004). The authors add that African American's adverse circumstances of high mortality, high incarceration, high joblessness, and high rates of having a child out of wedlock contributes to their being less likely to get married or stay married (Ooms & Wilson, 2004).

The Black Church

Douglas and Hopson (2001) state that the Black Church is a multitudinous community of churches, diversified by origin, denomination, doctrine, worshipping culture, spiritual expression, class, size, and other less-obvious factors that share a special history, culture, and role in black life. They further assert that the Black Church plays a pervasive role in the lives of black people as a conserver of morals and a strengthener of family life, often standing as the final authority on what is Good and Right (Douglas & Hopson, 2001). Lincoln & Mamiya (1990) add that historically, the Black Church has been the most important and dominant institutional phenomenon in the black community. The authors report that as far back as the ending of the civil war, the Black Church has assisted the black community, teaching economic rationality, promoting education, and helping keep families together. Contrasting the Black Church with white churches, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) write that while civil and social concerns reflect a Samaritan impulse in many white churches; such concerns are integral to what it means to be church in the Black church. The Black church is the cultural womb of the black community giving birth to new institutions like schools, banks, and low income housing, and it nurtures and supports young talent for musical, dramatic, and artistic development. The black church is engaged in most spheres of black life.

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) state that The Church of God in Christ (COGIC), African Methodist Episcopal (AME), National Baptist Convention USA (NBC), National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA), and the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) are among the seven major historically black denominations. It is estimated that 20 to 25% of all black churches are rural. This is a high percentage considering the rural black population. It is not uncommon for rural clergy to pastor more than one church. Rural church members seldom receive the kind of pastoral attention such as counseling, pastoral visits, and pastoral leadership

as do members in urban and suburban churches. Lower class, uneducated Black people make up a large part of black rural churches (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) estimate that approximately 95% of clergy in black churches are male with an average age of 51 years old. The authors also note that most African American Clergy have completed high school. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) estimate that 42.9% of the pastors of rural churches and 57.9% of the pastors of urban churches are full time pastors without any other occupation (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Clergy

Stanley and Markman (1997) believe that religious organizations comprise the single largest array of institutions in our culture that have both great interest in preventing marital breakdown and the capability to deliver premarital intervention. They support their assertion in stating that most people get married under the auspices of a religious organization. Furthermore, religious organizations are more embedded in their respective cultures than other organizations, and cultural resistances and barriers, which other institutions may encounter, are likely to be greatly lessened because of it. Markman et al (2004) concur stating that clergy and laypersons represent a passionate group of practitioners with access to many couples for premarital counseling; they are unlikely to read scientific journals, but are receptive to summarizations of research. Barlow (1999) writes that the Catholic Church has operated a program for engaged couples for over 30 years; some churches even offer premarital Sunday school classes.

Barlow (1999) believes that change concerning premarital counseling must take place in the church in order to help combat the increasing divorce rate. She observes that many clergy do not have the time or training to carryout effective premarital counseling. Although, some denominations have included instructions to pastors about the necessity of preparing couples for marriage, detailed steps to follow are not provided. Clergy are not instructed on specific issues

to be discussed or the amount of sessions necessary, and are not given guidelines on how to conduct premarital counseling. This leads to premarital counseling that is inconsistent and ineffective. Barlow (1999) also asserts that because of the amount of time given to other duties and responsibilities, pastors may not have time to devote six sessions to each couple. In addition, ministers may feel under-trained and think they are not providing the best counseling possible (Barlow, 1999). Silliman and Schumm (1999) add that few seminaries or graduate schools train students in marriage preparation, resulting in clergy ambivalence.

Campion (1982) notes the difficulty clergy may have in addressing sexuality as a topic due to embarrassment, and lack of knowledge, and breadth. He recommends questions on 1) sexual history; 2) sexual honesty; 3) birth control/medical exam; 4) marital sex; 5) spiritual considerations (but nothing on guilt, compatibility, or satisfaction criteria). He further proposes discussions based on male and female responsiveness, sex role differences and consequences for sex education and relationships. Other points of discussion include the broad definition of sexuality, obstacles of sexual exploitation/violence, idealization, and the naturalism myth. Finally he recommends rehearsing several male/female differences: 1) sight (M) and sound (F) stimulation; 2) briefer male arousal time; 3) mood influences (F) and misinterpretations; 4) male and female orgasmic experiences; 5) male and female "sexual peaks;" 6) physical and emotional meanings of sex. He also notes importance of communication process about sex and intimacy.

Silliman and Schumm (1999) points out that clergy and many religiously oriented premarital counseling programs are particularly concerned with moral teaching, evangelism, screening and approval for marriage, and wedding rehearsals. In many cases, religiously oriented young adults are uninterested in including such components in their premarital counseling. Furthermore counseling with clergy can cause anxiety for some clients who fear

they will be criticized for their lifestyle and/or be denied a wedding service (Silliman & Schumm, 1999).

Use of Assessments

Research in Premarital therapy has provided couples and counselors with a vast amount of tools, techniques, assessments, and programs. Williams, Riley, Risch, and Van Dyke (2000) found that using a premarital counseling inventory along with discussion between partners is reported as the most helpful component of premarital counseling. Silliman and Schumm (1999) assert that individual and couple strengths and needs should be assessed in premarital counseling. The authors further posit that this assessment can be formal or informal but it should address couple dynamics that predict marital outcomes and are amenable to behavioral change (i.e. conflict resolution and patterns of communication). Larson and Holman (1995) note that an adequate assessment should be 1) primarily or exclusively designed for assessing the premarital relationship, 2) reliable and valid, and 3) easy to administer and interpret.

There are three widely used and psychometrically sound premarital inventories that will now be reviewed: The Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation (PREPARE), Preparation for Marriage (PREP-M) also referred to as Relationship Evaluation or RELATE, and Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study (FOCCUS). They will be described in terms of content, usage, psychometric properties, and sampling demographics. Halford (2004) writes in her article *The Future of Couple Relationship Education: Suggestions on How It Can Make a Difference*, that PREPARE, RELATE, and FOCCUS are the most widely used inventories. The author further reports that these three inventories assess a broad range of couple functioning dimensions and provide the couple with systematic feedback about the results of the assessment. Halford (2004) mentions that the PREPARE, FOCCUS, and RELATE

instruments predict the trajectory of relationship satisfaction in early years of marriage. Each inventory measures a number of factors that are relevant to relationship outcomes.

PREPARE

PREPARE is a 125 item inventory designed to identify relationship strengths and work areas in 11 different relationship areas. These areas include: realistic expectations, communication, conflict management, children and marriage, sexual relationship, family and friends, leisure activities, equalitarian roles, religious orientation, personality issues and financial management (Fowers & Olson, 1986). According to Larson and his associates, a major strength of PREPARE is that it is short and comprehensive. In contrast, the authors mention that a weakness is that PREPARE is an expensive measurement inventory (Larson & Holman, 1995).

PREPARE is proven to be valid. PREPARE is also proven to be reliable with an internal consistency reliability (alpha) averaged .70 and a test retest reliability average of .78 (Fowers & Olson, 1986).

The participants in the original study consisted of 164 couples (328 individuals). The average age of the husbands was 25.2 and the average age of the wives were 23.2. The median income was \$14,400 annually. Couples were primarily white and were Christian (Fowers & Olson, 1986).

Presently over 1,000,000 couples have used PREPARE (www.lifeinnovations.com). There are other versions of PREPARE available to couples. There is a version for couples with children (PREPARE-MC) as well as for couples who are cohabitating together (PREPARE-CC). There are also several different translations for the PREPARE, including those in German and Japanese (www.lifeinnovations.com).

PREP-M

The PREP-M is another well-known inventory. The PREP-M was developed in 1980 and originally called The Marital Inventories. During this time the test had over 350 items that were designed for unmarried couples. The 1986 revision of the marital inventories became known as the PREP-M (Holman, Larson, & Harmer, 1994). The PREP-M measures factors in five broad areas: couple unity in values, attitudes, and beliefs; partner readiness for marriage; background and home environment factors; personal readiness for marriage; and couple readiness for marriage (Larson & Holman, 1995). According to Larson and Holman., the PREP-M is one of the most comprehensive and least expensive instruments available to premarital couples and others (Larson & Holman, 1995).

In 1989 the PREP-M was a 204-item test that took about 45 minutes to complete. Something different about PREP-M is that it could be used with friends, family, or even strangers as well as dating or engaged couples (Holman, Larson, & Harmer, 1994). The PREP-M was also found to be reliable and valid.

There were 103 couples (206 individuals) that participated in the development of the PREP-M. Sixty-eight percent of the participants grew up in the western United States. Seventy-two percent of the participants had some form of college education. The ages of the participants ranged from 17-48 years old. The mean age of all the participants was 22 years old. Ninety-five percent of the participants in this study were Caucasian. Eighty percent of the participants were Mormon (Holman, Larson, & Harmer, 1994).

The PREP-M has now developed further and in 1997 the name changed to RELATE (Relationship Evaluation) assessment. Carroll (2001) notes that RELATE is divided into four main subsystems: the individual subsystem (personality characteristics, styles of interacting, values, and beliefs); the couple subsystem (couple communication, pattern of interacting, conflict

resolution); the familial context (parents couple relationship, parent-child relationships, overall family tone); and the cultural context (social support, race, socioeconomic status, religion, cultural beliefs) (Carroll, 2001).

FOCCUS

FOCCUS is a 156 item assessment that was published by the Archdiocese of Omaha Nebraska. FOCCUS was designed to help couples learn and explore more about themselves and their relationship. It was designed to help couples work through certain pertinent issues before marriage. Larsen and Holman (1995) write that the inventory covers several areas including: lifestyle expectations, personality match, personal issues, problem solving, religion and values, parenting issues, marriage covenant, financial issues, and readiness issues (Larsen and Holman, 1995). FOCCUS can be administered to groups or individuals and is available in Spanish, Chinese, Korean, French, Portuguese, Polish, and Italian. FOCCUS is also available in Braille, on audiotape, and in sign language on video (www.foccusinc.com).

FOCCUS has been used many times in a variety of contexts and has proven to be valid and reliable (www.foccusinc.com). FOCCUS was updated in 1997 with cohabitating couples items and was revised in 2000 based on items related to spirituality and religion (www.foccusinc.com).

A Move Toward Diversity

There is recent research (Asai & Olson, 2004) emphasizing a cross-cultural perspective in premarital counseling. Each of the three questionnaires mentioned in the paper have been translated into other languages. However, more emphasis needs to be placed in making these inventories multiculturally sensitive in additional ways. Language makes up only a small part of any individual or couple's culture. These instruments and inventories need to be revised in light of the values, belief, and customs of each culture. Shuji Asai and David Olson make several powerful assertions regarding this issue in their article *Culturally Sensitive Adaptation of*

PREPARE with Japanese Premarital Couples. The first assertion the authors make is that studies that examine the issue of premarital relationships using cross-cultural populations are needed, particularly since most premarital research in the United States is based on predominantly white samples. Asai and Olson (2004) believe that many premarital inventories lack cultural applicability due to the lack of effort to establish cultural sensitivity and applicability through a carefully designed adaptation process. They report that in their research, PREPARE was changed only in some sections rather drastically in an effort to be culturally sensitive to Japanese couples. They note that it is rare that content experts from Caucasian and other ethnic minorities collaborate together to discern the cultural applicability of the inventories originally based on Caucasian normative sampling. They cite Gottman (1994) in declaring that it is essential that family researchers place current premarital relationship issues in the historical and cultural contexts in which particular familial structures are imbedded.

Conclusion

Change in the content and perspective of premarital counseling is greatly needed for non-white populations, particularly for providers of premarital counseling to African American couples. Research suggests (Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997; Silliman & Schumm, 1999) that approximately 75% of premarital counseling is provided by clergy. The authors assert that many clergy feel ambivalent about their preparation for premarital counseling because it is not covered in most seminaries. Sullivan & Bradbury (1997) posit that continued efforts are needed for marital therapists to work with churches to improve their premarital counseling programs. In most cases, counseling services for African Americans will be provided at the black church by an African American pastor. There are a significant number of African American pastors who never attended seminary. Because fewer African American pastors attend seminary, and a small number of seminaries or graduate schools provide training in marriage preparation programming,

it is unlikely that African American pastors have any training in premarital counseling. One is left to wonder what are the beliefs, attitudes, and current practices of African American pastors in premarital counseling.

Silliman & Schumm (1999) note that almost no research has been done that has assessed the needs of non-white audiences or offered programming from a multicultural perspective. The authors assert that more research is needed that considers and emphasizes the needs of non-white clients. Silliman & Schumm (1999) state that the needs of minorities remain unclear today. Sue and Sue (1999) write if counselors are to provide meaningful help to a culturally diverse population, they must develop new culturally effective helping approaches. I believe that premarital counseling is more effective when it is contextually and culturally sensitive. A way to accomplish this goal is to work with African American pastors in developing programs that are empirically supported programs that address the special issues of their congregation. The first step in this process is to identify the attitudes, beliefs, values and current practices of African American pastors in premarital counseling.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to (a) describe the background characteristics of African American Clergy who provide premarital counseling in the Black Church, (b) assess African American Clergy attitudes and beliefs about the necessity, importance, and value of premarital counseling in their local congregations and denominations, (c) assess the African American Clergy perceived self efficacy in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling, (d) determine African American Clergy desire for training in premarital counseling, (e) compare African American Clergy premarital counseling content to the content for premarital counseling supported by research, (f) compare African American Clergy premarital counseling style with the style of premarital counseling supported by research, (g) assess the influence of African American Clergy demographic factors on the content of their premarital counseling sessions, (h) assess the influence of African American Clergy demographic factors on their style of premarital counseling, and (i) assess clergy belief about their role in premarital counseling.

Variables

The independent variables included (a) whether the African American Clergy had received specialized training in premarital counseling, (b) religious affiliation/denomination, (c) age, and (d) other related professional training of African American Clergy.

One set of dependent variables, the content of premarital counseling sessions, included (a) conflict resolution, (b) communication, (c) finances, (d) parenting, (e) family, (f) friends, (d) leisure, (e) commitment, (f) family of origin, (g) gender roles within the marriage (h) religion, and (i) the sexual relationship.

Another set of dependent variables, included (a) African American Clergies' feelings about being adequately prepared to provide premarital counseling, (b) their desires for training in premarital counseling, and (c) their willingness to collaborate with mental health professionals in regards to premarital counseling.

Research Design

This study used a cross sectional mixed mode survey research methodology. Cresswell's (2005) report that cross sectional studies examine current attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices supports this decision. Dillman's (2000) tailored design methods were utilized with a multi-mode survey using phone, Internet, and face-to-face paper and pencil surveys. The tailored design method is a way to develop surveys and design survey studies taking into account respondent trust, reward and cost in order to reduce survey error. The study participants (African American Pastors/Clergy) received a survey instrument that included their demographic information investigates their beliefs, attitudes, preparation and practices in premarital counseling.

Population

The population of this study was comprised of African American Clergy who were pastors of predominantly black churches and who provided premarital counseling to their local congregation. The pastors are comprised of various denominations within the context of the black church. The three largest predominantly African American denominations were The Church of God In Christ, Baptist, and African Methodist Episcopal so the majority of the sample came from these denominations.

Sampling Procedure

Data Collection began after receiving approval of this study by the University of Florida Institutional Review Board. Pastors were surveyed using three methods. The researcher

surveyed pastors in person by attending conferences where they were gathered, through online surveys, and surveys conducted by phone. Because very little is found in the literature concerning African American clergy and premarital counseling, the goal of this study was to obtain a sample size of 300 persons. For this reason, the snowball sampling method was used as the sampling method. Creswell (2005) described snowball sampling as a type of nonprobability sampling that is an alternative to convenience sampling where the researcher asks participants to identify other possible participants. Creswell (2005) further states that this sampling method can yield a large number of participants for the study.

Key contact persons within the churches of various denominations were utilized. These contact persons received a letter by email or by hand (See appendix B) asking them to provide contact information for pastors whom they referred to the study. These key contact persons also received a letter (see appendix C) explaining the purpose of the research and asking for support that they gave to those persons they referred to the study. I also obtained contact information from online denominational directories and those churches that are listed in online yellow pages and phone books.

Person to Person Paper Surveys

Using contacts throughout various denominations, I attended several conferences where African American Clergy gather for enrichment. I spoke to the conference coordinators and participants asking them to announce or to allow me to announce my presence and purpose at their conference. I also conducted free workshops at one conference in particular on the topic of premarital counseling. In the case of the workshop, I asked that the surveys be done before hearing me present to avoid bias on the survey. In the cases where there were no workshops, I set up an area where I was able to explain my research and ask pastors to take the time to fill out the survey. I also gave the pastors the option of filling out the survey online.

Online Surveys

Church and clergy e-mail addresses were obtained from Internet Church and denominational directories and other clergy who referred clergy to the study by forwarding the e-mail I originally sent. The African American Clergy (AAC) were sent an email explaining who I was, the purpose of this research, and asking their participation in this research study. The e-mail sent to AAC included a link to the online survey, as well as my contact information inviting them to contact me for further questions as needed; they could also request a copy of the results of the study if they so desired. The survey itself was designed in a manner that was considered to be user friendly for those with minimal computer skills (Dillman, 2000). Survey Monkey, a web company that hosts surveys online maintained the site where African American Clergy went to complete the survey.

Telephone Surveys

Nelson (1996) asserts that phone interviews are effective when a large number of people must be interviewed. Since many pastors are not internet savvy, a few people were hired and trained to call African American Clergy and to ask them to participate in the study. To make African American Clergy feel more comfortable taking the survey by phone, the people trained to call clergy were selected based upon their knowledge of the Black Church and its culture and language. These individuals were given a script (see appendix D) as to what they were to say on the phone before reading the survey. A script for leaving a message was also provided for those making the phone calls. I acquired a list of pastors' contact information from key contact people in various denominations. I also discovered phone numbers from Internet searches. Those interviewing by phone were asked to put a CP in the corner of the upper right side of the paper to note the person was contacted by phone. A confidential phone log (see appendix F) was maintained by the callers to help them keep track of who they called and when they called.

Instrumentation

The Black Clergy Premarital Counseling Survey (BCPCS) is a 54 question survey. The survey requests African American Pastors' demographic information, their attitudes and beliefs about premarital counseling, their confidence in premarital counseling, and the topics they think are important to cover in premarital counseling.

To establish content validity, three licensed marriage and family therapy professionals reviewed the BCPCS and provided suggestions on possible revisions. The survey was then given to five African American Clergy. The clergy were asked the following after looking at the survey: 1) Is there anything about the survey that was unclear to you, 2) Is there any part of the survey that seemed offensive to you, 3) What are your thoughts about the length of the survey, 4) What are your thoughts about the appearance of the survey, 5) Is there anything you think should or should not be included in the survey, and 6) Do you have any other comments, questions, or suggestions regarding this survey? Revisions were then made according to the feedback and suggestions from the clergy. Because the BCPCS is basically a questionnaire to gather information, it was decided that a pilot test of the instrument was not needed. See the copy of the BCPCS in appendix A.

Operational Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions and hypotheses were evaluated in the data analyses:

- Research question 1: What are the background characteristics and demographics of African American Clergy (AAC) providers of premarital counseling based on responses on the BCPCS?
- Research question 2: What topics do AAC feel are most and least important in premarital counseling?
- Research question 3: What is the level of confidence of AAC teaching and or discussing certain topics in premarital counseling?

- Research question 4: What are AAC's attitudes and beliefs about premarital counseling and their preparation to do premarital counseling?
- Research question 5: Are there differences in AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling based on AAC demographics (whether or not the AAC has received specialized training in PMC, age, church size, level of education/training, and church denomination)?
 - Ho(1): There will be a difference in AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling based on whether or not AAC has received specialized training.
 - Ho(2): There will be no difference in AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling based on AAC church denomination.
 - Ho(3): There will be a difference in AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling based on AAC age.
 - Ho(4): There will be a difference in AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling based on AAC's church size.
 - Ho(5): There will be a difference in AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling based on AAC's level of education/training.
- Research question 6: What is the relationship between AAC's assessment of importance of aspects of premarital counseling and their confidence providing counseling in those particular aspects?
- Research question 7: What is the relationship between AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling and AAC attitudes assessed in the BCPCS (would like more training, support more clergy and family counselors working together, feeling adequately prepared to provide premarital counseling and welcoming a PMC manual or program created for black clergy)?
 - Ho(6): There will not be a positive relationship between AAC's level of confidence providing certain aspects and their attitudes and beliefs about premarital counseling and their a preparation to do premarital counseling.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the African American Clergy demographic variables. Means and standard deviations were calculated for each of the continuous variables (i.e. age, length of sessions, number of sessions). Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each categorical variable (i.e. whether or not the clergy has received specialized training in

premarital counseling, level of education/training, church size, church location, church denomination).

Psychometric properties were determined for the BCPCS. The BCPCS content validity was determined by a review of the BCPCS by two marriage and family therapists who are professors. A group of five pastors were asked to take the survey and provide feedback about its clarity, length, and formatting style.

A rank ordered means of analysis was used to answer question three. Mean scores for all the topics were calculated for each of the topics. The topics were then ranked according to their means for all African American Clergy.

An ANOVA was used to answer question four assessing AAC's confidence, and question five assessing AAC's attitudes and beliefs about premarital counseling. Nelson (1996) notes that ANOVA's are appropriate statistical tests to use in survey research to answer likert scale questions.

Several ANOVA's were conducted to test hypothesis based on research question six, which corresponds to hypothesis one through five. Because age was not a categorical variable in this study, correlation analysis was used to analyze the relationship of age and AAC confidence.

A correlation analysis was conducted to determine if there is a relationship between AAC's assessment of importance of aspects of premarital counseling and their confidence providing counseling in those particular aspects for question seven. The same statistic was used to determine if there is a relationship between AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling and AAC attitudes assessed in the BCPCS for question eight.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The results of a survey of African American/Black Clergy are presented in this chapter. The survey assessed the attitudes, beliefs, preparation, and practices of Black clergy in premarital counseling. First, the background and demographic characteristics of the sample are presented. Next, the analysis of each research question in this study is discussed including the following: (a) AAC's assessment of the relative importance of topics in premarital counseling; (b) AAC's level of confidence in teaching and/or discussing specific topics in premarital counseling; (c) AAC's attitudes and beliefs about premarital counseling; (d) AAC's preparation to do premarital counseling; (e) The relationship between AAC demographic information (whether or not the AAC has received specialized training in PMC, age, church size, level of education/training, and church denomination) and their level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling; (f) the relationship between AAC's assessment of the importance of aspects of premarital counseling and their confidence providing counseling in those particular aspects; (g) the relationship between AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling and AAC attitudes assessed in the BCPCS (i.e., would like more training; support more clergy and family counselors working together; feeling adequately prepared to provide premarital counseling and welcoming a PMC manual or program created specifically for black clergy). Lastly, AAC's responses to the open ended question on the BCPCS are reported. All tables referred to in this chapter are located at the end of the chapter.

Sample Demographics

The first research question examined the background information of Black/African American Clergy. Because of the difficulty in quantifying an exact number in the population, the lack of information about African American clergy in counseling research, and the desire

to gain information from as many African American clergy as possible, a convenience sample method was chosen.

The Black clergy in this study represented several denominations, church locations, and congregation sizes. The Church of God in Christ (the denomination of the researcher) comprised 56.9% of the respondents, African Methodist Episcopal and Baptist denominations each made up 8% of the participants. Nondenominational churches comprised 10.2% of the sample, and 17.1% of respondents represented congregations that did not fit in either of these categories (Table 1). In terms of marital status, 63.5% of the clergy were in their first marriage, 22.4% had remarried after the death of a wife or a divorce, 4.1% were widowed and had not remarried, 5% had never married, and 5% were divorced and had not remarried (Table 2).

The age of the respondents ranged from 19 to 86 years with the average age being 49.5 years. The median and modal age was 51 years and 50 years respectively. Males comprised 84.9% of the sample and females made up 15.1% (Table 3). Most of the sample 97.5 % was from the United States. Other countries represented in this study were Jamaica, Canada, England, St. Kitt and Nigeria (Table 4).

Approximately half of the clergy who participated in this study served churches that were located in rural areas (47%). Clergy serving in inner city/impoverished neighborhoods comprise 26.1%. The remaining 26.9% of the sample served in suburban areas or upper middle class areas near large cities (Table 5). In terms of the number of people in the various congregations, 31.1% of the respondents report being from churches with less than 50 people. 26% of the participants are from churches having 50 to 100 and 100 to 300 members respectively. Less than 10% of the clergy in this study served churches with over 500 members (Table 6).

The Black clergy in the sample also had various levels of ministerial training. Approximately half (53.3%) had earned a seminary degree, 40.9% reported certification based on training received within their church or denomination, 26.9% based on mentorship/apprenticeship training, 18.6% were self educated and 8.7% indicated other means of education (Table 7). The educational achievements of the Black clergy in the sample ranged from one without a high school diploma to 9 PhD degrees (Table 8). A small percentage of the sample 3.8% had earned a PhD, 23% a master's degree, 27.6% a bachelor's degree 14.2% an associate's degree, and 22.2% a high school diploma. Only one respondent reported never having graduated from high school (.4%).

More Black clergy reported *not* having completed specialized training in premarital counseling (53.3%) than those that reported completing such training (46.7%) (Table 9). Of the clergy who reported having had some preparation for premarital counseling, 29.5% completed a seminary class, 59.8% cited their reading program, and 9.4% reported no training at all (Table 10).

AAC's Assessment of Relative Importance of Topics in Premarital Counseling

Question two dealt with Black Clergy's assessment of relative importance of certain topics in premarital counseling. The responses ranged from 1 which indicated the topic was of absolutely no importance to 5 which indicated that it was extremely important. Mean scores were calculated for each topic listed on the Black Clergy Premarital Counseling Survey (Table 11). The topics rated as most important by clergy are couple communication, with a mean of 4.96 and a standard deviation of .21, couple commitment to the marriage, with a mean of 4.94 and standard deviation of 0.25, and conflict resolution, with a mean of 4.85 and a standard deviation of 0.40. The topics selected as least important were maintenance of friendships outside of the marriage, with a mean of 3.88 and a standard deviation of 0.74,

maintenance of extended family relationships, with a mean of 4.15 and a standard deviation of 0.73, and family of origin issues, with a mean of 4.19 and a standard deviation of 0.81.

AAC's Level of Confidence of Teaching and or Discussing Certain Topics in Premarital Counseling

Question four dealt with Black Clergy's assessment of their confidence in teaching, addressing and discussing various topics in premarital counseling. The responses ranged from 1 which indicated s/he was not at all confident to 5 which indicated s/he was extremely confident. Mean scores of clergy confidence were calculated for each topic listed on the Black Clergy Premarital Counseling Survey (see table 12). The topics clergy rated as "most confident in addressing" were (a) couples commitment to the marriage, with a mean of 4.68 and standard deviation of 0.50, (b) Couples expectation/gender roles, with a mean of 4.45 and a standard deviation of 0.61, and (c) Parenting issues, with a mean of 4.43 and a standard deviation of 0.64. The topics selected as areas in which clergy had the least confidence were (a) maintenance of friendships out side of the marriage, with a mean of 4.09 and a standard deviation of 0.76, (b) maintenance of extended family relationships, with a mean of 4.13 and a standard deviation of 0.73, and (c) family of origin issues, with a mean of 4.16 and a standard deviation of 0.75.

AAC's Attitudes and Beliefs about Premarital Counseling and their Preparation to do Premarital Counseling

Black Clergy answered a variety of questions soliciting their thoughts, beliefs and attitudes about premarital counseling. The responses were based on a Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree (Table 13). Eighty-four percent of clergy strongly agreed that premarital counseling should be mandatory before marriage. While 12% agreed, 3% neither agreed nor disagreed and only one person disagreed that premarital counseling should be mandatory before marriage. The average response for this question was 4.81. When asked if premarital

counseling helps build strong marriages 69% of clergy strongly agreed, 25% agreed, 6% neither agreed nor disagreed, and only one person disagreed. The average response for this question was 4.62. Clergy were also questioned if they thought premarital counseling helped prevented divorce; 42% strongly agreed, 33% agreed, 19% neither agreed nor disagreed, 4% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. The average response for this question was 4.07. In regards to specialized training, 50% of the clergy responding strongly agreed to “desiring more specialized training in premarital counseling”, 36% agreed, 10% neither agreed nor disagreed, 4% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed. The average response to this question was 4.30. Black clergy were asked if they supported collaboration with family counselors to provide premarital counseling: 54% strongly agreed, 37% agreed, 7% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 2% disagreed. The average response for this question was 4.42. These questions were tested for internal consistency using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha. The Cronbach’s alpha score was .88 (Table 14).

Using the same Likert scale, Black clergy were asked if they felt they had a strong premarital counseling program: 23% strongly agreed, 41% agreed, 25% neither agreed nor disagreed, 8% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed. The average response for this question was 3.76. Clergy were also asked if they felt adequately prepared to do premarital counseling: 33% strongly agreed, 44% agreed, 17% neither agreed nor disagreed, 5% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed. The average response for this question was 4.0. Clergy were asked if they would welcome a premarital counseling manual created for Black clergy: 72% strongly agreed, 22% agreed, 4.1% neither agreed nor disagreed, with only one respondent strongly disagreeing. The average response for this question was 4.65.

Black Clergy were asked a variety of questions regarding their preparation to provide premarital counseling. More Black clergy reported not having completed specialized training in premarital counseling (53.3%) than those that reported training (46.7%). Of the clergy

who reported having had some preparation for premarital counseling, 29.5% completed a seminary class, 59.8% cited their reading program, and 9.4% reported no training at all. Black clergy were asked to rate on a Likert scale their familiarity with premarital counseling research and whether or not they used a well researched premarital counseling program. 17% of clergy strongly agreed, 29% agreed, 26% neither agreed nor disagreed, 19% disagreed and 9% strongly disagreed to using a well researched program. The answers ranged from 1 to 5 with the average being 3.27. Concerning their familiarity with premarital counseling research, 7% strongly agreed, 12% agreed, 24% neither agreed nor disagreed, 22% disagreed, and 35% said that they were NOT familiar with premarital counseling research.

The Relationship between AAC Demographic Information and their Level of Confidence in Providing Certain Aspects of Premarital Counseling

The fifth question examined the relationship between certain demographic factors of Black clergy and their confidence in performing various functions in premarital counseling. The first research hypothesis states that there will be a difference in AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling based on whether or not AAC has received specialized training. A t-test was conducted. The results of this analysis revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between clergy who had specialized training in premarital counseling and clergy who did not have specialized training thus, indicating support for the first research hypothesis (Table 15).

The second hypothesis was that there will be no difference in AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling based on AAC church denomination. The results of an ANOVA indicated that there were no significant differences between various denominations and the clergies' level of confidence ($p=.41$) thus, supporting the research hypothesis (Table 16).

The third hypothesis states that there will be a significant relationship between AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling and AAC age. Using

correlation analysis, the third research hypothesis was tested. The result of the analysis indicated that there were no statistically significant relationship between AAC's age and AAC's level of confidence ($r = .02, p = .75$) thus failing to support the research hypothesis (Table 17).

The fourth hypothesis states that there will be a difference in AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling based on AAC's church size. Using ANOVA, the fourth research hypothesis was tested. The result of the analysis indicated that there were no statistically significant difference among AAC church membership size on AAC's level of confidence ($p=.19$) thus, failing to support the research hypothesis (Table 18).

The fifth hypothesis states that there will be a difference in AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling based on AAC's level of education. Using ANOVA, the fifth research hypothesis was tested. The result of the analysis indicated that there were no statistically significant difference among AAC's level of education on AAC's level of confidence ($p=.86$) thus, failing to support the research hypothesis (Table 19).

The six hypothesis states that there will be a difference in AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling based on AAC's level of training. Using an ANOVA, the sixth research hypothesis was tested. The result of the analysis indicated that there were no statistically significant difference among AAC's level of training on AAC's level of confidence ($p=.86$) thus, failing to support the research hypothesis (Table 20).

The Relationship Between AAC's Assessment of Importance of Aspects of Premarital Counseling and their Confidence Providing Counseling in those Particular Aspects

The sixth question examines the relationship between AAC's assessment of importance of aspects of premarital counseling and their confidence providing counseling in those particular areas. Correlation analyses were used to answer this question. Correlation coefficients between AAC's assessment of importance of aspects of premarital counseling

and their confidence providing counseling in those particular aspects are presented (Table 21). The result of the analysis indicated that there were several statistically significant relationships between AAC's assessment of the importance of aspects of premarital counseling and their confidence providing counseling in those particular aspects. For example, individuals who reported a high level of confidence in discussing the couple's sexual relationship also rated this topic as very important ($r = .41, p < .01$).

There were also certain noteworthy patterns of significant relationships when examining the data. For example, the columns noting confidence in discussing fun and leisure and discussing couple's sexual relationships had significant correlations with the assessment of relative importance for each topic tested. Those columns regarding confidence in teaching conflict resolution and addressing maintenance of friendships outside of the marriage also had significant correlations with the assessment of relative importance for each topic. When examining patterns by topic, there are significant relationships with the measure of confidence in each area for the topic of fun and leisure in a marriage (Table 21).

The Relationship between AAC's Level of Confidence in Providing Certain Aspects of Premarital Counseling and AAC Attitudes Assessed in the BCPCS

The seventh question examined the relationship between AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling and AAC attitudes assessed in the BCPCS. Correlation analyses were used to answer research question eight. Correlation coefficients between AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling and AAC attitudes assessed in the BCPCS are presented (Table 22). The result of the analysis indicated that there were several statistically significant relationships between AAC's level of confidence in providing certain aspects of premarital counseling and AAC attitudes assessed in the BCPCS.

There are several patterns of significant correlations regarding certain attitudes and clergy confidence. For example there were significant correlations in every area of

confidence and those rating feeling adequately prepared to do research and those feeling like they have a strong premarital counseling program. Also, interestingly there were no correlations with any area clergy confidence and the desire for more training in premarital counseling (Table 22).

Response to Open ended Question

Four open ended questions were asked at the end of the survey. The first two questions asked Black Clergy their suggestions on the number and length of sessions they thought appropriate for premarital counseling. The number of sessions ranged from one to 12 with three and six sessions suggested as the model number. The suggested length of premarital counseling sessions ranged from 30 minutes to four hours, the mode or most commonly suggested length of a session was one hour.

There were a variety of responses to the third open ended question which asked Black clergy how they view their role in premarital counseling. However common themes and roles were suggested the most common of which was the role of a facilitator. Examples of clergy responses are as follows:

- Facilitation and guide to discussing issues of marriage
- To facilitate each session by encouraging them to begin the communication process
- Discussion and discovery facilitator
- Facilitator and discussion leader.
- Facilitate discussion of matters and issues relevant to couple.
- Facilitator listener
- Facilitate understanding and communication.
- Facilitate bring awareness of expectations
- Facilitative helper
- Facilitation/leading in bible base direction

A number of clergy emphasized the role of spiritual teacher by identifying these activities:

- Showing people what the Bible says about marriage, explaining Biblical roles in marriage
- To provide practical Bible based information that
- Spiritual aspect of marriage
- To let them know that they need to keep the Lord Jesus Christ 1st and foremost in their marriage
- To bring out the biblical truth on marriage
- Biblical directions concerning marriage
- To help the couple understand God's purpose for marriage
- To give clear biblical instruction of what is expected of the husband and the wife
- To inform them about what the Bible says about a good marriage
- Make sure I marry two Christians
- Direct lives according to the Bible
- Basic biblical principles
- Resident theologian to clarify and reinforce Christian marriage principles and encourage a Christ centered marriage. Help the couple see marriage through the eyes of God.

Various clergy emphasized the role of expert/advisor. Examples of clergy responses regarding their role as an expert/advisor include:

- An advisor
- Strongly advise implement marriage advice on how to hold a marriage together for long time
- To explain the good and bad about marriage and relationships
- Advising recommendations
- Giving advice answering questions
- Make people aware of what marriage is all about

- I guide, direct, advise and provide information to ensure success
- Advisor informer,
- Adviser/teacher/facilitator, etc

Some clergy screen couples to make sure that the couples are right for each other and that each couple is ready for marriage. Examples of clergy responses that place them in the role of a screener include:

- On occasion, slow them down and let them know its O.K. to postpone or even cancel the wedding to work through issues. (I had one couple who took 5 years to decide they were ready.)
- Assist in making sure each person has selected the right person and to discuss information with them.
- I have refused to marry couples after some sessions.

The last open ended question asked Black clergy what skills or knowledge they think they need or want to develop to strengthen their premarital program. There were some notable common salient themes found in the responses of the clergy, particularly the desire for more training, education, tools, and support. Examples of such response include:

- I serve as Certification Chair within my professional organization, American Association of Pastoral Counselors www.aapc.org. We set standards and structure in pastoral care and counseling. This is a mainstream body of clergy but few of us are clergy of color. Every clergyperson needs advanced study in counseling theory which includes marriage and family issues. This is crucial due to poor emotional health in the African American community. It is now illegal to offer counseling without a licensure
- Proper material and practice
- Courses, seminars
- Educate OJT
- Workshop material assist with building a strong marriage
- Conflict resolution, extended family issues, financial planning, family planning
- Reality of life within culture. Don't play with truth
- Ethnocentric Assessments
- Better skill in how to elicit information

- A PMC Manual
- Insights from other Christian leaders on the topic of marriage
- Academic training
- Taking a course in premarital counseling to enhance my skills
- There needs to be workshops on marriage and as a continuous part of the local church. There needs to be an established program for couples before and after marriage
- More education and research

Some Black clergy felt that they did not need anything to strengthen their premarital program. Examples of responses of clergy with this perspective include:

- Well sir let me say this I been in the COGIC for a long time and it is time that we talked to everyone the same. Let me explain you are stating black marriages which are no different than white or any other color that's one hang up cause I don't believe we are just black ministers or ministering to black people. When I first came into the COGIC being a white man but following what the lord had told me I would pray that I would get some black parishioners and at the same time would hope they wouldn't come cause I was frightened that I might not know how to minister to them especially in a marriage situation so one bible study night I sat in my office bound in fear and torment hoping no black person would show up yet so badly I wanted that mixed church, when all of a sudden the lord spoke to me and said why are you so fearful after telling him he said to me you don't have to be bound you have the best tool for everything right there it will work for all ages and groups and people. The Lord set me free and you can counsel every one with that bible the word of god nothing more nothing less and it works for all color and race even Isaiah said we shall call him counselor and my church is mixed and 80%black 5% Hispanic the rest white I believe it works that's the real bishop mason church (mixed)
- I'm ok as is.
- N/A

Table 1 Respondents' Church Denomination/Classification

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	COGIC	139	56.3	56.5	56.5
	AME	21	8.5	8.5	65.0
	Baptist	20	8.1	8.1	73.2
	Non-Den	24	9.7	9.8	82.9
	Other	42	17.0	17.1	100.0
	Total	246	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.4		
Total		247	100.0		

Table 2 Respondent Marital Status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1 st marriage	153	61.9	63.8
	Remarried	54	21.9	22.5
	Divorce not remarried	12	4.9	5.0
	Widowed not remarried	10	4.0	4.2
	Single never married	11	4.5	4.6
	Total	240	97.2	100.0
Missing	System	7	2.8	
Total		247	100.0	

Table 3
Respondents'
Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	208	84.2	84.9	84.9
	Female	37	15.0	15.1	100.0
	Total	245	99.2	100.0	
Missing	System	2	.8		
Total		247	100.0		

Table 4 Respondents' Country of Origin

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	USA	235	95.1	97.5	97.5
	Jamaica	2	.8	.8	98.3
	Other	4	1.6	1.7	100.0
	Total	241	97.6	100.0	
Missing	System	6	2.4		
Total		247	100.0		

Table 5 Respondents' Church Location

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Rural	115	46.6	47.7	47.7
	Suburban	39	15.8	16.2	63.9
	Inner city	63	25.5	26.1	90.0
	City middle	24	9.7	10.0	100.0
	Total	241	97.6	100.0	
Missing	System	6	2.4		
Total		247	100.0		

Table 6 Respondents' Church membership size

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	50 or less	75	30.4	31.3	31.3
	50-100	63	25.5	26.3	57.5
	100-300	64	25.9	26.7	84.2
	300-500	16	6.5	6.7	90.8
	500-1000	10	4.0	4.2	95.0
	Over 1000	12	4.9	5.0	100.0
	Total	240	97.2	100.0	
Missing	System	7	2.8		
Total		247	100.0		

Table 7 Respondents' level of training

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Degree	128	51.8	54.2	54.2
	Certification	80	32.4	33.9	88.1
	Mentorship	19	7.7	8.1	96.2
	Self-education	6	2.4	2.5	98.7
	other	3	1.2	1.3	100.0
	Total	236	95.5	100.0	
Missing	System	11	4.5		
Total		247	100.0		

Table 8 Respondents' highest level of education completed

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	PhD	9	3.6	3.8	3.8
	Doc Div	33	13.4	14.1	17.9
	Master	49	19.8	20.9	38.9
	Bachelor	62	25.1	26.5	65.4
	Associate	32	13.0	13.7	79.1
	High/GED	48	19.4	20.5	99.6
	Less than high/GED	1	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	234	94.7	100.0	
Missing	System	13	5.3		
Total		247	100.0		

Table 9 Respondents' specialized training in premarital Counseling

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	113	45.7	46.9	46.9
	No	128	51.8	53.1	100.0
	Total	241	97.6	100.0	
Missing	System	6	2.4		
Total		247	100.0		

Table 10 Respondents' Level of training in premarital counseling

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Seminary class	72	29.1	30.0	30.0
	Workshop/seminar	77	31.2	32.1	62.1
	Premarital program	16	6.5	6.7	68.8
	Read books	55	22.3	22.9	91.7
	None	20	8.1	8.3	100.0
	Total	240	97.2	100.0	
Missing	System	7	2.8		
Total		247	100.0		

Table 11 Respondents assessment of relative importance of certain topics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
couple communication	235	4.96	0.213
conflict resolution	236	4.85	0.405
financial planning	236	4.74	0.460
maintaining good ext fam rel	232	4.15	0.730
maintaining good friendships	230	3.88	0.744
couple sexual relationship	236	4.53	0.601
Having fun leisure time	237	4.49	0.615
making the marriage work	236	4.94	0.247
Good parenting	234	4.74	0.512
Understanding family-of-origin	236	4.19	0.805
Understanding husband/wife roles	237	4.70	0.510
Valid N (listwise)	216		

Table 12 Respondents level of Confidence

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teaching communication skills	230	4.35	0.642
maintenance of extended family relationships	232	4.13	0.729
Teaching conflict resolution strategies	230	4.27	0.734
Discussing the significance of fun	233	4.26	0.692
Discussing the couple's sexual relationship	231	4.26	0.776
Addressing the maintenance of friendships outside the marriage	230	4.09	0.760
Teaching family financial planning	229	4.31	0.734
Discussing the meaning of commitment	230	4.69	0.501
Discussing family-of-origin	229	4.16	0.746
Addressing husband/wife roles and expectations	230	4.45	0.609
Discussing pregnancy and childbirth	228	4.24	0.777
Focusing on parenting issues	232	4.44	0.641
Valid N (list wise)	214		

Table 13 Respondents attitudes and beliefs

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Premarital counseling should be mandatory before marriage	230	4.81	0.490
Premarital counseling helps build a strong marriage	229	4.62	0.620
Premarital counseling helps prevent divorce	230	4.07	1.006
I would like more specialized training in premarital counseling	225	4.31	0.855
I support Clergy & family counselors working together to do premarital counseling	225	4.42	0.729
I feel like I have a strong premarital counseling program	225	3.77	0.958
My denomination has a structured premarital counseling program	225	2.70	1.219

Table 13 continued

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I use tests, inventories, or assessments in premarital counseling sessions	226	3.48	1.266
I give homework for the couples in my sessions	225	3.81	1.218
I teach skills to couples in my sessions	223	3.94	0.987
I feel adequately prepared to provide premarital counseling	225	4.01	0.931
I would welcome a premarital counseling manual or program created for black clergy	229	4.65	0.663
My church has established regulations about Premarital Counseling	221	3.15	1.362
I already use a well researched premarital counseling program	225	3.29	1.196
I am not familiar with premarital counseling research	226	2.36	1.272
I do most of the talking in the premarital counseling sessions	227	2.58	1.139
I talk very little in sessions I facilitate couple discussion	225	3.43	1.063
Valid N (listwise)	203		

Table 14 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.886	12

Table 15 AAC's confidence level with regards to specialized training

	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> (sig)
AAC with special training (n=103)	4.40	.45	2.93	.01
AAC without special training (n=111)	4.22	.45		

Table 16 Mean, standard deviation, and F score for AAC's confidence level

	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i> (sig)
Church of God (n=119)	4.26	.46	.97	.41
African Methodist (n=18)	4.35	.40		
Baptist (n=16)	4.41	.56		
Non-Denomination (n = 23)	4.41	.41		

Table 17. Correlation coefficient for AAC age and AAC confidence level

Variable	Age	Confidence Level	Mean	SD
Age	-	.02	49.50	12.02
Confidence level		-	4.31	.46

Table 18 score for AAC's confidence level and church size

	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i> (sig)
Under 50 (n=69)	4.27	.46	1.49	.19
50-100 (n=52)	4.30	.40		
100-300 (n=56)	4.35	.47		
300-500 (n = 14)	4.18	.39		
500-1000 (n=9)	4.19	.71		
1000 plus (n =10)	4.62	.43		

Table 19 AAC's confidence level and education

	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i> (sig)
Ph.D (n=7)	4.27	.42	.42	.86
Doctor of Divinity (n=27)	4.37	.46		
MA (n=46)	4.33	.47		
BA (n = 54)	4.22	.43		
AA (n=28)	4.30	.44		
High School(n =44)	4.31	.52		

Table 20. Mean, standard deviation, and F score for AAC's confidence level

	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i> (sig)
A degree from Seminary (n=112)	4.31	.47	.25	.86
Certification (n=73)	4.30	.46		
Mentorship(n=16)	4.31	.46		
Self Education (n = 3)	4.08	.25		

Table 21 Correlation of AAC's assessment of importance of topics and their confidence

	TCS	DEFR	TCR	DSFL	DCSR	AMFO	TFFP	DMC	DFO	AGR	DPC	FPI
CC	0.22**	0.23**	0.29**	0.25**	0.36**	0.21**	0.03	0.15*	0.18*	0.23**	0.13*	0.11*
CR	0.27**	0.14*	0.26**	0.24**	0.23**	0.26**	0.07	0.21**	0.09	0.15*	0.04	0.08
FFP	0.19**	0.14*	0.24**	0.32**	0.25**	0.25**	0.30**	0.06	0.12*	0.13*	0.16*	0.13*
MGEF	0.17*	0.31**	0.25**	0.22**	0.23**	0.24**	0.09	-0.03	0.12*	0.11*	0.08	0.23**
MGFO	0.31**	0.29**	0.33**	0.34**	0.29**	0.31**	0.19*	0.05	0.24**	0.16*	0.18*	0.23**
CSR	0.16*	0.27**	0.26**	0.27**	0.41**	0.24**	0.08	0.12*	0.26**	0.24**	0.19*	0.20**
FL	0.24**	0.23**	0.29**	0.41**	0.28**	0.27**	0.16*	0.19*	0.27**	0.27**	0.21**	0.27**
CMW	0.23**	0.18*	0.23**	0.24**	0.28**	0.30**	0.07	0.21**	0.12*	0.17*	0.09	0.07
GP	0.16*	0.20**	0.24**	0.25**	0.27**	0.25**	0.16*	0.13*	0.21**	0.17*	0.16*	0.22**
UFO	0.13*	0.16*	0.16*	0.25**	0.22**	0.13*	0.09	0.12*	0.33**	0.19*	0.25**	0.22**
UGR	0.24**	0.22**	0.27**	0.25**	0.28**	0.26**	0.07	0.18*	0.30**	0.35**	0.19*	0.24**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Note: TCS = Teaching communication skill; DEFR = Discussing the maintenance of extended family relationship; TCR= Teaching Conflict Resolution; DSFL=. Discussing the significance of fun and leisure; DCSR= Discussing couples sexual relationship; AMFO= Addressing maintenance of friendships outside the marriage; TFFP= Teaching family financial planning; DMC= Discussing meaning of commitment; DFO= Discussing family of origin issues; AGR= Addressing gender roles; DPC= Discussing pregnancy and childbirth; FPI= Focusing on parenting issues

Table 22 Correlation coefficients between AAC's level of confidence and AAC attitudes assessed in the BCPCS

	TCS	DEFR	TCR	DSFL	DCSR	AMFO	TFFP	DMC	DFO	AGR	DPC	FPI
PCMB	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.04	0.08	0.11*	-0.04	0.09	0.04	0.03	0.10	0.05
PCSM	0.22**	0.12*	0.15*	0.19*	0.23**	0.19*	0.23**	0.15*	0.12*	0.15*	0.22**	0.18*
PCPV	0.21**	0.16*	0.18*	0.21**	0.20*	0.15*	0.31**	0.10	0.13*	0.14*	0.22**	0.10
STPC	0.09	0.09	0.05	0.07	-0.04	-0.01	0.05	0.01	-0.07	-0.10	-0.01	-0.02
CFWT	0.06	0.06	0.16*	0.13*	0.14*	0.05	0.10	0.08	0.10	0.03	0.24**	0.06
SPCP	0.26**	0.35**	0.31**	0.29**	0.38**	0.32**	0.29**	0.16*	0.39**	0.25**	0.39**	0.31**
DPCP	0.05	0.15*	0.09	0.01	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.05	0.19*	0.07	0.08	0.03
TIAS	0.18*	0.22**	0.24**	0.19*	0.19*	0.21**	0.13*	0.15*	0.23**	0.16*	0.31**	0.22**
HCS	0.17*	0.18*	0.22**	0.21**	0.13*	0.21**	0.11	0.23**	0.22**	0.18*	0.22**	0.14*
SCS	0.24**	0.29**	0.35**	0.26**	0.26**	0.26**	0.21**	0.24**	0.25**	0.22**	0.29**	0.23**
APPC	0.33**	0.32**	0.32**	0.27**	0.29**	0.30**	0.27**	0.28**	0.22**	0.23**	0.23**	0.31**
PMCM	0.05	0.04	0.07	0.14*	0.09	0.11*	-0.02	0.09	-0.04	0.00	0.05	0.01
RPC	0.20**	0.21**	0.26**	0.19*	0.25**	0.23**	0.16*	0.12*	0.19*	0.17*	0.26**	0.17*
RPCP	0.21**	0.26**	0.24**	0.29*	0.22**	0.27**	0.21**	0.12*	0.18*	0.10	0.28**	0.23**
NFPC	0.04	0.03	0.12*	-0.07	-0.11*	-0.09	-0.03	-0.11	-0.02	-0.08	-0.07	-0.11
TPCS	0.09	0.02	0.05	-0.05	0.11*	0.05	-0.02	0.07	0.02	0.03	-0.03	0.05
LCD	0.07	0.16*	0.13*	0.03	0.00	0.05	0.06	0.14*	0.08	0.05	0.08	0.11

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Note: PCMB= PMC should be mandatory; PCSM= PMC build strong marriages; PCPV= PMC prevent divorce; STPC= specialized training in PMC; CFWT= I support clergy & counselors working together; SPCP= a strong PMC program; DPCP= Denomination has structured PMC program; TIAS= I use tests, inventories, or assessments in session; HCS= I give homework to couples in session; SCS= I teach skills; APPC= adequately prepared to provide PMC; PMCM= welcome a PMC manual for Black clergy; RPC= My church has established regulations about PMC; RPCP= I already use a well researched PMC program; NFPC= I am not familiar with premarital counseling research; TPCS= I do most of the talking in session; LCD= I talk very little I facilitate couple discussion

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

The negative effects of marital distress and divorce have a tremendous impact on society, touching the lives of everyone in some way (Stanley and Markman, 1997). High divorce rates for first-time marriages of approximately 50% and ongoing domestic violence elicit a significant amount of alarm and apprehension among couples, religious leaders, political leaders, persons in the media, and public policy advocates. Stanley and Markman (1997) assert that marital distress and divorce has placed American children at great risk for poverty, alienation, and antisocial behavior. Conflicts at home lead to decreased work productivity for adults in their place of employment and for children in their schools. The authors further assert that both adults and children are at increased risk for mental and physical problems due to marital distress. These assertions along with the special challenges in the Black community (e.g., high incarceration rates, unemployment rates, high school dropout rates, single parent homes) calls for individual attention to be given to assist this group of people.

One enduring and prominent institution dedicated to the betterment of the Black community has always been and continues to be the Black Church. Premarital counseling can be a useful tool in promoting lasting marriages and reducing marital distress (Murray, 2004). The current study explores the attitudes, beliefs, preparation and practice of Clergy in the Black Church in premarital counseling. This chapter will discuss the limitations of this study, present a summary of my findings, present the implications of the findings and state recommendations for further research.

Limitations of the Study

When conducting survey research, there are inherent limitations to be considered when interpreting results (Nelson, 1996). This study has limitations in the following areas: sampling

issues, limitations associated with a mixed modal survey, social desirability, and self-reporting/perception concerns.

One limitation of this study is that a non-probability sampling method was used, specifically, snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involves the researcher asking participants to identify others to participate in the study. This method has been useful in recruiting a larger sample size. As a consequence, there was no knowledge of exactly who was in the study, (response rate) who did and did not complete the survey and how well they represented the target population (Creswell: 2004). Nelson (1996) asserts that non-probability sampling techniques increase sampling error. Because Black clergy are a widely dispersed and diverse population, and there is such a lack of representation of this population in counseling research, a major endeavor was to obtain a large number of survey responses. There were no restrictions that would possibly decrease my sample size. Nelson (1996) suggests that convenience sampling is appropriate for exploratory studies where the population is large, potential biases are known by the researcher, and population lists are difficult to obtain.

Another possible limitation is the use of a mixed delivery modes for the survey. There were differences in the survey's appearance online versus black and white paper based surveys. Dillman (2000) writes that differences in survey modes can influence participant responses. I also found that certain pastors have colleagues and cohorts who are of like education and technological skill. The pastors who responded on line were more likely to have completed higher levels of education and be more technologically savvy. These pastors forwarded survey links to other pastors who were similar in education and who were more likely to participate in the study. I noticed more variety in clergy demographic factors in the paper based survey versus the internet survey.

One other limitation of the study was the aspect of social desirability and relying on self report measures. It is assumed that clergy would answer questions honestly and to the best of their ability. However, the possibility that they would give an answer that presented the participant in a positive light is always present with everyone. In checking I found that some clergy avoided answering questions that would present them in a less positive light.

Another limitation of the study was that perception/self reporting. I also found that some clergy answered questions incorrectly. Since I am a member of a particular denomination represented in the study, I know that our denomination does not have established rules and regulations for premarital counseling. Nonetheless, some clergy indicated on the survey that my denomination did have established rules.

Summary of Major Findings

Major findings in this study address attitudes, beliefs, preparation and practices of Black clergy regarding premarital counseling. Specifically, these findings illustrated the following: Black clergy's assessment of the relative importance of specific topics in premarital counseling, their report of their confidence addressing specific topics in premarital counseling, their attitude about the importance and effectiveness of premarital counseling, their training and desire for training, their feelings of adequacy, and the specific practices of Black clergy in premarital counseling.

Importance of Topics and Clergy's Confidence in Addressing them

The findings of this study show that the topics rated most important by clergy were couple communication, couple commitment to the marriage, and conflict resolution respectively. The topics selected as least important were maintenance of friendships outside of the marriage, maintenance of extended family relationships, and family of origin issues. The topics clergy rated most confidence in addressing were the couple's commitment to the marriage, their

expectations/gender roles, and parenting issues respectively. The topics selected as areas in which clergy had the least confidence were maintenance of friendships outside of the marriage, maintenance of extended family relationships, and family of origin issues.

Clergy Attitudes and Beliefs

The study also explored clergy attitudes around premarital counseling. Black Clergy answered a variety of questions soliciting their thought, beliefs and attitudes about premarital counseling. The responses were based on a Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Almost all of the clergy 97% strongly agreed or agreed that premarital counseling should be mandatory before marriage. When asked if premarital counseling helps build strong marriages 94% of clergy strongly agreed or agreed. Clergy were also questioned if they thought premarital counseling helped prevent divorce; 75% strongly agreed or agreed that premarital counseling helped prevent divorce. Black clergy were asked if they supported collaboration with family counselors to provide premarital counseling: 91% strongly agreed or agreed.

Clergy Preparation

More Black clergy reported not having completed specialized training in premarital counseling (53.3%) than those that reported training (46.7%). Of the clergy who reported having had some preparation for premarital counseling, 29.5% completed a seminary class, 59.8% cited their reading program, and 9.4% reported no training at all.

Black Clergy also answered questions concerning their preparation or desire for preparation to do premarital counseling. The responses were based on a Likert scale as above where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. 57% of the clergy indicated familiarity with premarital counseling research and 46% of clergy strongly agreed or agreed that they used a well researched premarital counseling

program. 77% of clergy strongly agreed or agreed that they felt adequately prepared to do premarital counseling. 86% of clergy strongly agreed or agreed that they desired more specialized training in premarital counseling. 94% of the Clergy strongly agreed or agreed that they would welcome a premarital counseling manual created for Black clergy.

Clergy Practices

Most Black clergy (96.5%) required premarital counseling before marrying a couple. They used a Likert scale as above to answer questions concerning their practices in premarital counseling.

Approximately half of clergy (50%) strongly agreed or agreed to talking little in sessions and facilitating couple discussion. 22% strongly agreed or agreed that they do most of the talking in sessions. 75% of clergy reported teaching skills in session. 68% of clergy gave homework, while slightly more than half (54%) reported using tests or inventories.

Implications of the Study

Implications for Practice

Although approximately 75% of premarital counseling is provided by clergy (Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997; Silliman & Schumm 1999), Sullivan & Bradbury (1997) assert that many clergy feel ambivalent about their preparation for premarital counseling. Over 50% of Black clergy in this study had no specialized training in premarital counseling. Therefore many clergy are providing premarital counseling services without training to do so. I join with Sullivan and Bradbury (1997) in calling for renewed efforts to train clergy to counsel premarital couples and working with Black churches to improve the programs for African American couples taught by African American Clergy. This study confirms the fact that there is a lack of training and a need for training of Black clergy in premarital counseling. Findings in this study revealed that 86% of Black clergy desired more specialized training in premarital counseling. When asked what was

desired or needed to strengthen their premarital counseling program, the Black clergy surveyed spoke as follows:

- Black clergy are interested in the use of ethnocentric assessments
- Conflict resolution, extended family issues, financial planning, family planning
Psychological evaluation skills, interpretation skills, effective communication, are topics that clergy desire more training on.
- Clergy are interested in preparing couples for the true reality of life within their culture.
- Clergy desire more education and research Continuing education and workshops that are designed, outside of seminary for pastors.
- Clergy desires a premarital counseling manual that is biblically based and supported by research.
- The ability to develop a counseling component in my church with an established program consisting of workshops on marriage for couples before and after marriage

This study elicited responses that the Bible is seen as the foundation on which training presented to Black clergy is grounded. Clergy expressed strong convictions that their role in premarital counseling is centered on the Bible. Examples of clergy responses include:

- Showing people what the Bible says about marriage, explaining Biblical roles in marriage
- To provide practical Bible based information that
- To bring out the biblical truth on marriage
- Biblical directions concerning marriage
- To help the couple understand God's purpose for marriage
- To give clear biblical instruction of what is expected of the husband and the wife
- To inform them about what the bible says about a good marriage
- The Lord set me free and you can counsel every one with that Bible the word of God nothing more nothing less and it works for all color and race
- I want updated research on biblical marriage counseling.

Clergy expressed great interest in programs, assessments, and trainings that are biblically based. I recommend the researchers work to develop materials that will reframe techniques, practices, and theories into a biblical language. For example, Gottman (1999) speaks about soft start-ups instead of harsh start-ups in couple communication. In parallel the scripture states a soft answer turns away wrath (see the book of Proverbs in the King James Version of the Bible).

Finally, when asked about working with family counselors 91% of the clergy in this sample supported collaboration with family counselors in the area of premarital counseling. This study highlights a need and an opportunity for researchers and practitioners to build and establish partnerships with African American clergy to assist them in premarital counseling. Knowledge of how the clergy see their role in premarital counseling gives researchers and practitioners insight into how they can help clergy achieve their goals for their congregations and communities.

Implications for Policy

Black clergy are many things to many people (i.e. counselor, surrogate parent, mentor, advisor, social worker, etc...). Clergy from this study indicated a desire for more knowledge to assist them in conducting premarital counseling particularly that synthesizes marital research with Biblical insights. Training in premarital counseling developed for these clergy can be a tremendous asset. There are frequent conferences and conventions that involve clergy educational sessions that offer a setting where such training can occur.

Recommendations for Future Research

Very few of the studies or literature regarding premarital counseling addresses the unique factors of non-White people, particularly African American people. Most of the studies of premarital counseling focus on the characteristics of middle class Caucasians. Carroll and Doherty (2003) confirm this in their meta-analytic review of outcome research looking at 13

prevention programs; they discovered that the samples in the research are almost exclusively young, European American, middle class couples, a discovery that led them to caution providers against generalizing this information to diverse populations. This lack of sample diversity in research calls for remediation now that ethnic groups make up a third of the US population (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). Silliman & Schumm (1999) note that almost no research has been done assessing the needs of non-white audiences or offering programming from a multicultural perspective. The authors call for more research that considers and emphasizes the needs of non-white clients, (whose needs remain unclear to many majority practitioners) (Silliman & Schumm, 1999) regarding premarital counseling. An assessment of the specific problems this population faces in their relationships would also prove helpful (i.e. HIV/AIDS epidemic). It would also be useful to explore Black couples perception of their premarital counseling experience.

Stanley et al (2005) report successful dissemination of the PREP program with clergy in the community as well as chaplains serving army bases. A small amount of the African Americans were represented in these studies. I recommend that replications of these studies and other dissemination studies be conducted for African American clergy serving the Black community.

I recommend a more thorough investigation of Black clergy. It became evident to me that some survey questions were misunderstood by those completing the survey. I also became aware that more in-depth information could be gathered from clergy in the context of an interview. I recommend research that provides an opportunity for Black clergy to ask questions for clarity, and converse about their needs, desires, and thoughts. Further research giving a more in-depth investigation on (a) Exactly what topics clergy do and do not cover, (b) clergy's method of delivery, and (c) what particular skills or competencies clergy want to develop.

Finally, I recommend that research be conducted to assess the perceptions and ideas of African American couples about their premarital counseling experience. I suggest research providing avenues for African American couples to discuss (a) how well they feel they were prepared in premarital counseling, (b) what did they find helpful, (c) what did they find unhelpful, and (d) what topics or issues do they wish they would have covered or discussed in premarital counseling.

APPENDIX A
THE BLACK CLERGY PREMARITAL COUNSELING SURVEY (BCPCS)

1. Church Denomination/Classification:
 - a. Church of God in Christ (COGIC)
 - b. African Methodist Episcopal (AME)
 - c. Baptist
 - d. Nondenominational
 - e. Other _____
2. Current age:
_____ Years
3. Marital status:
 - a. 1st time Married
 - b. Remarried
 - c. Divorced, have not remarried
 - d. Widowed, have not remarried
 - e. Single, have not married
4. Gender:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
5. Country of Origin
 - a. United States
 - b. Jamaica
 - c. Haiti
 - d. Other _____
6. Location of your church:
 - a. Rural, small town or city
 - b. Suburban, suburb of a major city
 - c. Inner city, impoverished neighborhood in a large city
 - d. City-upper middle class neighborhood
7. Church membership size:
 - a. Under 50
 - b. 50 to 100
 - c. 100 to 300
 - d. 300 to 500
 - e. 500 to 1000
 - f. 1000 plus

8. Your level of training (You may select more than one answer)
 - a. A degree from Seminary, Bible College, University, etc...
 - b. Certification through training within my church/denomination
 - c. Mentorship apprenticeship under another pastor.
 - d. Self Education
 - e. Other_____
9. Your highest level of education completed
 - a. Ph. D.
 - b. Doctor of Divinity (or other theology degree)
 - c. Masters Degree
 - d. Bachelors Degree
 - e. Associates Degree
 - f. High school diploma or GED
 - g. Less than a high school diploma or GED
10. Have you received any specialized training in premarital counseling/education?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
11. What level of training do you have in premarital counseling? (You may select more than one answer)
 - a. Took a class in seminary
 - b. Attended a seminar or workshop
 - c. Received training from a premarital education program
 - d. Read book(s) about premarital counseling
 - e. None
 - f. other

There are various topics discussed in premarital counseling to prepare couples for a healthy marriage. How important are the following items for healthy marriages. Use the following scale: 1= Absolutely no importance; 2= Very little importance; 3= Neutral; 4= Important; and 5 = Extremely important

	<u>NI</u>				<u>EI</u>
12. Couple Communication	1	2	3	4	5
13. Conflict Resolution	1	2	3	4	5
14. Family financial planning	1	2	3	4	5
15. Maintaining good extended family relationships	1	2	3	4	5
16. Maintaining good friendships with others	1	2	3	4	5
17. The couple's sexual relationship	1	2	3	4	5
18. Having fun & leisure time	1	2	3	4	5
19. Commitment to making the marriage work	1	2	3	4	5
20. Good parenting	1	2	3	4	5
21. Understanding family-of-origin issues	1	2	3	4	5
22. Understanding gender roles and expectations	1	2	3	4	5

Many activities are done in premarital counseling. For the following questions, please rate your level of confidence at this moment in doing the following activities in premarital counseling. Please rate using the following scale 1= Not at all confident; 2=Not really confident; 3=Unsure; 4=Confident and 5 = Extremely confident.

	<u>NC</u>				<u>EC</u>
23. Teaching communication skills	1	2	3	4	5
24. Discussing the maintenance of extended family relationships	1	2	3	4	5
25. Teaching conflict resolution strategies	1	2	3	4	5
26. Discussing the significance of fun and leisure	1	2	3	4	5
27. Discussing the couple's sexual relationship	1	2	3	4	5
28. Addressing the maintenance of friendships outside the marriage	1	2	3	4	5
29. Teaching family financial planning	1	2	3	4	5
30. Discussing the meaning of commitment	1	2	3	4	5
31. Discussing family-of-origin issues	1	2	3	4	5
32. Addressing gender roles and expectations	1	2	3	4	5
33. Discussing pregnancy and childbirth	1	2	3	4	5
34. Focusing on parenting issues	1	2	3	4	5

There are numerous beliefs, and practices regarding premarital counseling. Please rate your agreement on the following items using the following scale: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; neither agree nor disagree; 4=Agree; and 5 = Strongly agree

	<u>SD</u>					<u>SA</u>
35. Premarital counseling should be mandatory before marriage.	1	2	3	4	5	
36. Premarital counseling helps build a strong marriage	1	2	3	4	5	
37. Premarital counseling helps prevent divorce	1	2	3	4	5	
38. I would like more specialized training in premarital counseling	1	2	3	4	5	
39. I support Clergy & family counselors working together to do PMC	1	2	3	4	5	
40. I feel like I have a strong premarital counseling program	1	2	3	4	5	
41. My denomination has a structured premarital counseling program	1	2	3	4	5	
42. I use tests, inventories, or assessments at some point in my sessions	1	2	3	4	5	
43. I give homework for the couples in my sessions	1	2	3	4	5	
44. I teach skills to couples in my sessions	1	2	3	4	5	
45. I feel adequately prepared to provide premarital counseling	1	2	3	4	5	
46. I would welcome a PMC manual or program created for black clergy	1	2	3	4	5	
47. My church has established regulations about Premarital Counseling	1	2	3	4	5	
48. I already use a well researched premarital counseling program	1	2	3	4	5	
49. I am not familiar with premarital counseling research	1	2	3	4	5	
50. I do most of the talking in the premarital counseling sessions	1	2	3	4	5	
51. I talk very little in sessions; I facilitate couple discussion.	1	2	3	4	5	

Please answer the following questions:

52. Do you require those whom you marry to meet with you for premarital counseling?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

53a. How many premarital counseling sessions would you recommend for a couple?
 _____Sessions

b. What is a reasonable length for premarital counseling sessions?
 _____Hour(s)

54. What do you see as your role in premarital counseling?

55. What skills or knowledge do you think would be most useful for you to develop in order to strengthen your premarital counseling program?

APPENDIX B
INFORMED WRITTEN CONSENT

Dear Clergy Member:

I am a minister at Williams Temple Church of God in Christ and a doctoral student in the department of Counselor Education at the University of Florida. I am writing to ask your participation in a survey study on African American Clergy attitudes toward premarital counseling that I am conducting for my dissertation at the University of Florida. My study aims to explore the attitudes, beliefs, preparation, and practices of African American Clergy in premarital counseling. The results from the survey will allow marriage and family therapists to understand the attitudes, beliefs, preparation and practices of African American Clergy in premarital counseling.

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your consent at any time. You also do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. There is neither compensation nor perceived risks for your involvement in this study. You have the option to take the survey by phone or online. Either way the survey should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

If you have any further questions about this study, please contact me at adrianma@ufl.edu or at (352) 373-0329 or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Peter Sherrard at (352) 392-0731 or psherrard@coe.ufl.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant rights may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611; ph (352) 392-0433. Please make sure that you sign and return one copy of this form with the survey. Thank you very much for participating in this important study.

Sincerely,

Adrian Manley, NCC,
Principal Investigator

Dr. Peter Sherrard
Faculty Advisor

I have read the consent form described above for this survey. I voluntarily agree to participate in the survey and I have received a copy of this description.

Signature of participant

Date

Informed Online Consent

Dear Clergy Member:

I am a minister at Williams Temple Church of God in Christ and a doctoral student in the department of Counselor Education at the University of Florida. I am writing to ask your participation in a survey study on African American Clergy attitudes toward premarital counseling that I am conducting for my dissertation at the University of Florida. My study aims to explore the attitudes, beliefs, preparation, and practices of African American Clergy in premarital counseling. The results from the survey will allow marriage and family therapists to understand the attitudes, beliefs, preparation and practices of African American Clergy in premarital counseling.

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your consent at any time. You also do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. There is neither compensation nor perceived risks for your involvement in this study. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

If you have any further questions about this study, please contact me at adrianma@ufl.edu or at (352) 373-0329 or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Peter Sherrard at (352) 392-0731 or psherrard@coe.ufl.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant rights may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611; ph (352) 392-0433. Thank you very much for participating in this important study.

Sincerely,

Adrian Manley, NCC,

Principal Investigator

Dr. Peter Sherrard

Faculty Advisor

Please click the “I agree” square below to affirm that you have read the consent form described above for this survey and that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study

 I Agree

Informed Phone Consent

Hello Pastor

I'm [NAME]. I am calling you on the behalf of Minister Adrian Manley, a minister at Williams Temple Church of God in Christ in Gainesville Florida. He is also currently a doctoral student in the department of Counselor Education at the University of Florida

Minister Manley is conducting a study for his dissertation on African American Clergy who provide premarital counseling. The study aims to explore the attitudes, beliefs, preparation, and practices of African American Clergy in premarital counseling. I am asking you to take a few moments out of your schedule to complete his survey. If you have time now I would like to give you some brief information about the survey and your rights in taking the survey so that I can formally receive your consent.

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your consent at any time. You also do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. There is neither compensation nor perceived risks for your involvement in this study. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. If you would like to see a hard copy of this form you can look online at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=412601914827> or just request to be sent a copy in the mail.

If you have any further questions about this study, please contact Adrian at adrianma@ufl.edu or at (352) 373-0329 or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Peter Sherrard at (352) 392-0731 or psherrard@coe.ufl.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant rights may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, Box 112250,

Gainesville, FL 32611; ph (352) 392-0433. Pastor is there any questions I can answer for you at this time?

Pastor will you agree I have read you the consent form for this survey, you have understood what I have read, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the survey?

_____Yes

_____No

APPENDIX C
LETTER TO CONTACT PERSON

Dear Contact Person:

I am currently a doctoral student in the department of Counselor Education at the University of Florida I am writing to invite you to participate in a study on African American Clergy who provide premarital counseling that I am conducting for my dissertation. My study aims to explore the attitudes, beliefs, preparation, and practices of African American Clergy in premarital counseling.

I am contacting several African American Clergy to ask them to take a brief survey. The results from the survey will promote understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, preparation and practices of African American Clergy in premarital counseling. The answers to the survey will be anonymous, and participation in this survey is voluntary. There is neither compensation nor perceived risks for involvement in this study. Clergy have the option to take the survey by phone or online. Either way the survey should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

I am writing to ask your support. I am trying to reach as many African American Clergy from various areas in the country. I am requesting your support as a person who could assist me in recruiting Clergy for the survey. You can do this by providing me the contact information for clergy that you know or either directing the clergy to the website where they can take the survey online. Here is a link to the survey <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=412601914827>. I have also attached a letter that you can e-mail or give to other clergy.

If you have any further questions about this study, please contact me at adrianma@ufl.edu or at (352) 373-0329 or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Peter Sherrard at (352) 392-0731 or

psherrard@coe.ufl.edu. I feel that this study will be a blessing for African American Clergy and the families they serve. Thank you very much for participating in this important study.

Sincerely,

Adrian Manley

PhD Candidate

University of Florida

APPENDIX D
LETTER FOR CONTACT PERSON

Greetings Pastor _____:

I pray that all is well with you and yours. I am writing this letter on behalf of Minister Adrian Manley, a member of Williams Temple Church of God in Christ in Gainesville Florida. He is also currently a doctoral student in the department of Counselor Education at the University of Florida.

Minister Manley is conducting a study for his dissertation on African American Clergy who provide premarital counseling. The study aims to explore the attitudes, beliefs, preparation, and practices of African American Clergy in premarital counseling. I am asking you to take a few moments out of your schedule to complete his survey.

The answers to the survey will be anonymous, and participation in this survey is voluntary. There is neither compensation nor perceived risks for involvement in this study. Clergy have the option to take the survey by phone or online. Either way the survey should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. If you choose to complete the survey by phone then let me know the best time and number that you can be reached. If you choose to complete the survey online just click on <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=412601914827> or type it in your URL address box.

I sincerely thank you for your time and participation. This study can be very beneficial to African American Clergy and the congregations we serve. Please feel free to invite other pastors to take the survey as well. If you have any further questions about this study, please contact Adrian at adrianma@ufl.edu or at (352) 373-0329 or myself

Yours in Christ,

Contact Person

APPENDIX E
PHONE SCRIPT LEAVING A MESSAGE

Pastor [NAME]

I'm [NAME]. I am calling you on the behalf of Minister Adrian Manley, a member of Williams Temple Church of God in Christ in Gainesville Florida. He is also currently a doctoral student in the department of Counselor Education at the University of Florida

Minister Manley is conducting a study for his dissertation on African American Clergy who provide premarital counseling. The study aims to explore the attitudes, beliefs, preparation, and practices of African American Clergy in premarital counseling. I called to ask you to take a few moments out of your schedule to complete his 10 to 15 minute survey.

It would wonderful if you could help us by taking this survey. It is available online at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=412601914827> or I am more than happy to call back at a better time for you. May God Bless you Good Bye

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Adrian T. Manley was born February 10, 1979 to Terry Lamar and Jessie Manley. Adrian grew up in the small city of Groveland Florida. He graduated from South Lake High School in 1997. Adrian attended the University of Florida and obtained a Bachelors of Science degree in Rehabilitation Services. Adrian continued his education at the University of Florida's Counselor Education where he received a Masters and Specialist degree in education.

Adrian married the love of his life, Katrina Collier on February 26, 2005. Adrian works as a counseling specialist at the Santa Fe Community College Counseling Center and as an adjunct instructor at Santa Fe Community College in the department of Student Development Instruction. Adrian is an associate minister at Williams Temple Church of God In Christ.

Adrian plans to continue his work as a counselor and instructor at Santa Fe Community College. He also plans to work with African American clergy specifically in the Church of God in Christ to provide premarital counseling training for clergy, and to assist in the development and implementation of premarital education programs.