PERCEPTIONS OF MARRIAGE AND GENDER ROLES AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A substantial amount of research has been published on the marriage relationship and the many ways in which gender role attitudes shape our perceptions and interactions. Gender role attitudes affect our perceptions of our self and others. A plethora of research studies concerned with gender and marriage have examined and analyzed the relationship between gender stereotypes or gender role attitudes and such variables as relational intimacy, division of labor, physical attraction, individual personality traits, and marital satisfaction. The research produced on these subjects provides the groundwork for an in-depth examination of college students' perceptions of marriage and gender roles. Human subjects' approval sought and received from Texas Tech University.

Purpose of the Study

This project is a qualitative investigation of college students' perceptions of marriage. I believe qualitative methods will allow for the most useful exploration of these perceptions. The variables listed above (relational intimacy, division of labor, physical attraction, personality traits, etc.) are all part of a complete whole. The holistic nature of this inquiry demands that several variables not be factored out in order to focus on a single common denominator because all factors have meaning and add to a deeper understanding of my research questions. The goal of this project is to explore and seek to develop a complete and holistic understanding of college students' perceptions of

marriage. The naturalistic paradigm facilitates research of this sort because it does not attempt to manipulate the research setting, but seeks to understand and observe a phenomenon as it naturally occurs. This "discovery oriented" approach allows the researcher to be open to whatever emerges, rather than trying to formulate a single dominant rule that describes all participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, to the fullest extent possible, this project is not based on any preconceived notions, a priori frameworks, or educated guesses about how the participants might respond to marriage. Rather, the purpose of this endeavor is truly to explore college students' perceptions of marriage, discover how they respond to certain questions, and analyze their reactions and discussions in accordance with standards of qualitative inquiry.

College students are of particular interest and became the focus of this study for several key reasons. College students seemed to be a reasonable group to focus on because of their unique position in life. During the college years, the prospect of marriage becomes more likely for some college students and an inevitable step in their future for others. However, a majority of college students are not yet married and their thoughts and discussions about marriage are merely that–thoughts and discussions about how they believe they <u>will</u> or <u>should</u> participate in this relationship. Due to the focus of this project, only students who had never been married were asked to participate in this study. Researchers (Greenberg et al., 1982) have made the argument that college students are an ideal group for studying gender and marriage because they are at a stage in life where they begin to focus on romantic relationships and reflect on marriage more frequently. Other scholars (Martin & Martin, 1984; Tamashiro, 1979) suggest that individual's

perceptions of marriage have already developed and should be fairly stable by the time they reach college. Further understanding college students' perceptions of this social reality (i.e., marriage) can lead to a more complete understanding of general ideological principles concerning gender and society. In our field, ideology has been defined as the "fundamental attitudes, values, and beliefs of a culture" (Burchardt, 1995, p. 441). I believe that understanding how this generation relates to marriage will provide clues as to where we (future media, teachers, and policy makers) are on the subject of gender and marriage. Another reason I chose to concentrate on college students is simply personal interest and experience. I have had the opportunity to discuss marriage and gender concerns in several different academic and social contexts with individuals who happen to be college students. Each conversation proved to be stimulating and unique. While everyone's perspective was somewhat different, I noticed that this age group approached the topic with unusual vigor and enthusiasm. It seemed that marriage especially as it related to gender evoked some sort of emotional response in each of the participants of these different conversations. The research questions addressed in this thesis are: (1) What attitudes toward marriage are described by unmarried college students? and (2) What are the reactions of unmarried college students to non-traditional courtship and marriage practices?

Significance of Study

As mentioned earlier, there have been numerous studies on gender, marriage, and additional related variables. Several studies (Ragsdale, 1996; Peplau, Hill, & Rubin,

1993) addressed variables such as relational intimacy or marital satisfaction from a qualitative standpoint. Others (Pennel & Ogilve, 1995) attempted to measure and compare marital variables such as attraction or personality traits from a quantitative perspective. Still other articles (Suarez, 1997) that address marriage or gender include a rhetorical analysis that is often based on feminist concerns. While each of these articles are important and have added unique knowledge to ours and other academic fields, a gap remains in our analysis of contemporary marriage and gender concerns. As evidenced by my review of the literature, there is no record of any academic study employing qualitative methods that addresses the relationship of marriage (as perceived by college students) as a complete whole. I believe this study is important because it seeks to answer questions that have gone unanswered and provide an accurate portrayal of college students' stance on gender issues within the context of marriage.

Examining perceptions of marriage as a whole by qualitative means invites the researcher to witness the ways in which discussions surrounding marriage and gender function communicatively in the real world. This study should produce an accurate portrayal of how the college students interviewed envision marriage and respond to gender roles within the context of marriage. Rather than measuring specific variables in a laboratory or superficial setting or offering an analysis based on an a priori framework, these interviews can provide clues as to how marriage and gender roles are enacted and "worked out" in the real world. The marriage relationship and family structure have been described, rightly or wrongly, as the backbone of Western civilization in the modern world (Brubaker, 1994). The interplay between the private sphere and the public sphere

should not be underestimated. Understanding how individuals create rules for gender enactment in response to marriage in the private sphere can provide clues as to how we create rules for, participate, respond to, and enact gender in the public sphere. A detailed assessment is necessary for those concerned with gender scholarship because it provides a reading of a particular sample of college students' perceptions of a social reality; this social reality (marriage) can not be separated from gender ideology. It becomes difficult to go any further when you do not know where you are or how far you have come. The research I have conducted aids in this sort of analysis because it examines if and how gender ideology has changed or progressed within society.

Chapter II provides a literature review of the most pertinent material that has been published on perceptions of marriage, marital communication, gender role attitudes, and gender studies related to college students. This information should provide the reader with a general understanding of the foundation of this scholarship. Chapter III details my methodological approach. Chapter IV outlines several themes that emerged during my analysis of the interview data. Finally, Chapter V includes a discussion of the possible implications of the themes presented in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have produced a host of research on the implications of gender role attitudes and gender identity on relationships and interpersonal communication. Furthermore, the institution of marriage has been the focus of many researchers in various fields. The majority of the literature I have reviewed is based on the implications of gender ideology on heterosexual romantic relationships because the heterosexual marriage relationship is the focus of this thesis. It is my intention to add to this body of research by examining how college students' envision and talk about marriage. A review of the literature on marriage and communication behaviors, couple types, gender role attitudes, gender role attitudes and college students, marriage and college students, implications of gender role stereotypes for women, gender related concepts and perception biases, gender and language, and gender role attitudes and dating and marriage relationships should provide sufficient background knowledge for this inquiry.

Couple Types and the Relational Dimensions Instrument

The Relational Dimensions Instrument (RDI) is an instrument that was developed by Fitzpatrick in 1977 to measure respondents' belief structures concerning marriage. The RDI is 64 item scale which addresses eight dimensions concerning marriage including sharing, ideology of traditionalism, temporal regularity, assertiveness, autonomy, ideology of uncertainty and change, undifferentiated space, and conflict

avoidance. Fitzpatrick (1977) introduced the RDI as a method of classifying marriages based on couples perceptions of their relational behaviors specific to these eight areas. The RDI tested an individual's perceptions of marriage based on self-reports concerning different beliefs and behaviors that might characterize a marriage. The first dimension, sharing, was based on open expressions of love and compassion, ability to comfort one another during hard times, and a belief that one's marriage is lighthearted and fun. The second dimension, ideology of traditionalism, was characterized by a belief in the importance of marriage rituals such as the wedding ceremony, women taking the last name of their husband when the marry, and faith in the law and society's institutions. Temporal regularity addressed the extent to which a couple followed a fairly stable daily routine such as eating meals at the same time every day. The next dimension, assertiveness, was based on items such as the likelihood of one spouse persuading or forcing the other to do something he or she did not want to do or the couples' likelihood to argue in public. Autonomy measured whether or not each individual was likely to have his or her private space in a home. Another dimension, ideology of uncertainty and change, was characterized by beliefs and behaviors that objected to personal constraints and restrictions and embraced individual freedom, novelty, humor, and spontaneity. Undifferentiated space was characterized by statements such as I feel free to interrupt my spouse when he or she is concentrating or I open my partner's mail without his or her permission. Finally, conflict avoidance addressed the frequency of conflicts and the manner in which couples engaged in conflicts.

Based on participant's responses to these eight dimensions, Fitzpatrick developed three couple types. She believed each couple type represented a marriage ideology which consisted of a specific set of beliefs and expectations for marriage. Traditional couples were likely to embrace conventional beliefs about marriage and gender roles, value togetherness and stability in a marriage, prefer regularity in the use of their time. Traditionals report that they engage in limited conflict and attempt to handle conflict with restraint and tact. Independents embraced non-traditional beliefs about marriage and gender roles, emphasized togetherness and autonomy, preferred uncertainty, spontaneity, and an irregular use of time, and shared physical space. Independents report to be highly expressive during conflict with one another. Separates are more likely to uphold traditional marriage values and gender roles, prefer autonomy, personal space, and regularity in use of their time. Separates are most likely to be emotionally distant and engage in conflict avoidance behaviors.

Fitzpatrick (1988) suggested that traditionals, independents, and separates function as marital schemata or specific belief structures representing individual's perceptions of the ideal marriage. The work of Fitzpatrick and others (Perse, Pavitt, & Burggraf, 1990) distinguished the RDI as a measurement of implicit theories of marriage. They believed that these "implicit theories of marriage" described general characteristics of the ideal marriage and were likely to remain consistent over time.

Other scholars examined the impact one's implicit theory of marriage might have on marriage behavior. Fitzpatrick (1988) believed that variables such as information processing, marital communication, and marital satisfaction were directly related to one's

marital schemata. For example, traditionals consistently rated themselves as highest on marital satisfaction. Sillars, Pike, Jones, and Redmon (1983) found that a couple's marital satisfaction was highest when their communication behaviors matched their marital ideology. Therefore, a discrepancy between an individual's view of an ideal marriage and the actual marriage behaviors engaged in can lead to feelings of disappointment and frustration.

Other research focused on how implicit theories of marriage develop and stabilize over time. Fitzpatrick (1981) suggested that children's perceptions of marriage were likely to be based on their parents' marriage. Martin and Martin (1984) argued that individual's implicit theories of marriage usually stabilize and remain consistent during the college years. Robinson (1985) found that many individuals allow television programs to shape their perceptions of the ideal marriage. Perse, Pavitt, and Berggraf (1990) designed a study that examined the relationship between participants' implicit theories of marriage and participants' perceptions of television marriages. They found that respondents' marital schemata only partially predicted what television couple type they perceived as most satisfied. Traditionals, Separates, and Independents all rated traditional television couples as higher in marital satisfaction than separate or independent television couples.

Pavitt, Perse, and Burggraf (1995) designed a study intended to measure the RDI's ability to measure college students' implicit theories of marriage. Their results were inconsistent with prior research. They reported that the RDI lacked the ability to effectively measure implicit theories of marriage. Specifically they "explored whether

self-reports concerning the ideal marriage on the RDI performed by the same students on two occasions one year apart remained consistent on the dimensional and marital type levels" (Pavitt, Perse, and Berggraf, 1995, p. 334). Their findings suggest that college students do not have stable unchanging implicit theories of marriage. Rather, college student's general perceptions of marriage were likely to fluctuate over time.

Gender Role Attitudes

Gender role attitudes (also referred to as sex role attitudes) have been defined as "an individual's beliefs about appropriate behavior for men and women" (Peplau, Hill, & Rubin, 1993, p. 32). One's gender role attitudes are likely to indicate her or his adherence to socially accepted and culturally based norms that dictate behavioral standards in cross-sex relationships. Gender role attitudes indicate the degree to which a person accepts or rejects socially accepted and culturally based norms that dictate appropriate behavior that is gender specific. Most research on gender role attitudes has focused on the role gender norms and stereotypes play in male/female relationships (specifically, heterosexual romantic interaction). Gender role attitudes vary widely and have been studied in many different contexts. Examples of gender role attitudes include such statements as "men should open the door for women," "fathers and mothers should participate equally in nurturing and caring for their children," "men are primarily responsible for earning money and providing for their family," and "women should adopt their husband's surname upon marriage."

Gender role attitudes are generally conceived of as varying along a continuum between two polar opposites. The two polar opposites are most commonly labeled as "traditional versus egalitarian," "traditional versus modern," or "traditional versus feminist." The traditional sex-role ideology centers on a gender based division of labor and male dominance (Peplau, Hill, & Rubin, 1993). Egalitarian (feminist/ modern) gender role attitudes are characterized by a belief in the equality of both genders and the rejection of traditional gender norms.

Furthermore, a significant amount of the research on gender role attitudes or gender ideology evaluates the notion that certain behaviors, attitudes, and traits are inherent to a specific gender. The idea that certain traits are likely to be ascribed to men while other traits are likely to be ascribed to women has received various labels, including "instrumentality versus expressiveness," "feminine versus masculine," and "agency versus communion." All of these labels share a common theme: "male" traits are typically viewed as impersonal, individualistic, and goal-oriented whereas "female" traits are characterized by a social or interpersonal focus.

Gender Role Attitudes and Perceptions

Peplau, Hill, and Rubin (1993) argue that an individual's gender role attitudes are a likely indicator of what they will perceive as appropriate or normal behavior for men and women. Thus, an individual might employ her gender role attitudes to create rules about how she believes the men and women with whom she interacts on an everyday basis should behave in various contexts. Whether or not the men and women with whom

she interacts meet these expectations probably shapes her perceptions of these individuals. Thus, one might guess that an individual's gender role attitudes also affect the manner in which she perceives herself. Research indicates that gender role attitudes do indeed shape one's perception of self and others. However, Pennell and Ogilvie (1995) found that people apply gender role attitudes and stereotypes to themselves quite differently than they do to others. Their study examines the effects of gender-related concepts in two contexts – perception of self and perception of others.

While society's beliefs about the appropriate role of women are changing (be it ever so slowly), Pennell and Ogilvie (1995) discovered that perceptions of males (self - perceptions and other perceptions) were likely to be connected to traditional stereotypes about what it means to "be a man." They also found that individuals are much less likely to classify themselves as the stereotypical man or woman than they are to assign others stereotypical gender roles or traits. This research is consistent with interpersonal research that suggests that we are more likely to apply stereotypes to others than to ourselves. The significance of Pennell and Ogilvie's research lies in their discovery that an individual's gender role attitudes are subject to change according to who is being perceived.

Gender role attitudes and ideas about traits or tasks that are specific or inherent to a particular gender encourage us to stereotype or pigeonhole individuals according to their gender. Obviously, this practice has negative implications for both males and females. However, gender biases in language, traditions, and the work place have tended to historically favor men and produce undesirable consequences for women. Examples of

such negative consequences are discussed below in my review of recent research that examined the impact of gender role attitudes and stereotypes on women.

Negative Implications of Gender Role Attitudes for Women

Many gender scholars would agree with Suarez' (1997) comment that "the loss of a woman's independence through marriage is most clearly illustrated by the common practice of her adopting her husband's last name" (p. 323). A 1990 study related to surnames and gender found that the transition of surname from father to son follows the random extinction of surnames based on family size distribution (Chakraborty & Schwartz, 1990). The concern in this study was that the father's surname would become extinct if it were not passed down to male children. Interestingly, the study's participants and authors expressed little concern for the females or mother's surname becoming extinct.

It is a longstanding tradition in America for women to adopt their husband's last name upon marriage. This tradition has solidified into a social norm from which is seldom deviated. Even though this social custom is merely a tradition and is no longer required by law, a woman who chooses to deviate from it often faces negative consequences. An analysis of the traditions that led to this custom, procedures women must follow when they change their name, and the social and legal ramifications a woman faces when she chooses to keep her birth name demonstrated that this custom is harmful to a woman's self-concept and self-development (Suarez, 1997). Suarez details the extent to which government agencies and financial institutions are chained to this

tradition, which results in inflexibility and interferes with a woman's right to choose her own name. She contends that society is "simply not equipped for a man and wife to have different last names" (Suarez, 1997, p. 238). Suarez cites several cases in which courts made an issue of a woman's choice to keep her birth name. For instance, one judge asked a woman's ex-husband if she had his permission to go back to using her birth name after they were divorced. Her former husband consented so the judge "allowed" the woman to use the last name she was given at birth. This is just one example of how strict adherence to a stereotype based on gender results in negative consequences for women.

Additional research in this area examines the implications of different titles of address for women. Men are consistently addressed as "Mr." regardless of age or marital status. However, women may be addressed as Miss, Mrs., and Ms. according to age, marital status, and personal preference. Dion and Cota (1991) studied the general public's perceptions of women who were addressed as Ms. rather than Mrs. or Miss. They found that a woman who prefers Ms. as her title of address is perceived by both sexes as being higher in both positive and negative instrumental qualities (qualities traditionally referred to as masculine such as competition and assertiveness) and also lower on positive and negative qualities of expressiveness (qualities traditionally referred to as feminine such as nurturing and domestic) than a woman who prefers a traditional title. Furthermore, when it was indicated that a woman preferred to be called Ms. (rather than the title being stated as an implicit part of the woman's description), instrumental trait attributions were significantly stronger. This study provides evidence that a woman's title of address is a stereotypic cue for perceivers. Thus perceptions of women are shaped according to which

traditions a woman chooses to follow regardless of whether or not the women fit the stereotype.

Gender-Related Concepts, Marriage, and College Students

Many studies were designed specifically to learn more about the traits, attitudes, belief, and behavior of college students. A few recent studies have increased our knowledge of how gender-related concepts affect college students' expectations, beliefs, and attitudes towards the opposite sex. One might guess that, as society continues to change, the free thinkers of the world (including college students) would be among the first to challenge or reject traditional norms and gender stereotypes. Interestingly, this is not the case. Lueptow, Garovich, and Lueptow (1995) discovered that gender stereotypes persist in college students even in the face of a changing social structure. They studied college students' perceptions of gender stereotypes over a 17-year period and found that gender stereotypes not only stayed consistent, but they seemed to be more rigid and solidified. The primary focus of their research was characteristics and behaviors that college students generally conceive of as masculine or feminine. The college students compared in their research assigned the same stereotypical traits to women and men in 1995 as they did in 1978. Gender stereotypes for males included but were not limited to traits such as being authoritative, self-confident, domineering, athletic, decisive, and aggressive. Gender stereotypes for women included but were not limited to traits such as being timid, affectionate, nurturing, romantic, sympathetic, talkative, and obedient.

Another study involving gender-related concepts and college students examined the extent to which gender differences determined the characteristics college students believed to be desirable in a potential sex or marital partner (Regan & Berscheid, 1997). As one might expect the characteristics college students desired in a potential sexual partner were substantially different from the characteristics they desired in a life mate. Regan and Berscheid reached several significant conclusions: both men and women prefer physically attractive sexual partners, women did not rate social or financial power in a potential sex partner or a potential spouse any higher than did men, and men rated physical attraction in a potential spouse as more important than did women. This research rebuts traditional thinking that women want to marry a man who has financial or social power so he can take care of her.

As discussed earlier, several researchers have focused specifically on college students' perceptions of the marriage relationship. Some scholars (Martin & Martin, 1984, Tamashiro, 1979) suggested that individual's perceptions of marriage were already developed and should be fairly stable by the time they reach college. However, Frazier and Esterly (1990) argue that college students' perceptions of marriage were still undergoing development and their beliefs about love and marriage differed according to age and dating experience. Finally, Pavitt, Perse, and Berggraf (1995) found that college student's perceptions of marriage were inconsistent and tended to flucuate over time.

Gender Bias and Language

Other scholars have explored the reciprocal nature of gender role attitudes, gender-biased language, and social structure. Several scholars have argued that discursive choices can be a form of gender bias and that gender-biased language holds severe negative implications for women and men. Robin Lakoff (1975) coined the phrase "women's language" which referred to both language used by women and language used to describe women. Lakoff argued that discursive choices act as a mirror of people's social attitudes and primary values. By highlighting the disparity between the words we use to describe men and women, she uncovered a gender-biased social context in which women are stifled, excluded, and oppressed. Spender (1980) provided evidence that illustrated the patriarchal nature of language and argued that its structure facilitates the subordination of women in society. She argues that men literally made the English language and that it was still primarily under males' control. Spender contended that male bias present in the English language provided men with a monopoly on maintaining power in society and minimizing the power and worth of women since language constructs our meanings and perceptions of social reality.

MacKay (1980) suggested that gender biased pronoun usage has "subtle and powerful effects on the self-concepts of attitudes of both men and women" (p. 488). Burr, Dunn, and Farquhar (1972) argued that generic language characterized women as invisible, less familiar, and less active. Additional studies support the argument that generic biased pronouns are not actually "generic terms" at all. As early as 1977, Nilsen claimed that gender biased language perpetuated a patriarchal social structure that

characterized men and masculine elements as superior, more active, and more favorable than women or feminine elements. The hypothesis that language shapes reality would suggest that gender-biased language is implicated in the construction and maintenance of a gender-biased social structure. This hypothesis has been supported in a number of studies (e.g., Gastil, 1990; Hamilton, 1988; Rubin & Greene, 1991;). Researchers have demonstrated that "generic-he" pronouns are not always interpreted as gender neutral. Moulton, Robinson, and Elias (1978) found that using generic he pronouns in stories were more likely to conjure up male images in participants' minds than images of both male and female.

Matheson and Kristiansen (1987) add that gender-biased language also acts as a reflection of a gender-biased social structure (continuing the cycle). Specifically, they discovered less positive attitudes toward nontraditional women and greater occupational stereotyping was associated with gender-biased pronoun use. For example, students who were asked to compete the sentence "when a dentist examines x-rays ... " overwhelmingly chose the pronoun "he" to complete the sentence. Likewise, Jacobson and Insko (1985) found that subjects who held negative attitudes toward non-traditional women were more likely to use gender-biased language. This type of research demonstrates the reciprocal nature of the relationship between social factors, gender-biased language, and traditional gender role attitudes. In a related study, Barber and Axinn (1998) found that the gender role attitudes of young women influenced their early marriage behavior and early marriage behavior had a reciprocal impact on their gender

role attitudes. Some scholars have focused specifically on the impact of gender role attitudes on male-female relationships in dating and marriage.

These articles suggest that gender-biased language is not anywhere close to being eliminated from our everyday discourse or the grammar lessons taught to children in schools. Harrigan and Lucis (1988) found that while most of the participants in their study were aware that gender-biased language exists, most groups made only minimal efforts to change it. A culmination of the articles discussed in this section indicates that gender-biased language does indeed persist in our culture and continues to reflect a gender-biased social structure and gender biased relationships. These types of articles suggest that word choice and language usage should be an important part of this study. If, as these articles suggest, the words we use to describe men and women represent social inequity then the researcher might gain valuable insight as to the type of relationship college students perceive marriage to be by reflecting upon the discursive choices college students make when describing the marital relationship. Gender-biased language (or lack there of) in the interviews may provide clues as to college students' values and attitudes concerning marriage.

Gender Differences and Talk

The differences in the way men and women relate to marriage and talk about relationships has received a great deal of attention from a variety of scholars. Tannen (1990) explored specific gender differences in the way males and females engage in conversation. Tannen explained that males are likely to view a conversation as a

competition and focus on achieving status and avoiding failures. She states that while men are primarily focused on opposition, females are primarily focused on connection during a conversation. Tannen reports that women and men are likely to view and discuss the same incident differently because women live in a world of intimacy in which "individuals negotiate complex networks of friendship, minimize differences, try to reach consensus, and avoid the appearances of superiority" (Tannen, 1990, p. 26). She further explains that men live in a world of status in which "independence is key, because a primary means of establishing status is to tell other what to do, and taking orders is a marker of low status" (Tannen, 1990, p. 26). Tannen introduced the concept of "report talk" versus "rapport talk". Men are prone to "report talk" which is characterized by demonstrating knowledge, establishing independence, and fixing problems. Women are prone to "rapport talk" which is characterized by relational maintenance strategies.

Finally, Tannen explains that men and women are likely to view different topics as worthwhile or important to talk about and when they discuss the same topic they approach it differently. For example, when men talk about friendships and relationships they are more likely to talk about the amount of time they spend with the other person or doing activities together such as playing sports. When women talk about friendships and relationships they are likely to talk directly about the relationship and their feelings. She notes that while these are general tendencies specific to gender they should be viewed as generalizations and are not always the case. Burnett (1987) found that women talk more about their relationship and are more comfortable talking about their relationship with their partner than are men. Frazier and Esterly (1990) report that men see relationship in

more romantic terms than women do, whereas women see serious relationships (and marriage in particular) in more practical terms.

Gender Role Attitudes, Relationships, and Marriage

Peplau, Hill, and Rubin (1993) conducted a longitudinal study which examined the gender role attitudes of college students and their relationship correlates during college and 15 years later. Their four areas of analysis included: variability in gender role attitudes, individual correlates of adherence to traditional versus egalitarian gender role attitudes, relationship correlates of gender role attitudes, and the extent to which gender role attitudes held during college predicted the life course (education level, job, marital satisfaction) of the college students 15 years later. They found that there was considerable variability in the gender role attitudes of the college students in their study. Family history, religious or political conservatism, self-esteem, perceived attractiveness and intelligence, educational plans, and attitudes about romance and children all appeared to be related to an individual's gender role attitudes. Gender role attitudes were not a predictor of a couple's well being. Couples who held traditional gender role attitudes were equally likely to be as satisfied or dissatisfied with their marriages as those couples with egalitarian gender role attitudes. Furthermore, gender role attitudes were unrelated to the frequency or satisfaction of sexual activity. Couples in which the man held traditional gender role attitudes reported an unequal balance of power favoring the man. The 15-year follow-up revealed that gender role attitudes held while in college did not have statistically significant effects on the likelihood of marriage, children, or work.

However, there was a significant difference in the amount of education the women received according to their gender role attitudes. Peplau et al. (1993) found that women who possessed egalitarian gender role attitudes in college were much more likely to continue their education and pursue graduate degrees than were women who possessed traditional gender role attitudes.

In a similar study, Hutson and Geis (1993) examined the significance of each partner's gender ideology in marriage behavior and interaction. Their study of 53 pairs of newlyweds resulted in the conclusion that the nature of gender role attitudes and beliefs and marital interaction is multidimensional. In other words, dominant cultural values are not the sole predictor of individual behavior in marriage. Patterns of marital interaction (satisfaction, affection, etc.) reflect varying combinations of internal and external factors such as gender ideology, gender role attitudes, upbringing, and personality characteristics.

Gender Roles, Equity Theory, and Maintenance Strategies

Several scholars have studied the effect that certain gender role attitudes especially those pertaining to family roles have on marital relationships. Most of these scholars examined the extent to which gender role attitudes and gender ideology effects the perception of equity among married couples. Equity theory suggests that if a person is involved in a relationship that they perceive as inequitable they will not be satisfied with that relationship (Brehm, 1992). Several articles that address equity theory claim that husbands and wives who perceive inequity in their relationship report overall less

satisfaction and commitment to the marriage than do couples who perceive their marriage as equitable (Davidson, 1984; Horst & Doherty, 1995; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1996). In addition, scholars have noted the positive relationship between equity in marriage and marriage partners' self-concepts (Schafer, Keith, & Lorenz, 1984). Finally, Larson, Hammond, and Harper (1998) note that wives who define their marriage as inequitable report less compatibility, identity, expressiveness, and overall intimacy than wives who define their marriage as equitable. These articles illustrate some of the real world implications of gender role attitudes and gender ideology for the marriage relationship.

Matthews and Beverly (1997) examined the impact that married women's gender orientations had on their beliefs about marital roles and family strategies. They hypothesized that women's family strategies are a result of their gender orientations and the gender-structured context (i.e., expected to complete traditional chores at home and increased participation in the workforce) of their lives. The authors envisioned family strategies as decisions about the timing of marriage and birth, and negotiating child rearing and working outside of the home. The focus of this article was an examination of the similarities and differences, in attitudes about marital roles and family strategies, between women who possess more traditional and those who possess more egalitarian gender role orientations. The dimensions that were addressed included the respondents' beliefs about advantages and disadvantages of marriage, readiness for marriage, how marriage changes people's lives, estimation of people who choose not to marry, childbearing age and responsibility, and parenting and work. While the egalitarian

women were no less committed to marriage than the traditional women were, there were a few differences between the two groups.

Women who possessed egalitarian gender orientations were more supportive than traditional women were of women who choose not to marry. Egalitarian women also preferred to marry at a later age and wait longer between marriage and children. The authors note that traditional women seemed to plan everything in their lives around birthing and raising children (the family was of central importance), while egalitarian women seemed to deem outside activities such as work as significant and important as children. Both traditional and egalitarian women believed that children require fathers and mothers to make career sacrifices, however the types of sacrifices that each group envisioned were quite different. Traditional women did not ascribe equal sacrifices to men and women. Some examples of the sacrifices they described include fathers should make career sacrifices by "preserving leisure time for their children" while mothers should "put your career on hold." Egalitarian women described more balanced career sacrifices for mothers and fathers suggesting that either parent might choose to stay home with the children. Despite all of these differences, Matthews and Beaujot conclude that egalitarian and traditional women are more similar than different in their overall attitudes concerning the desirability and advantages of marriage and children. Both groups of women cited advantages and disadvantages of being married, but seemed to value marriage and prefer it to being single.

A similar article (Smith & Beaujot, 1999) examined the differences between men's gender orientation concerning marriage and family roles. Their respondents

(married men) were interviewed concerning their beliefs about family and parenting roles and classified according to their answers as possessing either traditional, intermediate, or liberal gender role orientations. The purpose of this article was to provide a composite picture of these three different types of men's gender orientation and thus avoid lumping all men together as the traditional stereotypical man. The respondents answers differed in three different categories: preference of "working on the job" or "taking care of one's children," parental roles and responsibilities of raising children, and necessity of career sacrifices of mothers and fathers.

Half of the traditional respondents voiced a preference for "working on the job" over "taking care of one's children," and all traditional respondents believed that women preferred to stay at home and take care of the children rather than work outside of the home. Traditional respondents attributed different parental roles and responsibilities to mothers and fathers. Most traditional respondents believed that the father's role centered around acting as an authority figure and providing financial resources while the mother's role centered around care giving and domestic housework. Finally, traditional respondents described different kinds of career sacrifices for men and women. They believed that the family was of prominent importance and men should make career sacrifices such as not spending an excessive amount of time on the job or burdening his family with his work problems. The type of career sacrifices they described for women included giving up a career all together or waiting until the children were in school to start a career.

The responses of intermediate participants concerning men's and women's preference to work on the job or take care of their children were much more diverse than responses from traditional participants. Most of the intermediate men claimed that they preferred taking caring of their children to working on the job. However, many of these respondents noted that other conditions such as well-behaved children and financial stability are an important part of that preference. Others reported that they prefer to work on the job because taking care of children is just not a "natural occupation for a man." Furthermore, intermediate men widely believed that if financial circumstances permitted and women were given the choice, they would prefer to stay home and take care of the children. Like traditional respondents, most intermediate respondents referred to parental roles and responsibilities in a gendered context attributing women with household duties and men with those outside of the home. However, they hinted at the apparent necessity of a division of household labor if both parents worked outside the home. Lastly, intermediate men described a more moderate view than traditional men did on the issue of career sacrifices describing more equal sacrifices for men and women.

Most liberal respondents found working on the job and taking care of their children equally enjoyable. They believed that many women try to incorporate both aspects into their lives and enjoy both activities, but they still believed that if dual incomes were not necessary most women would prefer stay home and take care of their children. Liberal respondents differed most from the other two groups in their discussion of parental roles and responsibilities. They placed supreme importance on an equal division of household labor and balance of power. Finally, liberal respondents believed

that men and women were equally responsible for making career sacrifices that would benefit the family. Smith and Beaujot (1999) effectively present the reality of the difference in men's gender orientations and how these differences effect marital behavior.

Several studies report gender differences in the way marital partners manage relational maintenance and respond to conflict. Acitelli (1992) reported that relational maintenance was predominately viewed as wives' role rather than husbands' and that women spend proportionately more time than their husbands engaging in relationship maintenance strategies. Furthermore, other studies have suggested that some gender role attitudes -male as breadwinner, woman as housekeeper and caretaker- are destructive to marital satisfaction. Zietlow and Sillars (1988) argued that an equitable division of household labor does have relationship significance and is strongly linked to building a mutually satisfying marital relationship. Ragsdale (1996) points out in his study of relationship maintenance strategies that wives used many more openness, network, and sharing household tasks strategies than their husbands. Canary and Stafford (1992) reported that use of relational maintenance strategies and perceptions of partner's use of relational maintenance strategies were positively related to feelings of equity among married couples. Obviously, division of household labor and relational maintenance are directly linked to values of equality and mutual satisfaction between marriage partners. This research holds interesting implications for my research endeavor because it illustrates the importance of discerning whether or not these gender differences in relational maintenance, views of marriage, and division of labor are evident in my interviews of unmarried college students.

Gender and Financial/Emotional Resources

Additional research on gender and marriage has explored the relationship between gender ideology, money, and power. Vogler and Pahl's (1993) study of the relationship between employment patterns, social class, gender ideology, and financial allocation systems of married couples found that greater financial equality between partners was most often the result of both husband and wife working full time and the wife successfully challenging her husband's status as the main bread winner of the family. Vogler and Pahl (1994) found that, "in couple households there are significant associations between control over household finances and more general power within the household" (p. 264). Research suggests that even when both partners work and they nominally pool their money, one partner is likely to exercise control over the funds. Vogler and Pahl (1994) report that only twenty percent of couples who pool their money jointly control their finances. These couples were characterized by the highest levels of equality between husbands and wives in terms of decision making power and access to personal spending money. Vogler and Pahl (1994) found that female control of finances increased their decision- making power but did not protect them from financial deprivation. Interestingly, male control of finances increased their decision making power, access to personal spending money, and insured their protection from financial deprivation. Gender inequality was least in households with pooled money and greatest in households where males exhibited control over the finances.

Research Gap and Research Question

This review of the literature on gender ideologies, gender role attitudes, and their impact on interpersonal interaction and marital communication demonstrates the wealth of information already published on the subject. While this information increases our understanding of the implications of gender-related concepts for men and women, there remains a gap in the research. Though the literature on this subject has provided several significant insights, important questions remain unanswered. The articles reviewed leave several questions unanswered that will shape and direct this research project. The first few articles reviewed in this paper suggest that our gender role attitudes play a significant role in the way that we perceive ourselves and others and that it is extremely likely that we modify our gender role attitudes according to whom we are perceiving (Pennell & Ogilvie, 1995; Peplau, Hill, & Rubin, 1993). These studies do not address questions such as, if gender role attitudes are modified and tailored according to who is being perceived, are they also modified by what (social institution, significant relationship, etc.) is being perceived? Are men's and women's perceptions of marriage based on the gender role attitudes that they apply to themselves or others?

Other articles addressed the implications of gender-biased traditions and social norms such as titles of address, name changes, and engagement rings for women in the context of work and family life (Chakraborty & Schwartz, 1990; Dion & Cota, 1991; Suarez, 1997). These articles do not, however, include a discussion of the role that these social norms play in our perceptions of marriage. Thus, while these articles add important insight, they do leave a gap in our knowledge about the effects of certain gender-biased

traditions or social norms. Specifically, do gender-biased traditions (such as engagement rings or name changes) reflect a gender-biased social context (marriage)?

Several of the articles reviewed provide us with significant clues as to how gender related concepts such as the presence and strength of stereotypes and desirable characteristics of a potential relational partner effect college students (Lueptow & Garovich, 1995; Regan & Berscheid, 1997). While these studies do not specifically focus on the social context of marriage, a researcher who sought to develop a holistic understanding of how college students perceive marriage would likely include these variables. Studies addressing the reciprocal nature of gender-biased language and a gender-biased social structure (Gastil, 1990;Hamilton, 1988;Harrigan & Lucic, 1988; Matheson & Kristiansen, 1987; Rubin & Greene, 1991) imply that close attention to the language choices students make as they talk about marriage is essential to a study exploring gender and perceptions of marriage.

Finally, a multitude of studies that focused on the impact of gender role attitudes in behavioral patterns and relationship satisfaction within marriage (Hutson & Geis, 1993; Peplau, Hill, & Rubin, 1993, Vogler & Pahl, 1993, 1994) provided focus and direction to my study by encouraging me to concentrate on a single social context – marriage. Other articles (Martin & Martin, 1984; Perse, Pavitt, & Burggraf, 1995) provided focus to my project by encouraging me to concentrate on a single demographic – college students. In conclusion, a significant amount of research has been produced on the subjects of marriage, college students' beliefs about gender and marriage, gender and language, and gender role attitudes within the context of dating and marriage. The

research produced on these subjects provides the groundwork for an in-depth examination of college student's perceptions of marriage and gender roles.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Participants

One hundred traditional (18-24 years old) undergraduate students who were enrolled in a four-year college or university and had never been married or divorced participated in this study. They were recruited by undergraduate students enrolled in an honors section of an undergraduate course in gender and communication. Each student enrolled in the class recruited four other college students and interviewed them separately regarding their feelings and perceptions of marriage in return for course credit. In addition to these interviews the researcher also conducted two interviews. The interviews usually lasted between 15-30 minutes and were audiotaped with the permission of the respondents. The interviews were conducted in a quiet setting where conversation was not difficult. Participants were interviewed only one time at their convenience.

The criteria used to determine which interviews were transcribed and coded were random selection, sound quality, and saturation. First, each interview was coded according to interviewer and interview order. Each of the students who conducted interviews for extra credit was assigned a number. For example, student John Doe was assigned the number twelve. The second interview that John Doe conducted was coded 12-2. Next, the researcher randomly selected one interview from each interviewer. Due to poor sound quality, seven interviews were discarded. These tapes were omitted from the selection process and new tapes (which were also selected at random) were used.

Interviews were transcribed until themes became repetitive and saturation occurred. Saturation occurred in this study after twenty-eight interviews were transcribed.

Sixteen males and twelve females participated in the study. Participants ranged from 19 to 24 years of age. Three students were nineteen years old. Six students were twenty years old. Six students were twenty-one years old. Six students were twenty-two years old. Six students were twenty-three years old. One student was twenty-four years old. Racial and ethnic backgrounds of the participants also varied; one student was Asian, one student was American Indian, two students were African American, one student was Cuban Dominican, sixteen students were Caucasian, one student was Korean, one student was Ethiopian, one student was Egyptian, and four students were Hispanic. Nine students reported that their parents were divorced. In addition, there was considerable diversity in the hometowns and majors represented by the participants. Sixteen students' hometown size was over 100,000. Two students' hometown size was between 75,000 and 100,000. Three students' hometown size was between 10,000 and 50,000. Seven students' hometown size was under 10,000. The participants also classified themselves as belonging to various faith traditions. Seven respondents classified themselves as Christian. Two respondents classified themselves as Protestant. Five respondents classified themselves as Roman Catholic. Six students classified themselves as Baptist. Two students classified themselves as Church of Christ. Two students classified themselves as Methodist. One student classified himself as Jewish. Two students classified themselves as agnostic. Finally, one student's response to the demographic question "religion?" was simply "sure".

Procedures

Qualitative interviewing methods were utilized to answer the research question. Specifically, a standardized open-ended interview format facilitated the exploration of college students' perceptions of marriage. The researcher did not create the general interview guide. The interview format was created by two graduate students at the time the interviews were conducted in exchange for course credit. The standardized open-ended interview format is particularly useful for this project because of the manner in which the interviews were conducted and the type of data that were obtained from each interview. First, as detailed above, the interviews were conducted by several different individuals. The interviewers used a standard open-ended interview format to insure that the same type of data were gathered from interviewees and to enhance the comparability of data across interviews. Multiple interviewers serve to eliminate the potential bias that is a product of a single interviewer who conducts every interview and is responsible for all of the data collection. Furthermore, it is extremely likely that, while they were trained in interviewing skills, the interviewers in this study (undergraduate college students) did not have existing theoretical frameworks or predetermined objectives for completing these interviews, beyond satisfying requirements for their assignment. Thus, it is likely that they were not as prone to ask leading questions, encourage or search for specific information, or react strongly to answers. Their primary objective was to use the questions provided in a standard interview format to obtain as much information as possible from interviewees. Furthermore, this design allowed data to be collected in a more natural setting because the interviewees were interviewed by other college students

and were less likely to feel nervous or intimidated. These precautions served to reduce the risk of bias in data collection. At the same time the standardized open-ended interview format minimized interviewer effects and insured that the same type of information was obtained from every person that was interviewed. Furthermore, this interview format facilitates the organization of the data so emerging themes are easily recognizable.

The interview format consisted of fourteen open ended questions and seven demographic questions. The first four questions were designed to elicit information about the interviewee's opinions and values concerning marriage. The interviewees were encouraged to describe their unique views of marriage, indicating the supreme values that they associate with marriage. Next, the respondents were asked to report their own experience or behavior; they are asked to imagine how they would behave in a particular scenario. The question "If you are in a relationship and marriage is mentioned, what is your reaction?" serves to elicit information about the respondent's personal readiness for marriage. The next set of questions is designed to assess the interviewee's thoughts about the appropriate timing and readiness for marriage of the general public. The respondents were also asked questions that would reflect their beliefs about the different duties and roles of marriage partners. Another question encouraged interviewees to describe desirable characteristics and traits of a potential spouse. Finally, respondents were asked questions that were designed to measure their response to specific gender stereotypes. Demographic information obtained from each respondent included age, divorces in

family, adoption, race, sex, religion, and hometown size. The entire interview format has been placed in Appendix A and can be viewed at the back of this document on page 112.

Data Analysis

Once data collection was complete, a cross-case analysis was used to analyze the interviews. First, the interviews were transcribed and then coded according to overarching themes and patterns rather than by each individual question. Coding was a two-step process based on an approach detailed by Lofland and Lofland (1995). The purpose of the first step, initial coding, is to allow the researcher to explore the data and "look for what they can define and discover in the data" (Chamraz, 1983, p.113). During the phase of initial coding the researcher seeks to identify general themes within the data. During the first step the researcher compiled lists that consisted of the responses of all participants to different interview questions (i.e., statements that reflected either a general attitude toward marriage or reactions to non-traditional courtship and marriage practices). For example, one list consisted of interview responses based on religion. Responses that seemed to feature religion as their foundation for reasoning or motive appeared as answers to several of the interview questions and in a variety of different interviews.

The second step in the process described by Lofland and Lofland (1995), focused coding, calls for the researcher to examines the themes and patterns produced by initial coding and distinguish between less productive or ambiguous themes and dominant themes that seem to have explanative power. During this step, the lists were combined or collapsed into dominant themes that the researcher believed helped explain the data.

Criteria such as recurrence and repetition helped identify dominant themes and important categories. Recurrence occurred when a number of responses communicated the same meaning, even though the wording may have been different. For example, the statements "that's just the way God intended it (a family) to be" and "the Bible says men should be the head of a household" both represent the role that religion plays in students' perceptions of marriage. Next, repetition was noted when key words or phrases were repeated several times within individual interviews or across interviews. It is important to note key words or phrases (such as "partner," "companion," "parent," and "taking care of") that students continually use to describe their perceptions of marriage because these words could be the basis of their beliefs about the social reality of marriage. During this step the list that was labeled religion became a subcategory of a dominant theme which was labeled "keys to a successful marriage."

Sensitizing concepts such as security versus freedom, appropriate timing of marriage, marriage imagery, keys to a successful marriage, tradition versus change, and gender differences emerged as significant themes that shed additional light and understanding on the phenomenon of interest. Once focused coding was complete, each theme was explored separately and in light of one another as they were compared and contrasted. The results of this data analysis are provided in Chapter IV. Finally, the data were considered as a unique whole as the researcher sought to describe emergent themes, and based on these themes, to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In the previous chapter, I explained the data analysis process. During this process several themes emerged that I believe describe college students' perceptions of marriage. In this chapter, I will detail these findings by explaining each theme individually. The descriptive themes that emerged during the data analysis process include security versus freedom, appropriate timing for marriage, marriage imagery, keys to a successful marriage, gender differences, and tradition versus change. Quotations from different participants are included throughout the chapter. The number listed directly after the chapter indicates respondent number and interview code.

Security versus Freedom

The first, and perhaps, most dominant theme that emerged was security versus freedom. This theme appeared in some shape or form in nearly every interview that was analyzed. At its core this theme addresses what college students seem to recognize as the ultimate benefit and the ultimate sacrifice related to marriage. Almost every single interview included several comments that celebrated the security offered by the marriage relationship as well as a brief but ominous discussion about the loss of freedom and limitations imposed by marriage vows. The tension between these two values is illustrated perfectly in one interview in which the participant acknowledges each of these feelings within seconds of each other: "You have a partner there for you, for comfort, all

the time, and that someones there to share everything with you, and just to know that you have someone there for life to support you and love you," Then he explained that he did not look forward to "always having to answer to someone and, um, just being there, not, well having to be there, and oh not getting to go out and party" (18-4).

Loss of Freedom

Most interviewees associated a degree of personal loss with getting married. Participants' descriptions of the loss they associated with marriage included beliefs or feelings about loss of personal freedom, further restraints imposed by marriage, additional responsibilities, lack of flexibility and loss of independence or identity as an individual. Some participants alluded to a basic lack of personal freedom, "Um, maybe not being free, ya know what I'm saying, sometimes, I mean you have responsibilities, I mean when you're married that you have to follow through with – it could get old at times ya know" (05-1). Other participants explained that being married meant an individual simply could not do exactly what they wanted to anymore: "You can't just always get your way all the time, you can't ya know do whatever you want to, you have like certain responsibilities that have to come first before, ya know, before you can ya know just go out and play or do whatever you want to do" (05-3). All of these participants equated sacrificing "play time" with marriage, "agreeing and doing stuff you have to do, and something they might notthey do" (06-4).

The additional responsibilities alluded to seem to be the responsibility of coordinating one's life with another individual or being responsible for two people's

happiness rather than one. For example, "I guess you would lose, um, some kind of freedom because in a marriage you, um, have to think of the other person as almost more important than yourself, in a marriage I mean if you truly love that other person, I mean you think of them first" (07-3). The need to coordinate activities, decisions, and desires with one's spouse apparently represented a lack of personal freedom. One participant stated that "you have to, uh, have the consent of someone every time you make a major decision its no longer just you, but you have to look out for the well-fare of the other person" (01-4).

Still other participants believed marriage stifles one's freedom because it requires additional sacrifices and limits personal flexibility. Several different personal sacrifices were described, such as "the consideration of the other at times, uh, some of the self-sacrifices you have to give: career, guy friends, girl friends, monetary" (02-2). Some individuals identified the sacrifices as primarily related to financial matters, like "bills, more bills, your kids' stuff, your expenses, your insurance" (13-1). Other participants described possibly sacrificing opportunities for personal gain or fulfillment, including job advancement opportunities or the opportunity for a better relationship:

> Maybe the time constraints as far as you have to be a lot more willing to give up things that you want to do because you have someone else to think about, and they might be, even job positions and stuff like that, you've got someone else to think about and that can cause a problem – even if you did have good communication – that can put a lot of stress on the marriage, if you're wanting to advance and your partner can't you know find another job wherever you're going. (25-1)

Other participants shared that a person may be sacrificing personal happiness by settling for the wrong person. As one participant explained, "I guess that sometimes people feel

like they have to settle, like they don't know what's still out there, like maybe this person isn't the one, and they want to keep, but they're the best right now" (01-4).

Finally, other participants associated marriage with a loss of independence. One respondent stated that "I guess that sometimes you can come to rely on someone too much and maybe you don't do things for yourself, and you kinda lose sight of who you are – yourself" (03-1). Another individual believed that once one is married he or she can no longer be independent: "It can also be a disadvantage if you feel like you just want to be independent – on your own again. If you have that type of streak within you, then you might feel tied down" (14-2). Other participants described their loss of freedom as limited possibilities for personal growth once they are married:

> It might be hard on you if your goals are primarily around, are business at the beginning and economics and you might have to travel a lot, and that's really hard on a relationship. So, sometimes it might be better to put off marriage until you've established yourself in the business world first and developed who you are as a person before you try to get married. Some people rush into marriage too soon before they really even know who they are, so that's some disadvantages. (11-3)

Another participant expressed her concern that personal growth might be limited if her partner was not willing to grow and change with her:

> I think there's always a little bit of fear that what if I change to the point whether either I outgrow my partner or he no longer is in love with the person I become so I think that kinda keeps you who you, who you started out being. Like if you get married when you're twenty years old, I am no where near the person that I want to be in ten years or twenty years. I mean I have so much change I want to go through, and it would make it difficult to do that unless my partner was willing to go that road with me as well. (20-2)

Beliefs about a loss of independence or a loss of identity as an individual were further illustrated by statements about the necessity of forming a new identity as a couple. Many participants cited the importance of two individuals becoming one after they are married:

> Marriage, it's like, to me it is a giving, it is a leaving behind of one life and starting a new life with somebody else, so ya know, so if both people come together it's like they combine both advantages and disadvantages in life that they had in a sense. I mean they cherish the memories, but they form new memories together. They become in a sense – one – that is it, when like you get married for me you become one. (14-2)

Another participant explained, "I mean again like tradition – I like, I think it should be better, you know like, you take on the surname of your husband just to you know symbolize that you're one – you know not still separate people – if you're separate people you might as well not be married in my opinion" (24-4). Clearly, many participants associated marriage with some degree of personal loss. They described this loss in many different ways, including loss of flexibility, additional responsibility, personal sacrifices, and a loss of independence or identity as an individual. A majority of the negative characteristics that college students associate with marriage related to a loss of personal freedom. However, the loss of individuality that is noted above is directly linked to a new identity as a couple. The security that this new identity as a couple offered was overwhelmingly represented in every single interview that was examined.

Celebration of Security and Belonging

Each participant alluded to the companionship and security that the marriage relationship offers. In contrast to feelings of personal loss were comments about the major benefit or advantage to being married. Most of the respondents described the

marriage relationship as a unique relationship that offered a deeper level of security. A sense of security consisted of several different elements, including companionship, support, safety, security, and belonging. One participant described this sense of security as having your best friend with you all the time:

> The biggest advantage is just having, I mean, like your best friend with you for all of your life, like fifty years of forty years, it's awesome because it's kinda like he or she will be like your soul mate, and ya know you have friends that you see every once in a while, but it's awesome because you wake up with them every single day. (07-3)

Many participants believed that this type of intense friendship was the most significant advantage of being married. The fact that marriage provides one with a constant companion was celebrated throughout each of the interviews. The security that companionship provides was described in several interviews. One participant described the type of companionship that marriage offers as a basic human need: "The biggest one I think is companionship, I mean, I think that's very important to humans – is they need someone there – um, it's steady companionship, and it's love and trust and it just helps you out a lot" (11-3). Again, participants described the sense of security that is offered by companionship as the assurance that someone will always be there: "Companionship – someone's always there to talk to, you have someone there you can depend on to help you with stuff" (03-3). Words such as "always" and "consistent" illustrate the type of stability that is associated with the kind of companionship that was described, "just a companion, companionship – constantly having a friend there, always having a friend there" (04-2).

Participants seemed to equate marriage with the type of companionship that is capable of fulfilling many different needs: "Well you have a companion and someone that can kind of be a strength or encouragement to you and, um, can help you see things in a way that you might not see them, and there's extra strength when there's two, and you can attack things together" (04-3). The need to be cared for, helped, and supported were described as a few of the needs that spousal-companionship fulfils: "You always know that there's someone there that will care for you and will support you and will help you work through the bad things and will still be there in the good times and just there's always someone there"(03-1). Another participant believed the type of companionship offered by a spouse is characterized by a deeper level of trust and loyalty: "Just ya know that mutual friendship and someone that you can always depend on and trust and you just have that person to lean on and, yeah, to have that total trust in" (09-3).

It seems that while coordinating one's life with another individual was described as a potential disadvantage in some interviews, actually having someone to coordinate with was also recognized as providing a sense of belonging and security. This intense companionship that marriage offers was described by other participants as "that sense of belonging, knowing that you have someone that loves you, being able to work through life with someone" (02-2). Many participants looked forward to this sense of belonging and added security: "That's kind of a safety thing, waking up next to the person you love, that you're going to spend the rest of your life with" (06-1). One individual described this type of companionship as producing a level of commitment that provides security and inspires confidence in an individual: "I think security and um, I like just like knowing

you have that commitment from somebody is, really ya know, special, and it's like a really special bond and just to know, that just to know I mean, that you completely want to spend the rest of your life with somebody; it says a lot"(05-3).

Finally, many respondents believed that this intense constant companionship fills a void in people's lives. Accordingly, an individual might enjoy success, worldly possessions, or other friendships and still not be completely satisfied without the type of companionship a spouse offers. One participant shared, "They'll be pretty happy in the rest of their life and they'll just feel there's a void somewhere and when, and they'll know when the time's right to fill that void by marriage" (11-3). Furthermore, comments such as "I think the older you get the lonelier you get if you're single" (20-1) and "when you find somebody you don't really care about having anybody else, like you, you would want someone to be there every waking moment, and you won't ever feel lonely, and they're always there for you" (10-3) illustrate participants' descriptions of the added security and protection from being alone that this type of companionship offers.

The struggle between the security that this type of companionship offers and the limitations or loss of personal freedom imposed by marriage vows was a consistent theme throughout the interviews. Each participant seemed to describe marriage as coordinating and blending one's life with another individual. The togetherness of marriage was identified as both closing doors of opportunity and freedom and opening doors of fulfillment and satisfaction. This struggle between duality versus unity represented the core of what college students believed to be the best and worst about marriage. However, the satisfaction and security that marital companionship offers received much greater

emphasis and seemed to be of greater import than any loss participants associated with marriage.

Appropriate Timing for Marriage

The second descriptive theme that emerged that helped explain college students' perceptions of marriage is related to the appropriate timing for marriage. This theme emerged across interviews as college students discussed when individuals are ready for marriage. This theme encompasses both general and specific comments about the appropriate timing for marriage. The specific comments were descriptions of self and centered on the participant's beliefs about when he or she would be personally ready for marriage. Other comments were more universal or holistic in nature describing college students' beliefs about when the general public is ready for marriage. These general comments typically consisted of prerequisites or steps that should be completed as either a couple or an individual before marriage should be considered. The prerequisites for marriage can be divided into interpersonal relational variables pertaining to the couple and demographic and personal variables pertaining to the individual.

College Students' Personal Readiness for Marriage

Every participant interviewed expressed interest and enthusiasm toward the idea of getting married. In other words, at some point in their future the majority of participants envisioned themselves getting married. However, the point at which the participants imagined this might happen divided the participants into two distinct

categories. When discussing the appropriate timing for marriage participants typically identified themselves as either ready for marriage or not ready for marriage. One should note that the responses were not divided among demographic lines; males and females from every age group, ethnicity, and religious background represented in the study were divided on their readiness for marriage.

Participants seldom claimed that they were ready for marriage right now. However, those individuals who identified themselves as ready for marriage related the college environment and their present relationships and experiences as primers for marriage. Therefore, many participants identified themselves as much closer to being ready for marriage than other participants seemed to be. These participants typically envisioned themselves being married within a couple of years, which usually translated to towards the end of college or shortly after college graduation. They were generally open to talking about marriage and discussing it with friends and relational partners. These individuals also shared a common belief that the college environment was the best place to meet a potential spouse:

> I think probably there's a lot more pressure towards when you get out of college because you start thinking about when you go into the quote unquote real world and you're thinking you're never going to find the kind of person in the real world just because the social opportunities aren't there like they are in college. So I think a lot of people probably think it's easier to meet somebody in college who have [sic] a lot of the same interests as them. (20-1)

Thus, they were more likely to view present relationships as a stepping stone to marriage. Participants who expressed interests in getting married relatively soon (within a couple of years) reported that they viewed relationship partners as potential spouses at this point in their lives:

> I wouldn't be in a relationship where I couldn't picture myself marrying the girl anyways. I – I would be able to talk about marriage with her probably, but I wouldn't, I wouldn't be able to um -I wouldn't be in a relationship where I couldn't marry somebody but I would be able to talk about it with them freely and I would try and be open and honest about it and it would probably be something I would say it would happen in a couple of years but I wouldn't – I myself wouldn't put myself in a relationship where I couldn't even picture myself marrying the girl – it's a waste of my time. (11-3)

Another participant believed it was acceptable to talk about marriage with his significant other because he would not date someone he would not consider marrying:

> I normally don't get into relationships unless I have plans that I might marry that person, and the minute I find out, or once I find out that there's something I wouldn't marry about them I don't stay in it – so, um, if I'm in a relationship and marriage is mentioned then most likely I've already thought could I marry this person, and I would probably, I'm going to consider it. (06-1)

In contrast, those individuals who reported that they were not ready for marriage disclosed that they were not particularly open to discussing marriage with relational partners. One participant imagined that if his relational partner approached the topic of marriage his response would be similar to "Oh my God! You have got to be crazy; I'm in school still" (09-3). Participants who were not ready for marriage cited several reasons for not being ready. Many of these reasons related to the loss of personal freedom individuals associate with marriage, which was included in the discussion of the first theme. These participants explained that marriage simply was not their number one priority right now, nor would it be in the near future. Many of these respondents believed that they must accomplish certain tasks, achieve particular goals, and even purchase various material possessions before they married:

> Right now it's kind of a back away standpoint, maybe uh, uh, a little further down the road I'd be more excited to hear marriage come up, but right now uh it's kinda school and career are my top priorities, and marriage would hinder any movement

> in that direction. So, I would have to say that I would not really care to talk about marriage right now. (12-4)

Another participant listed several milestones that must be achieved before marriage is considered:

> Personally, I don't want to get married until I finish school and then I want to have a job, a steady job, and I want to get myself secure, ya know where I want to be, and there's a few things I want to get ya know – ya know I want to get a boat and some material things before I get a wife who says I can't get those. (25-1)

Another participant explained, "I don't know, right now I don't think I'm really uh wanting to talk about marriage only because I know that I'm not ready for it, um, 'cause I don't know where I'm going to go in life. I don't know what I want to do and I want to figure out what I want to do before I get in a relationship"(04-2). Thus, there was a clear distinction between participants who reported that they were not ready for marriage in relation to other priorities and participants who reported that they envisioned themselves being ready for marriage in the near future. The most notable difference between these two groups was the way they related their current relationships, priorities, surroundings, and experiences to marriage. Generally, those individuals who were closer to being ready for marriage were more open and comfortable talking about marriage with their relational partners who they viewed as potential mates. Those individuals who were not ready for marriage expressed a desire to pursue other priorities before considering marriage.

General Prerequisites for Marriage

During the interviews the participants also made many comments about the appropriate timing for marriage for the general public. These comments consisted of descriptions of when individuals in general are ready for marriage. The majority of participants neglected to identify a certain age that was appropriate for marriage; rather, they identified certain variables that they believed signified readiness for marriage. These variables included interpersonal relational variables as well as intrapersonal or individual variables.

College students listed several interpersonal relational variables that they believed signified that members of a couple were jointly ready for marriage. Time and variety of experiences received a great deal of emphasis: "You have to have a lot of things go on between you two. You have to go through a lot before you know you could stand a lifetime with this person" (10-3). The idea that a couple has shared a substantial amount of time and experiences is specifically related to the degree of comfort between relational partners. Many participants stressed the importance of each relational partner being completely comfortable with the other. One participant suggested, "I think a person is ready for marriage if, um, if they're comfortable being with the other person like not just out and dressed up, ya know, but just being who they are and not having to worry about what the other person thinks about them" (01-4). Another respondent claimed, "If you're not comfortable enough to tell the other person really honestly what you're thinking or how you feel about anything, ya know, if your, if you feel the need to reserve things, privacy's fine, but if you don't feel comfortable enough to share what your

thinking and truly who you are, then I don't think the marriage could work really well" (20-2). Other participants focused on interpersonal variables such as the degree of intimacy or commitment in a relationship. Marriage was described as the ultimate connection between two people producing the highest level of intimacy and requiring the greatest degree of commitment:

> In a deep relationship, yes, you are bound to somebody but not legally like if one person or the other gets mad at the other you just break up, you don't have to go through a legal divorce and settle half of your stuff, like that. I think marriage is the ultimate connection between two people and it's two people becoming one and if you think you're not ready for that than you definitely should not delve into that. (20-1)

Another participant explained intimacy as the extent to which each person knows and accepts the other.

> I think whenever they know the other person well enough that like maybe they'll know how they'll react in situations, know their likes and dislikes, and know what they're like when they get up in the morning and when they are having a bad day and stuff like that and know that they can handle them, and I think also they have to know the things that the other one does that they don't necessarily like cuz there's always things like but they have to know those and know that they're not going to let that get in the way of their relationship. (Respondent 03-1)

Thus, the interpersonal relational variables that college students believed signified that a couple was ready for marriage were based on comfort level, degree of familiarity and intimacy, and level of commitment.

Participants also specified several intrapersonal variables or variables pertaining to the individual that they believed signified that an individual was ready for marriage. Several of the individual variables related to material success, personal accomplishments, and financial stability:

> I don't plan on getting married until I'm, like, out of college and pretty much financially stable even though you're never going to be financially stable in this day and age, but when I'm out of college and won't be such a strain on my life to be married and be in college at the same time, all the bills and everything are piling up. (03-3)

Many comments made throughout the interviews illustrate college students' belief about the importance of establishing financial independence before marriage. One participant claimed an individual was not ready for marriage until they could afford it: "on a monetary note – ya know do they have a good job? Ya know can they afford it" (09-3)? Many individuals commented on the need to have a stable job before one gets married: "as long as you know that you need a steady job, that your going to have to support someone" (25-1). Another participant explained, "I wouldn't get married till I was out of school and comf – and like had a job and was financially ready for it" (05-3). Another participant related an individual's financial stability to his or her ability to commit to someone, "when they are financially stable, regardless of age, um, in that sense when you feel that you're going to make the commitment and your going to do it and not cheat on your wife, not doing anything else but give your wife one hundred percent of your attention" (21-2). Male and female participants were equally likely to emphasize the importance of financial stability before marriage. Thus, one level of intrapersonal variables that seemed to indicate an individual's readiness for marriage were based on completing one's education and becoming financially stable.

Finally, college students listed certain extrinsic experiences or elements of personal maturity as variables that would signify individual's personal readiness for

marriage. Several participants explained that an individual is not ready for marriage unless they have experienced or participated in the real world:

> If you haven't experienced a lot, like not necessarily travel, but just had different life experiences and different situations, like if you've just been cooped up in your house, like if you're a teenager and you just grow up with just your parents, you're not really interactive with the outside world. You don't go many places, interact with different people, I'd say you're not mature enough or have enough responsibility to be married. (03-3)

Other respondents focused on an individual's level of emotional or psychological maturity as an indicator of personal readiness for marriage.

> When you haven't fully developed as a person yet when you, when your, of course people are continuously evolving, but I think there comes a point in your life when you've pretty much established who you are and a lot of times people rush into marriage, and they do it when they're too young. I think that's, they don't even know who they are yet, and you have no identity yourself, and if you rush into a marriage then you're going to completely lose your identity and your marriage will probably fail, and you going to lose all hopes of attaining your identity. (11-3)

These participants focused on the importance of individual development.

> Like when you get married it's almost like you solidify who you are and if you aren't ready like if you haven't been completely formed or whatever, then you've left that part of your development out, ya know, because I mean you have this other person who constantly keeps you in check of who you are and keeps you that person which can be good or can be bad if you haven't fully developed than it keeps you immature, it keeps you from exploring all of these other possibilities that you have always wanted to do, because it's like life gets complicated and it takes so much effort to survive, and you can no longer be selfish and it's so much easier to say I want I want to do this today and you can't – you can no longer function like that. (20-2)

Another participant explained,

> Um, I think that person needs to be mature in and of themselves like that person needs to be aware of who they are; they should not find their identity in the girl that they date or in the guy that they date, and they need to have a firm establishment of who they are, and also I think they need to have a firm

> establishment of what they believe, what their convictions are, what their aspirations in life are. (14-2)

Other participants related individual development to one's self-concept. These participants asserted that, until an individual truly knows and loves him or herself, they are unable to know or love another person. One participant explained the importance of being comfortable with yourself before you are married: "I think so because if you're not comfortable with who you are, how can you be comfortable with somebody else's perception of you" (01-4)? Another respondent related self-concept to recognizing one's full potential: "I think you're too young for marriage when you haven't figured out what you want for yourself and you haven't really explored all the possibilities, but you don't know what all your capable of, and I don't know, like you just haven't, just haven't found yourself yet" (03-3).

Satisfaction with one's position in life, self-respect, and being content to be alone were also discussed as important individual variables that signify personal readiness for marriage. Several participants focused on the need to accomplish personal goals and be completely happy with one's position in life before marriage:

> It's when you're comfortable with the life you've created for yourself and when you've reached your goals as a person, and you're ready to take on goals with another person. When, um, you haven't, you haven't completely fulfilled what you, your dreams, what you wanted to accomplish in life, um, a lot of people want to be a lawyer or a doctor, but if they go in and they get married before college or before they they get to these goals, then they may end up regretting it later in life and that can really put a damper on a marriage. (12-4)

Other participants identified completely accepting oneself and being content to be alone as an indication that an individual is emotionally mature enough for marriage:

> I think when they're content to be by themselves, when they're, when they have no problems being alone, and ya know, no problems dealing with their own life, they don't use their partner as a means to escape themselves. I think that that is a good sign that they're on their way to being able to form a healthy bond with another person. I just don't think that unless you know yourself that you can know another person, and until they explore that and can be comfortable with themselves, I don't think that bond will ever be, ya know, as strong or as great as it could be. (20-2)

Another participant explained that a person is ready for marriage "when, I think, that person is ready to respect themselves and love themselves and be mature, and I think anybody's ready for marriage that, if you can go and be by yourself and live by yourself and know who you are, and then share that with another person, then I think you're ready" (26-4).

The appropriate timing for marriage emerged as a theme that can be viewed in several different ways. First, many participants elaborated on when they personally would be ready for marriage. The participants who were closer to being ready for marriage related their current surroundings and relationships as a stepping stone to marriage. Those individuals who were not ready for marriage described education and occupational goals as their number one priority. Finally, many participants made general comments about when they believe an individual is ready for marriage. They listed several prerequisites including interpersonal and intrapersonal variables.

Marriage Imagery

Throughout the interviews the participants explained and elaborated upon the meaning of the word "marriage." In completing this task, they often explained why they believed the marriage relationship is important, the marital relationship's position or

function in society, and how they envisioned their future marriages. In addition, many participants described the mental images that they associate with marriage. Three sub-themes emerged as respondents described their vision of marriage and marital imagery: envisioning marriage as part of the family cycle, "Ward Cleaver" utopian imagery, and marriage and love as work.

Marriage as Part of the Family Cycle

When describing how they envisioned marriage, participants continually related marriage to the broader relationship that a family shares. Many respondents specifically described the marriage relationship as the beginning of the family cycle. Several comments illustrated their belief that the institution of marriage functions in society to perpetuate the family cycle (i.e., parents and children). Their descriptions of family seemed to be limited to the traditional nuclear family:

> To have a family, uh, I think that's beautiful, and marriage is the place to have a family, ya know. I know there are a lot of single mothers, and I know, I commend them and everything, but I think that having, ya know, a husband and wife and children, having a solid family like that; I think marriage was the institution that was made for it. (14-2)

Many individuals echoed similar sentiments about marriage and family: "You need a marriage before you start having a family, and marriage is what makes the family work, I think" (24-4). Other participants associated marriage with the parenting role to the extent that they believed that reproduction was the sole legitimate purpose for marriage:

> I think marriage is the beginning of the family cycle, ya know, and I think that you need two people who know each other well, communicate well, and have all these great positive things going for them to even begin to start a family. If you have problems before you bring children into this world; I think that just

> perpetuates the cycle of dysfunction. If they couldn't see themselves bringing a life into this world anytime in the near future, because that becomes such a possibility, I don't think, I mean if you know its going to be a really hard road for the next five years, well, maybe you should wait a couple of years before you get married. I think the marriage bond should be about the family cycle. Basically, when you get married, it's basically saying children will follow even if you choose not to do it; you still have that responsibility. (20-2)

While other participants did not express such firm convictions about the institution of marriage as the foundation for parenting, many respondents immediately associated marriage with having children and raising a family with their spouse. Some students envisioned doing certain things with their family, such as enjoying meals or vacationing together. One respondent described the mental images she associated with marriage as "hmm, family, uh, family trips, dinners, big dinners, I guess like that, just family big dinners, sitting around and talking – those are my images" (04-2). Another respondent described the images he associated with marriage as "I picture maybe us getting old together, ya know what I'm sayin, sometimes going on summer vacations uh every now and then, and kinda holding hands in the park, things like that, going to the mall on Sunday, ya know, goin to church together, ya know, all with your kids. I mean all of that I kinda envision with marriage, so, I mean, yeah" (05-1). When asked about the advantages to being married one participant responded, "having kids, family, I guess that'd be it" (16-4). Other respondents answered the question in a similar manner: "Family – I'd want to have a big family, and, um, just getting to be with each other all the time" (21-4). Another respondent explained "You have a family, someone to, uh, that you can love and that will love you back and, uh, I don't know, I guess that's just the American dream, ya know to grow up and get married and have a family – yeah the

traditional thing" (25-1). Thus, college students envision marriage as part of the family cycle and explain the parenting role as one of the key functions of the marriage relationship.

Idealistic Images of Marriage

Many students described their visions of marriage as a fairy tale relationship, where happiness triumphs and life becomes uncomplicated. The scenario that many participants described closely resembled a scene from Leave It to Beaver or The Ozzie and Harriet Show. Happiness, white picket fences, and two-car garages played the leading role in many participants' descriptions of marriage. Several respondents simply equated marriage with happiness: "I think wedding, then I think kids, um, I guess all of the happy things" (24-4). Another participant envisioned marriage as "happiness, a settling feeling, not, there's no more looking, when your married you're with the person that you want to be with, so it's, uh, there's a settled feeling" (02-2). The sole images a majority of the participants related to marriage revolved around happiness, love, and intimacy:

> Happiness, um joy, I mean pretty much all good things, love, sharing, um, I don't know, just the fact knowing that two people are meant to be with each other, and they found each other. I just think of a guy and a girl just completely with each other, just kind of like that mushy stuff, gazing into each other's eyes, holding hands, a nice house, a happy house, a safe house, and, ya know, a couple of kids. (07-3)

Several participants associated marriage with a house and other symbols of serenity or stability. One participant's images of marriage included "family, like, uh, like the family going on a picnic or something, spending a lot of time together ya know, and

kids and shit running around, three bedroom house, white picket fence, two-car garage" (03-3). Another respondent explained the mental images he associated with marriage as "white picket fence and a dog" (25-1). Another participant described his images of marriage as "House, a nice porch, a garden, a wife with a smile, rings, a nice neighborhood clean, and one kid, and a nice car" (10-3). One student described his view of marriage as "family and, um, like holidays and spending time with one another and having children. I kind of have like this in my mind, I have like the big, like the big house with the white picket fence, like the Ward Cleaver kinda image of marriage" (05-3). However, these idealistic images of marriage were balanced by comments that depicted marriage as requiring hard work and compromise, as noted below.

Pragmatic Images of Marriage

Many participants described marriage as a relationship that requires hard work, commitment, dedication, and compromise. Their images of marriage included hard times as well as happy moments. The necessity of compromise played an essential role in many respondents' images of marriage. In fact, when asked to describe an unsuccessful marriage a majority of the responses were based on a lack of compromise:

> A marriage where you don't know how to, I guess, give and take. One person once told me, or I was talking with them about marriage, and they said marriage is not a 50-50 thing, it's a 100-100 thing. So, I guess people that think of it, I guess, as a 50-50 thing or, ya know, I get this and I gotta take. If you don't understand each other, and your selfish and ya don't – being with that person has to be your thing. (07-3)

Other individuals focused on the necessity of compromise: "I think a marriage is usually unsuccessful because there's just, like, people refuse to compromise and, ya know, so

much, just a lot of people I think are so stuck in their ways; and can't, they don't understand the concept of like compromising" (05-3). Another participant described a successful marriage as "They have to compromise and they know when to give in and when to work things out, and, even though difficulties might come up, they stick through it" (12-4). These participants believed that marriage required effort, absolute trust, and commitment: "Lack of trust, lack of commitment towards each other as in time, um, lack of communication, um, lack on each other's part in order to meet each other in the middle and then giving up and not trying when things get hard" (02-2).

Several participants' images of marriage included hard work and difficult times. This sub-theme encompasses those who envisioned marriage as overcoming adversity and working to make it through life's challenges with another person. Some individuals described successful marriages as those in which spouses struggled through hard times together: "They've been through so many hard times, through deaths of brothers and sisters and parents, and I think that they've, their relationship has grown stronger because of it, and they're still friends" (01-4). One participant described her parents' marriage as successful because they were able to overcome adversity:

> My dad's Hispanic and my mom is not, and so they started out like, I think they met under like a lot of opposition, and so I think they met or they decided to stay together for the right reasons, like, like, they care about each other, ya know. I think to do something like that in the seventies, like that was really really a bold thing. I think they just, I don't know, they're just really determined to make it work, and they believed in it, and I think that's what made it work, is they were determined to make it work. (20-2)

Several comments acknowledged the possibility of spouses growing tired of one another or becoming annoyed with little problems or quirky habits. Other participants believed

realistic expectations about one's future spouse or marital relationship was essential to surviving marriage: "If you don't learn to love the little problems and quirks the other person's going to have, because they are going to have them, then uh, that can create a problem, and uh, you can get tired of being married" (21-2). Another participant emphasized the importance of realistic expectations:

> I think what happens a lot of times is people don't realize how hard it's going to be ya know, so they get really discouraged. It's just not being prepared for what you're going to face, you know, either not necessarily going at it too early but just going at it with false expectations, ya know, thinking that marriage will make things easier or ignoring things that are upsetting about the other person, or things that aren't going well, ignoring those things before you get married, and, ya know, those are things. That's what's going to make things difficult is the things you don't really think about right now, but are in the back of your mind that kinda bother you, and that stuffs never going to go away as long as you're married. (20-2)

One should note that the participants who acknowledged that sometimes marriage is a struggle requiring hard work and compromise did not associate marriage with everything negative. They simply did not associate marriage with everything positive, as did those who described "Ward Cleaver" images of marriage. Finally, whether one described an optimistic and simplistic image of marriage or a more realistic version, the majority of participants envisioned marriage as part of the family cycle.

Core Values Associated with Marriage

Another theme that emerged throughout the interviews was the core values that participants believed define marriage. Respondents repeatedly referred to five elements that they associated with the development of a successful marriage. Those five components were religion, similar values and life goals, communication, intimacy, and

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the necessity of non-intimate roles. Obviously, each of the five elements was not referenced in every single interview. However, each participant elaborated on at least one of these elements in their discussion of marriage. Furthermore, these five elements consistently materialized as the core values the participants either desired their future marriages to possess or associated with successful marriages.

Religion

Religion was repeatedly referred to as the foundation of marriage. Many individuals described marriage as a sacred institution created by God. A few participants explained marriage as a Holy institution, usually in some Christian faith tradition, and as part of God's master plan, "Having a life-long partner in life, and basically God says two are better than one, together; I mean we're supposed to be married. I mean, I think in the Bible, and God has someone for everybody" (06-1). Another participant explained "really to me, I think marriage is an institution being from God, so for me I value that a lot, and I'm willing to wait for that right person" (14-2). Other participants related religion to marriage by explaining that it was important to them that their future spouse maintained a relationship with God: "They have to love God, that's first, because I believe that it like that, that completes kind of a triangle there. They love God, and I love God, we're connected kinda like" (06-1). Still others attributed successful marriages to the presence of religion or faith in the couple's lives. One participant described a couple who has a successful marriage as "they respect each other; um, I think church has a lot to do with it.

They are very religious" (26-4). Another participant believed a couple's faith was partially responsible for the success of their marriage:

> The reason it's successful I think is because, uh, first of all they're very mature, and uh, and uh I think they, uh, they're more concerned about the other person's well-being than they are their own, for the most part; and secondly, uh, I think they're very religious people, and I think their faith has a lot to do with why they, uh, have a strong relationship. (08-3)

Another participant attributed successful marriages to the Christian faith and common religious beliefs.

> There's like a lot of couples that I know that have awesome, awesome marriages and, um, with them, what I've found in all of them, there's just a consistency in each couple. There's, um, they have the same foundation, and their foundation is Christ, and the things that they do and the values that they hold, they embrace, they're both the same because they're both looking up to one God, so they have the same foundation and the same belief system and that allows them to communicate really well together. Something else that I really thought was kind of neat was that in these couples when they came together each is like a servant, you know, I mean its not just, like ya know, the wife just be submissive, which is true, but the husbands are just as much as a servant, and it's more like let me do this for you, no, no, no, let me do this for you. So, both have this spirit of servanthood for one another. Everyday they grow to love them just a little bit more, everyday they're more thankful to God of the person, of the partner that He has given them, and I mean they have awesome, I mean they have quiet times and Bible studies together as a family to keep, and, um, but I think all of that, the base, the foundation makes it a really good marriage. (14-2)

Thus, self-described Christians consistently referred to religion as the base or foundation of marriage. Participants continually attributed successful marriages to the presence of religion in the marriage, described marriage as a Holy union created by God, and explained that they desired their mate to be religious.

Shared Values and Goals

Shared values, worldviews, and similar life goals were also consistently referred to as essential elements of marriage. While some participants did not specifically focus on religion, they did explain that it was important to them that their spouse possessed similar values or morals. One participant explained,

> The biggest thing that jumps out at me is your values, your moral values, they have to pretty much kind of go along with my values just because you become one, so the values are definitely there. She should have really good moral values, … and well she needs to be nice; personality is one of the biggest things, personality, like how nice she is, how she treats others, um, how she feels about other people, it's the whole values thing, pretty much the whole package. (07-3)

Another individual attributed a couple's successful marriage to their shared values: "Basically, I know what their marriage is based on and they have the same values, uh they felt the same way, they wanted to raise children, they both wanted to – children raised the same way, um and they both know how to give and take in a relationship" (05-3). Other participants believed that similar worldviews were a key element of successful marriages: "Like if you both have different philosophies as to what marriage is, or if you have different philosophies of love, then I don't think there's a basis for you guys to communicate" (14-2). Finally, many respondents reflected upon their desire that their spouses share similar goals as well as possess the same moral convictions:

> Shared common goals, I think it needs to be a person with the same interests as me. I want it to be a supportive person, someone who is willing to support me in my goals and who I can support in their goals. Um, I want someone with the same ethical and moral background as I have, same, that falls along the same interests, but I think it goes deeper than that a little because religion, um, isn't really important as long as they have the same moral beliefs as I do, and a lot of people do, so that's all right. (11-3)

Another participant characterized an unsuccessful marriage as comprised of spouses who did not share similar goals or interests:

> No love would be the main thing, um, ya know, lack of communication and then just basic, um, goals on what you want in life, like, ya know, do you want children, what do you want as a career, education level may be a small factor, but just big things in life, ya know, I think they have to be the same. I think its true that opposites do attract, but I still think that overall themes, big themes in life, of what type of life you want to live, they do have to have some type of connection and ya have to have just self-interest in each other. (09-3)

Common goals, interests, and moral beliefs received a great deal of attention during the participants' discussions of marriage. Initially, respondents disclosed that they desired their mate to share common values, goals, and interests. Further, participants described successful marriages as those in which both spouses posses the same worldviews, life goals, and moral convictions.

Communication

Communication was repeatedly identified as a building block or foundation of the marriage relationship. Almost every single participant believed a successful marriage was characterized by open and effective communication, and an unsuccessful marriage was characterized by lack of communication. One participant explained that "An unsuccessful marriage would probably have a major lack of communication if nothing else" (20-1). Comments such as "the person you marry needs to be your best friend, because if you can not have, communication is the key to a relationship, if you can not communicate with this person then there's no point in being with them" (26-4) were typical of the majority

of the participants' discussion of successful marriages. Many participants defined communication as the ability to talk with one another and discuss important issues:

> I think what really makes it successful for them is they are very open with each other. I hear them talk about every and any subject, and uh, their lives seem to just – they coexist together very much, and they never do one thing without letting the other person know. In fact my parents even work together in the same place, so not only do they come home and, ya know, have dinner and talk about their day, they've actually been to work with each other. (09-3)

Other participants seemed to define communication as simply being together and spending time with one another. Respondents equated spouses who neglected to spend time with one another with a lack of communication and a lack of commitment. Respondents repeatedly described an unsuccessful marriage as one in which husband and wife did not spend quality time together or were unable to enjoy one another's company: "If you're married and you're together, and you don't enjoy each other's company and you don't have any contact, and you don't, there's no relationship, really you'd have to call that marriage unsuccessful" (01-4). Another participant described unsuccessful communication between spouses as "Not spending enough time with your partner, I would think, 'cause you know not spending enough time, that's the whole purpose of getting married, ya know, committed to another person. If you're not going to be together, it's not a marriage really" (16-4). Another individual explained "An unsuccessful marriage would probably be, you know, knowing that you're not happy with the other person, but yet not telling them, I think that would be an unsuccessful marriage, just in the inside, and, um, not spending a lot of time with your partner, I think that makes an unsuccessful marriage" (18-4). Thus, communication was repeatedly described as one of the building blocks of marriage. Communication was described as the ability to talk

with one another and discuss important issues, as well as the commitment to spend time with one another and enjoy each other's company.

Marriage as Intimacy

Intimacy was also consistently described as one of the defining characteristics of marriage. Participants continually referred to marriage as requiring complete openness and intimacy. As discussed earlier, many respondents shared the belief that an individual should not get married until he or she is capable of being completely intimate and vulnerable with another person. One participant suggested that an individual is ready for marriage "when they can let somebody in, when they can let their guard down, and let somebody care for them, and let somebody want to help and take care of them" (20-1). Other participants described marriage as an intimate relationship that required spouses to be best friends: "I think ya would have to, I would think they would have to end up being your very, very best friend, and I mean the most intimate person that you would share everything with" (09-3).

Intimacy was also described as the desire to be with that person more than anything: "When he or she knows that at any point in time during the day they'd rather be with that person, when a person can see themselves loving that person and no other person, when that person can see going to sleep every night and not wanting to be anywhere but in that, than with their lover" (02-2). Finally, references to marriage included images of emotional or psychological intimacy such as compassion and caring for another as well as physical intimacy:

> Starting a life with a person when you're just exclusively with them and around them all the time, and how much commitment and love and care and work it takes. But it can also be a very rewarding thing because they can offer like images of holding each other and waking up next to somebody, anyway you might not but I think that's good. (01-3)

References to marital intimacy included one's ability to be open and vulnerable with their spouse, intimate friendships, and psychological and physical intimacy.

Necessity of Non-Intimate Roles

In contrast to romantic love and physical intimacy, many participants discussed the importance of non-intimate roles. Respondents stressed the need for non-intimate roles because they believed romantic love would not always be a part of marriages:

> I always said I'm going to marry my best friend, so that's just something I want, ... I don't think there's always going to be that romantic kind that comes and goes, that romantic kind of, part of the love, but there's always going to be a friendship base, you need to know how to operate in a friendship with that person, it makes it a lot stronger. (06-1)

One participant suggested "I think, um, romance can only go so far, and I'd want a person that I could talk to and have an intelligent conversation with, and that shares my views and things like that" (08-3). Another respondent added that sex and physical intimacy were not enough to make a marriage complete, "cause that's the space, if you don't consider them a friend, if you can't talk to them as if I was talking to a friend, than it defeats the purpose of being married. I mean, it seems like if you're not friends, the only thing left is sexual" (21-2). When discussing the importance of non-intimate roles, participants seemed to concentrate on the buddy aspect of friendship, meaning they

focused on the basic qualities of friendship such as "getting along" or less meaningful activities such as "hanging out":

> There's got to be some degree of friendship there because I mean, as I said, you're going to be living with this person, so you have to get along and have at least a few common interests, and be able to spend time with them, and I guess in a non-intimate way as well as intimate, you've got to have that ability to just kinda hang out – friendship. (01-3)

Another participant explained,

> You need to be best friends and going into the relationship you need to realize that you're best friends before you're lovers. Um, generally with a best friend you consider their needs, their feelings, um, you want to be with them, um, you get home from work and you call your best friend and see what's going on. You want to go out to the bars and hang out with your best friend, uh, to often than not you have relationships that start out as relationships not best friends, and they haven't experienced the best friend, they grow into it sometimes, but sometimes they don't, and, uh, I just think when you have a best friend that there's a higher comfort and a higher respect. (02-2)

Other participants referred to the role of partners or teammates. Doing things with one another and working together were continually described as important elements of a successful marriage:

> They do things for each other, like when my grandma was still working, my grandpa was retired and he would cook, and even now my grandma's retired now, and they'll do dishes together, she'll wash and he'll dry, and whenever they have problems they work them out and then when they have little fights, they don't let it get in the way of how they feel about each other. (03-1)

The partnership that marriage requires was discussed by several participants, "Well, its just, you got two people working for the same goal, and they can help each other out, comfort each other, and, uh, give each other what maybe they need to get through" (12-4). Thus, many participants emphasized the importance of non-intimate roles in a marriage relationship.

The five components of marriage consistently referred to throughout the interviews were religion, similar values and life goals, communication, intimacy, and the necessity of non-intimate roles. These five sub-themes represent the core values or elements that participants associate with marriage. Respondents continually used these terms to explain their definition and perceptions of marriage.

Permanence of Marriage

Another theme that emerged consistently throughout the interviews was the permanence of marriage. Initially, many individuals specifically classified marriage as a commitment that should be honored until death. Further, a large portion of the respondents identified infidelity or abuse as the only potential reasons to end a marriage. Finally, a significant number of participants believed that it was acceptable to end a marriage for a plethora of reasons.

First, many individuals elaborated on their beliefs that it was wrong to end a marriage for any reason. These individuals shared a common belief in the marriage vow 'til death do us part". When asked the question, "Under what circumstances should a couple end a marriage?" one participant responded, "I don't think a couple should end a marriage. [No matter what?] No matter what" (08-3). Another respondent related her concept of marriage as a life-long commitment to her beliefs as a Christian:

> For my personal life, and I've never experienced that so I can't really say, but I believe that to me, I think it's hard, but personally for me ... I think that the person that I marry, that it's, ya know, that's my life-long commitment, that's going to be it for me, and so if he was to abuse me, that is a cup that I would have to take, ya know, in sickness and in health ... and that comes from my beliefs as a Christian, that there's not really supposed to be divorce. (14-2)

Several participants regarded marriage as a serious commitment that should be honored no matter what: "I think once you decide to get married, there's no growing apart, I mean you're together, you're stuck together, and I, that's a commitment that I don't think, that shouldn't be broken" (20-2). This group of participants seemed to agree that absolutely nothing justifies ending a marriage. "I think that you can probably try to work through anything, um, if both people are willing. I don't think that there's ... I, there aren't very many reasons. I don't know, I can't think of any reasons to end a marriage" (26-4).

Second, other individuals seemed to view the marriage commitment just as seriously, yet they believed that infidelity and abuse could serve as possible rationale for divorce. Some participants named abuse as the only reason a couple should end a marriage: "Abuse, big time, verbal, physical, every kind" (24-4). Another participant shared, "With my religion, I don't think that a person, that a couple should ever end their relationship, but if one of the spouses is beating the other or mistreating them and they are not willing to change, then I think that the other person needs to get out of that relationship" (03-1). Others listed infidelity as the only valid reason to end a marriage, "when, uh, there's cheating on the other side" (02-2). Several participants listed both infidelity and abuse as the only two circumstances that would make divorce acceptable, "under cases of abuse or one spouse cheating on the other perpetually" (04-3). One respondent explained "I think for some people adultery might be a reason to end a marriage, and I think abuse of any sort should be reason to end a marriage" (01-4).

Third, in at least half of the interviews used for actual data analysis, respondents listed a variety of circumstances that they believed made it acceptable to end a marriage.

Two of these individuals believed that although several circumstances might rationalize a divorce, it should always be the last possible option: "If you've tried everything, counseling, you know, you should at least try to work it out, um, but when it comes down to you can't work it out, and you've tried everything, um, that's when you should end it" (21-4). Another participant echoed similar sentiments about ending a marriage:

> If you're going to end your marriage it should be the last possible option, you should've gone through other ways, you should have gone through every way possible, before you actually end a marriage and get a divorce. You just have to, I mean, you're going to have problems, so I think you need to, uh, ya know, learn how to work through stuff. (05-3)

In contrast, several participants believed that if a couple simply fell out of love or just did not along, then they should end their marriage without "dragging it out": "I guess when they just don't get along anymore, I don't know, if you're not getting along for a long period of time, there's no point in dragging it out and wasting the other person's time, if you're unhappy, you're unhappy, call it quits" (15-4). One respondent suggested, "If one, ya know, stops loving the other person, I guess that'd be the time to end it" (16-4). These participants believed it was acceptable to end a marriage when one or both spouses did not feel love anymore. It seemed that not only was falling out of love a valid reason for divorce, but it was a realistic possibility: "Uh, well, if they fall out of love with each other, if they don't get along anymore, if they fight a lot, sometimes people just grow apart" (03-3). Another respondent suggested that a couple should end a marriage "when the love is gone because they shouldn't dwell on the past because that can only, um, hurt a marriage instead of strengthen a marriage" (05-1). Again, these participants focused on feelings of love in order to determine when it was acceptable to end a

marriage: "I think if something happens to the couple, where you just fall completely out of love, and you've tried reconciling and there's just no hope, if you can't get back together, and you can't have the shared like feelings, and you just don't love the person anymore, I think it might be best to end it" (11-3).

Other individuals cited irreconcilable differences and constant fighting as reasons to end a marriage. One participant suggested a couple should end a marriage when "they agree that they disagree on everything and there's no love left in a relationship, and, uh, they know they can't go on with the marriage, even if children are involved which would be the toughest reason why not to" (09-3). Most of the respondents who listed fighting as a reason to end a marriage discussed its negative impact on the well being of children:

> End a marriage? Hmm, probably when they stop speaking to each other, communicating, stop communicating, and um, when they're fighting constantly and when there's children involved. I don't think that would be great. I mean the fighting, they could probably get counseling, but I think to end a marriage that would have to be if the children see it all the time, that just can't be good, it's not a healthy environment, but definitely get counseling first. (04-2)

Another participant explained,

> I think if there's children involved and the parents just can not meet a common ground on anything, and there's so much fighting and arguing, that can, I think divorce or breaking up could easily, uh, calm a household down so kids can grow up in a peaceful setting. I think, um, all the arguing and fighting can really hurt children's, um, growing process, and they can grow up and think that's a way a marriage is supposed to be, and it can be a lifelong chain of events, um, from kids to grandkids and so on. So, I think once the arguing and fighting is everything that really the marriage is about, it might be better for everyone to just break apart and make a peaceful surrounding. (12-4)

There was considerable variety in the participants' statements about and beliefs in the permanence of marriage. Many individuals perceived marriage as a serious sacred commitment that should endure no matter what. Other respondents listed infidelity and

abuse as the only reasons a couple should end a marriage. Finally, at least half of the participants believed that, once a couple fights all the time or simply no longer feels love for one another they should end a marriage.

Gender Differences

Up to this point, the themes discussed have not been categorized or classified according to gender. The interview clips and discussion of these clips have equally represented the views and perceptions of both male and female participants. However, several comments made by either male or female participants highlight differences in gender and perceptions of gender. For instance, males and females differed in the qualities that they ranked as most desirable in a potential mate. Furthermore, several comments divided men and women into distinct categories or focused on perceived differences in gender. This section will include a comparison of the different qualities men and women desire in a potential mate and a discussion of the participants' perceptions of appropriate gender roles within the context of marriage.

Ideal Qualities of a Future Mate

Throughout the interviews, participants listed the qualities that they desired in a potential mate. Male and female participants both ranked qualities such as physical attraction, problem solvers, understanding and accepting, and financial security as important or desirable characteristics. This quote is typical of both male and female participants who desired their mates to be problem solvers, as apparently all genders

desire potential mates to be someone who "just really doesn't take every little thing and blow it out of proportion, can look at something as a whole and can kinda calmly suggest maybe a solution to any problem, and not seriously just blow up at every little thing in the world" (12-4). Many male and female participants listed physical attraction first when describing the qualities they desired in a potential mate. One woman explained that "there has to be a sort of chemistry between you, a physical attraction, I guess that's what it is" (04-3). Similarly, a male participant shared "I like the total package. I like the physicalities, I mean I'm not going to lie, I would like to marry a beautiful woman" (09-3). Furthermore, male and female participants were about equally likely to list financial security as a desirable characteristic, "money, uh, other important qualities, uh, she must be able to speak her mind" (13-1). Likewise, many female participants desired "somebody that's financially independent, financially stable, that's a big one with me" (04-2). Furthermore, male and female participants were equally likely to mention joint finances when describing the benefits of marriage. Both male and female participants desired their future mates to be understanding and accepting. A male participant disclosed that "I'm looking for understanding, someone who can understand me or at least be patient with me. That's important" (01-3). Female participants also ranked understanding and acceptance as important qualities.

> I want someone who understands me on every level or can at least accept the complications that are involved with knowing another person so deeply, ya know, I want them to, I don't ask that they have the same ideas or philosophies in life as I do but just be able to understand mine and I should be able to understand theirs. I want someone who is unafraid of what they feel, and unafraid of what they think and unafraid of who they are. (20-2)

Thus, male and female participants were equally likely to list physical attraction, problem solvers, understanding, and financial security as characteristics they desired in a potential mate.

Aside from those common qualities, men and women differed in many of the qualities that they ranked as most important or most desirable in a potential mate. Women were most likely to list trustworthiness, responsibility, dependability, high moral convictions, and family orientation as the qualities they most desired in a future mate. Several female participants ranked honesty as the most important quality. For example, one female participant said, "I think honesty is the number one thing, you have to be able to trust them with your lives because that's what you're doing" (01-4). Many women elaborated on their desire for their mate to be responsible, "a sense of responsibility, that they really know what marriage is, and that they wanna be, that this is the only marriage that they want, that they know it's forever" (03-1). Other female respondents focused on their desire for their mate to be trustworthy, "I think it should be a person that your really have no doubts about it, that you can trust completely" (04-3). Many female participants highlighted both traits "Trust, um, responsibility, I think those are the two biggest issues" (21-4). Several women listed morality as an important virtue in a potential mate: "I would like for him to have really great morals you know, he may not go by the Bible, by the book or whatever, but, um, he has certain things and he knows what's right from what's wrong" (24-4). Another participant shared, "I think that a person should share your belief system so they can help you out with that and encourage you in it" (04-3).

Finally, women were more likely than men to list family-oriented as an important quality of a future mate: "I would like for him to want to have a big family. Personally, I was pretty much an only child for thirteen years until out came my little sister, so I never really had like siblings or anything, and I think that would be really cool to have a big family" (24-4). Another woman desired for her mate to posses "a drive to be the best that he can possibly be, um, somebody that is family-oriented" (04-2). As a whole, women seemed more likely than men to list honesty, responsibility, trustworthy, moral, and family-oriented as desirable characteristics.

Male participants were more likely to list intelligent, nurturing, and sense of humor as desirable characteristics of a potential mate. Most of the male participants disclosed that they desired for their mate to be intelligent or to have common sense. Intelligence was often the first quality male participants listed when describing their ideal mate: "Intelligence, compassion, passion, wit, humor" (08-3). Another male participant responded "Intelligence, um spontaneity, hmm, class" (21-2). One male participant admitted that he wanted his mate to be smart but not smarter than him: "They have to be kind, they get involved, they're smart, sometimes it's harder if they're smarter than me" (10-3). Male participants were also more likely than female participants to list kindness and compassion as desirable qualities. Overall, most male participants desired for their mates to be nurturing, "somebody who's really just caring and affectionate" (05-3). Another male participant described his ideal mate by saying that, "she should be kind, good with children, uh, a very loving person, willing to so help others, um, a really good friend, a trusting person, one you can rely on a hundred percent of the time, um, an

honest person, and a smart person" (07-3). Finally, male participants repeatedly listed a sense of humor as a desirable quality in a spouse, "someone that has a sense of humor that can laugh about things, not take everything so seriously" (01-3). Another male participant explained "I need to have somebody with like a sense of humor" (05-3). Another respondent shared "The person I marry? Well, I'd like for them to have a good personality and a good sense of humor" (15-4). Thus, male participants were more likely to list intelligence, nurturing, and sense of humor as the qualities that they most desire in a potential mate.

Appropriate Spheres and Division of Labor

Both male and female participants made comments that revealed their gender role attitudes concerning the appropriate roles of men and women within the context of marriage. Several individuals made comments that separated men and women into separate spheres. Men were usually envisioned as participating and succeeding in the public sphere, whereas women were ascribed domestic qualities and relegated to the private sphere. Some participants credited a marriage's success to this distinction:

> The way they handle, uh, day to day things, uh, sometimes my mom doesn't know how to handle the business aspects of their relationship and, uh, but yet she's the one who's at home to wait for the pool guy and set up little house things like that. My dad's got more of a business mind to him, I mean, my mom works, but she works out of the house, so I guess which is good for her to take care of things around there all day, but, uh, my dad has more of a business mind on him, I mean he went to college, my mom didn't. He takes care of all the family financial stuff, tax return time and all that. (20-1)

Furthermore, when describing the images they associate with marriage both male and female participants envisioned a wife cooking. One female participant's sole image

of marriage was based on cooking: "I think about cooking, cooking disasters and cooking, just you know, good things" (04-3). Another female participant described the mental pictures she associated with marriage as "I picture just sitting on the couch in front of a fireplace or hiking somewhere together or fishing or some outdoors thing or coming home, or I picture being in the kitchen cooking when he comes home from work" (04-3). One male participant described his images of marriage as "A big house, cars, uh, a couple of kids running around the house and your wife cooking, and you, I don't know, sitting on the couch having a beer or something" (13-1). While no male or female participants' images of marriage included the husband cooking, one male participant associated marriage with yard-work, a chore that is stereotypically completed by males. He explained "Having a family, doing yard work on the weekends, having breakfast before noon, ya know, sitting with your wife reading the newspaper" (15-4). One should note, however, that there was one exception to the images of man and wife fulfilling stereotypical roles:

> Um marriage, uh happiness and children, I see children and, uh, um, a nice little home where everything's taken care of and responsibility, uh, everyone divides up and chores and, um, even the bills and stuff. I think, I don't think the man should have to pay for everything. I think the woman should definitely give in, and I think that it's vice versa on housework and stuff. I think the man should take part of the responsibility in housework and chores just as the woman should. I think it's just a mutual bond that everyone works together. (12-4)

Despite this one exception, many participants associated traditional roles and separate spheres for men and women with marriage.

Intrinsic Differences between Men and Women

Throughout the interviews male and female participants made comments that illustrated their belief in the intrinsic differences between men and women. Many individuals made comments that suggested that men avoid talking about marriage until completely necessary. One male participant explained "If it's the right time than it's something you can discuss but for the most part, we don't want, from a male's point of view it's not something I like to talk about until I know for sure" (21-2). As noted above, other individuals made comments that connected men with work outside of the home and women with housework. One female participant described her mother as a man because her mother was the one who worked outside of the home while her father raised the children. She explained "My mom is just much more the man than my father in that sense. I think that's great to see. It taught me independence and taught my brother sensitivity" (20-2). Other participants believed that women desire to get married more then men and that women are under more pressure to get married than men:

> I think it's probably a lot more pressure on girls, I don't know because they have the term she came here to get her Mrs. degree, um, a lot of girls do that, especially ones from smaller towns who grow up and come to college and find their city boy who's going to take them away on their fairy tale life, um guys, guys are looking for it too, I mean maybe not nearly to the extent as girls. (20-1)

Finally, one participant actually cited different ages according to gender that it was acceptable to marry. He explained that it was unacceptable to marry "when you can't afford it, when you can't afford a family, ya know if you can't afford kids by all means don't, um, if you want an age, any younger than 22 for a male, for a female any younger

than 18" (21-2). Several comments made throughout the course of the interviews illustrated some participants' belief in the intrinsic differences between men and women.

Hierarchy According to Gender

Both male and female participants also elaborated on a sort of family hierarchy based on gender. These individuals explained marriage as a hierarchical relationship in which the man is the head of the household, and the woman is supposed to be submissive to the man. It was common for participants who perceived marriage as a hierarchical arrangement to express disapproval of women who were less traditional. One female participant shared her reaction to women who keep their birth names after marriage:

> It's cheesy basically. I mean that's kind of the point is to take on your husband's name, as he's the head of the household scripturally. It's just they, I don't know, I can't, I don't think, I mean, I look forward to taking on a new name. Basically, I think it's stupid. I guess there's a point for all the like you think of writers as people who keep their, mm-mm, just mm-mm. My first impression is to think that they're the kind of women who run the marriage then the household. There's always the kind of women that like, it's just stupid, it's just part of what marriage is about is taking on your husband's name, and you're no longer a part of, I mean your no longer under your dad's household and stuff. (06-1)

A male participant expressed similar disapproval of less traditional women as he described his view of the marriage hierarchy:

> I don't think it's right. I think when you get married you in a sense become one and in a way, traditionally yeah, but in a sense you become one, and I think, I think on a very basic level, you're going to hate me for saying this, but I think the girl needs to be submissive to her husband a little; not in terms of, ya know, clean the dishes, but in terms of, uh, I think the man is the man of the household and I think she should take his name as a sign of she's coming into his house and they're going to form the house together and she's leaving her parents in the past and starting a new life. (08-3)

While few participants made reference to marriage as a hierarchical relationship, those who did obviously felt strongly about it and described their stance in quite detail. Notice the male receives ownership and independence in marriage while the female is supposed to leave her parents and come into his house. Thus, some male and female participants explained their perception of marriage as a hierarchical relationship based on gender.

Sexist Language in Interviews

The last difference related to gender can be classified differences in discursive choices according to which gender was being addressed. As noted in Chapter II, discursive choices act as a mirror of people's social attitudes and primary values. By highlighting the disparity between the words we use to describe men and women, Lakoff (1975) uncovered a gender-biased social context in which women are stifled, excluded, and oppressed. Both male and female participants made discursive choices that did not refer to the genders in equal or similar terms. At some point in their interview almost every single participant referred to males as men or guys and females as girls. This quote was typical of both male and female participants' manner of addressing gender:

> A girl will be ready for marriage when you can tell, when she's like settled down with you, like when she's comfortable, you don't see her looking at other guys and she doesn't call other people anymore, and you know that she's going to be there for you, and, she's not, she's just really set on you now because sometimes girls are still shopping around, they're with you, but if they see something better they'll go for that guy. (10-3)

As noted in the literature review, discursive choices related to naming males and females often reflect a gender-biased relationship or perceptions of a gender-biased relationship. Discursive choices related to men and women were unbalanced in many interviews.

While one participant used the names of baby animals to refer to women, he simply referred to men as guys:

> If a guy proposes, and the chicks not ready, and she says no, then the guy's gonna feel crushed and probably, or, ya know, if he really cares maybe he'll stay. But, if it's the opposite way, and the guys not ready, then the chick's, like, when's he gonna ask me, when's he gonna ask me, and then you have some problems. So, I think it would be good to maybe talk after a couple of years of dating, then we can discuss it, then once you feel that you're both ready, he can ask her.(21-2)

In short, throughout the interviews both male and female participants made discursive choices that addressed men and women with terms that were unequal or not similar. Several differences related to gender were noted throughout the course of the interviews including different ideal qualities of a potential mate, intrinsic differences between men and women, family hierarchies, division of labor, and discursive choices.

Tradition versus Change

The last theme that emerged represents participant's comments that were characterized by either an attitude of tradition or change. Over the course of the interviews, several participants described traditional images that they associated with marriage or explained their perception of marriage in traditional terms. Furthermore, many respondents hailed tradition as a worthy value that justified their view of marriage. However, several participants' descriptions of marriage were characterized by change. These individuals embraced new trends or untraditional practices within the context of marriage. As one might expect, those students who valued tradition were less likely to be accepting of women who keep their birth name after they are married and men who wear engagement rings.

Tradition

Students who valued tradition proposed a variety of different rationales for upholding courting and marriage traditions. First, some male and female participants explained that they believed both members of an engagement do not need to wear engagement rings, because a ring is just a material possession:

> No, no, I don't because an engagement ring is just an engagement ring. It's just a material thing, but if you both know what you both want and you know that you're married to this person, you know you love this person, I don't think a ring should even symbolize that. You both should know what you're getting into before, if you don't then you're just kinda doing it because everyone else is doing it. (04-2)

Several participants actually laughed when they answered a question concerning engagement rings for men, as if the idea of each member of an engagement wearing an engagement ring appeared funny or even absurd to them. One male participant laughed and responded "I personally would not have to wear a ring to show my affection or my love for the person I'm engaged with" (08-3).

Another typical answer regarding the need for both members of an engagement to wear an engagement ring was that men don't need to because it's just a material possession, and women do because they want that material possession. One participant explained "No, girls wear engagement rings just because they like to wear the rings (laughter). I don't think it's necessary on either part because if you're marrying somebody obviously you trust them, and you trust them enough to be faithful to you, otherwise, you shouldn't be marrying them anyhow" (01-4). Some male participants shared their beliefs that while it was not necessary for men to wear engagement rings women should because it ensures monogamy. One respondent offered "men want them to

wear engagement rings so they don't, so other guys see that they're engaged, or maybe it's a lot harder to cheat when you have a ring on" (11-3). Another male participant said simply "probably just the woman, so she will be faithful to her man, I guess" (13-1). Therefore, several respondents rejected the untraditional practice of both members of an engagement wearing engagement rings because they believed only women needed to wear them to ensure that they are faithful or that a ring is just a material possession that women wear because they like rings.

Participants who seemed to value tradition, whether women or men, also rejected the practice of women keeping their birth name after they are married. Several individuals, male and females, shared their belief that a woman who keeps her birth name after marriage somehow insults her husband. One female participant said, "I think it's kind of a put down for the man, it's not wrong in every situation but it depends on how the guy feels about it because that really hurts some guys' feelings" (01-4). Many male participants said while they wouldn't let it ruin the relationship it would, indeed, bother them or hurt their feelings if their wives kept their birth name after they were married. One male respondent shared "I think it would kind of bother me a little bit that she didn't want, I don't know, it just kinda seems like that's the standard way you do it, and, um, I guess it would bother me a little bit, but it wouldn't be a relationship breaker or anything" (05-3). Another participant explained

> Uh, that's fine with me, well I'm fine with it, but I definitely wouldn't let it go without an answer why. I mean, I, I'm all for the strong independent woman whose, ya know a feminist, ya know. If that's what she wants to do that's fine but, ya know, but, ya know, make sure. I just want to know why, if it's, I think it's shows a sign of love for her taking the last name so I guess I'd be a little sad about it but I guess if that's what she wants, that's what she gets. (09-3)

Other participants viewed a woman's desire to keep her birth name after marriage as prideful or a lack of commitment on her part:

> I've never really understood it. I don't know if maybe it's a sense of pride, why they keep their name or a sense of them not wanting to fully commit for some reason, but I've never understood the reasons for keeping their given last name, but I definitely think they should change it. I think in marriage people give themselves to each other, and I think the way a woman gives herself to the man is to take on his last name. (How does a man reciprocate and give himself to the woman?) The only thing that a man really does is put on a wedding ring and have her name put on the checkbook too. (20-1)

Other participants shared similar sentiments about women who keep their birth name after marriage "I disagree, untraditional and lack of commitment, I believe that your marriage life should come before your profession" (02-2). Another participant explained "I kinda think that she may be holding on to her own independence which isn't really a good thing that she's hasn't completely given herself to her husband and is still trying to remain two people instead of the two becoming one like how your supposed to in marriage" (03-1). Participants viewed a woman choice to keep her last name as a lack of commitment because they believed a woman taking her husband's last name signifies two becoming one or the woman becoming part of the man. A male participant expressed "I don't see how the whole, how like chicks are, like, no forget yours, I don't know I wouldn't mind. It's just it'd be nice if, ya know, they act like they're excited about becoming one. (07-3). Female participants also adhered to the idea of a name change as symbolic of unity: "I guess its just mostly a thing with our culture but it seems like people, women that keep their own name, I guess their just wanting to hang on to their own identity and their sense of themselves as a unique person, but to me taking your

husband's name is just a sign that you're a part of him now" (04-3). Both male and female participants rejected the untraditional practice of women keeping their birth name after they are married because either they viewed it as a direct insult to the man or illustrated a woman's lack of commitment or desire to become one.

Finally, several respondents rejected untraditional practices simply because they were untraditional. One respondent explained, "I don't really like it [women keeping their birth name] because it's a tradition, not only with my family but other generations that I've seen. So, uh, I really don't like it" (05-1). They believed traditional courting and marriage practices were the right way to do things simply because they were, in fact, traditions. One female participant explained that she did not think both members of an engagement should wear engagement rings:

> (Lots of laughter) No, I don't think so because I'm also a traditionalist as well as a romantic, but because it's just not tradition, it's like the tradition, its like, ya know, the tradition is that the guys court you and they get on their knees and give you the ring, and that's what I want. The distinction is this for me: to me it's not for me to go up and ask the guy to marry me, it's for him to come to me and ask me to marry him; the distinction of the engagement ring is when he asks, when he proposes to me, when he asks for me to be a part of his life, that's the distinction. I would never ask a guy to marry me. Never. (14-2)

Several participants simply pointed to tradition as the reason either they had not considered or the reason they rejected both members of an engaged couple wearing engagement rings or a woman keeping her birth name after she was married. Several male participants said they had never even considered the practice of a man wearing an engagement ring. One male respondent explained "Um, I think that's kinda just up to both of the people, I don't know if the guy wants to then he can, but I don't know I'm kind of traditional so I just haven't really ever considered it" (03-1). Another male

participant responded "No, no, no, no, no – I don't know, I'm kinda a traditional guy so I've never heard of a guy wearing an engagement ring" (07-3).

Many individuals seemed to reject change and to value traditional practices simply because they are the way things have been done in the past: "I guess it's all right, I don't know, I've just always thought, ya know, the woman was supposed to take the man's [name], ya know" (16-4). Another participant explained

> I've never been a big fan of it, I mean it's always been just what you do, ya know. When you marry somebody you become Mrs. so and so. Um, I've never understood why they would want to keep their family name unless, only in cases of, uh, in which maybe they're the last person in that family with that particular name and they want to keep the name going on. (20-1)

Another participant responded to the practice of both members of an engagement wearing engagement rings in a similar manner: "I think they should just get an engagement ring for the girl, I'm just too traditional I guess, I think it's better that way, keep it like it's always been" (24-4). Thus, participants listed a variety of reasons that they rejected untraditional courting and marriage practices including the claim that engagement rings are just material possessions that women wear because they like rings, women need to wear engagement rings to insure their own monogamy, a woman's decision to keep her birth name signifies an insult to her husband or lack of commitment, and tradition for tradition's sake.

Change

Although this group was much smaller in number, there were participants who accepted untraditional courting and marriage practices. These students also provided

different rationales for accepting or supporting women who keep their birth names after they are married and both members of an engaged couple wearing engagement rings. Several participants who embraced the concept of both members of an engagement wearing an engagement ring seemed to view engagement rings as a sign of commitment. One participant explained that both men and women should wear engagement rings "because it shows that I love her and she loves me and the commitment we're both trying to abide by" (06-1). Both male and female participants believed that it was desirable for both members of an engagement to wear an outward symbol of their exclusive commitment to one another. One respondent shared "I don't know if they should, but I think that's a cool idea because I think that the woman might have an engagement ring on, but the man has just as much reason to as far as a sign of commitment and a sign to the world that he is committed, I think, I mean, I like that idea" (01-3). Another participant explained

> I agree with the ring, a lot of men have problems wearing rings or they just don't like them, but, um, yes, I think it signifies a bond that you have made with somebody and then everybody knows that you have made this bond and that you're not a single person out having a good time, and that you have made this umm, commitment and I think a ring just signifies everything. (Respondent 12-4)

Other individuals explained that they embraced the idea of both members of an engagement wearing engagement rings because it was an issue of fairness or equality. One male participant said, "If she's going to wear a ring saying I'm engaged, I guess he should too, it just kinda like makes it easier for people not to, I don't know, sure" (06-1). Another male participant explained, "because knowing guys, I think it would help a lot, um, I don't know, I think it just takes the commitment step one step further, and I think if

the girl should have to do it, than a guy should be honored to do it as well. (08-3). Some female participants echoed these sentiments:

> The guys never get to wear anything, and I think they should because it's not fair for the guys to like still be, how can you say it, single, like when they know they're about to get married, but the girl has to be claimed, I guess you could say knowing that she is going to get married here sometime soon, I think the guy should be too. (18-4)

One participant pointed to specific undesirable consequences related to the traditional practice of the woman being the only member of an engagement to wear a ring:

> Because a male, um, I know a couple that the girl wears a ring all the time and he doesn't consider himself to be taken all the time. It's kind of him owning her, that's his way of never having, ya know, if she wanted to go out and have a good time with another male, yeah, she belongs to him, but he can go out anytime he wants and no one will ever know. (26-4)

In short, male and female participants embraced the practice of both members of an engagement wearing an engagement ring because they viewed engagement rings as a symbol of a mutual commitment.

Finally, in some cases both male and female participants accepted and even supported a woman's decision to keep her birth name after she was married. Female participants who agreed with the practice typically provided a brief explanation for their position or no explanation whatsoever: "I think it's wonderful" (26-4). Another female participant responded less enthusiastically, "I think that's fine, I have no problem with that. I might keep my own name like my mom; she has kept her own name" (14-2). Still another female explained, "If you're really proud of your name I see no reason to change it, if you really don't want to" (18-4). While only three females out of twelve supported the practice of women keeping their birth name after marriage, seven males out of sixteen

supported the idea. Some men explained that if their wives decided to keep her birth name, it would not really upset them because a name was just simply not that significant. One male respondent shared, "I guess that wouldn't bother me too bad if that's what she wanted to do, then, ya know, that's fine. I wouldn't say, like, well you're not pledging your allegiance to me" (25-1). Another male participant explained,

> I think that's really between the couple because some people have important names and heritages that they want to keep, but as far as I'm personally concerned it doesn't bother me if my partner would want to keep her name rather than take mine 'cause that's just a name and that doesn't really classify what the relationship is like, that's in your heart. (01-3)

Many male participants explained that they respect a woman who chooses to keep her birth name. One respondent shared, "I really don't care. I mean it would be nice to keep my name going, ya know, but I can't force, that just shows me that she's a really strong female, and she knows what she wants in life, and I can't take that away from her because I really, I admire that in somebody" (10-3). Another participant explained, "I think that's cool, they're keeping their own identity, um, I think, I would have no problem with that. (11-3). Another respondent said, "That's what she is, that's what she chose to be, so I respect that" (13-1). Students whose comments about traditional marriage practices were characterized by an attitude of change seemed to view engagement rings as an important symbol signifying commitment and respect or at least accepted a woman's decision to keep her birth name after marriage. Thus, comments that responded to courting and marriage practices were either characterized by an attitude of change or tradition.

Summary

As the data analysis in this chapter suggests, seven themes emerged regarding college students' perceptions of marriage. Each of these themes provides insight as to how the participants in this study relate to and expect to experience marriage. The seven themes that serve to describe college students perceptions of marriage include security versus freedom, appropriate timing for marriage, marriage imagery, core values associated with marriage, permanence of marriage, gender differences, and tradition versus change. In Chapter IV, I will discuss these findings and attempt to answer each of the research questions. Additionally, I will explain the project's limitations and suggest possible directions for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Although several scholars in our field have debated the stability of college student's theories of marriage, no qualitative study has attempted to examine this phenomenon holistically. Fitzpatrick (1988) and others have suggested that college students' ideas and attitudes about marriage can be described as marriage scripts or implicit theories of marriage or consistent beliefs about marriage that remain fairly stable over time. However, Pavitt, Perse, and Berggraf (1995) found that college students' theories of marriage are not stable and are likely to fluctuate over time. Basically, they contend that college students' perceptions of the ideal marriage are subject to change within a year's time. Each of these studies used the Relational Dimensions Instrument (Fitzpatrick, 1981) to measure their respondents' perceptions of marriage. Thus, the respondents were presented with several options to choose from but were not able to provide their own descriptions of their theories of marriage. Past studies in this areas contributed to our knowledge of the stability of college student's theories of knowledge, but did not fully explore and describe what these theories actually were. This study was specifically designed to encourage college students to describe their perceptions of marriage in their own words. Two major questions provided direction for this study: (1) what attitudes toward marriage are described by unmarried college students? And (2) What are the reactions of unmarried college students to non-traditional courtship and marriage practices?

Describing College Student's Perceptions of Marriage

Chapter Four discussed several themes that emerged during data analysis that provide deeper insight into the respondents' attitudes toward marriage and non-traditional courting and marriage practices. The themes that emerged from the data (e.g. security versus freedom, appropriate timing for marriage, core values associated with marriage, marriage imagery, appropriate timing of marriage, gender differences, and tradition versus change) suggest that a variety of attitudes characterize college student's general perceptions of marriage. On the whole college students' attitudes toward marriage are positive if not idealistic. However, themes such as security versus belonging illustrate that at many points these attitudes are oppositional and represent internal and external tension.

Other attitudes towards marriage described by college students are expressed in the core values or images they associate with marriage. Themes such as the core values associated with marriage and marriage imagery illustrate that the majority of college student's attitudes about marriage are linked to and can best be understood in terms of a shared ideology and common ideographs. Finally, there was great diversity in the attitudes toward marriage and non-traditional marriage and courting practices described by college students. Themes such as tradition versus change and gender differences illustrate that college students are not united in their attitudes toward marriage and non-traditional courting and marriage practices. These attitudes, which can be viewed in various degrees of contrast, illuminate the extent to which college students subscribe to different ideological beliefs about relationships and gender. Thus, I believe college

students' attitude toward marriage and non-traditional courting and marriage practices can be described and better understood in terms of relational dialectics, shared ideology and common ideographs, and different ideological beliefs about relationships and gender.

Relational Dialectics

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) introduce relational dialectics as a way of understanding intimate romantic relationships. They explain relational dialectics as dyadic communication strategies necessary for coping with the inherent dialectical tension that are endemic to close personal relationships. In their study of romantic relationships Baxter and Montgomery recognized several contradictions or internal and external tensions that seemed inherent to romantic relationships. They identified dialectics as the "push-me-pull-you" contradictions in our relational world. They explained that these contradictions should not be viewed in blatant opposition of each other as in an either/or scenario. Rather, relational dialectics or opposing tendencies presents a both/and scenario, which makes relationships complicated but also makes them work. By recognizing the contradiction and attending to both tendencies, one ensures that one desire or value is not sacrificed for the other.

Many of the attitudes expressed toward marriage by college student's can be explained by relational dialectics. The majority of participants expressed contradictory attitudes towards marriage within their interview. While participants were likely to express contradictory attitudes within a few minutes of one another, they were less likely to acknowledge the contradiction. It seems that instead of focusing on the contradictory

feelings or attitudes and how this tension might affect their future relationship they talked about how they might balance these "push-me-pull-you" values. Whether or not they were aware of the apparent contradiction that they expressed towards marriage, they seemed to accept the tension and concentrate on how it might be worked out in their future relationships.

A few of the tensions named by Baxter and Montgomery appeared in this study. The first theme, security versus belonging, identified several conflicting attitudes towards marriage. This theme is essentially the same as Baxter and Montgomery's theme autonomy versus connection. Essentially, this theme illustrated that college students associate increased security and belonging and decreased freedom and autonomy with marriage. Students valued the security, sense of belonging, and interdependence they associate with marriage. At the same time they valued the freedom, autonomy, and independence they believed marriage threatened. Most students seemed to deal with these tensions by focusing on feelings of security and belonging and accepting loosing autonomy or independence once they married as unavoidable. These types of expressions illustrate one of the ways in which students planned to resolve the resulting tension of relational dialectics. Relational dialectics explains the presence of college students' desire for both security and freedom, interdependence and independence, belonging and autonomy.

While the presence of tensions such autonomy versus connection confirms past research in the area, new tensions identified in this study add to relational dialectics theory. A desire for intimacy and a desire for non-intimate roles illustrate another

relational dialectic present in college students' attitudes toward marriage. Many participants explained that they envisioned marriage as an intimate relationship between lovers. Most participants also described their belief that romance and sexual intimacy will not sustain a marriage: rather, spouses also must fulfill non-intimate roles. Several students explained "lovers" and "buddies" as seemingly contradictory yet equally essential roles. Rather than focus on one role as superior or define the roles as mutually exclusive, they described intimate and non-intimate spousal roles as ones that could coexist together. Respondents dealt with the tension between "buddy" and "lover" by reframing it as a healthy positive aspect of the relationship in which both needs were celebrated. Relational dialectics explains college students' desire for their spouse to be both a buddy and a lover.

According to the theory of relational dialectics, the internal contradictions apparent in college students' attitudes towards marriage are not only normal, they are healthy. The theory suggests that the more college students become aware of these tensions and attend to opposing tendencies the greater the chance of relational success. Baxter and Montgomery suggest several strategies individuals employ to cope with relational dialectics. The students in this study used strategies such as selection and reframing to deal with the tension presented by relational dialectics. First, respondents who described a tension between belonging versus freedom tended to focus on one need only or exalt one need over the other. Baxter and Montgomery identified this coping strategy as selection. Finally, dealt with the tension between intimate and non-intimate roles by celebrating both needs as important and essential to the relationship. Baxter and

Montgomery identified this coping strategy as reframing. While it may be the most complex, reframing seems to be the coping strategy that will lead to the greatest degree of satisfaction for the respondents in this study. An individual is more likely to experience fulfillment when the need for belonging is satisfied as well as the need for autonomy. By the same token, a marriage characterized by both physical intimacy and friendship is more likely to succeed than a marriage only characterized by either physical intimacy or friendship. Baxter and Montgomery regard the tension between these opposing tendencies as a necessity because sacrificing one need to satisfy another results in broken or unhappy relationships. Many of the contradictory attitudes towards marriage expressed by college students can best be understood in the context of relational dialectics.

Shared Ideology

In our field, ideology has been defined as the "fundamental attitudes, values, and beliefs of a culture" (Burchardt, 1995, p. 441). Another definition suggests that an ideology is a "pattern or set of ideas, assumptions, beliefs, values, or interpretations of the world by which a culture or group operates" (Foss, 1996, p. 291). The word "fundamental" in the first definition signifies that ideologies represent the core assumptions about what people believe are accurate or realistic perceptions of the way the world does (or should) operate. Ideologies are often manifested in our normative beliefs or interpretations of the world. Ideological commitments not only structure what an individual attends to but how he or she attends to it.

I believe that many of the attitudes toward marriage expressed by college students can be better understood as expressions of ideology. Adherence to an ideology shapes one's perceptions of relationships, social institutions, and political entities. The fact that most participants agreed on the core values and images that they associate with marriage is evidence of a shared ideology among some participants. College students' perceptions of marriage are a result of their ideological beliefs. Thus, their ideology functions to create rules, norms, and values for a social reality they have yet to participate in. Elements such as religion, family, friendship, communication, intimacy, and tradition seem to be central to most participants' ideology. Thus, I believe the values and images the respondents associated with marriage illustrate adherence to a dominant or hegemonic ideology.

The hegemonic ideology most participants seem to adhere to is learned in a variety of ways. Children are inculturated by our society's beliefs about marriage and gender from an early age. Institution such as churches and schools sculpt individuals' beliefs about marriage by teaching what a "normal" or "healthy" marriage should look like and how one should participate in a marriage. Along with churches and schools, popular culture in the form of television shows, movies, and music influence the values, feelings, and behaviors individuals associate with marriage. Finally, individuals learn about marriage by observing their parents' and others' marriage relationship.

Ideographs

I believe that "religion" and "tradition" serve as ideographs that function as rationale behind some of the attitudes that respondents expressed toward non-traditional courting and marriage practices. McGee (1980) identifies ideographs as key terms or slogans that unify or control our ideological beliefs. In short, ideographs "function as guides, warrants, reasons, or excuses for behavior and belief"(McGee, 1980, p. 45). Students consistently referred to religion and/or tradition as the reason that they rejected non-traditional courting and marriage practices.

I believe terms such as religion and tradition qualify as ideographs because they were consistently repeated throughout interviews as the reason behind a participant's beliefs about marriage. First, these terms were repeated so many times that they can be viewed as key terms or slogans used by participants to explain their beliefs about marriage. Next, I believe these terms qualify as ideographs because most participants seemed to react to these words as expressions of values that automatically justify their beliefs or behavior. Rather then explaining why religion or tradition was important they simply pointed to these words as the reason to accept or reject beliefs about how one should participate in marriage. Participants were fully capable of explaining what religion or tradition called for; however, when push came to shove, they were generally incapable of explaining why religion or tradition mandated specific beliefs or practices pertaining to marriage. Ideographs such as "religion" and "tradition" serve to maintain the status quo and reject opposing ideological conceptions of marriage by acting as one-word slogans that justify and rationalize participants' beliefs associated with marriage.

Different Ideological Beliefs

Several themes including appropriate timing for marriage and permanence of marriage divide the participants of the study into two or more groups. For example, one theme "permanence of marriage" was divided into three sub-categories: participants who conceived of marriage as forever, participants who believed adultery and abuse were the only two reasons to end a marriage, and participants who listed a variety of reasons to end a marriage. These themes (e.g., permanence of marriage and appropriate timing for marriage) illustrated that participants were not completely united in many of their attitudes toward marriage. These inconsistencies can be described as the result of variations in ideological commitments of the students.

While the majority of the participants seem to participate in a hegemonic ideology concerning the general values associated with marriage, many participants obviously adhere to separate ideologies that provide different ideas about when it is appropriate to begin or end a marriage. While general agreement concerning the core values associated with marriage is evidence of a dominant hegemonic ideology, disagreement concerning certain marriage rituals or beliefs about the permanence and timing of marriage is evidence of distinctly different variations in those ideological beliefs. Thus, participants might agree on general beliefs and values concerning marriage because they participate in a shared culture and dominant ideology as American citizens, college students, or products of the same education system or popular culture. However, participants might disagree about when it is acceptable to begin or end a marriage because they participate in different faith traditions. For example, it is likely that a

Roman Catholic participant and a Methodist participant might express many similar attitudes towards marriage but disagree on the reasons they believe it is acceptable to begin or end a marriage. Thus, the variety of attitudes concerning when it is acceptable to end a marriage and when a couple should begin a marriage can be explained by variations in these ideological commitments.

Challenging the Hegemonic Ideology

Two other dominant themes (tradition versus change and gender differences) were also characterized by competing answers. These two themes dealt specifically with gender ideology and sex-role attitudes. The attitudes described by these two themes can basically be divided into individuals who valued traditional gender roles and rejected non-traditional marriage and courting practices and individuals whose attitudes towards gender roles and non-traditional courting and marriage practices were characterized by a receptive attitude toward change. These inconsistencies concerning college students' attitudes toward marriage represent two separate and competing ideological valences present in society today. Although it is being challenged more and more, the hegemonic ideology is represented by traditional attitudes concerning gender roles, courting, and marriage practices. Attitudes that embrace non-traditional gender roles, courting, and marriage practice represent direct challenges to the hegemonic ideology. The distinct disagreement that characterizes these themes suggest that tradition itself is being challenged by these students and that tradition may be revised over time as these students

marry, assuming that they do not return to traditional commitments as they gain more first-hand experience with marriage.

The various attitudes towards marriage described by the participants in my study were generally positive if not idealistic. I believe the internal inconsistencies or tensions identified within individual interviews can be best understood within the context of relational dialectics. Furthermore, I believe the common values and images most participants associated with marriage are a result of the ideology to which they adhere. I argued that ideographs such as tradition and religion function as the rationale for rejecting non-traditional courting and marriage practices. Finally, I explained that differences in opinion among participants concerning gender roles, marriage, and courting practices represent distinct and competing gender ideologies present in society at large.

Theoretical Implications

This study suggests several interesting implications for the literature it was based on. First, this study makes a contribution to the literature on couple types, implicit theories of marriage, and the relational dimensions instrument produced by Fitzpatrick and others. Fitzpatrick used the relational dimensions instrument to measure individuals' beliefs structures concerning marriage based on sharing, ideology of traditionalism, temporal regularity, assertiveness, autonomy, ideology of uncertainty and change, undifferentiated space, and conflict. This study provides evidence that at least some of these dimensions emerge as qualitative themes when the participants are allowed to

create and describe their own categories concerning marriages. Dimensions from Fitzpatrick's work that emerged as themes in this study include ideology of traditionalism, autonomy, and ideology of uncertainty and change. Future qualitative research in this area might consider an interview format that focused on dimensions such as sharing and conflict avoidance to discern whether or not these themes also emerge in a naturalistic setting. This study also adds support to equity theory. Many comments illustrated respondents' tendency to weigh the potential cost and rewards of marriage. A few respondents considered how different levels of commitment and satisfaction might affect a marriage. Thus, the present study supported past research on equity theory, couple types and implicit theories of marriage and suggested ways in which these theories might be extended in the future.

Finally, this study is directly related to research on gender role attitudes. Specific interview questions were designed to measure respondents' gender role attitudes within the context of marriage. The resulting themes illustrate that this samples' gender role attitudes are in a state of flux. There is evidence of both traditional and egalitarian gender role attitudes among the college students interviewed. Furthermore, this study suggests that an individual's gender role attitudes indeed shape their perceptions and beliefs about appropriate behavior within the context of marriage.

Limitations of the Study

There are three main limitations to this study. First, I chose to concentrate on a single population (i.e., college students). Focusing on a single population facilitated data

collection and shaped the research question. The choice to focus on a single population provided structure and focus to my research project. However, college students are a unique population and the findings of this study may not be generalizable to other unmarried populations. Additionally, this study was designed to explore college students' attitudes concerning a single context (i.e., heterosexual marriage). This study did not attempt to explore attitudes concerning other contexts involving serious romantic relationships such as homosexual couples or couples that live together. Thus, a single population and a limited context can be considered as limitations of the study.

Additional limitations are related to the researcher's lack of involvement in the interview design and data collection. The interview format was originally designed by two other graduate students, and the interviews were conducted by students enrolled in an undergraduate class in gender and communication. The data were reviewed by the researcher and eventually evolved into an extended project. Thus, while the data that was collected were rich and plentiful, the researcher did not conduct the initial interviews that provided the groundwork for this project. Therefore the researcher did not control possible follow-up questions and opportunities for collecting explanations or additional comments pertaining to specific topics. Furthermore, the researcher did not create the interview-guide that was used during the interviews. In hindsight, the interviews may have been more valuable if they addressed additional topics and included more follow-up questions. This could have been corrected by conducting a pilot-test of the interview guide. This pilot test might have suggested the utility of rewording original questions or adding additional questions to the interview-guide. Despite these limitations, the

interview-guide and original interviewers produced rich and meaningful data that enabled the researcher to design and conduct the present study. Furthermore, the researcher used the existing interview guide to conduct two interviews in order to become more familiar with the interview guide and participate in data collection.

Directions for Future Research

Several studies have explored the nature of communication in romantic relationships. This study examined a specific population's attitudes toward a single context within romantic relationships. There are several options available for researchers interested in extending the findings presented in this study. It would be interesting to explore whether or not these findings are generalizable to other populations by conducting a similar study using older respondents with different experiences and lifestyles. Other studies might examine the same population's perceptions and attitudes concerning other contexts within the realm of romantic relationships.

Another direction for future research could derive from this study's observation of the presence of relational dialectics. While other studies have noted that individuals involved in relationships experience tension regarding contradictory feelings, this study seems to be the first to report the presence of relational dialectics in participants' anticipation of future relationships. Additional research regarding the extent to which participants experience and realize these tensions in anticipation of participating in a serious romantic relationship might further explain the nature and function of communication in dating and courting behavior.

Furthermore, scholars could add to the chain of research concerning college students' theories of marriage by further examining how a variety of relationships and experiences shape college students' attitudes and perceptions of marriage. Several researchers have debated the stability of college students' theories of marriage. These studies provided information concerning how long college students were likely to subscribe to certain beliefs and attitudes concerning marriage. The present study detailed the specific beliefs and attitudes towards marriage expressed by a sample of college students. I believe it would be interesting to build on this study by examining the factors that shape the development of these attitudes. Future studies employing qualitative methods might invite college students to explain not only what they believe about marriage but also what sources they perceive as having influenced their perceptions of marriage.

Finally, I think it would be useful to conduct a study specifically designed to further explore college students' gender role attitudes within the context of marriage. The present study presents evidence that while college students seem to participate in a dominant ideology concerning general values associated with marriage, they are not completely united in their beliefs about appropriate gender roles within the context of marriage. Future studies in this area can provide information concerning the extent to which gender ideology is changing among college students.

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APPENDIX A

OPENING STATEMENT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a research study conducted in the Department of Communication Studies at Texas Tech University. This research study will look at college age students, and their perceptions of marriage. Your input is important to the study, so answer all questions as completely as possible. Please be assured that you will remain completely anonymous. If you have any questions regarding the research project please contact Dr. Brian McGee at 742-3911.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW FORMAT

1. Tell me about a couple you know that has a successful marriage. What makes it successful?

2. How would you describe an unsuccessful marriage?

3. What are some of the advantages to marriage?

4. What are some of the disadvantages to marriage?

(Questions 1-4 are all designed to elicit information about the interviewee's opinions and values concerning marriage. Questions 1-4 are designed to encourage the interviewee to describe his/her unique view of marriage. Responses should indicate the supreme values that the interviewee associates with marriage.)

5. If you are in a relationship and marriage is mentioned, what is your reaction?

(Question 5 is a question about the interviewee's experience and behavior. It asks the interviewee to imagine how they would behave in a particular scenario. This question serves to elicit information about the interviewee's personal readiness for marriage.)

6. When do you think a person is ready for marriage?

7. When are people too young for marriage?

8. When are people too old for marriage?

(Questions 6-8 are questions designed to assess the interviewee's opinions about the appropriate timing and readiness for marriage of the general public. These questions give the interviewees an opportunity to reflect on themselves personally or provide their opinion about the appropriate time for marriage for the general public.)

9. Do you need to be friends with the person you marry? Why?

10. Under what circumstances should a couple end a marriage?

(Questions 9&10 seek to elicit information about the interviewee's opinions about different roles and duties of marriage partners. The follow-up probing question "why?" is a necessary "why?" question because participants might believe that the obvious answer to question #9 is yes and automatically answer that way. By explaining why they believe that marriage partners should be friends they provide additional information about their perceptions of the nature of marriage and the different roles they believe the relationship entails.)

11. What are some of the most important qualities you are looking for in the person you marry?

(This question is designed to encourage interviewees to talk descriptively about traits and characteristics that they value and desire in a potential mate.)

12. Do you think both relationship partners should wear engagement rings once they are engaged? Please explain the reasons for your opinions about this subject.

(This question is designed to elicit the interviewee's opinions about a specific gender stereotype.)

13. How do you feel about women who keep their birth name when they get married?

(This question is designed to evoke an emotional response in order to measure the interviewee's feelings about a specific gender stereotype.)

14. When you think about marriage, what images come to mind?

(This question is a final attempt to gain any further information about relationship roles, values, and behavior that the participant associates with marriage.)

<u>Demographic Questions</u>
Age?
Are there any divorces in your family? How many? Parents?
Are you adopted?
Race or Nationality?
Sex?
Religion?
What is your hometown size?

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Table 1 Respondent Demographics

Respondent Code	Age	Sex	Race/ Ethnicity
01-3	21	M	Caucasian
01-4	21	F	Caucasian
02-2	21	M	Caucasian
03-1	19	F	Caucasian
03-3	22	M	American Indian
04-3	21	F	Caucasian
05-1	23	M	African American
05-3	21	M	Caucasian
06-1	19	F	Caucasian
07-3	20	M	Hispanic
08-3	24	M	Egyptian
09-3	23	M	Caucasian
10-3	20	M	Korean American
11-3	22	M	Caucasian
12-4	21	F	Caucasian
13-1	20	M	Asian
14-2	20	F	Ethiopian
15-4	22	M	Caucasian
16-4	19	M	Caucasian
18-4	22	F	Hispanic
20-1	23	M	Caucasian
20-2	20	F	Hispanic
21-2	23	M	Cuban Dominican
21-4	23	F	Caucasian
24-4	20	F	African American
25-1	23	M	Caucasian
26-4	22	F	Caucasian

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Agree (Permission is granted.)

Student Signature — Date: 11-13-00

Disagree (Permission is not granted.)

Student Signature — Date