

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Mary Lynn Edmundson entitled "Marriage Myths and Dysfunctional Relationship Beliefs among Undergraduates." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Child and Family Studies.

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MARRIAGE MYTHS AND
DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP BELIEFS
AMONG UNDERGRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to (a) explore what single undergraduate university students who never have been married believe about romantic relationships and marriage myths; (b) determine if there were any gender differences, age differences, or differences between students from divorced and intact families of origin in beliefs in myths about marriage, as well as dysfunctional relationship beliefs; and (c) investigate the possibility of influence by sociodemographic variables on students' beliefs about marriage.

The sample for this study included 164 university students who were classified as undergraduates and who had never been married. Sociodemographic data indicated that 33% of the participants in the sample were male and 67% were female; those students between the ages of 17 and 20 comprised 69% of the sample, whereas the remaining 31% were aged 21 to 24 years old; and the majority of the sample (88%) were classified as White American. Sixty-five percent of the undergraduates indicated that their biological parents still were married to each other, and 35% had parents who either were separated or divorced.

Data analyses using SPSS revealed significant gender differences for subscription to marriage myths and the dysfunctional relationship belief of *sexual perfectionism*. There was also a significant difference in beliefs about *the sexes are different* between the participants from intact families and those from separated or divorced homes. Finally, Whites and non-Whites had significant differences in their beliefs regarding ideas that *partners cannot change*.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Though the divorce rate continues to hover around 50% (Divorce Magazine, n.d.), marriage still remains a popular choice. One might wonder why millions of people each year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) insist upon engaging in a practice that has such a high rate of failure. One possibility might be that the majority of young adults do not think that divorce would be in their future, a sort of “it won’t happen to me” mentality (Blinn & Pike, 1989). However, Wolfinger (2003) found that individuals from divorced families are less likely to marry after age 20, even though growing up in any type of alternative family structure decreased an individual’s chance of attending college and increased his or her chance of early marriage (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998).

In regards to those “alternative family structures,” there has been one particular trend evolving at least since the 1970s. Stephen M. Johnson published a book in 1977 in which he described singlehood as a rewarding way of life as he gave advice about constructively living alone and enjoying it. In 1981, *Single Life*, a book edited by Peter J. Stein became available to anyone interested in alternatives to marriage. In it, the pushes and pulls toward and away from marriage and singlehood are organized concisely into a chart to summarize a variety of motivations people identified when choosing between the two. It would seem self-evident that those with more positive attitudes about marriage are more likely to marry (Sassler & Schoen, 1999); however, there is also an abundance of research describing an increase in single households and in delay of marriage, as well as

an overall lower marital prevalence (Faessen, 2002; Forsyth & Johnson, 1995; Haines, 1996; Raymo, 1998; Sassler & Schoen, 1999; Schellenberg, 1991; Teachman, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000). Furthermore, some suggest that single women are better off physically and psychologically than married women and that single women also have advantages in comparison to single men (Marks, 1996). However, when single women are broken down into subgroups of never married and divorced or separated, some differences have been found among the groups (Waldron, Weiss, & Hughes, 1997).

What impacts this decision to marry or remain (or become) single? If biological sex and gender roles impact the decision, how so? More importantly, how are individuals socialized to perceive males and females in the relational context? Ward (2002) found that television viewing was associated with support for the stereotypes that were being portrayed about gender. A correlation between watching television and expectations for gender, relationship beliefs, and expectations of satisfaction in marriage was found by Aubrey, Harrison, Kramer, and Yellin (2003). Interestingly enough, men and women are becoming more similar in values they desire in a mate, with both showing an increase in the importance of physical attractiveness (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001). In addition, both genders desire kindness and intelligence in their mate, while men place additional importance on physical attractiveness and women find status and resources essential (Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier, 2002).

If these expectations are being socially constructed, but without emphasis on healthy relationships, then there is real potential for trouble. For instance, Segrin and Nabi (2002) found that television viewing in general does not encourage development of idealistic expectations, although soap operas, romantic comedies, and other romantically-

themed programs were associated strongly with those expectations. In another study, increased frequency of soap-opera viewing habits was associated with dysfunctional relationship beliefs (Haferkamp, 1999). It is possible that, when people hold those unrealistic relationship beliefs and expectations for marriage, it can be destructive, thus providing one factor contributing to a high divorce rate.

There is evidence for the existence of false beliefs and myths about relationships and marriage, as well as society's ambivalent attitude toward marriage (Martin, Martin, & Martin, 2001). Jeffrey Larson (2000) published his book, *Should We Stay Together? A Scientifically Proven Method for Evaluating Your Relationship and Improving its Chances for Long-term Success*, in order to provide prevention-based guidance about relationships to singles and couples who not yet are married. He built a case for discrediting many of the marriage and relationship myths held by individuals. Those 11 myths are: (a) there is one and only one right person in the world for you to marry; (b) until a person finds the perfect person to marry, he or she should not be satisfied; (c) you should feel totally competent as a future spouse before you decide to get married; (d) you can be happy with anyone you choose to marry if you try hard enough; (e) you should choose someone to marry whose personal characteristics are opposite from your own; (f) being in love with someone is sufficient reason to marry that person; (g) choosing someone to marry is a "decision of the heart;" (h) living together will prepare you for marriage and improve your chances of being happily married; (i) choosing a mate should be easy; (j) preparing for marriage "just comes naturally;" and (k) we know practically nothing about what predicts a happy marriage, so just take your chances.

Likewise, Catherine Surra, Michelle Batchelder, and Debra Hughes (1995) published a book in which they examined and debunked four myths about dating and courtship: Courtships follow fixed scripts and similar pathways to marriage; courting partners idealize and romanticize one another and their relationship; people are naive about commitment and about why they get committed; and relationships begin anew at marriage and have equal chances of becoming successful marriages. In support of the need for these types of books, research (Sullivan & Schwebel, 1995) has revealed that many young adults do have idealistic expectations regarding relationship happiness, and those with lower levels of irrational relationship beliefs find more satisfying relationships.

Rationale

Research regarding the marriage myths held by young adults has been somewhat sparse and inconsistent through the years. Potential trends have been hard to discern, and research evidence lends itself to drawing a variety of different conclusions. Research results regarding gender, age, and their influence on marriage myths exemplify some of these inconsistencies. For example, James Honeycutt (1991) noted differences by gender and age for students in a marriage and family communication course in their endorsement of myths regarding the relational content of that course. Researchers have found that gender only partially contributes to the variance in mate selection (Doosje, Rojahn, & Fischer, 1999). Most recently, data have suggested that there are no gender differences in constraining beliefs about mate selection, but significant age differences are present (Cobb, Larson, & Watson, 2003).

Looking at the physical health of women over the past decade, marital status and health trends were analyzed over two intervals consisting of 5-year follow-ups in the years of 1978-1983 and 1983-1988, with results varying by age and cohort (Waldron, Weiss, & Hughes, 1997). According to these findings, older women in the 1970s and 1980s who were divorced or separated experienced more health problems than those who were never married, but in the younger women that difference was less obvious and perhaps even reversed. In the second follow-up interval, women who were divorced and separated had a larger increase in psychosomatic symptoms and overall health problems than did those women who were married. The authors concluded that women who were not married had worse health trends than those who were married and that the health of those who were never married was as bad as or even worse than the health of those women who were divorced or separated.

For those children coming from divorced families, researchers (Sinclair & Nelson, 1998) have studied their outcomes regarding intimacy and relationship beliefs, with some (Sprecher, Cate, & Levin, 1998) concluding that relationship beliefs are not affected negatively by parental divorce. In a study highlighting parental divorce and longevity, men who had experienced parental divorce were more likely to be divorced themselves, obtain less education, and engage in fewer service activities (Tucker et al., 1997). Women with divorced parents were more likely to smoke more and to be divorced also. In each of these cases, the mediating factors just mentioned led to a higher mortality risk for adults who had experienced parental divorce.

Judith Wallerstein is a leading researcher studying the effects of parental divorce on children of across time. She has found that 25% of children of divorce comprise the

cohort of individuals aged 18-44 years (Wallerstein, 1989). Also, of the children currently experiencing divorce, half are under age 6. Some of the effects of parental divorce do not become apparent until early adulthood. Then, those adult children of divorce report feeling anxious about their own marriages and less competent in relationships due to the dissolution of their parents' marriages. Even in parental marriages that were perceived as relatively good marriages prior to parental divorce, there were still feelings of abandonment and betrayal. Finally, Wallerstein saw as the most crucial task of an adult child of divorce that of taking a chance on love themselves. This involves turning away from a relationship model that consisted of failed marital commitment. Young adults who experienced parental divorce then must risk involvement and attempt to cope with heightened relationship anxieties. Robinson (1999) found that the young adults of divorce in her study consistently felt like they had no positive role model for a successful marital relationship.

Where relationship beliefs and marital satisfaction are concerned, there is support for irrational beliefs adversely affecting marital adjustment (DeBord, Romans, & Krieshok, 1996) and dysfunctional relationship beliefs being associated with increased marital distress (Haferkamp, 1994). There is evidence also for marital status to be a significant positive predictor of life satisfaction (Barrett, 1999). Even so, inconsistent trends for what has been called the *happiness effect* of marriage have been reported (Lee, Seccombe, & Shehan, 1991). Researchers analyzing data from the General Social Surveys from 1972-1989 found trends for married and never married individuals and their personal happiness to be inconsistent across the years. For example, from 1972 through 1986, happiness from marriage declined, but that process began to reverse in the

1980s so that happiness and being married were once again positively correlated. Then, the direction of the relationship began to change once again at the end of the 1980s.

Dysfunctional relationships may have more detrimental effects on individuals' well-being than those with no romantic relationships at all (Ross, 1995). In one study (Chun & Park, 1997), the belief factors in the Relationship Beliefs Scale (RBS) were used to examine the beliefs that made relationships successful for 230 participants in Korea. After analysis, however, the factors were found not to be significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction, but rather to love attitudes. In conclusion, if it can be known that myths are present and causing harm to current and potential relationships, then a push for prevention and education for marriage and family life would be called for with an approach that is both practical and constructive (Sharp & Ganong, 2000; Steimle & Duncan, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore what single undergraduate university students who never have been married believe about romantic relationships and marriage myths. This study also sought to determine if there were any gender differences, age differences, and other differences between students from divorced and intact families of origin in beliefs in myths about marriage, as well as dysfunctional relationship beliefs. In addition, the possibility of influence of sociodemographic variables on students' beliefs about marriage also was examined. Data were collected from never-married undergraduates using two survey questionnaires that focused on marriage myths and relationship beliefs.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to explore and describe the myths and beliefs about marriage and intimate relationships that characterized never-married undergraduate university students. Therefore, the primary objective for the study was to examine if there are differences in relationship beliefs and myths about marriage when comparing groups by gender, age, and family of origin (intact versus divorced).

Theoretical Basis for the Study

Theoretically, this study was grounded in symbolic interactionism. A main assumption of this theory is that an individual is active as well as reactive (Rollins & Thomas, 1979). In other words, an individual may choose to enact a behavior through internal processes of his/her own as well as responding in a prescribed manner as a result of his/her social context. Behavior is a choice (Winton, 1995), so the presence of myths and dysfunctional beliefs in society does not mean that all individuals necessarily will believe or adhere to those just because they exist.

The concepts of *self* and *mind* are two of the most basic tenets of symbolic interactionism. Self refers to seeing oneself in the environment and as a part of the surrounding environment, whereas mind refers to thinking before acting in an informed, methodical manner (Winton, 1995). For instance, in the context of a relationship, decisions merely can be reactive to the situation at hand, but more often are made based on internalized beliefs regarding social norms. Symbolic interaction theory depicts romantic love as a social phenomenon.

As mentioned before, individuals are seen as actors, and therefore situations are evaluated according to how events and experiences are interpreted by those actors involved (Klein & White, 1996). Signs and symbols that are common in a particular culture may be perceived differently by different individuals. The symbolic interactionist would ask why. The answer would be found in the meanings that each individual ascribes to the situation and stimulus, then to the action. Furthermore, two tenets of this theory are that (a) human behavior must be understood by meanings of the actor and (b) society precedes the individual (Klein & White, 1996). In the context of marriage perceptions, that human behavior would revolve around dating, courtship, and marriage and the meanings held by the actor for those situations would likely come from beliefs and myths constructed in social interaction. Also, because society does precede the actor, what is being promoted in society will be a likely influence for personal meaning, and personal meaning thus could be an indicator of what is prevalent in society. In this case, the level to which young adults subscribe to myths about marriage and dysfunctional relationship beliefs could indicate also the extent of these norms in a greater societal context.

Finally, individuals as actors can choose to behave according to the roles prescribed by society or to act in an alternative manner. Because symbolic interactions represent actions as choices, there are a variety of ways individuals can respond to situations. Those roles relevant for the present study are defined by dysfunctional relationship beliefs and marriage myths. In addition, clarity of roles leads to greater harmony between individuals in social situations. When roles are defined specifically, then followed, actors have a common understanding of the present situation and its meaning. For example, in a significant relationship between two individuals, an

individual must have clear expectations in order to perform his or her role adequately.

Furthermore, each member of a couple must be aware of the meaning he or she gives to the relationship, as well as his or her partner having some sense of that meaning. If the expectations are not clear, or are unrealistic, then one or both of the partners will eventually become dissatisfied with the meaning they find in his or her relationship.

Burke and Cast (1997) used this theory to highlight reformation of newlyweds' gender identities. Because change may occur in a relationship as a result of taking on the role of a spouse, one's own identity may change as he/she incorporates aspects of his/her partner's identity.

In summary, symbolic interaction theory contributed to this study because young adults choose to behave in relationships as a result of beliefs (including myths) constructed in society. How they perceive themselves and their partners and the roles they give themselves and their partners also serves to influence choices and interactions. Assessing the beliefs and myths subscribed to may serve to illuminate what false information about relationships and marriage is prevalent in the experience of contemporary young adults.

Nominal Definitions

These definitions were taken in part from a list found in Carter (1998).

1. Beliefs: An individual's attitudes and expectations, whether they are based on myth or fact (i.e., unrealistic versus realistic), about the roles, relationships, and processes associated with marriage (Larson, 1988).

2. Myth: A simplification or distortion of reality that is based on a lack of experience or information (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001).
3. Expectation: The rules or norms based on one's beliefs about marriage and family roles and relationships, acquired through the socialization process, that govern behavior for self and others (Huston & Geis, 1993; Larson, 1988; Larson & Holman, 1994).
4. Assumption: Beliefs about the ways that relationships actually operate, as well as what men, women, and one's partner are like (Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, & Burnett, 1996).
5. Standards: The beliefs that partners hold regarding the ways that marriage and spouses should be (Baucom et al., 1996).
4. Marital myth: A simplification or distortion or reality associated with marriage and marital issues that is based on a lack of experience or information (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001).
5. Gender: The state of identifying oneself as being male or female.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Sociodemographic Data Summary

The rates of never-married singleness, marriage, divorce, cohabitation, and parental divorce give a snapshot of what is going on in American relationships. As of the year 2000, there were an estimated 59.9 million individuals aged 15 years and older, or 27.1 percent of the population, who had never been married (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In the year 2003, 2.1 million people in the United States were married for a marriage rate of 7.5 per 1,000 total population, whereas the divorce rate for the same year was 3.8 (Munson & Sutton, 2004). Furthermore, an estimated 4.9 million households in the United States consist of opposite-sex unmarried partners who are cohabitating (Simmons & O'Connell, 2003).

Given the focus on college-aged young adults for this study, it was relevant to offer further statistics pertaining more clearly to that cohort. Out of the estimated 32.3 million never-married males in the U. S., 3.8 million are between the ages of 18 and 19, and 7.6 million are between the ages of 20 and 24. Combined, that is 35% of the entire never-married male population. In addition, there are 1.3 million males in the 18- to 24-year bracket who are married and 125,644 who are divorced (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

For females, an estimated 27.5 million have never been married, and 3.4 million of those are 18 to 19 years old; 6.4 million are 20 to 24 years old. Together, that is almost 36% of the total never-married female population. In the same age bracket, 2.3 million

are married and 219,545 are divorced. Regardless of marital status, 8.9% of women aged 15-19 years have ever cohabited, compared to 38.3% of women aged 20 to 24 years (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002).

Because the research for the present study took place in Tennessee, specific information regarding this state was relevant. The provisional number of marriages taking place in Tennessee in 2003 was 73,381, which shows a small but steady decline over past years (Munson & Sutton, 2004). There were 76,531 marriages in 2002 and 77,749 in 2001. There were 29,242 divorces in Tennessee during 2003, as opposed to 21,456 in 2002 and 29,987 in 2001. For Tennessee in 2002, the overall marriage rate was 13.1 per 1,000 total population residing in the area, and the overall divorce rate was 5.1.

Finally, in 2002, 2,765 respondents in the U. S. were asked about their living arrangements at age 16 (Davis, Smith, & Marsden, 2002). Only 1,861 indicated that they lived with both their biological mother and father. Four hundred and eighty-five participants (17.5%) stated that they had other living arrangements due to their parents being divorced or separated.

In short, though the marriage rate seems to be holding relatively steady, more or less, so does the divorce rate. There also remains a large proportion of people, many of whom are in the 17-24 year age group, who have never been married. What are their views toward serious relationships, and what might influence their chances for success should they make a decision to wed in the future?

Overview

In 2000, researchers administered the Relationship Beliefs Inventory (RBI; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982) and found that couples who held discrepant views about relational disagreements and beliefs that they should be able to read each other's minds had less satisfying relationships (Johnson, Fine, Polzella, & Graetz, 2000). Just the year before, Sprecher and Metts (1999) found that romantic beliefs affected love, satisfaction, and commitment. How relationship beliefs influence satisfaction with a romantic relationship was the focus of another study (Metts & Cupach, 1990). Researchers concluded, in that case, that the relationship between dysfunctional beliefs and satisfaction was mediated by actual problem-solving responses implemented by the couples. Furthermore, those responses were governed by the existing beliefs (e.g., partners cannot change) held by partners. A more important question is what influences those relationship beliefs (and myths) in the first place. In the following paragraphs, gender, parental divorce, and education all will be examined.

Gender and Marriage Beliefs

Throughout past years, there has been a variety of research published describing how men and women differ in their opinions and perceptions of gender, relationships, marriage, and family. There is support for gender differences in the cultural meaning of marriage (Barich & Bielby, 1996). For instance, women hold more expressive expectations for love, affection, and emotional security. Some researchers have found evidence that there are differences in the way male and female adolescents predict their future interpersonal lives (Blinn & Pike, 1989). Results from the study indicated that

female students were much more inclined to envision themselves in a traditional nuclear family in the future. Inglis and Greenglass (1989) found that women and men rated very similarly the advantages and disadvantages of marriage, though women reported much more motivation to marry than did men. In a study measuring myths related to sexuality, Kumar and Jadeja (1993) found that both men and women scored highest in myths related to male sexuality, although females did indicate that they understood their own sexuality better than males understood theirs. Further, gendered beliefs influenced assumptions about irreconcilable differences in male and female relationship needs, and relationship-specific beliefs influenced seeing more alternatives, lower relational commitment, and lower matching to comparison levels that are ideal (Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999). After examining gender and the interplay between gendered beliefs, relationship-specific beliefs, and commitment, the researchers found that, for females, the relationship between commitment and both gendered relationship beliefs and relationship-specific beliefs was mediated by the investment model. This model describes how an individual might determine the value of a relationship, and it is roughly based on appraisals of relational costs and rewards. For instance, when rewards, barriers, and degree of match to ideal comparison level are perceived as high and costs and alternatives are perceived as low, then commitment is greater among women. In contrast, men's commitment and relationship beliefs were not mediated, and their gendered beliefs were not related to commitment.

Newman, Roberts, and Syré (1993) found that there were differences in how men and women defined family when subjects were presented with combinations described by legal and spatial ties. For example, when mixed-gender subjects were asked to describe

their concept of family, a higher percentage of women than men mentioned both shared activities and family roles. Also, when looking at definitions of family on legal and co-residence factors, men were more likely than women to accept those definitions as examples of families. Women were less accepting of family definitions consisting of legal ties without biological ties. Women emphasized no more than men the affective ties of family, but they did place more emphasis on specific family roles and the importance of doing things “together.”

When it comes to mate selection, consistent gender differences have been noted. Alan Feingold (1992) found that women were interested more than men in nonphysical characteristics such as socioeconomic status, character, and intelligence. Also, the largest gender difference was in desire for traits that lead to acquisition of resources (e.g., status and ambitiousness). Sprecher, Sullivan, and Hatfield (1994) subsequently confirmed these findings when they concluded that the gender differences they found were consistent with those of previous research. For example, men found youth and physical attractiveness more important, whereas women focused more on the earning potential of a mate.

In a study identifying the top 10 marital problems (Risch, Riley, & Lawler, 2003), each issue, such as balancing job and family, was compared by gender, suggesting that men and women may view relationships, marital standards, and problems differently. Three different studies seem to support this conclusion. First, after university students responded to relationship belief questionnaires, analyses indicated that there were differences between the genders in relationship beliefs and that men were less aware of a partner’s feelings and the emotional aspects of their relationships and found sex, as well

as physical attractiveness, to be more important (Frazier & Esterly, 1990). Next, in a comparison of men and women for their relationship beliefs about love and romance, gender differences found included men being less likely to see the significance of maintaining a marriage through emotional satisfaction, being more willing to marry without love, and being more idealistic about romance (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002). Finally, Stackert and Bursik (2003) found that the irrational relationship beliefs they had specified were endorsed in patterns related to gender. A MANOVA test revealed significant main effects for gender in regards to irrational beliefs related to categories of *disagreement is destructive*, *sexual perfectionism*, and *partners cannot change* on the Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI). For the first two scales mentioned, men had higher scores on irrational beliefs, but on the last scale, women had higher irrational belief scores.

Some further conflictual evidence for trends in gender differences exists. For instance, DeRoda, Martinez-Iñigo, DePaul, and Yela (1999) found that romantic myths relating to subjects such as fidelity, predestination, marriage, and eternal passion were more supported by females. However, Elizabeth Sharp and Lawrence Ganong (2000) split students into a comparison group and an integrative teaching group and scored each group on a pre-test and post-test measure. They concluded that fewer unrealistic relationship and romantic beliefs are held by women than by men, though the influence of gender was somewhat weak in regards to influence of post-test scores. Women scored lower on the Relationship Beliefs Inventory and also the Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS; Sprecher & Metts, 1989). The RBI measured the unrealistic beliefs of *disagreement is destructive*, *mindreading is expected*, *partners cannot change*, and *sexual perfection is*

possible; the RBS measured the romantic beliefs of: *love finds a way, there is a one and only, idealization* (e.g., “our true love will be perfect,” p. 389) and *there is love at first sight*.

Finally, there also is some evidence for gender differences regarding family of origin. Bonnie Barber and Jacquelynne Eccles (1992), in a summary of divorce research, examined literature dealing with the influence of family interaction on identity formation and gender role-related behaviors that are linked with marriage. They mentioned that women from intact families seem to have more positive attitudes about marriage and more negative attitudes about divorce than those from families that are divorced, separated, or remarried. In that section, the attitudes toward marriage held by men were not discussed.

Age and Marriage Beliefs

Regarding age, marriage beliefs, and preferences, there is a variety of research available. Even when it comes to defining a basic family unit, along with issues of divorce and adoption, there are significant differences between younger children, older children, adolescents, and university students. Newman, Roberts, and Syré (1993) broke up their subjects into age groups of 4-6 years (group 1), 7-9 years (group 2), 10-12 years (group 3), 13-15 years (group 4), and university students (group 5). In their definitions of family, 13- to 15-year-olds and university students more often mentioned both biological relationships and affective relationships than 4- to 12-year-olds. Ten- to 12-year-olds were more likely to mention family roles than the other groups. Concerning complexity scores for the concept of divorce, 4- to 6-year-olds had a mean score lower than 7- to 9-

year-olds, 13- to 15-year-olds, and university students. Also, 10- to 12- year olds had a mean score that was lower than for the group of 13- to 15-year olds.

Age also has been associated with mate preferences and attitudes toward perceived future marriages. For instance, Frazier and Esterly (1990) found that the more age and experience women had, the less romantic and selfless (*agapic*) and more pragmatic in beliefs about relationships they tended to become, although the same did not hold true for men. After dividing up their sample into those under 30 years of age ($n = 113$) and those over 30 ($n = 71$), Doosje, Rojahn, and Fischer (1999) found that the participants classified in the younger group found physical attractiveness in future partners to be of greater importance than did the older group. Risch, Riley, and Lawler (2003) divided their sample up into those 29 years old or younger and those aged 30 years or older. Participants were couples recruited from a marriage preparation program, and they were asked to rate different issues that they thought might cause problems during the early years of marriage. The age groups differed significantly on five of the problematic issues: *balancing job and family*, *frequency of sexual relations*, *constant bickering*, *communication with spouse*, and *time spent with one's spouse*. For each of these five issues, those 30 or older rated them as more problematic than those 29 or younger.

Age also may be a factor in perceived current and future roles within marriage. When looking at what causes household conflict over issues regarding the household division of labor in homes where women are employed full-time, Stohs (1995) concluded that one of the biggest contributors was a woman's younger age. Scheuble and Johnson (1993) looked at the plans and attitudes of college students regarding marital name

change and found that the women who were less likely to take their future husbands' last names were those who planned to marry at later ages.

There is interplay between divorce, age, and attitudes toward marriage. In his 2003 study, Nicholas Wolfinger analyzed data from 1973-1994 in regards to parental divorce, the current age of the children from those divorces, and their subsequent marriage timing. What he found was an interesting trend. Children coming from divorced families were more likely to marry between the ages of 14 and 20. After that, the higher rates begin to decline. At age 20, marriage rates were similar for those from both divorced families of origin and intact families of origin. After age 20, if a child of divorce was still single, then he or she was more likely to remain that way. This supported Wallerstein's (1989) conclusions by providing quantitative verification of her qualitative work.

When examining undergraduates' beliefs about relationships and marriage, a few studies have found age to be a significant factor. Cobb, Larson, and Watson (2003) created the Attitudes about Romance and Mate Selection Scale (ARMSS) and found a weak, yet significant, correlation between age and total ARMSS scores and also between age and specifically the *Love Is Enough* scale. There was a negative correlation that might indicate that older adults have gained more wisdom through relationship experience. Undergraduates responded to both the Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982) and the Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS; Sprecher & Metts, 1989) for Elizabeth Sharp's and Lawrence Ganong's study (2000). The researchers found that age and scores on the RBS were significantly correlated but did not elaborate on this finding. Finally, Larson's (1988) Marriage Quiz was administered to 56 students enrolled

in either an introductory interpersonal communication course or a marital and family communication course on the first day of class (Honeycutt, 1991). He found that age and the total number of myths that were endorsed were associated negatively.

Parental Divorce and Attitudes toward Relationships

In regards to family of origin and parental divorce, much research has been published. In continuation with the previous section's emphasis on gender differences, results from one study indicated that, when children from divorced homes were compared to children from intact homes, significant gender differences in their personalities were observed (Fox, 2001). The author found that women tended to be more sociable, preferred to work with other people, and placed a greater emphasis on close interpersonal ties. Women also indicated that they were more restrained, cautious, avoidant of harmful situations, and conventional. On the other hand, men scored much higher on an aggression scale.

Children of divorce also may have more negative personality characteristics (Barber, 1998), as well as more psychological and behavioral problems, well-being deficits, and maladjustment (Sun, 2001). Sun concluded that both male and female students from divorced families tended to have more behavior maladjustment. Students from divorced families were less likely than students from intact families to report a good relationship between parent and child. Barber concluded that parental divorce increased the likelihood for women to be insecurely attached. Furthermore, Stackert and Bursik (2003) found that adults with anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attachment styles were more likely to endorse relationship-specific irrational beliefs than adults who were

securely attached. Lisa Laumann-Billings and Robert Emery (2000) found that college students from divorced families tended to be more distressed than those students from intact families, and other researchers found an association between parental divorce and lower self-esteem among college females from divorced families (Clifford & Clark, 1995). Ross and Mirowsky (1999) did not find the link between parental divorce and adult depression that they expected, but they did find other potential problems such as lower levels of education, younger age at first marriage, higher divorce rates, and increases in unhappy relationships. Finally, in one study (Jacquet & Surra, 2001), women from divorced families described less trust and satisfaction, yet more ambivalence and conflict in their own romantic relationships, as compared to women coming from intact families of origin.

In addition to the potential influence on personality and emotion for children involved in parental divorce, perspectives about relationships and interactions in marriage also may be affected. Conclusions from the findings of three separate studies indicated that children of divorce have less trust for a future spouse and less optimism about marriage. Further, parental conflict predicted negative attitudes toward marriage in college students, with young adults from divorced families holding pessimistic and negative views about marriage because of negative familial changes (Franklin, Janoff-Bulman, & Roberts, 1990; Garbardi & Rosen, 1992; Mahl, 2001).

Regarding parental divorce and offspring marital status, Tucker et al. (1997) found that the long-term effects of divorce included the increased probability that these children's own marriages would end in divorce. However, although a study of 151 men found little association between family of origin and current marital status, there were

more instances of “don’t be close” injunctions, a guarded-hostile interpersonal style, and a maladjusted sense of responsibility (Silvestri, 1992). Wolfinger (2003) explained some of the divergence in the existing scholarly literature on parental divorce and offspring marriage by noting a change over time. In the 1970s, children of divorce were more likely to marry, although by the 1990s, they married less often.

It is debatable whether it is the actual divorce or the other disruptive factors surrounding parental separation that influences the development of children from those families. For example, a qualitative study of 60 university students revealed that the attitudes and behavior of those from divorced homes were affected by other factors such as parental conflict and parents’ supportiveness during and after the divorce (Duran-Aydintug, 1997). Sun (2001) reported that pre-disruption factors were largely responsible for adolescents’ maladjustment after their parents’ split. Divorce in and of itself still may be responsible for some of the changes. Though evidence for strong predivorce factors has been found, divorce remains associated with negative results in the welfare of adult children from those families (Furstenberg & Teitler, 1994). Finally, Paul Amato (1988) found no differences in perspectives regarding the advantages and disadvantages of marriage between young adults from intact or divorced families when he controlled for other family-of-origin variables (i.e., father’s and mother’s years of education, father’s and mother’s country of birth, father’s and mother’s religion, father’s and mother’s church attendance, and number of full biological brothers and sisters), though subjects experiencing parental divorce did hold more negative views of their families of origin and somewhat complex perspectives about marriage. Those complex perspectives held by adult children of divorce consisted of the ideas that marriage should last and partners

should be monogamous, but at the same time, these adult children from divorced families were more likely to have less idealized views of marriage and to be more accepting of alternative family forms than were the adults from intact families.

The Marriage Quiz

In 1988, Jeffrey Larson published his research detailing his work with undergraduate students and the Marriage Quiz he had developed. Since then, the instrument has been utilized a few times, and the initial study has been referenced many times and in many contexts. The instrument consists of 20 true or false items, and a higher score indicates greater belief in marital myths.

Some authors have chosen to use Larson's work as an illustration of the ideas they were trying to present in their own research. For example, Stafford and Reske (1990) mentioned Larson's work because of its emphasis on the concepts of satisfaction and stability, whereas Segrin and Nabi (2002) studied the development of unrealistic expectations in regard to television exposure. They mentioned Larson's work by suggesting that, if divorce could have potential causes, one would be those false beliefs and unrealistic expectations people bring to marriage. Finally, Larson and Holman (1994) referenced the Marriage Quiz article for its emphasis on dysfunctional beliefs, and in the same year, Laner and Russell used it to demonstrate the "high end" of a continuum of expectations (i.e., "If my spouse loves me, he/she should instinctively know what I want and need to be happy" (p. 11; Larson, 1988, p. 5).

Larson (1988) sampled college students in his study, and several researchers have followed that sampling approach. In their study of college-aged young adults, Sharp and

Ganong (2000) referenced Larson several times throughout their article. Citations included examples of research that lent evidence of unrealistic beliefs about marriage eventually leading to less satisfaction within intimate relationships and instances of marriage courses having a positive impact on knowledge about marriage. Sullivan and Schwebel (1995) based their hypothesis that students would hold unrealistic expectations about the future of their relationships on Larson's work.

Couples also have been the focus of researchers utilizing Larson's work. For instance, researchers in one study (Schwebel, Moss, & Fine, 1999) concluded that, when couples transitioned from the honeymoon phase to the disillusionment phase, it might have been due to unrealistically high expectations of marriage. In other words, during the honeymoon phase, partners tend to see everything in a positive light and are confident in decisions regarding their relationship and choosing one another. However, slowly the realization that high expectations are not being met will surface, and partners then will begin to feel as if they have made a mistake or that things are not as they originally thought, thus bringing on the period of disillusionment. The assets, strengths, and positive traits so obvious in the honeymoon phase have given way to an emphasis on liabilities and shortcomings (Winton, 1995). Larson was a key researcher in identifying and highlighting ascription to those unrealistic expectations by young adults. Larson (1992) referenced his own previous research when describing a premarital counseling technique.

The Marriage Quiz has been useful in developing other instruments and, along with those instruments, providing a context for discussion in classes regarding attitudes about dating and marriage. Cobb, Larson, and Watson (2003) cited Larson regarding his support of men endorsing romantic beliefs more so than women, information that was

valuable to them when they were creating items for the ARMSS related to gender and romantic beliefs. They also concluded that the Marriage Quiz, along with the ARMSS, would provide a strong basis to encourage class discussion about marriage and relationship beliefs.

An example of a study actually utilizing Larson's instrument was that conducted by Carson and Pauly (1990). The Marriage Quiz was used along with various other instruments to compare young adults from intact families of origin and divorced families of origin on perceptions of marriage and family life. The group of instruments, including the Marriage Quiz, provided 22 measures and demonstrated several significant differences between the groups. Compared to the young adults in the non-divorced parental group, young adults from divorced families were more likely to hold non-traditional perspectives (i.e., companionship/egalitarian) on a scale measuring marital role expectations for social participation of married partners and marital sexual relations. They also believed that they would have less control in their individual ideal family environments, as indicated on a scale measuring family environment.

One additional researcher utilizing Larson's scale was James Honeycutt (1991). He was interested in four myths regarding classes about family interaction being circulated among students: (a) *Family communication is trivial*; (b) *students are absorbed with their own personal relationships*; (c) *females basically enroll in family communication courses*; and (d) *attention will be concentrated on parent-child relationships*. To measure student myths about marriage, Honeycutt gave 56 students the Marriage Quiz on the first day of class. Seventeen students were in an introductory interpersonal communication course, while 39 students were enrolled in an upper-level

marriage and family communication course. Results revealed that myths were more endorsed by students in the interpersonal communication course, males, and Catholics, as opposed to upper-level students, females, and Protestants or those with no religious affiliation. Honeycutt found the average number of myths endorsed to be less than Larson's number in 1988. He accounted for this by examination of the age of the samples in each study, finding that students in his sample averaged being 2 years older than those in Larson's study. The conclusion drawn in Honeycutt's study was that students need to take relationship communication courses more seriously in order to reap the benefits from them in their own lives.

The Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI)

Published in 1982 by Eidelson and Epstein, the RBI describes dysfunctional beliefs through subscales and includes statements representing ways which an individual might feel about his or her relationship with another. The statements characterize the five following irrational beliefs: (a) *Disagreement is destructive*, (b) *partners cannot change*, (c) *mindreading is expected*, (d) *sexual perfectionism*, and (e) *the sexes are different*. Higher scores indicate greater adherence to dysfunctional relationship beliefs.

The RBI is often paired with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976), as was the case with several of the articles mentioned below. Information from married couples was collected by Bradbury and Fincham (1988). They were interested in providing a more accurate contextual model of marriage, so they recruited 43 couples to complete several questionnaires, including the RBI. Variables in the distal context (such as sex role and relationship beliefs) were distinguished from variables in the proximal

context (such as causal and responsibility attributions). Results indicated that high levels of dysfunctional relationship beliefs were negatively correlated with marital satisfaction.

Möller and Van Zyl (1991) administered both the RBI and the DAS and found the same negative correlation between marital satisfaction and dysfunctional relationship beliefs. More specifically, dyadic adjustment and relationship beliefs had significant associations for two of the RBI subscales (*disagreement is destructive* and *sexual perfectionism*). Lawrence Kurdek (1992) described his use of the RBI to assess the reliability and validity of four subscores derived from the DAS. A significant negative relationship between marital satisfaction and dysfunctional relationship beliefs was found by Haeferkamp (1994). She also found that two of the RBI subscales (*disagreement is destructive* and *partners cannot change*) had negative relationships to marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives in her sample.

This instrument also has been paired with other questionnaires. A version of the RBI was given along with the Romantic Belief Survey (RBS; Sprecher & Metts, 1989) to two separate classes in a pre-test/post-test format. One course section used non-integrative teaching techniques, and that class served as the comparison group. Two other classes were approached with integrative learning tools for marriage education, such as large and small group discussions and interactive exercises. Post-test scores indicated that romantic beliefs changed but not the unrealistic relationship beliefs. The authors accounted for this finding by the nature of the teaching materials presented being geared more toward romantic beliefs. There was a weak influence by gender, with women having lower scores than men. Therefore, results indicated that females endorsed fewer unrealistic beliefs than did males.

Two studies used the RBI in relationship to individuals' exposure to media. Shapiro and Kroeger (1991) analyzed a convenience sample of 109 adults involved in intimate relationships which revealed that participants strongly endorsing unrealistic beliefs also scored higher on a measure of exposure to popular romantic media than subjects who did not endorse unrealistic beliefs as strongly. In addition, married women who were engaged more so by popular romantic media tended to be less satisfied with their intimate relationships. More specifically, results indicated that participants who had higher scores on the RBI (more unrealistic beliefs) reported watching TV news and documentaries less often than subjects who were more realistic in their beliefs. Also, subjects who less often read action or adventure novels were those who had higher scores on the *disagreement is destructive* subscale. In another study, Claudia Haeferkamp (1999) questioned 188 undergraduates about their television and soap opera viewing habits. Results supported the hypothesis that viewing habits and dysfunctional beliefs were positively correlated. Moreover, *the sexes are different* and *mindreading is expected* subscales were associated with greater television viewing and greater soap opera viewing, respectively.

Some studies focused on specific subscales of the RBI. For instance, Duncan Cramer (2001) focused solely on *disagreement is destructive* when examining the intimate relationships of college students. He was interested in whether or not holding that belief affected relationship satisfaction when also considering the level of negative conflict. Because there were too few men in the sample to do gender comparisons, men's and women's answers were analyzed together. There was no indication that the destructive disagreement belief moderated the connection between level of negative

conflict and relationship dissatisfaction, nor for the moderation of the relationship between level of consensus and relationship satisfaction.

Johnson, Fine, Polzella, and Graetz (2000) examined the *disagreement is destructive* subscale, as well as the *mindreading is expected* subscale. Their purpose was to expand each of those scales in hopes of using them to assess the possibility of a relationship between intrapersonal cognitive discrepancies and relationship satisfaction. Standards, perceptions, and assumptions were all distinguished. The 63 undergraduates comprising the sample were found to more likely hold dysfunctional beliefs regarding *mindreading* than *destructive disagreement*. The hypothesis was supported in that differences were found for major intrapersonal cognitive discrepancies that were negatively related to satisfaction in relationships.

The instrument has been used also to assess the climate of relationships. Stackert and Bursik (2003) used the RBI to examine gendered patterns in irrational beliefs. Women were more likely to hold *disagreement is destructive* and *partners cannot change* beliefs, while men were more likely to support *sexual perfectionism* beliefs. Generally, the more strongly the belief was endorsed, the more likely relationship satisfaction was to suffer. In this case, men's sexual perfectionism beliefs and women's destructive disagreement beliefs each were negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction.

Relationship beliefs, problem-solving responses, and relationship satisfaction all were negatively correlated with one another in one study (Metts & Cupach, 1990). Problem-solving responses included *exit*, *voice*, *loyalty*, and *neglect*. Exit and neglect were hurtful to relationship satisfaction, but voice (e.g., discussing problems, compromising) was beneficial. The effects of loyalty in this study were ambiguous.

The Relationship Beliefs Inventory has been utilized with groups of college-aged young adults in a manner similar to the marriage quiz. When a group of undergraduate students were given the RBI along with a questionnaire measuring relationship satisfaction, they demonstrated higher expectations for their own relationships than the expectations they would set for others (Sullivan & Schwebel, 1995). This held true for four relationship stages: (a) casually dating; (b) engaged; (c) married 5-years; and (d) married 15 years. Across those stages, the students expected their relationships to increase in satisfaction over time. Contrary to the other studies mentioned in this section, the results in this study did not support individuals with high levels of irrational beliefs as having the most unrealistic expectations about relationship satisfaction.

Finally, like the marriage quiz, the Relationship Beliefs Inventory also has been given to couples. The RBI was utilized to examine the relationship of dysfunctional beliefs and marital distress (Jones & Stanton, 1988). In an interesting usage of the questionnaire, couples completed the RBI twice: once for themselves and again as they believed their spouse would respond. Husbands and wives did not differ significantly on the marital satisfaction and dysfunctional belief measures. Preliminary analyses hinted that couples who had been married longer indicated fewer desired changes for their marriages and that women involved in their marriages longer showed greater perceived similarity on RBI ratings between themselves and those they reported for their husbands. The *disagreement is destructive* subscale significantly predicted distress for males, and lower perceived similarity was associated with higher distress for both males and females.

Summary of Literature Review

To summarize, there are clear and consistent age-related findings regarding marriage and relationship beliefs, but they typically have been between different cohorts. The present study examined the 17- to 24-year-old cohort of contemporary adults. For gender, there has been less consistency in findings for the influence of gender on relationship beliefs and marital myths. Over time, men and women have become more similar, but differences remain. Therefore, this study compared contemporary young adult men and women. Finally, although much scholarly research has been accomplished on children of divorce, less has focused specifically on the marriages of adult children of divorce. The findings of research that has been done on this group are inconsistent. Therefore, this study also analyzed the attitudes toward relationships held by young adult children of divorce.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the research findings of the literature reviewed, the following six hypotheses were proposed in the null form, in order to evaluate them in the light of data analysis:

H₀1: There are no differences between men and women in subscription to marriage myths.

H₀2: There are no differences between men and women in dysfunctional relationship beliefs.

H₀3: There are no differences among undergraduates of different ages in subscription to marriage myths.

H₀4: There are no differences among undergraduates of different ages in dysfunctional relationship beliefs.

H₀5: There are no differences between young adult children of separation/divorce and those from intact families in subscription to marriage myths.

H₀6: There are no differences between young adult children of separation/divorce and those from intact families in dysfunctional relationship beliefs.

Selection of the Sample

For this proposed study, participants were recruited from the student body of The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, during the 2004 fall semester. Individuals who were enrolled in undergraduate classes in the Child and Family Studies Department, Chemistry Department, and Human Resource Development Department were given questionnaire packets. Students who indicated on the personal information questionnaire that they had never been married, were classified as undergraduates, and were between the ages of 17 and 24 years were included in the study.

Description of the Sample

The sample consisted of students who were enrolled in Child and Family Studies, Chemistry, and Human Resource Development classes. The classes represented a variety of levels, and time was set aside during regular class time for students to complete the questionnaires. Roughly half of the sample were from a physical science class (Chemistry), whereas the other half were involved in the social sciences classes (Child and Family Studies and Human Resource Development). Comparisons were not made between these two groups because the students enrolled in these classes did not necessarily have a major in that department. In sum, over 200 undergraduates completed and returned the surveys. A few cases were deleted due to missing or incomplete data. Of the remaining sample, 164 students met the three criteria in order to be included in the study.

Descriptive analyses of the demographic data provided by the students indicated that 33% of the participants were male and 67% of the participants were female. Students

in the 17 to 20 age category comprised 69% of the sample, and the remaining 31% of participants were 21 to 24 years old. Splitting up the sample into the two age groups yielded very different group sizes, a result also seen when splitting the sample into two groups according to gender. The majority of the sample were Caucasian American/White (87.8%), and, of the remaining sample, 5.5% were African American, 3% were Asian American, 1.8% were Hispanic/Latin American, 1.8% chose the category of *other*. Of the undergraduate students included in the study, 42.7% classified themselves as freshman, 24.4% were sophomores, 7.9% were juniors, and 25.0% were seniors. Regarding the marital status of the participants' biological parents, 65% indicated that their parents were married, and 35% had parents who were separated or divorced from each other. Of those 58 students whose parents were separated or divorced, 15.9% were 6 years old or younger, 8.5% were 7 to 12 years old, 9.1% were 13 to 17 years old, and 1.8% were 18 to 24 years old when their parents split up.

Instrumentation

Students were given packets containing a personal profile form, the Marriage Quiz, the Relationship Beliefs Inventory, and a scan form. The questions were numbered 1-67, with 7 questions coming from the profile form, 20 questions from the Marriage Quiz, and 40 questions from the RBI. Respondents were asked to mark the answers on the scan form provided. Question number 7 on the personal profile form (participant age at time of parental split) was answered only by students whose biological parents had divorced or separated. The answers on the scan forms then were compiled to provide the data to be analyzed.

Personal Profile Form

A demographic information sheet (see Appendix A) was provided in the packet in order to capture the basic characteristics of each respondent. Questions regarded age, gender, ethnicity or race, marital status, university classification, and the marital status of biological parents. Responses were analyzed to provide descriptive statistics that would depict the sample in terms of sociodemographic characteristics.

The Marriage Quiz

The 20 items comprising the Marriage Quiz (see Appendix B) are constructed so that 15 are myths about marriage, and 5 are true and serve as filler items. Those 5 are deleted during the scoring process, and the remaining myths marked *true* (those responses scored as a *one*) by the participant are tallied. Scores may range from 0 to 15, with higher scores indicating more beliefs in marriage myths.

The validity and reliability of the instrument has been tested (Larson, 1988). The individual items were developed through analysis of existing literature and then reviewed by professors holding doctorates in the fields of family relations and family therapy. After further testing of the items in empirical work, the remaining items were filtered through a panel of college professors. Then those items were given to a college class to determine internal consistency, and the final 15 items were selected for the instrument. Cronbach's alpha was .70, and test-retest reliability was .89, indicating acceptable reliability (Cronbach, 1951). Criterion-related validity also was determined by giving the quiz to three different groups of people: undergraduate students, graduate students, and

members of a section under the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR). The graduate students and council professionals missed many less items than did the undergraduates.

Whereas all items were supported by the research when Larson first developed and wrote about the quiz, some of the items have become dated due to the time lapse between that study and the present one. Therefore, after personal communication with Larson and consideration given to his expressed concern for updating some items, he gave consent to proceed with an updated version of the quiz. In Items 5 and 6, the statements, as well as years, were slightly changed to make the questions more recent. Because both of these statements serve as filler items on the scale, the statement must be true to retain the nature of the original instrument. Number 5 was changed from “the divorce rate in America increased from 1960 to 1980” to the statement “the divorce rate in America stabilized from 1980 to 2001.” Over that 21-year span, the divorce rate went from 5.2 per 1,000 population in 1980 to 4.0 in 2001, with very little variation in the years between (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995 and 2002). In Number 6, the statement “a greater percentage of wives are in the work force today than in 1970” was changed to “a slightly greater percentage of wives are in the work force today than in 1990.” In 1990, the percentage of the married female population participating in the labor force was 58.4, compared to 61.0 in 2002 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). This shows a slight increase, but the change is much less incremental than in the years before 1990. Although both of these items remained unchanged in the utilization of the instrument, the statements became more current and relevant to the sample for this study.

Reliability for the current sample was tested using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951), and the pre-determined criterion for that measure was set at .60. The five filler items (Numbers 2, 5, 6, 12, and 16) were first removed, and then the 15 remaining items were analyzed for reliability. In order to achieve an acceptable level of reliability, 7 items were removed from the scale, resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of .60 for the remaining items. In keeping with the criterion level of acceptable reliability of .60 and because the remaining statements (Numbers 4, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, and 17) represented a variety of myths about the marriage relationship, only those 8 items were used in the analyses of group differences to test hypotheses focused on the marriage quiz. Those statements used were (a) *the best predictor of overall satisfaction is the quality of a couple's sex life*; (b) *marital satisfaction for a wife is usually lower if she is employed full time than if she is a full-time homemaker*; (c) *if my spouse loves me, he/she should instinctively know what I want and need to be happy*; (d) *no matter how I behave, my spouse should love me simply because he/she is my spouse*; (e) *husbands usually make more lifestyle adjustments in marriage than wives*; (f) *couples who cohabitated before marriage usually report greater marital satisfaction than couples who did not*; (g) *I can change my spouse by pointing out his/her inadequacies, errors, etc.*; and (h) *either my spouse loves me or does not love me; nothing I do will affect the way my spouse feels about me.*

Relationship Belief Inventory

As mentioned earlier, the items on this questionnaire (see Appendix C) are representative of these five dysfunctional relationship belief subscales: (a) *Disagreement is destructive* (e.g., disagreement is destructive to a relationship), (b) *mind reading is*

expected (e.g., partners should be able to read each other's minds), (c) *partners cannot change* (e.g., partners are incapable of changing themselves or their relationships), (d) *sexual perfectionism* (e.g., one should expect sexual perfection of oneself and/or one's partner), and (e) *the sexes are different* (e.g., men and women have fundamental differences in their relationship needs). Participants responded to the 40-item instrument using a Likert-type scale indicating to what degree they believe each statement is true or false. For each of the subscales, approximately half of the items are positively keyed and half of the items are negatively keyed. The range for scores is 0 to 200, with higher scores indicating greater degrees of belief in dysfunctional beliefs. For each subscale, scores may range from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating greater degrees of belief in the specific dysfunctional beliefs represented by the subscale.

The Relationship Belief Inventory has been found to be both reliable and valid. Results from Eidelson and Epstein (1982) indicated internal consistency, convergent validity, and construct validity for the subscales used in the instrument. The calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each subscale ranged from .72 to .81, establishing internal consistency. Four of the five scales were significantly positively correlated with a measure that indicated irrational beliefs about self; the exception was *the sexes are different*. Finally, all five RBI scales were significantly negatively correlated with participant scores on an instrument measuring marital adjustment.

Emmelkamp, Krol, Sanderman, and Rüphan (1987) found that the Relationship Belief Inventory subscales have adequate internal consistency and test-retest reliability. Cronbach alphas were within acceptable limits (scales ranged from .44 to .65) and test-retest reliability for the subscales was good (ranging from .58 to .69). Convergent validity

of the RBI constructs was supported through positive association with an irrational belief test and negative association with a communication inventory, although the discriminant validity was unsatisfactory because it could not be confirmed. The authors concluded that the instrument stands as a profitable research instrument; researchers should only be cautious when implementing it for clinical use.

In the current study, reliability for the overall RBI was .71, and Cronbach's alphas for the 8-item subscales ranged from .59 to .71. More specifically, the Cronbach's value for *disagreement is destructive* was .66, *mindreading is expected* was .71, *partners cannot change* and *sexual perfectionism* were both .59, and *the sexes are different* was .60. Once again, the pre-determined criterion for Cronbach's alpha in this study was .60. All 40 items were retained for use in the analysis of group differences.

Procedure

Data were collected from all willing students in the classes mentioned previously. The classes chosen to receive the packets were those with a greater variety of students by university classification and gender. Out of those, packets from never-married undergraduate students between the ages of 17 and 24 years were separated. Information received on the personal profile form, marriage quiz, and belief inventory from these students was entered into the SPSS statistical analysis computer program. The program then was used to analyze data from the participants who met the sampling criteria.

Data Analyses

Quantitative data analysis using the SPSS software program examined findings from the information provided by the students. First, descriptive statistics were run on the information included in the personal profile form in order to describe the sample. Then, t tests were run to test group differences between students of different ages, genders, and marital status of their families of origin (divorced/separated and intact) on each of the questionnaires.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

As mentioned previously, each of the scales used in the questionnaire contain myths about marriage and relationships. The five subscales of the RBI represent specific dysfunctional concepts about relationships. The possible range of scores for each scale was as follows: The Marriage Quiz (0-8, after the other items were dropped to increase reliability), the Relationship Belief Inventory (0-200), and each RBI subscale (0-40). During analyses, the subscales were abbreviated as follows: *Disagreement is destructive* = D, *mindreading is expected* = M, *partners cannot change* = C, *sexual perfectionism* = S, and *the sexes are different* = MF. The abbreviation “MQ” represented the Marriage Quiz, and overall scores on the Relationship Belief Inventory were listed under “RBI.”

Means for each of the two scales and for the five RBI subscales were computed for each of the groups that the sample was divided into, according to the six null hypotheses. Those groups defined for the comparisons were male, female, ages 17-20, ages 21-24, those from homes where the biological parents were still married, and those with separated/divorced families of origin.

Males

In the present study, males ($n = 54$) had a mean score of 2.78 on the Marriage Quiz, with a standard deviation of 1.67. Their mean score for the overall RBI was 97.83,

with a standard deviation of 17.62. For each of the five subscales, their scores were as follows: *Disagreement is destructive*, $\underline{M} = 12.80$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.25$; *mindreading is expected*, $\underline{M} = 16.50$ and $\underline{SD} = 6.54$; *partners cannot change*, $\underline{M} = 15.15$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.30$; *sexual perfectionism*, $\underline{M} = 20.94$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.36$; and *the sexes are different*, $\underline{M} = 20.74$ and $\underline{SD} = 6.29$. Based on their higher means, it was concluded that is possible that males adhere more strongly to beliefs about *sexual perfectionism* and *the sexes are different* than beliefs related to the other three subscales (see Table 1).

Females

The mean score for females ($\underline{n} = 110$) on the Marriage Quiz was 2.08, with a standard deviation of 1.90. Females had a mean score of 98.24 on the overall RBI, with a standard deviation of 16.44. Regarding each of the five RBI subscales, women scored as follows: *Disagreement is destructive*, $\underline{M} = 12.86$ and $\underline{SD} = 4.46$; *mindreading is expected*, $\underline{M} = 16.29$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.20$; *partners cannot change*, $\underline{M} = 14.13$ and $\underline{SD} = 4.69$; *sexual perfectionism*, $\underline{M} = 16.93$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.09$; and *the sexes are different*, $\underline{M} = 20.68$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.67$. Based on their means for the subscales, it was concluded that women were more likely to affirm statements related to the dysfunctional belief that *the sexes are different* than statements regarding the other four beliefs. They were less likely to believe that *disagreement is destructive* (see Table 1).

Ages 17-20

Those participants aged 17-20 ($\underline{n} = 113$) had mean scores of 2.40 for the Marriage Quiz and 98.30 for the RBI, with standard deviations of 1.91 and 16.86 respectively. This

Table 1: Group Statistics for Gender

Measure	Gender	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MQ	Male	54	2.78	1.67	.23
	Female	110	2.08	1.90	.18
RBI	Male	54	97.83	17.62	2.40
	Female	110	98.24	16.44	1.57
D	Male	54	12.80	5.25	.71
	Female	110	12.86	4.46	.42
M	Male	54	16.50	6.54	.89
	Female	110	16.29	5.20	.50
C	Male	54	15.15	5.30	.72
	Female	110	14.13	4.69	.45
S	Male	54	20.94	5.36	.73
	Female	110	16.93	5.09	.48
MF	Male	54	20.74	6.29	.86
	Female	110	20.68	5.67	.54

age group had means as follows on the subscales: *Disagreement is destructive*, $\underline{M} = 12.70$ and $\underline{SD} = 4.85$; *mindreading is expected*, $\underline{M} = 16.67$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.81$; *partners cannot change*, $\underline{M} = 14.47$ and $\underline{SD} = 4.99$; *sexual perfectionism*, $\underline{M} = 18.49$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.91$; and *the sexes are different*, $\underline{M} = 20.85$ and $\underline{SD} = 6.05$. Based on the mean of the subscales, it was concluded that students in the 17 to 20 age range were most likely to believe that *the sexes are different* over the beliefs represented by the other four subscales (see Table 2).

Ages 21-24

Participants ranging from age 21 to 24 ($n = 51$) had a mean score of 2.12 for the Marriage Quiz, with a standard deviation of 1.70. Their RBI mean score was 97.67, with a standard deviation of 16.76. Students in this age range had the following scores for the five subscales: *Disagreement is destructive*, $\underline{M} = 13.16$ and $\underline{SD} = 4.41$; *mindreading is expected*, $\underline{M} = 15.67$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.28$; *partners cannot change*, $\underline{M} = 14.45$ and $\underline{SD} = 4.75$; *sexual perfectionism*, $\underline{M} = 17.72$ and $\underline{SD} = 4.48$; and *the sexes are different*, $\underline{M} = 20.37$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.47$. Because the mean score for *the sexes are different* was higher than the mean score for each of the other subscales, it was concluded that students in this age group were more likely to affirm statements regarding this dysfunctional belief (see Table 2).

Undergraduates with Married Biological Parents

Students whose biological parents remained married to each other ($n = 106$) had a mean score of 2.13 ($\underline{SD} = 1.73$) on the Marriage Quiz and a mean score of 97.36 ($\underline{SD} = 16.38$) on the Relationship Belief Inventory. Their scores for the RBI subscales are as

Table 2: Group Statistics for Age

Measure	Age	<u>n</u>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MQ	17 - 20	113	2.40	1.91	.18
	21 - 24	51	2.12	1.70	.24
RBI	17 - 20	113	98.30	16.86	1.59
	21 - 24	51	97.67	16.76	2.35
D	17 - 20	113	12.70	4.86	.46
	21 - 24	51	13.16	4.41	.62
M	17 - 20	113	16.67	5.81	.55
	21 - 24	51	15.67	5.28	.74
C	17 - 20	113	14.47	4.99	.47
	21 - 24	51	14.45	4.75	.66
S	17 - 20	113	18.49	5.91	.56
	21 - 24	51	17.72	4.48	.63
MF	17 - 20	113	20.85	6.05	.57
	21 - 24	51	20.37	5.47	.76

follows: *Disagreement is destructive*, $\underline{M} = 12.53$ and $\underline{SD} = 4.77$; *mindreading is expected*, $\underline{M} = 16.14$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.86$; *partners cannot change*, $\underline{M} = 14.32$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.05$; *sexual perfectionism*, $\underline{M} = 18.55$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.76$; and *the sexes are different*, $\underline{M} = 21.41$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.90$. Their belief in statements regarding *the sexes are different* was strongest out of the five subscales (see Table 3).

Undergraduates with Separated/Divorced Biological Parents

Participants in this category ($n = 58$) had mean scores of 2.63 on the Marriage Quiz and 99.46 on the RBI, with standard deviations of 2.02 and 17.56 respectively. They had the following scores on the RBI subscales: *Disagreement is destructive*, $\underline{M} = 13.41$ and $\underline{SD} = 4.60$; *mindreading is expected*, $\underline{M} = 16.75$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.28$; *partners cannot change*, $\underline{M} = 14.72$ and $\underline{SD} = 4.66$; *sexual perfectionism*, $\underline{M} = 17.71$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.00$; and *the sexes are different*, $\underline{M} = 19.40$ and $\underline{SD} = 5.60$. The subscale with the highest mean score was *the sexes are different*, meaning that students with separated or divorced biological parents were more inclined to support statements related to that dysfunctional belief than the other four beliefs represented (see Table 3).

Test of Hypothesis 1

The first null hypothesis was that there were no gender differences in subscription to myths about marriage. Group differences were analyzed using a t test that compared the mean score of the males with the mean score of the females on the Marriage Quiz (see Table 4). A nondirectional hypothesis was tested because a result in either direction would be important. Results indicated that there was a difference between the mean

Table 3: Group Statistics for Marital Status of Biological Parents

Measure	Parental Marital Status	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MQ	Married	106	2.13	1.73	.17
	Divorced/Separated	58	2.64	2.02	.26
RBI	Married	106	97.36	16.38	1.59
	Divorced/Separated	58	99.46	17.56	2.31
D	Married	106	12.53	4.77	.46
	Divorced/Separated	58	13.41	4.60	.60
M	Married	106	16.14	5.86	.57
	Divorced/Separated	58	16.76	5.28	.69
C	Married	106	14.32	5.05	.49
	Divorced/Separated	58	14.72	4.66	.61
S	Married	106	18.55	5.76	.56
	Divorced/Separated	58	17.71	5.00	.66
MF	Married	106	21.42	5.90	.57
	Divorced/Separated	58	19.40	5.60	.74

Table 4: Group Differences for Gender

Measure	t test for Equality of Means						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
MQ	2.295	162	.023*	.70	.30	.10	1.29
RBI	-.144	162	.886	-.40	2.80	-5.93	5.12
D	-.086	162	.932	-.07	.78	-1.62	1.48
M	.222	162	.825	.21	.94	-1.65	2.07
C	1.255	162	.211	1.02	.81	-.58	2.63
S	4.668	162	.001**	4.02	.86	2.32	5.72
MF	.060	162	.952	.06	.98	-1.87	1.99

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .001$

Marriage Quiz score for the male group ($\underline{M} = 2.78$, $\underline{SD} = 1.76$) and the mean Marriage Quiz score for the female group ($\underline{M} = 2.08$, $\underline{SD} = 1.90$). The .70 difference between the means was statistically significant ($t(162) = 2.29$, $p = .023$, two-tailed, 95% CI = .10 to 1.29). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, leading to the conclusion that males were more likely than females to believe in myths related to marriage.

Test of Hypothesis 2

The second null hypothesis was that there were no gender differences in dysfunctional relationship beliefs. Analyses were performed using a t test in order to determine any differences between males and females in beliefs about dysfunctional relationship beliefs, based on their total mean scores on the Relationship Belief Inventory. No significant differences were found between the two groups in their overall responses on the instrument (see Table 4). Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. However, results did indicate that there was a difference between the mean *sexual perfectionism* subscale score for the male group ($\underline{M} = 20.94$, $\underline{SD} = 5.36$) and the mean *sexual perfectionism* subscale score for the female group ($\underline{M} = 16.93$, $\underline{SD} = 5.09$). The 4.01 difference between the means was statistically significant ($t(162) = 4.67$, $p = .000$, two-tailed, 95% CI = 2.32 to 5.72). Based on the resulting gender differences on this subscale of the RBI, it was concluded that males were more likely than females to affirm dysfunctional relationship beliefs regarding *sexual perfectionism*.

Test of Hypothesis 3

The third null hypothesis was that there were no differences among undergraduates of different ages in subscription to marriage myths. Upon performing a t test to analyze group differences between 17-20 year-olds and 21-24 year-olds, the Marriage Quiz mean scores for each group did not differ significantly from one another (see Table 5). Therefore, the null form of Hypothesis 3 was not rejected.

Test of Hypothesis 4

The fourth null hypothesis was that there were no differences among the age groups in dysfunctional relationship beliefs. A procedure using a t test to examine group differences found that the two groups did not have Relationship Belief Inventory mean scores that were significantly different (see Table 5). Furthermore, there were no significant differences on any of the five subscales of the RBI. These findings support the null form of Hypothesis 4.

Test of Hypothesis 5

The fifth null hypothesis was that there were no differences between children of separation/divorce and children from intact families of origin in subscription to marriage myths. Group differences on the Marriage Quiz were analyzed using a t test, and findings were that the mean responses of the two groups on the instrument did not significantly differ from one another (see Table 6). Therefore, the null was not rejected.

Table 5: Group Differences for Age

Measure	t test for Equality of Means						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
MQ	.899	162	.370	.28	.31	-.34	.90
RBI	.223	162	.824	.63	2.84	-4.97	6.24
D	-.574	162	.567	-.46	.80	-2.03	1.12
M	1.054	162	.293	1.01	.95	-.88	2.89
C	.022	162	.983	.018	.83	-1.62	1.66
S	.820	162	.414	.76	.93	-1.07	2.60
MF	.481	162	.631	.48	.99	-1.48	2.43

Table 6: Group Differences for Marital Status of Biological Parents

Measure	t test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		
						Lower	Upper
MQ	-1.685	162	.094	-.51	.30	-1.10	.09
RBI	-.768	162	.444	-2.11	2.74	-7.53	3.31
D	-1.151	162	.251	-.88	.77	-2.40	.63
M	-.667	162	.506	-.62	.92	-2.44	1.21
C	-.502	162	.616	-.40	.80	-1.99	1.18
S	.935	162	.351	.84	.90	-.934	2.61
MF	2.132	162	.035*	2.02	.95	.15	3.89

* $p \leq .05$

Test of Hypothesis 6

The sixth and final hypothesis was that there were no differences between children of separation/divorce and children from intact families of origin in dysfunctional relationship beliefs. A t test of the RBI scores revealed that the two groups did not respond significantly differently on the overall instrument, supporting the null hypothesis (see Table 6). However, on the subscale *the sexes are different*, the mean subscale score for the group with married biological parents ($M = 21.41$, $SD = 5.90$) was higher than the group with separated/divorced parents ($M = 19.40$, $SD = 5.60$), and the 2.01 difference between the means was statistically significant ($t(162) = 2.13$, $p = .035$, two-tailed, 95% $CI = .15$ to 3.89). Based on this information, undergraduates with biological parents who are married to one another believed more strongly in *the sexes are different* than did those students whose biological parents were separated/divorced from one another.

Additional Analyses

When further analyzing sociodemographic information in light of the questionnaire results, one additional finding appeared in regard to the race and ethnicity of the participants. Because the sample was predominantly White, the races/ethnicities were grouped into two categories, *White/Caucasian* and *various other* (see Table 7). Comparing students of a White/Caucasian background with students of all other backgrounds (i.e., African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, and other), there were no significant group differences found on the Marriage Quiz or the overall RBI. However, there was a difference on the *partners cannot change* subscale (see Table 8). The mean score for the White/Caucasian group ($M = 14.18$, $SD = 4.81$) was lower

Table 7: Group Statistics for Race/Ethnicity

Measure	Race/Ethnicity	<u>n</u>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MQ	White	144	2.21	1.86	.16
	Various other	20	3.05	1.57	.35
RBI	White	144	98.16	15.00	1.25
	Various other	20	97.70	26.88	6.01
D	White	144	12.96	4.90	.41
	Various other	20	12.00	3.01	.67
M	White	144	16.33	5.57	.46
	Various other	20	16.60	6.42	1.44
C	White	144	14.18	4.81	.40
	Various other	20	16.50	5.23	1.17
S	White	144	18.18	5.39	.45
	Various other	20	18.75	6.36	1.42
MF	White	144	20.76	5.82	.48
	Various other	20	20.25	6.29	1.41

Table 8: Group Differences for Race/Ethnicity

Measure	t test for Equality of Means						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
MQ	-1.924	162	.056	-.84	.44	-1.70	.022
RBI	.114	162	.909	.46	4.02	-7.47	8.39
D	.851	162	.396	.96	1.13	-1.26	3.18
M	-.202	162	.840	-.27	1.35	-2.95	2.40
C	-1.999	162	.047*	-2.32	1.16	-4.61	-.029
S	-.433	162	.666	-.57	1.32	-3.17	2.029
MF	.366	162	.714	.51	1.40	-2.26	3.28

* $p \leq .05$

than for the group of students from other backgrounds ($\underline{M} = 16.50$, $\underline{SD} = 5.23$), and the 2.32 difference between the means was statistically significant ($t(162) = -2.00$, $p = .047$, two-tailed, 95% $\underline{CI} = -4.61$ to $-.03$). Therefore, students identifying themselves as White or Caucasian American were less likely to believe in the dysfunctional belief that *partners cannot change* than were the students identifying themselves as something other than White or Caucasian American.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected in this study revealed that there were some differences in how various groups of undergraduates perceive marriage. Upon examining the scores of the students for the various measures related to marriage myths and dysfunctional relationship beliefs, it was noted that most groups missed roughly 25% of the eight items on the Marriage Quiz and almost half of the items on the Relationship Belief Inventory. Of the RBI subscales, all students were least likely to affirm statements related to the idea that *disagreement is destructive*, and female students across all categories were most likely to believe that *the sexes are different*. The *sexual perfectionism* subscale had the most missed items for males in the present study. Based on the group comparisons that were found to be statistically significant, it would seem that gender, family of origin, and possibly race or ethnicity have the most impact on the beliefs an individual holds about relationships and marriage. In the current study, there were found no significant differences between groups related to age.

Conclusions from the Study

1. There was a substantial degree of dysfunctional relationship beliefs and beliefs in myths about marriage among the sample.

2. There were gender differences related to belief in marriage myths (based with a higher mean score for males on the Marriage Quiz), meaning that males subscribed more to myths about marriage.

3. There were gender differences related to the dysfunctional beliefs of *sexual perfectionism* (based on a higher mean score for males on the RBI subscale), meaning that males were more likely to hold these dysfunctional relationship beliefs.

4. There were structure of family of origin differences related to the dysfunctional belief of *the sexes are different* (based on a higher mean score for participants with biological parents who remain married than those with separated/divorced parents). Undergraduates from intact families of origin were more likely to falsely believe that *the sexes are different* than those undergraduates from separated or divorced families of origin.

5. There was one significant racial/ethnic difference of belief in the *partners cannot change* subscale. Participants identifying themselves as White American or Caucasian had a lower mean score on that subscale than did the students from other backgrounds, therefore those students from other various backgrounds were more likely to believe in that particular dysfunctional belief.

6. The internal consistency of the Marriage Quiz was not found to be as acceptable with this sample as it had been in previous research.

Discussion

The results of the study yielded both statistically significant differences between a few groups and scores between groups that did not differ significantly. Of those items that did achieve statistical significance, the males' higher scores on the Marriage Quiz maintained were consistent with previous research that males and females perceive even the basic meaning of marriage differently (Barich & Bielby, 1996). Just as Sprecher and Toro-Morn (2002) found that men are more idealistic about romance, the present study supported the notion that men are more likely to believe in myths about marriage.

In addition, men also scored significantly higher than women on the *sexual perfectionism* subscale of the Relationship Belief Inventory. According to Eidelson and Epstein (1982), this subscale represents unhealthy ideas related to beliefs that one must be a "perfect" sexual partner. A decrease in sexual arousal and performance can result from the perception of sex as a task, thus reducing the pleasure derived from the relationship (p. 716). In one past study measuring beliefs in myths about sexuality (Kumar & Jadeja, 1993), both males and females scored highest in myths related to male sexuality; however, females indicated a better understanding of their own sexuality than did males. Findings consistent with the conclusion of the current study also include Frazier and Esterly (1990), who found that men considered sex and physical attractiveness to be the most important aspects of a relationship. Finally, the present study echoes the findings of a previous study also using the RBI (Stackert & Bursik, 2003) that found men to have significantly higher scores on this particular subscale of the instrument.

Do college students from intact families of origin believe more in *the sexes are different* than students with separated or divorced biological parents? This subscale encompasses the idea that partners may perceive men and women as differing so dramatically in their personalities and relationship needs that they may encourage stereotyped perceptions about their significant others which diminish sensitivity to individual characteristics (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982, p. 716). Despite much of the previous literature describing children from intact homes being better off when it comes to their own relationships and marriages (Ross & Mirowsky, 1999; Jacquet & Surra, 2001; Mahl, 2001), the current study found the undergraduates from intact homes to have a stronger belief in the RBI subscale *the sexes are different*. Because much of the previous research does present inconsistent conclusions about the influence that family of origin has on marriage and relationship beliefs, the current study's findings remained relevant to past findings. For example, the conclusion from one study was that relationship beliefs are not negatively affected by parental divorce (Sprecher, Cate, & Levin, 1998). Amato (1988) found that adult children from divorced families were more likely to have less idealized views of marriage, possibly contributing to their comparable scores on the Marriage Quiz and RBI, and better scores on *the sexes are different* subscale. The lack of difference between the groups on the scores for the Marriage Quiz and overall RBI may be explained by Amato's findings that, once he controlled for various other family-of-origin variables, few differences remained between young adults from intact families and young adults from divorced families regarding their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of marriage.

Also, in the present sample, nothing was known about the nature of the relationships between the parents who did stay married. Whether they were healthy or not could have impacted how the students from those families perceived the differences between genders represented by that subscale. Those students from separated or divorced homes may have scored lower because, in some cases, dysfunctional relationships may be more detrimental than no relationship at all (Ross, 1995). In addition, in the present study, of those participants reporting that their biological parents had split up, almost half indicated that they were under the age of 6 when it happened. This is in keeping with Judith Wallerstein's (1989) findings that, of children currently experiencing divorce, half are under age 6.

The unexpected additional finding regarding racial/ethnic background and the *partners cannot change* subscale lent itself to the possibility that certain sociodemographic characteristics may potentially influence personal beliefs about marriage and relationships. When holding beliefs related to this subscale, partners feel as if they cannot change themselves or the quality of their relationship. As a result, the satisfaction derived from the relationship can become diminished because partners have lower expectations, feel less committed to the relationship, and take less initiative to resolve conflict (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982, p. 715). In short, a sense of hopelessness prevails. Duncan, Box, and Silliman (1996) compared Black and White college students' perceptions of marriage preparation programs. They found that Blacks reported a significantly greater perceived need than Whites for marriage preparation. In the current sample, the group of students identifying themselves as something other than White or Caucasian American was more likely to hold the dysfunctional belief that *partners*

cannot change. Of that group, the majority of the participants identified themselves as African American, lending support to the findings of the previous study.

The finding that female undergraduates had lower scores on both the Marriage Quiz and the Relationship Belief Inventory was consistent with some previous research. Though some researchers have concluded that women are more likely hold false beliefs about marriage and relationships (DeRoda, Martinez-Iñigo, DePaul, & Yela, 1999), many researchers have concluded that females, more than males, hold more realistic knowledge regarding these contexts. Though the possibility exists that women are more prepared because they are more motivated than men to marry (Inglis & Greenglass, 1989), they have scored lower than men in several different studies. Females scored lower on both the Relationship Belief Inventory and the Romantic Beliefs Scale in one study (Sprecher & Metts, 1989), and in another study (Sharp & Ganong, 2000), women expressed fewer unrealistic beliefs than men. Finally, Newman, Roberts, and Syré (1993) found that, when women described the concept of family, they were more likely to mention family roles, which were outlined by a few of the questions on the Marriage Quiz. Perhaps a deeper understanding of family dynamics led the women in this study to score lower on the Marriage Quiz than the men.

Age was not a significant factor in predicting scores on the Marriage Quiz or the RBI. This was inconsistent with some previous research, including one study (Honeycutt, 1991) examining undergraduate students and their adherence to myths about taking a marital and family communication course. In that study, there was a significant negative association between age and the number of myths endorsed. Sharp and Ganong (2000) also studied undergraduates and found age to be associated with scores on the Romantic

Beliefs Scale. Some studies, however, divided the participants into general categories such as under 30 years old and 30 or older so that all college students remained in the same group (Doosje, Rojahn, & Fischer, 1999; Risch, Riley, & Lawler, 2003). Therefore, findings from the present study were inconsistent with previous findings, but few previous studies have used age differences among college students as a consideration in differences about marriage beliefs.

Implications for Theory

Implications for theory can be drawn from the present study. According to symbolic interactionism, an individual's behavior is a reaction to internal processes calculating the prescribed manner suitable in regard to the prevalent social context. Because behavior is a choice (Winton, 1995), based on the interpretation of that social context, the mere existence of marriage myths and dysfunctional relationship beliefs does not ensure consistent adherence throughout all individuals. For the current sample, males more strongly endorsed myths about marriage and *sexual perfectionism* than did females, and participants from intact families more frequently endorsed statements regarding *the sexes are different* than did participants from separated or divorced families. Based on this theory, outcomes must be evaluated according to how the individuals involved perceived the situation (Klein & White, 1996). Individuals construct different personal meanings about signs and symbols common to an environment. Therefore, the meanings held by individuals are what should be used to understand human behavior, and those individuals are preceded by society. The results of this study supported this theory because, though the myths are present throughout society, some are internalized more

strongly by males and, in some cases, young adults from intact families. Because of the outcomes in the present study, it could be concluded that society perpetuates more myths about marriage, particularly the subscales focused on *sexual perfectionism* and *the sexes are different*, than about the content of relationships generally and, more specifically, the other three subscales: *disagreement is destructive*, *mindreading is expected*, and *partners cannot change*. In conclusion, the overall fact that the students did claim myths as truths on an average of 25% of the items on the Marriage Quiz and almost half of the items on the RBI revealed that the internal meanings they hold about marriage are influenced by the beliefs constructed in society.

Implications for Future Research

Some of the implications for future research from this study are in reference to sampling and analysis, whereas others are related to specific findings. First, although the sample size was acceptable, the sample itself was very homogeneous with 67% of participants being female and 88% being White. Also, 69% of the sample was between the ages of 17 and 20 years, whereas only 31% were aged 21 to 24. Because significant findings were present in the current study in spite of such homogeneity, future researchers would do well to further explore these differences with a more diverse group of undergraduates. Sampling also could be expanded to other departments of study to include persons with a wider variety of interests.

Second, because both family of origin and gender were significant for items on the questionnaire, continued assessment of any interaction between the two variables would be of interest. Of particular interest would be what influenced the participants from

intact families to score higher on the RBI subscale representing the belief that *the sexes are different*. Possible contributors could be gender or condition of the intact marriage (e.g., happy/unhappy, stable/unstable). Although the separated/divorced group and the intact group did not differ significantly on their means for the Marriage Quiz ($p \leq .05$), there was a trend to indicate some group differences ($p \leq .10$). Further research should be conducted to examine subscription to marriage myths with larger and more heterogeneous samples of young adults from divorced and intact families.

Third, further exploration of any association between undergraduate age and adherence to marriage myths and dysfunctional relationship beliefs is necessary in light of the inconsistencies of previous research and lack of significance in the current study. Are undergraduates so much alike in their beliefs, despite age differences, that they performed similarly on the survey, or are there subtle differences yet to be found?

Fourth, because race was not set forth as a potential variable in this study, the significance of the sociodemographic characteristic on the *partners cannot change* subscale was unexpected. Partly because of the expected homogeneity of the sample and partly because of the lack of previous research, race was not initially considered to be a factor in predicting the marriage beliefs of undergraduate students. Because marriage rates are lower for non-White groups in general (Acock & Demo, 1994, p. 11), future research should examine any association between the lower marriage rates and their beliefs about marriage and relationships. Because of the significantly higher scores on that particular subscale for those students from backgrounds other than Caucasian, follow-up with a more diverse sample might reveal additional information regarding this area of marriage and relationship beliefs.

Finally, it was difficult to obtain an acceptable value of internal consistency for the Marriage Quiz. Cronbach's alpha with this sample was lower than those reported in previous studies, and the internal consistency of this instrument needs to be examined in any research project utilizing it. The low value may have been due in part to the forced choice nature of a true/false response, as well as the homogeneous sample in the present study. For future research, however, the internal consistency of the Marriage Quiz does need to be examined closely.

Implications for Practice

The results in this study were consistent with previous studies that have stressed the need for family life education programs that focus on dispelling the myths and false beliefs about marriage and relationships (Honeycutt, 1991; Risch, Riley, & Lawler, 2003; Sharp & Ganong, 2000). Programs specifically targeting the marital relationship need to be available to college students, especially those who have yet to be married. Data analysis from the present study found that students do endorse marriage myths and dysfunctional relationship beliefs. Laner and Russell (1994) found that college students held high expectations for marriage but that a marriage education course for unmarried students had modest outcomes among the female participants.

The effectiveness, design, and content of marriage preparation programs have become a focus for research (Silliman & Schumm, 1999). Premarital prevention programs have been found significantly effective in increasing interpersonal skills and overall relationship quality, at least for the short term (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). Another form of education can be found on the Internet. One study evaluated a family life

education Website and found that it was used by individuals worldwide, was viewed positively, and had a positive impact on those who visited the site (Steimle & Duncan, 2004).

Larson (1992) used nine unrealistic beliefs about selecting a mate in a premarital counseling technique to present a contrast for more functional, healthier beliefs. Another study used the top issues and problems for couples married less than 6 years as the content for premarital education (Risch, Riley, & Lawler, 2003) for couples considering marriage and also listed the following six goals for premarital education programs: (a) They communicate to couples that marriage matters, not only to them as a primary interpersonal relationship but also to the multiple organization in which they live as a basic social and religious institution; (b) they help couples examine, and either confirm or alter, their decision to marry this person at this time; (c) they help couples explore various models of marriage and identify and discuss crucial, possibly problematic, areas of their life together; (d) they teach couples skills in dealing with those problematic issues; (e) they inform couples of educational and counseling options and predispose them to seek those options if they are needed later in their marriages; and (f) they may reduce the risk of marital dissatisfaction and instability. Schumm, Silliman, and Bell (2000) found that the participants in their study who had premarital counseling had a higher likelihood of using marital and family therapy services later on, lending support to the fifth goal (“They inform couples of educational and counseling options and predispose them to seek those options if they are needed later in their marriages”) of premarital education.

Based on the scores in the present study, program content could include information regarding the dysfunctional relationship beliefs of *sexual perfectionism*,

partners cannot change, and the sexes are different. Also, because of the gender difference in the scores on the marriage quiz, information should be offered regarding those eight items/myths: (a) The best single predictor of overall marital satisfaction is the quality of a couple's sex life; (b) marital satisfaction for a wife is usually lower if she is employed full time than if she is a full-time homemaker; (c) if my spouse loves me, he/she should instinctively know what I want and need to be happy; (d) no matter how I behave, my spouse should love me simply because he/she is my spouse; (e) husbands usually make more lifestyle adjustments in marriages than wives; (f) couples who cohabitated before marriage usually report greater marital satisfaction than couples who did not; (g) I can change my spouse by pointing out his/her inadequacies, errors, etc.; and (h) either my spouse loves me or does not love me; nothing I do will affect the way my spouse feels about me.

Finally, whether the program is in the form of premarital counseling for couples or a more generalized education program, there is a need to educate young adults about marriage so that they have realistic expectations and successful relationships (Powell & Cassidy, 2001). Such programs could be provided by marriage therapists, family life educators, or other teachers; and they could take place in many different environments.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations of the present study. First, as mentioned before, the homogeneity of the sample was a concern. Students were only sampled in certain classes (based on the consent of the professor), in certain departments (based on access to the classes and professors), so that the sample may not be entirely representative of the

student population at the university. Secondly, the study implemented only self-report measures to collect the data. There is no way to ensure the accuracy of the students' responses, so that the data quality cannot be verified. Qualitative studies of undergraduates and their beliefs about marriage would help ensure the validity of the quantitative data. In addition, the uneven group sizes for gender and age was of concern. The sample was mostly female and fell mostly in the younger age group.

The instrumentation itself had a limitation. As mentioned previously, it was difficult to obtain an acceptable Cronbach's alpha for the Marriage Quiz. In the end, seven items had to be discarded in order to acquire a suitable value, with the information from those items being sacrificed. More evaluation of the internal reliability of the Marriage Quiz needs to take place so that the quiz will be able to provide results for all 15 items.

Summary

This study examined the marriage myths and dysfunctional relationship beliefs held by never-married undergraduate students between the ages of 17 and 24 years. Gender, age, and family of origin were evaluated as factors influencing those beliefs in light of the participants' scores on both the Marriage Quiz and the Relationship Belief Inventory. It was found that significant gender differences were present on the Marriage Quiz and the *sexual perfectionism* subscale of the RBI, with males scoring higher on both. Also, family-of-origin differences were apparent on the RBI subscale *the sexes are different*, with students from intact families scoring higher on this dysfunctional belief subscale than students with separated or divorced biological parents. Finally, an

unexpected sociodemographic characteristic, race, was significant on the *partners cannot change* subscale. Those students identifying themselves as White or Caucasian American scored better than those students identifying themselves as from a different background. There were no significant differences in scores between the different ages of undergraduates.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PERSONAL PROFILE FORM

Please answer questions by filling in the correct letter on the scan form provided. Thanks.

1. Gender:

- A. _____ Male
- B. _____ Female

2. Age:

- A. _____ 16 - 17 years
- B. _____ 17 - 20
- C. _____ 21 - 24
- D. _____ 25 or older

3. How would you describe your ethnic or racial background?

- A. _____ White/American, Caucasian
- B. _____ African American
- C. _____ Asian American, Asian Pacific
- D. _____ Latino/Hispanic American
- E. _____ Native American
- F. _____ Middle Eastern American
- G. _____ International Student
- H. _____ Other

4. Present marital status:

- A. _____ Single (never married)
- B. _____ Married (first marriage)
- C. _____ Separated
- D. _____ Divorced
- E. _____ Widowed
- F. _____ Remarried
- G. _____ Other

5. Current university classification:

- A. _____ Freshman
- B. _____ Sophomore
- C. _____ Junior
- D. _____ Senior
- E. _____ Graduate student
- F. _____ Other

6. Marital status of biological parents:

- A. _____ Married to each other
- B. _____ Divorced from each other
- C. _____ Separated from each other
- D. _____ Widowed
- E. _____ Were never married to each other

7. If biological parents did break up, your age at time of the split: (Answer only if you put B or C for number 6.)

- A. _____ Under 6
- B. _____ 7 - 12
- C. _____ 13 - 17
- D. _____ 18 - 24
- E. _____ 25 or older

APPENDIX B

THE MARRIAGE QUIZ

The statements below describe the marriage relationship. Please mark each item as true or false, by answering 0 for false and 1 for true. *Please mark every one.*

1. A husband's marital satisfaction is usually lower if his wife is employed full time than if she is a full-time homemaker.
2. Today most young, single, never-married people will eventually get married.
3. In most marriages, having a child improves marital satisfaction for both spouses.
4. The best single predictor of overall marital satisfaction is the quality of a couple's sex life.
5. The divorce rate in America stabilized from 1980 to 2001.
6. A slightly greater percentage of wives are in the work force today than in 1990.
7. Marital satisfaction for a wife is usually lower if she is employed full time than if she is a full-time homemaker.
8. If my spouse loves me, he/she should instinctively know what I want and need to be happy.
9. In a marriage in which the wife is employed full time, the husband usually assumes an equal share of the housekeeping.
10. For most couples, marital satisfaction gradually increase from the first year of marriage through the childbearing years, the teen years, the empty nest period, and retirement.
11. No matter how I behave, my spouse should love me simply because he/she is my spouse.
12. One of the most frequent marital problems is poor communication.

13. Husbands usually make more lifestyle adjustments in marriage than wives.
14. Couples who cohabitated before marriage usually report greater marital satisfaction than couples who did not.
15. I can change my spouse by pointing out his/her inadequacies, errors, etc.
16. Couples who marry when one or both partners are under the age of 18 have more chance of eventually divorcing than those who marry when they are older.
17. Either my spouse loves me or does not love me; nothing I do will affect the way my spouse feels about me.
18. The more a spouse discloses positive and negative information to his/her partner, the greater the marital satisfaction of both partners.
19. I must feel better about my partner before I can change my behavior toward him/her.
20. Maintaining romantic love is *the key* to marital happiness over the life span for most couples.

APPENDIX C

THE RELATIONSHIP BELIEF INVENTORY

The statements below describe ways in which a person might feel about a relationship with another person. Please mark the space next to each statement according to how strongly you believe that it is true or false for you. *Please mark every one.* Write in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, or 0 to stand for the following answers:

- 5: I strongly believe that the statement is *true*.
- 4: I believe that the statement is *true*.
- 3: I believe that the statement is *probably true*, or more true than false.
- 2: I believe that the statement is *probably false*, or more false than true.
- 1: I believe that the statement is *false*.
- 0: I strongly believe that the statement is *false*.

1. If your partner expresses disagreement with your ideas, he/she probably does not think highly of you.
2. I do not expect my partner to sense all my moods.
3. Damages done early in a relationship probably cannot be reversed.
4. I get upset if I think I have not completely satisfied my partner sexually.
5. Men and women have the same basic emotion needs.
6. I cannot accept it when my partner disagrees with me.
7. If I have to tell my partner that something is important to me, it does not mean that she/he is insensitive to me.
8. My partner does not seem capable of behaving other than she/he does now.
9. If I'm not in the mood for sex when my partner is, I don't get upset about it.
10. Misunderstandings between partners generally are due to inborn differences in psychological makeups of men and women.

11. I take it as a personal insult when my partner disagrees with an important idea of mine.
12. I get very upset if my partner does not recognize how I am feeling and I have to tell him/her.
13. A partner can learn to become more responsive to his/her partner's needs.
14. A good sexual partner can get himself/herself aroused for sex whenever necessary.
15. Men and women probably will never understand the opposite sex very well.
16. I like it when my partner presents views different from mine.
17. People who have a close relationship can sense each other's needs as if they could read each other's minds.
18. Just because my partner has acted in ways that upset me does not mean that she/he will do so in the future.
19. If I cannot perform well sexually whenever my partner is in the mood, I would consider that I have a problem.
20. Men and women need the same basic things out of a relationship.
21. I get very upset when my partner and I cannot see things the same way.
22. It is important to me for my partner to anticipate my needs by sensing changes in my moods.
23. A partner who hurts you badly once probably will hurt you again.
24. I can feel OK about my lovemaking even if my partner does not achieve orgasm.
25. Biological differences between men and women are not major causes of couples' problems.
26. I cannot tolerate it when my partner argues with me.
27. A partner should know what you are thinking or feeling without you having to tell.

28. If my partner wants to change, I believe that she/he can do it.
29. If my sexual partner does not get satisfied completely, it does not mean that I have failed.
30. One of the major causes of marital problems is that men and women have different emotional needs.
31. When my partner and I disagree, I feel like our relationship is falling apart.
32. People who love each other know exactly what each other's thoughts are without a word ever being said.
33. If you don't like the way a relationship is going, you can make it better.
34. Some difficulties in my sexual performance do not mean personal failure to me.
35. You can't really understand someone of the opposite sex.
36. I do not doubt my partner's feelings for me when we argue.
37. If you have to ask your partner for something, it shows that he/she was not "tuned into" your needs.
38. I do not expect my partner to be able to change.
39. When I don't seem to be performing well sexually, I get upset.
40. Men and women will always be mysteries to each other.

VITA

Mary Lynn Edmundson was born in Nashville, Tennessee on April 5, 1980. She attended a private school, Ezell-Harding Christian School, and graduated in May 1998. During her time at Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas, she was a member of Alpha Chi National College Honor Scholarship Society and Kappa Omicron Nu Honor Society, Nu Delta Chapter. She also received the honors of being named a USAA All-American Scholar, being nominated for the National Dean's List, and being invited to join Who's Who among Students in American Universities and Colleges.

Upon completing her Bachelor of Science degree majoring in Child and Family Science in 2002, the author began Master of Science studies at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in the Child and Family Studies Department. There she won the Clarence Cheng Kuo Outstanding Nursery School Teacher Award for her work as a graduate assistant in the UT Child Development Laboratories. In addition, she served as secretary-treasurer for the Child and Family Studies-Graduate Student Organization and co-chair of the hospitality committee for the 2004 Southeastern Symposium for Child and Family Development. Finally, the author is a member of the National Council on Family Relations and achieved provisional status as a Certified Family Life Educator during her spring 2004 semester.