

**AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF ENGAGED INDIVIDUALS'  
PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR MARRIAGE PREPARATION NEEDS**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This exploratory study analyzes the content and structural marriage preparation needs of engaged individuals. The volunteer sample consists of 74 of engaged individuals who attended one of three bridal shows. Questionnaire results found that communication was the predominantly preferred topic area, followed by problem solving/conflict resolution, money/financial management, having children/parenting, and building friendship in marriage. Subjects also reported that their preferred format for marriage preparation is participating in group discussions and that programs being effective is the most important format attribute. Friends and relatives were found to be the most influential referral source for marriage preparation programs. Results support the recommendations that programs be approximately 10 hours in length and cost no more than \$135.72. Respondents reported that the best time to offer workshops is on weeknights and strong support was shown for programs to be held in community centres. Results are discussed in terms of implications for future research, as well as for marriage preparation providers to use in the design, promotion, implementation, facilitation, and evaluation of marriage preparation programs.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Although the marriage rate in Canada has fluctuated over the past seventy-five years, marriage or marriage-like committed relationships remain the preferred lifestyle choice of most Canadians. In 1996, approximately 73% of those aged 15 years or older were either married, living in a common law relationship, or had been married at some point in their lives (The Vanier Institute of the Family, 2000). This statistic supports marriage as a lifestyle choice that remains popular in contemporary Canadian society.

One of the more common motivations for young adults to marry is the existence of a 'marrying culture' in North American society. This marrying culture places pressure on young adults to marry, helps young adults to separate from their family of origin, supports the belief that marriage will improve one's life and correct any areas of unfulfillment, helps to satisfy sexual desires and urges, and encourages individuals to gain emotional maturity and intimacy (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1987).

Expectations of marriage have changed over time because the institution of marriage has made a shift from being authoritarian to companionate. Historically, marriage and family laws were based on the concept of coverture where it is the husband's duty to protect and influence his wife. These laws have established many rules and expectations of what it means to be married and how married people should behave and interact with one another. The provisions of the old marriage contract have strongly influenced marriages over time and have helped to create a culture that includes wives being responsible for caring for the home and children and husbands being responsible for providing support for the family and being the head of the household. These marital laws reinforced the ideas of wives owing their husbands domestic and companionate services and husbands owing their wives protection and economic support (Schwartz & Scott, 1994). The past has represented families and marriages as formal institutions where the unifying factors were external, formal, and authoritarian in nature (Burgess & Locke, 1960; Mace, 1975).

Modern marriages and families are becoming increasingly companionate in nature, adhering to fewer community pressures and more emotional relationships based on affection and understanding (Burgess & Locke, 1960; Mace, 1975). Marriage "based

on the companionate model may be characterized by: 1) affection as the basis for its existence; 2) husband and wife with equal status and authority; 3) major decisions made by consensus; and 4) common interests and activities coexisting with division of labor and individuality of interests" (Farnden, 1990, p.11). As couples marry in this time of companionate marriages, they are seeking friendship and comradeship in their marital unions.

As a result of changes in the reasons for getting married and in the institution of marriage itself, some couples are preparing for their transition into marriage in new and different ways. Traditionally, preparing for marriage has been informal, as couples observe and seek advice from family and friends. In previous times this process appeared sufficient, but as marriage has changed, families and couples have turned to more formal sources of marriage preparation to help cope with these changes (Hill & Aldous, 1969; Mace, 1975; Russell & Farnden Lyster, 1992). Early forms of marriage preparation began in religious institutions in the 1920's as clergy helped to guide couples through the transition into marriage (Bowman, 1970). The focus during this time typically was on the details of the wedding ceremony and on reminding couples of the spiritual and religious components of marriage. During the 1930's and 1940's, attention was expanded to include the physical and emotional adjustments of marriage and issues around family planning (Furgusen, 1952). During this time, the main goals of the marriage preparation provider were to serve as a screening agent to identify those couples who should not get married, to encourage religious participation to those getting married, and to help couples arrive at decisions that encouraged their personal growth and enrichment.

By the 1970's, the field of premarital preparation was enhanced, had become well established, and continued to expand (Schumm & Denton, 1979; Silliman & Schumm, 1999). This included the development of courses for groups of couples, the training of para-professional counsellors to administer premarital counselling and education, the development of premarital education for specific audiences such as the developmentally disabled, the formation of interdisciplinary teams (lawyers and counsellors) to help reduce the chances of divorce, and the provision of premarital education such as communications skills classes for university students (Schumm & Denton, 1979). According to Bowman (1970), emphasis was placed on growth in both knowledge and

behaviour for the participants. Two important issues that received attention during the 1970's were the training of the educators and the evaluation of programs (Schumm & Denton, 1979).

Since the 1970's, the field of marriage preparation has developed substantially and more engaged couples are participating in premarital preparation courses (Silliman & Schumm, 1999). With more courses being offered in several types of settings, premarital programs are more accessible to couples with varying needs. One example is the trend to provide marriage preparation courses in secular settings such as community centres and schools in addition to those courses offered in religious settings. As well, many religious institutions are now mandating marriage preparation, requiring couples to participate in some kind of premarital program before they will be married. In some communities, religious institutions have collaborated to form community marriage policies where all of the institutions in that community agree to only marry couples who have taken a marriage preparation course. This prevents couples from going to another institution to avoid formal marriage preparation (McManus, 1995). State-level initiatives in the United States have also striven to support engaged couples' relationships by encouraging them to participate in formal marriage preparation and giving them incentives to do so (Stanley, 2001).

The nature of marriage preparation has also changed since the 1970's. The rationale of formal marriage preparation now takes a more proactive and pre-therapeutic approach. This rationale reflects the belief that the purpose of premarital preparation programs should be to help couples learn to behave in ways that will prevent problems and provide couples and individuals with the opportunity to develop to their full potentials (Stahmann & Salts, 1993). To help achieve this, the main goals of marriage preparation encourage couples to gain insight into themselves as individuals as well as into their relationship, to learn about marriage and family patterns and processes, to acquire new skills, to make a case for why marriage matters, and to lower the risk of overall marital distress (Arcus, Schvaneveldt, & Moss, 1993; Stanley, 2001).

The main focus of research in the field of marriage preparation over the past thirty years has remained constant. Topics such as how premarital individuals view married life, premarital individuals' perceived readiness for marriage, how to train educators, the

overall design of marriage preparation programs, the evaluation of programs, and the effectiveness of programs are continually being explored (Silliman & Schumm, 1999; Williams, 1992). Although past research supports the concept of marriage preparation and provides insight into programs, its main focus has not been to encourage more engaged couples to voluntarily participate in marriage preparation by exploring what their perceived needs are. Program implementers and educators are now asking questions such as “why don’t most couples voluntarily participate in marriage preparation and how can we encourage couples to become more involved in marriage preparation?” (Williams, 1992, p.506).

Schumm and Denton (1979) noted that there had been little research on the desired or required needs of marriage preparation courses as perceived by premarital couples. In their view, the lack of research on this topic might reflect a belief that the needs and perceptions of premarital couples were less valuable than were the experiences and insights of marriage counselors or marriage educators. Williams (1992) suggests that an exploration of the perceived needs of those who participate in the courses will give new insights into what couples want and will contribute to the development of better programs and then promotion. With better programs and program promotion, it is more likely that couples will voluntarily participate in these educational environments. Until recently there were “no published studies that examined in detail what engaged individuals perceive their marriage preparation needs to be” (Williams, 1992, p.506). Little information existed on what potential marriage preparation participants desired and/or required when it came to the content and structural design of marriage preparation programs. With a better understanding of the benefits of considering participant needs, the past decade has produced a handful of American studies (Silliman & Schumm, 1989; Silliman, Schumm, & Jurich, 1992; Silliman & Schumm, 1995; Williams, 1992) that have explored the needs of potential marriage preparation participants.

Previous research on the perceived needs of potential marriage preparation participants has not specifically defined the concept of marriage preparation needs. For the purposes of the research at hand, marriage preparation needs are defined as the required and/or wanted elements of formal marriage preparation programs that support couples in establishing a strong marital foundation allowing them to achieve marital

strength and health. These elements of support can be in the form of program content (what information or skills participants need) and structure (what type of program design aspects, procedures, and format(s) participants need). The terms of content and structure are used for the first time in this study with the purpose of organizing and condensing the terminology around marriage preparation needs that have been previously documented. Content terms such as topics and issues, and structure terms such as formats, format attributes, sources of information, course length, course cost, and course location have been previously used (Silliman & Schumm, 1989, 1995; Silliman et al., 1992; Williams, 1992). This will allow for a clear presentation of previous research on the marriage preparation needs of engaged individuals as well as clarity in the organization of variables for the current study.

Consequently, the purpose of this study was to build on the few studies that have already explored the content and structural needs of potential marriage preparation participants, and provide new insights into the perceptions of engaged Canadian adults regarding their marriage preparation needs. Past research in this field has generally consisted of samples taken from universities at American colleges where participants tended to be younger in age, higher in religiosity, and either engaged, dating, or single. The study at hand provides a uniquely Canadian sample where all of the participants are engaged and their mean age is representative of the marrying age in Canada (29.5 for males and 27.4 for females, The Vanier Institute of the Family, 2000). This study also offers a Canadian representation of religiosity and its influence on marriage preparation content and structural needs.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature on needs for marriage preparation as perceived by young adults. Attention is given to those studies that have specifically examined a variety of content and structural marriage preparation needs. Although several studies examine couples' perceptions of their post-marriage preparation experiences, only four studies were found to have specifically examined adults' perceptions of their marriage preparation needs. As these studies helped guide the focus of the current study, they are discussed in more detail below.

#### Marriage Preparation Needs

Silliman and Schumm (1989) conducted a study of clients' views of the topics they found interesting in premarital counselling, which gave insight into what young adults perceived their marriage preparation content needs to be. Questionnaire data were obtained from a sample consisting of 53 never married men and 132 never married women between the ages of 18 and 25 years old. Participants were selected from one of two family relations courses, a business course or an agriculture course at Kansas State University. Variables included preferences for topics in relation to sex, college major, familiarity with premarital programs, involvement in religious groups, hometown background, dating status, anticipated years to marriage, and education level.

Subjects were asked to rate their level of interest in a particular topic associated with marriage preparation on a 7-point Likert-type scale. In terms of level of interest for each topic, 98% of responses were rated 4 or higher (positive) on the scale. Three quarters of the subjects reported they were quite interested or extremely interested in the topics that were listed and just over half of respondents reported that they were interested in marriage preparation. Participants ranked parenting skills, resolving differences, and effective listening as their top three desired topics. Seven other topics including learning to forgive, strong family characteristics, avoiding divorce, money management, marital roles and expectations, stress management, and sexuality also received strong support. The three least interesting topics were time management, in-law relations, and spiritual development.

Significant correlations were found between the interest levels of participants and several demographic variables. Women were found to have a significantly higher interest in all topics except for parenting, where males and females reported equal interest. College major also influenced interest levels with students in human ecology courses reporting higher levels of interest in topics than students in the business or agriculture courses. Subjects who reported being very familiar with marriage preparation programs had lower interest levels in all of the topic areas than subjects who reported being somewhat familiar with programs. Scores for both of these groups were in the "quite interested" range. Perhaps this unexpected result is a reflection of some people knowing a program well but strongly disliking it. Participants who were very active in religious groups rated higher interest levels overall than those participants who were not active in religious activities. This study explored young adults' views and perceptions of their premarital counselling needs. Results found that there was a strong interest to learn about all aspects of marital life with certain group trends being found for topic preferences.

Silliman et al. (1992) focused on young adults' preferences for the structural design of premarital preparation programs. They investigated the relationship between premarital relationship development, marital quality, and premarital counselling procedures and formats to help determine clients' interests for program formats. The variables of sex, age, hometown background, religious affiliation, dating history, relationship stage, family background, parents' income, priorities for marriage preparation, and intentions to participate in marriage preparation to help determine their goals and preferences toward preparing for marriage were explored. A convenience sample of 185 undergraduates was selected from four separate courses (courses not stated) at a Midwestern university. Of these, nearly three quarters were female, over 95% were Caucasian, and the mean age was 20.9 years (range 18 to 25 years). Just over two thirds reported that a strong marriage was an important aspect of their future and nearly 90% felt that a conscious effort to prepare for marriage was very important. Participants were asked to rate the need for information on marriage issues. This resulted in almost a quarter of respondents reporting a very high need, just under a third reporting a high need and just over a third reporting a moderate need. Over 90% of the sample was familiar

with premarital counselling and stated that their pastor had introduced them to the concept of marriage preparation.

Respondents reported their parents were their first choice along with personal experience as their primary resource for quality information about marriage. Resources that were moderately ranked included premarital counselling, learning from experience, and learning from friends. Print and electronic media were ranked as the least valuable resource. Overall results showed that premarital individuals had a preference for familiar sources of information that included opportunity for personal reflection and control of the program's agenda.

A significant component of the Silliman et al. study focused on subjects' preferred conditions for formal marriage preparation. Participants rated 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6 hours of premarital training approximately the same. Programs that were over 7 hours long were desired less; however they were still desired by those wanting to attend marriage preparation, regardless of the time commitment. The results of this study show that although marriage preparation providers are creating thorough programs, students may not be interested in investing the amount of time required to cover the material. A lack of interest in longer programs may be due to egocentrism, romanticism, lack of awareness of the complexities in marriage, a perceived threat to wedding plans, limited understanding of what marriage preparation is, and a limited understanding of the role of the facilitator (Silliman et al., 1992). The study suggests that a six session program be offered giving participants the option to extend their counselling for another 2-3 sessions.

A combination of marriage preparation providers was preferred by participants. Although the majority of subjects reported themselves as active church-goers, results showed that participants more or equally desired the involvement or substitution of private teachers and facilitators to clergy. The minority of the sample not involved in religious activities may have skewed these results, however; overall subjects felt that several teachers/facilitators may increase the resource base and decrease the misuse of power that one provider may use.

In terms of provider characteristics, the young adults reported that they desired a facilitator who is perceived as being well-trained, respectful, and familiar. Respondents cared least for facilitators who were not open and who do not respect couples' privacy

(e.g., by requesting to know about couples' secrets). These results reinforced respondents' desire for a client-centered approach where they were not being judged.

Not surprisingly, the highest level of interest in marriage preparation occurred during the engagement period with high levels of interest also being reported for cohabitators and those seriously dating. Interest was also highest for those who voluntarily participated in the programs rather than those who were recommended and/or required to take the program. Respondents were willing to pay the lowest amount possible and there was more interest in participating in programs if they were free. This study also found that young engaged individuals supported a therapist-couple format the most with less interest in programs where there were small groups, individual sessions with a therapist, large group settings, or both couple and individual counselling. Participants reported that having a combination of approaches was the most favoured instructional format and that interactive discussions with questions and answers were highly valued as was an approach that supported "how-to" skill development.

Subjects reported a strong need for programs to emphasize self-awareness and partner awareness. Although these elements received the highest levels of interest, respondents also reported a significant interest in skill-building and a high interest in receiving information about marriage.

This research not only suggests that marriage preparation facilitators listen to consumer needs and tailor programs to meet these needs, it also helps to provide a structural model on which proposed marriage preparation courses could be based.

Williams (1992) conducted a quantitative needs assessment of couples' attitudes and opinions regarding preparation for marriage. The study focused both on topic areas (content) to address in marriage preparation and engaged individuals' attitudes and preferences regarding the format (structure) of marriage preparation programs. Subjects for the study were recruited through announcements in a marriage and family life course at a large university, referrals from churches in the community, engagement announcements in local papers as well as from personal referrals. Of the 112 respondents, the average age was 24.0, over half were in college, the majority (84%) had been engaged less than one year, nearly all participants (92%) were preparing for their first marriage, and a quarter of the couples were cohabiting.

Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire developed specifically for the study. Subjects were asked to report their views on what topics should be covered in marriage preparation, their preferred format, important format attributes, the effectiveness of different referral sources, their attitudes toward marriage preparation, their readiness for marriage, and the types of marriage preparation that they had used.

Results of the study indicated that communication (60%) and money/finances (50%) were the two most desired topic areas. Conflict negotiation (28%), children (24%), religion (19%), careers (15%), sexuality (14%), and family of origin (12%) were also ranked as important topic areas. Participants specifically wanted more information on dealing with work stress, the effects of children on marriage, keeping romance alive, dealing with anger and silence, resolving differences, and identifying trouble signs.

The questionnaire also examined different format types. Subjects reported that their preferred formats for marriage preparation were counselling with a minister, weekend retreats, meeting with a married couple, and small group discussions. Less desired formats included reading books, completing a workbook, classroom lecture, and counselling with a therapist. Participants also reported that they would be more likely to attend marriage preparation if they heard about it through personal sources such as friends and family, their minister and/or their counsellor. Radio, television advertisements, and brochures were the resources that were least likely to influence people to participate.

Two thirds of the respondents believed that the majority of couples would benefit from participation in a marriage preparation program while only 22.3% believed that most couples do not need marriage preparation and 12.6% believed that premarital programs should be taken only by couples who are having problems. Engaged participants seemed to be quite optimistic about their futures, with only a third reporting they were concerned about their marriage ending in divorce. Over 90% of the subjects felt their marriages would be happy and last for a long time and did not anticipate any problems they felt they and their partner could not handle. Surprisingly, only 6.3% felt they were not adequately prepared for marriage. Half of the sample (50.9%) had participated in marriage preparation of some type and slightly more than half had used a book to prepare themselves for marriage.

In 1995, Silliman and Schumm performed an additional analysis of their 1992 study of clients' structural interests (needs) in premarital counselling. They investigated the relationship between demographic effects and individual backgrounds with general interest in premarital preparation and specific aspects of marriage preparation program design. Subjects were asked questions that explored age, sex, size of hometown, dating status, parental income, longest dating relationship, size of family of origin, religion, number of years having dated, birth position, familiarity with marriage preparation, perceived importance of marriage preparation, and their perceived need for information about marriage. The study was a continued analysis of a convenience sample taken in 1986. The sample was taken from four undergraduate courses at Kansas State University and consisted of 184 (52 males and 132 females) never married subjects between the ages of 18 and 25.

The initial analysis found six variables (size of hometown, vital marriage, number of years having dated, dating status, longest previous relationship, and perceived needs for information on marriage) to be insignificant predictors of one's intention to attend marriage preparation and one's attitude toward marriage preparation. All variables concerning relationship history were also found insignificant, suggesting that attitudes toward marriage preparation are formed before couples begin to seriously date. The second analysis found significant predictors of one's interest in premarital preparation in familiarity, perceived importance of preparation, family income, marital optimism, and sex where females, those familiar with programs, from higher income families, and with a belief that marriage preparation is important were more favourable toward premarital preparation. Subjects with a positive family climate, larger family size, lower birth order, higher age, and higher religiosity were more likely to be interested in premarital counselling and more likely to report that they intend to attend a program in the future.

The overall results of this study found that respondents who have strong relationships are more likely to be comfortable with relationship intervention and therefore are more favourable toward premarital intervention. The opposite is also true where those people who have problems appear to be the ones who avoid premarital intervention (Silliman & Schumm, 1995).

Silliman and Schumm (1995) found programs favoured by all clients had certain characteristics. These programs were voluntary, less than four hours in duration, led by clergy, or a combination of professionals, led by well-trained counsellors who respected their clients, focused on engaged clients, free or cost \$50 or less, involved one couple at a time, and used a combination of methods focusing on discussion, interpersonal skill-building, and increasing awareness. Programs that were rated low by subjects were more than 10 hours in duration, led by medical doctors, had leaders that searched for personal secrets, refused to answer questions, or had different values, focused on casually dating couples, cost over \$100, involved large groups, and were based on instruction and information. Subjects who had positive attitudes toward premarital intervention favoured programs that were between 5 and 20 hours, involved either clergy or a combination of professionals, were led by well-trained counsellors who respect clients opinions, offered to engaged couples and perhaps dating couples, preferably recommended and not required, relatively inexpensive, involved one couple or small groups, combined teaching methods with emphasis on skills and discussion, and focused on awareness-building and skill-building. In reviewing these findings we see that clients with positive attitudes toward marriage preparation want similar program characteristics as other clients do; however, they are more willing to participate in programs that take place earlier, last longer, and are mandated.

In summary this research suggests that those people who are more likely to attend marriage preparation are those who are better adjusted to begin with. The authors recognize that further research is needed to compare their findings with those from other schools, socio-economic groups, age groups, non-students and those who have been previously married (Silliman & Schumm, 1995).

Most of the literature on the content and structural needs of marriage preparation participants has been studied and written by a small group of researchers (Silliman & Schumm 1989, 1995; Silliman et al., 1992). In their 1999 review of the research on potential participants' marriage preparation needs, Silliman and Schumm provided insights into program development and suggested strategies to improve practice in the field of marriage preparation. Silliman and Schumm (1999) recommend that the marriage preparation experience should be reflected in a positive confidential learning

environment where the provider is professionally competent, kind, open, and honest. The marital status of the provider remains less important as long as he/she is able to model practical interpersonal skills. It was also suggested that providers should work with participants, inviting them into the learning procedure rather than simply “talking at them.”

Silliman and Schumm (1999) also recommended that an assessment of the individuals' and couples' needs be taken before participation in marriage preparation to provide them with appropriate options ranging from education to therapy. By focusing on patterns in the assessment results, providers can tailor program goals to meet the needs of the participants. They suggested that marriage preparation take place six to twelve months before marriage to encourage more open discussion and time for behaviour changes. If couples are not able to take marriage preparation this far in advance then the pros and cons of last minute training should be explained to them. Either way, it was felt that during the marriage preparation experience, a supportive connection should be developed to encourage participants to participate in post-marital enrichment workshops.

Silliman and Schumm (1999) stated that it was important that training be at least 12-24 hours in length to offer an effective program where skill development could take place. They suggested that it may be useful to initially have a shorter (four to six hours) program that focuses on practical problem-solving skills and then allow couples to decide if they want to participate in further training.

To allow programs to be cost effective it was recommended that family and organizational sponsors be encouraged to support workshop costs. Costs could also be decreased by moving away from a couple/therapist approach to combining couple coaching with small group discussions and lectures. Using experienced lay couples to recruit, train, and mentor couples will also help to decrease costs as well as help to increase program credibility and quality.

Silliman and Schumm (1999) also recommended increasing public awareness of marriage preparation. They suggested increasing learning opportunities in skill development areas of communication and conflict resolution for adolescents (especially those at risk) and parents. They also believed that the focus of this awareness should be

on program benefits rather than institutional requirements and that discounts on wedding and honeymoon items could be used as incentives to increase participation.

The literature on premarital counselling repeatedly supports that premarital preparation can be effective for engaged couples (Arcus, 1995; Bader, Microys, Sinclair, Willet, & Conway, 1980; Center for Marriage and Family, 1995; Gottman, 1994; Olson, 1983; Silliman & Schumm, 1995, 1999). However, it is difficult for programs to be successful if couples are not participating. Research supports that in the most effective programs, couples participate voluntarily making it important that programs are able to attract a captive audience (Silliman & Schumm, 1995). Although the concept of formal marriage preparation continues to gain acceptance as concern increases around the rising divorce rate and interest in prevention-based programs grows (Silliman & Schumm, 1999), an assessment of the actual content and structural needs of potential/actual marriage preparation participants can provide valuable information on how to develop programs that engaged individuals feel encouraged to use (Williams, 1992). Findings in the reviewed studies support the rationale for the research at hand, where addressing individuals' and couples' marriage preparation needs can help the premarital counsellor/facilitator to design, promote, and implement useful and effective programs for engaged couples. A review of the literature in this field also supports the need for further research in this area. This research is needed as the marriage preparation needs of engaged individuals remain relatively unexplored, and the existing research has been performed by a limited number of researchers and is based on samples that were taken in the late 1980's and early 1990's. The study at hand provides the field of marriage preparation with updated information and insights into the content and structural needs of potential marriage preparation participants.

### **Research Problems**

Relatively little research has been done on engaged individuals' perceptions of their marriage preparation needs (Schumm & Denton, 1979; Silliman & Schumm 1989, 1995; Silliman et al., 1992; Williams, 1992). As such, both the independent and dependent variables used in this study have not been extensively examined, making it difficult to determine definitive hypotheses and rationales. Consequently, in an attempt to gain insight into engaged couples' perceived marriage preparation needs this

exploratory study examined the content (general and specific topics) and structural (program format, format attributes, referral sources, level of delivery, course length, cost, course day and time, and course location) marriage preparation needs of engaged individuals.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methods**

The objectives of this study were to identify the perceptions of engaged individuals regarding their marriage preparation needs. This chapter describes the specific procedures that were used to conduct this study along with the methodology of this investigation.

### **Sample**

The population for this study included engaged individuals who reside in the Vancouver Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada. Subjects were gathered with permission from two distinct places which included one of two Newlands bridal shows or a Welcome Wagon bridal show. The Marriage Project is a non-profit organization that provides marriage preparation and marriage enrichment workshops to couples in the Lower Mainland. On March 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 2000, The Marriage Project participated in the Newlands Bridal Shows in Langley. As a result of their participation in these bridal shows, The Marriage Project received a list of brides' names, addresses, phone numbers, and wedding dates. The purpose of this list is to enable wedding show proprietors to contact brides with the hope of future business. The Marriage Project gave the list to the researcher with permission to use the information in conducting the study at hand. Welcome Wagon, a company that organizes bridal shows around British Columbia, gave permission to hand out questionnaires to brides and/or grooms at a Vancouver Bridal Show on April 5, 2000. These two organizations were chosen for this study because of their potential to provide a unique and diverse population of individuals from which to sample. It was the goal of the researcher to collect a sample that allowed for variability in demographic factors (age, sex, ethnicity, religion, religiosity, and socio-economic status) to gain insight into how marriage preparation programs can be designed to meet the needs of different people.

### **Procedures**

After permission to conduct this research study was obtained from the University of British Columbia Ethics Review Committee, data were collected by using a self-administered closed-ended questionnaire containing 42 questions. Each subject was given a package containing a letter of introduction and questionnaire instructions, two

copies of the questionnaire (one for the bride and one for the groom), as well as a self addressed stamped envelope to return the completed questionnaires back to the investigator. Each potential subject was assured of complete confidentiality of their responses (see Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire).

A list of Newlands Bridal Show participants was obtained from The Marriage Project. This list contained the names, addresses, phone numbers and wedding dates of approximately one hundred brides. Packages were mailed to every bride on the registration list. Potential participants were asked to complete the questionnaire within one week of receiving it and then mail it to The School of Social Work and Family Studies in the provided stamped envelope (see Appendix B for a copy of the introductory letter). Questionnaires were numbered to allow for observation of who was returning completed forms and to allow for contact should the subject win a prize for completing and returning his/her questionnaire.

Subjects (brides and grooms) recruited from the Welcome Wagon bridal show hosted at the Empire Landmark on April 5, 2000 were directly approached by the researcher and were asked if they would like to participate in a research study. If they agreed to participate they were given a package with two questionnaires along with a stamped envelope addressed to the researcher at the School of Social Work and Family Studies, University of British Columbia. When participants were given the questionnaires they were asked to write a contact phone number (in order to phone them if they won a prize in the draw) on a piece of paper that had corresponding numbers to the questionnaires. They were then asked to mail their completed questionnaires back to the researcher within one week.

Questionnaires given to couples contained a couple code (e.g., 1a and 1b) to allow for future analysis between and among couples. To allow for future analysis between sample groups, different coloured questionnaires were issued for each group.

In total, a goal to distribute approximately 300 questionnaires to 150 people was established. The person directly receiving the package containing the information letter, questionnaires, and return envelope was asked to encourage his/her partner to participate in the study as well. Sample characteristics are discussed in Chapter Four.

### Measures

#### Dependent Variables: Content and Structural Needs of Marriage Preparation

As discussed in Chapter Two, specific research on participants' needs in the area of marriage preparation has focused on several program design aspects that may affect couples' participation rates in marriage preparation classes. These aspects include the content needs of which general and specific topics are important to address, and the structural needs of 1) what are the preferred formats of programs, 2) what are the most important format attributes, 3) what are the most effective referral sources, 4) when is the best time in the relationship to take marriage preparation, 5) what are the most desired qualities of a facilitator, 6) what is an appropriate level to deliver the information, 7) how many hours should a program be, 8) what is the best time of day and time of week for a program to be held, 9) how much should programs cost, and 10) where is the best location/environment for marriage preparation to take place (Silliman & Schumm, 1989, 1995; Silliman et al., 1992; and Williams, 1992).

Due to the nature of the study at hand where the sample was taken prior to the marriage preparation experience, ten of these aspects were chosen as critical dependent variables to investigate. These variables included: 1) general topics; 2) specific topics; 3) level of delivery; 4) format; 5) format attributes; 6) referral sources; 7) course length; 8) course time; 9) course cost; and 10) course location.

The dependent variables were measured with the use of several indexes that were adopted or created for the purposes of this study. Adopted indexes originated from Williams' (1992) quantitative needs assessment of couples' attitudes and opinions regarding preparation for marriage. Indexes were primarily taken from this study due to the lack of indexes available from other studies, the fact that they were the most timely indexes in the field of premarital needs assessments, and because permission was granted by the author to use the indexes. These indexes were used to measure the ten chosen content and structural design items (engaged individuals' marriage preparation needs) that represented the dependent variables of this study.

General topics addressed commonly taught subject areas in marriage preparation such as communication skills, problem solving/conflict resolution skills, sexuality/intimacy, careers, money/financial management, household management/roles,

religion, having children/parenting, family of origin/friends, and building friendship in marriage (Williams, 1992). To measure subjects' desired general topics, participants were asked to select the top five areas that they would like information on, and then rank order these choices from most desired (1) to least desired (5). This index was adopted from Williams' 1992 study.

Specific topics broke down the commonly used general topics of marriage preparation programs into specific information that is desired in each general category. Participants were given a list of possible specific topics for each general subject and then asked to choose the two most desired topic areas under each subject heading. This index was adopted from Williams' (1992) study.

Format was a variable that described the environment and approach used in delivering marriage preparation programs. Formats included reading a book, completing a workbook with exercises, small group discussions, lectures/classes, meeting with a married couple, weekend retreat, counselling with a minister/rabbi, and counselling with a therapist comprises the variable of 'format'. This variable was measured by asking subjects to rate each format on a five point Likert type scale from 'Strongly Like' (1) to 'Strongly Dislike' (5). This measure was directly taken from Williams' 1992 study.

Format attributes was a variable that described the goals and/or structure of different types of formats. Format attributes consisted of items such as the program is interesting, effective, does not require a lot of time, inexpensive, protects privacy, and provides an opportunity to meet with other couples. Subjects were asked to rate each one of these format attributes on a four point Likert type scale from 'Most Important' (1) to 'Not at all Important' (4). This index was adopted from Williams' (1992) study.

Referral sources was a variable that explored how likely an individual would be to attend a marriage preparation program if he/she heard about it from varying sources such as friends/relatives, the work place, a Minister/Rabbi, television/radio, a counsellor, a mailed brochure, or a newspaper. Subjects were asked to rank each of these referral sources on a five point Likert type scale from being 'Very Likely' (1) to 'Very Unlikely' (5) that they would attend a program if they heard about it from the previously listed sources. This index was directly taken from Williams' (1992) study.

Level of delivery was a variable that was added to this study. This variable addressed preference for the type of information offered and whether it should be academic or personal in nature. To assess these variables a two question index was developed. The first question asked subjects to rate the degree to which they would like or dislike hearing personal stories and experiences from the marriage preparation facilitator on a seven point Likert type scale from 'Strongly Like' (1) to 'Strongly Dislike' (7). The second question asked subjects to indicate the degree to which they would like or dislike hearing factual materials based on scientific research and findings in a marriage preparation course on a seven point Likert type scale from 'Strongly Like' (1) to 'Strongly Dislike' (7).

Course length was a variable that described the number of hours that a formal marriage preparation program should be. This variable was measured by asking participants for a realistic number of hours that they would be willing to commit to participating in a marriage preparation program. Average responses for this question were examined. This index was created for the purposes of this study.

Cost measured the amount that a person would be willing to pay for formal marriage preparation. Subjects were reminded that the cost of a program included two people and then they were asked to state a dollar amount that they would be willing to pay for marriage preparation.

Course day and time simply reflected the day of the week and the time of day that was most convenient to take marriage preparation classes. Subjects were asked to choose the most convenient times from weekdays, weeknights, weekend days, weekend nights, weekend retreat or other. This index was created for the purposes of measuring this particular variable in the study at hand.

Course location assessed the most comfortable/desired place for a marriage preparation course to take place. Subjects were asked to choose one place where they would feel most comfortable participating in a marriage preparation course from a list consisting of a church, a community centre, a school, someone's home, or an office. This index was created for the purposes of this study.

### Independent Variables: Demographics, Relationship Characteristics, and Personal Beliefs

Based on previous research and the desire to gain practical insights that can be directly applied to existing and future marriage preparation programs, several independent variables were chosen. These variables included: 1) sex; 2) age; 3) education level; 4) religion; 5) religiosity; 6) relationship length; 7) parent's income; 8) cohabitation; 9) family background; 10) perceived importance of preparing for marriage; and 11) familiarity with marriage preparation programs. Two additional demographic variables that had not been previously examined were also considered. These included ethnicity (to allow for cultural diversity in responses and to take into consideration that most marriage preparation programs are developed by culturally North American Caucasian people for culturally North American Caucasian people) and personal income (to take into consideration that people are marrying at later ages giving them the opportunity to financially define themselves rather than being defined by their parents).

Religiosity was measured on a five point Likert type scale where subjects were asked to rate themselves as being 'Extremely Religious' (1) to 'Extremely Non-Religious' (5). The belief that preparing for marriage is important was measured by using a seven point Likert type scale ranging from 'Not important at all' (1) to 'Extremely important' (7). The variable of familiarity with marriage preparation programs was also measured with a seven point Likert type scale which ranged from 'Not familiar at all' (1) to 'Extremely familiar' (7). All three of these measures were developed for the purposes of this study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Findings and Results**

This needs assessment of engaged individuals' perceptions of their marriage preparation needs is a preliminary step in exploring potential participants' content and structural needs so that programs can be designed and promoted to meet these needs. This chapter presents the results of this exploratory study by including a description of the response rate, a description of participants in the study, and the findings in relation to each variable.

#### **Response Rate**

In total, 260 questionnaires were distributed to 130 brides and/or grooms who attended either the Welcome Wagon Bridal Show held at the Vancouver Landmark Hotel on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2000 or one of the Newlands Bridal Shows held at Newlands Golf Club on May 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 2000. Of the 56 questionnaires distributed to 28 people at the Welcome wagon bridal show, 41 questionnaires (73.21%) were returned. A list of 102 brides who attended either one of the Newlands bridal shows was obtained from the Marriage Project. Two hundred and four questionnaires were mailed to these brides which resulted in another 30 responses (14.71% response rate). Through snowballing effects another eight questionnaires were given to four couples. Three of these questionnaires were returned resulting in a 37.50% response rate for this method of data collection. In total, 268 questionnaires were distributed to 134 couples. Seventy-four questionnaires were completed and returned indicating an overall response rate of 27.61%. Of the completed and returned questionnaires, thirty-five couples responded to the study along with four single responses from females. In total this sample consisted of 39 (52.7%) females and 35 (47.3%) males.

#### **Description of the Sample**

The sample ranged in age from 22 to 54 with the average age of participants being 28.4 which is consistent with the national average age of first marriage (Vanier, 2000). The sample consisted of an educated group where 64.8% had either attended some college/university or had completed a bachelor's degree. Overall, the majority of respondents (63.0%) reported that they only identified with being Canadian while (37.0%) stated that along with being Canadian they identified with another culture or

country. Just over one third (37.8%) of the sample reported that they did not participate in any religion and when it came to those who did participate in a religion, the majority identified themselves as either Catholic or Protestant. When it came to religiosity, subjects appeared to be neutral in their approach to religion where the majority of respondents (37.8%) reported that they are neither religious nor unreligious. The average income for participants was between \$30,001 and \$40,000 and the average parental (combined income of subjects' parents) income was in the \$70,001 - \$80,000 range. The average relationship length of subjects in this sample was just over four years (4.18) and the majority of the sample population (60.81%) were cohabiting with their partner. Interestingly, the majority of subjects rated preparing for their upcoming marriages to be 'important', however most participants reported that they were 'not really familiar' with marriage preparation programs. The number of divorces that participants reported in their close family background ranged from zero to ten with the average number of divorces being 1.95. Appendix C includes general descriptive statistics of the sample characteristics.

### **Findings**

For each dependent variable, descriptive statistics are listed below. For the purposes of analyzing the outcomes of the data set, men and women are also examined separately to avoid a repetition of responses due to homogamy effects (Gonzalez & Griffin, 1999; Griffin & Gonzalez, 1995). In addition to the analysis of participants' perceptions of their content marriage preparation needs, comment is made on substantial frequency differences (greater than ten percent) between the male and female sub-samples on the variables of general and specific topics. As noted by Mueller, Schuessler, and Costner (1970), it is worthwhile to highlight frequency differences between sample sub-sets that are equal to or greater than ten percent. Paired sample t-tests were used to examine differences between the male and female sub-samples on the structural variables of format, format attributes, referral sources, level of delivery, course length, course cost, course time, and course location. Significant differences between the sub-sets are reported in addition to general findings on the total sample.

### General Topics

Participants were asked to indicate and rank the top five areas that they would like more information on regarding their relationships. There were 12 different topic areas: communication, problem-solving/conflict resolution, sexuality/intimacy, careers, money and financial management, household management and roles, religion, having children and parenting, family and friends, building friendship in marriage, and two categories of 'other' where subjects could insert their own topic area. As depicted in Table 1, communication was overwhelmingly supported as the most preferred general topic of participants in this study. Problem solving/conflict resolution and money/financial management were also predominantly preferred general topics for the entire sample, followed by having children and parenting, and building friendship in marriage. It is interesting to note that the male sub-sample mainly supported communication as their most preferred general topic followed by parenting and having children, while the female sub-sample's responses were more distributed with women supporting communication, followed by problem solving/conflict resolution, and money/financial management.

Contradictory to gender role expectations, none of the female respondents reported having children and parenting as a preferred general topic compared to the male sub-sample where having children and parenting was rated as their second most preferred general topic. It is also worthwhile noting that the general content areas of household management and roles, religion, and family and friends were not highly supported by participants in this study, however, they are considered high priority content areas (by researchers and facilitators) in many marriage preparation programs (Silliman & Schumm, 2000).

**Table 1****Preference for General Topics**

<b>General Topic</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>		<b>Males</b>		<b>Females</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Communication	33	46.5	19	59.4	14	35.9
Problem Solving/ Conflict Resolution	11	15.5	2	6.3	9	23.1
Money/Financial Management	9	12.7	2	6.3	7	17.9
Having Children and Parenting	5	7.0	5	15.6	--	--
Building Friendship in Marriage	4	5.6	1	3.1	3	7.7
Sexuality/Intimacy	3	4.2	1	3.1	2	5.1
Careers	2	2.8	1	3.1	1	2.6
Household Management and Roles	1	1.4	--	--	1	2.6
Religion	1	1.4	--	--	1	2.6
Family and Friends	--	--	--	--	--	--
Other	2	2.8	1	3.1	1	2.6

Note: "--" = 0 responses

**Specific Topics**

The goal of examining specific topics was to take a closer look at exactly what types of information engaged individuals wanted to learn in each of the general topic areas. For each general topic area there was a list of specific topics that could be covered in a marriage preparation program. From this list, subjects were asked to indicate the top two specific topics/skills that would be most helpful to them. Results of respondent's first specific topic choices are presented.

**Communication**

Table 2 illustrates the findings of the responses to the question regarding specific communication topics. Specific topics such as 'learning to be an effective listener' and 'learning to express one's feelings' were equally and highly supported by the entire sample, followed by 'learning how to read my partner's non-verbal signals', and then 'learning to be an effective speaker'. It is interesting to note that 'learning to be an effective listener' was ranked substantially higher than 'learning to be an effective speaker.' This may be due to the similarities between the specific verbal content areas of

'learning to be an effective speaker' and 'learning to express one's feelings'. Subjects equally selected 'learning to express one's feelings' and 'learning to be an effective listener' which supports both the encoding and decoding components of the communication process (Gerbner, Holsti, Krippendorff, Paisley, & Stone, 1978).

**Table 2**

**Specific Topic Needs on Communication**

Specific Communication Topics	Total Sample		Males		Females	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Learning to be an effective listener	22	29.7	12	34.3	10	25.6
Learning to express one's feelings	22	29.7	10	28.6	12	30.8
Learning how to read my partner's non-verbal signals	18	24.3	8	22.9	10	25.6
Learning to be an effective speaker	12	16.2	5	14.3	7	17.9
Other	--	--	--	--	--	--

Note: "--" = 0 responses

Problem-solving / conflict resolution

Table 3 depicts strong support for the specific topic of 'learning how to resolve differences' and then 'learning how to deal with anger or silence'. 'Learning problem-solving skills' and 'learning how to fight fairly' were equally represented as participants' third choice. When comparing the responses between the male and female sub-samples, males and females both supported 'learning how to resolve differences' and 'learning how to deal with anger or silence' as their first and second choices. Differences were however found with females supporting 'learning how to deal with anger or silence' more enthusiastically than their males counterparts.

**Table 3****Specific Topic Needs on Problem-Solving/Conflict Resolution**

<b>Specific Problem-Solving/Conflict Resolution Topics</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>		<b>Males</b>		<b>Females</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Learning how to resolve differences	29	39.2	15	42.9	14	35.9
Learning how to deal with anger or silence	21	28.4	8	22.9	13	33.3
Learning problem-solving skills	10	13.5	5	14.3	5	12.8
Learning how to fight fairly	10	13.5	6	17.1	4	10.3
Learning assertiveness skills	3	4.1	--	--	3	7.7
What to do when there is violence	1	1.4	1	2.9	--	--
Other	--	--	--	--	--	--

Note: "--" = 0 responses

#### Sexuality and intimacy

As depicted in Table 4, strong support for 'learning how to keep romance alive in marriage' as a specific topic choice was found. 'Learning how to show affection for one another' and 'learning how to please my partner' were also moderately supported, followed by 'learning how to deal with sexual difficulties' and 'learning to talk to your spouse about sex'. Although the male and female sub-samples both reported 'learning how to keep romance alive in marriage' as their first specific topic choice in the content area of sexuality and intimacy, the male sub-sample showed stronger support for this specific topic compared to their female counterparts whose responses were slightly more distributed between the other specific topics in the general content area of sexuality and intimacy.

**Table 4****Specific Topic Needs on Sexuality and Intimacy**

<b>Specific Sexuality/Intimacy Topics</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>		<b>Males</b>		<b>Females</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Learning how to keep romance alive in marriage	34	47.2	18	54.5	16	41.0
Learning how to show affection for one another	10	13.9	4	12.1	6	15.4
Learning how to please my partner	9	12.5	4	12.1	5	12.8
Learning how to deal with sexual difficulties	6	8.3	3	9.1	3	7.7
Learning to talk to your spouse about sex	6	8.3	2	6.1	4	10.3
Information and instruction on birth control	3	4.2	2	6.1	1	2.6
General sex education	3	4.2	--	--	3	7.7
Other	--	--	--	--	1	2.6

Note: "--" = 0 responses

Careers

Table 5 illustrates the distribution of preferred specific topics in the content area of careers. When looking at the entire sample, results show that participants overwhelmingly supported 'learning how to cope with stress from work' as a preferred specific topic, followed by 'sharing expectations on how career decision will be made', and 'learning how to deal with both partners working'.

**Table 5****Topic Needs on Careers**

<b>Specific Careers Topics</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>		<b>Males</b>		<b>Females</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Learning how to cope with stress from work	39	53.4	20	58.8	19	48.7
Sharing expectations on how career decisions will be made	16	21.9	6	17.6	10	25.6
Learning how to deal with both partners working	15	20.5	8	23.5	7	17.9
Other	3	4.1	--	--	3	7.7

Note: "--" = 0 responses

### Money and finances

Specific topics around money and finances are listed in Table 6 along with their frequencies. When looking at the entire population, frequencies representing 'how to make and plan a budget' and 'sharing expectations on how money decisions will be made' were the top two choices and were almost equally rated. It is interesting to note that for their third choice the male sub-sample selected 'how to buy a house', where the female sub-sample reported that they want more information on 'how to buy a house' as well as 'information on investing money' as their third choice specific topic choices in the content area of money and finances.

**Table 6**  
**Specific Topic Needs on Money and Finances**

Specific Money and Finances Topics	Total Sample		Males		Females	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
How to make and plan a budget	19	26.0	9	26.5	10	25.6
Sharing expectations on how money decisions will be made	18	24.7	8	23.5	10	25.6
How to buy a house	15	20.5	7	20.6	8	20.5
Information on investing money	11	15.1	3	8.8	8	20.5
How to obtain and manage consumer credit	4	5.5	4	11.8	--	--
Information on taxes and insurance	2	2.7	2	5.9	--	--
How to be a smart consumer	1	1.4	--	--	1	1.26
How to write a will	--	--	--	--	--	--
Other	3	4.1	--	--	2	5.1

Note: "--" = 0 responses

### Household management and roles

Table 7 illustrates the frequency responses of the sample for their specific topic needs around household management and roles. When looking at the entire sample, frequencies represent 'sharing expectations on household chores' as the most preferred specific topic, followed by 'maintaining your personal identity within the relationship'. It is interesting to note that although the male and female sub-samples reported the same first and second preferred specific content areas, the male sub-sample showed overwhelming support for 'sharing expectations on household chores' while the female

sub-sample's responses were more distributed between 'sharing expectations around household chores' and 'maintaining your personal identity within the relationship'.

**Table 7**

**Specific Topic Needs on Household Management and Roles**

<b>Specific Household Management and Roles Topics</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>		<b>Males</b>		<b>Females</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Sharing expectations on household chores	41	56.9	21	63.6	20	51.3
Maintaining your personal identity within the relationship	25	34.7	9	27.3	16	41.0
Societal pressures and expectations of men and women	5	6.9	3	9.1	2	5.1
Other	1	1.4	--	--	1	2.6

Note: "--" = 0 responses

Religion and marriage

Table 8 illustrates specific topic needs for information on religion and marriage. Of the participants who chose a first preference, frequencies overwhelmingly supported 'sharing expectations about religious practices', followed by 'what it means to have a Christian (or other religious faith) marriage', and then 'sharing your religion with your children'. Differences between the male and female sub-samples was found where the male sub-set supported 'sharing expectations about religious practices', 'what it means to have a Christian (or other religious faith) marriage', and then 'sharing your religion with your children', while the female sub-set supported 'sharing expectations about religious practices', followed by 'sharing your religion with your children', and then 'what it means to have a Christian (or other religious faith) marriage'.

**Table 8**  
**Specific Topic Needs on Religion and Marriage**

Specific Religion and Marriage Topics	Total Sample		Males		Females	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sharing expectations about religious practices	22	37.3	12	44.4	10	31.3
What it means to have a Christian (or other religious faith) marriage	9	15.3	6	22.2	3	9.4
Sharing your religion with your children	7	11.9	1	3.7	6	18.8
Learning to pray together	3	5.1	--	--	3	9.4
Other	7	11.9	2	7.4	5	15.6
Not applicable	6	10.2	4	14.8	2	6.3

Note: "--" = 0 responses

#### Having children and parenting

Table 9 presents frequency responses for preferences in the topic area of having children and parenting. The entire sample largely chose 'sharing expectations about raising/disciplining children' as their most preferred specific topic, followed by 'information on the effects children have on marriage', 'sharing expectations about having children', and 'parenting skills'. Female responses supported 'sharing expectations about raising/disciplining children', 'information on the effects children have on marriage', 'sharing expectations about having children', and 'parenting skills'. For the male sub-sample, the predominant choice of specific topics was also 'sharing expectation about raising/disciplining children', however their second choice was 'sharing expectations about having children', followed by 'parenting skills', and then 'information on the effects children have on marriage'.

**Table 9****Specific Topic Needs on Having Children and Parenting**

<b>Specific Having Children and Parenting Topics</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>		<b>Males</b>		<b>Females</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Sharing expectations about raising/disciplining children	23	31.5	11	32.4	12	30.8
Information on the effects children have on marriage	16	21.9	5	14.7	11	28.2
Sharing expectations about having children	13	17.8	9	26.5	4	10.3
Parenting skills	12	16.4	8	23.5	4	10.3
Information on pregnancy and childbirth	4	5.5	1	2.9	3	7.7
Being a step-parent	2	2.7	--	--	2	5.1
Other	1	1.3	--	--	1	2.6

Note: "--" = 0 responses

Family and friends

Table 10 represents the frequencies of participants' preferred specific topic needs in the content area of family and friends. As the table illustrates, frequencies for the entire sample predominantly supported 'how to deal with in-laws and family' followed by 'blending two family traditions' and 'negotiating friendships as a married couple'.

**Table 10****Specific Topic Needs on Family and Friends**

<b>Specific Family and Friends Topics</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>		<b>Males</b>		<b>Females</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
How to deal with in-laws and family	40	56.3	17	51.5	23	60.5
Blending two family traditions together	16	22.5	8	24.2	8	21.1
Negotiating friendships as a married couple	14	19.7	2	21.2	7	18.4
Other	--	--	--	--	--	--

Note: "--" = 0 responses

Other issues

The last section of specific topics included several different specific topics under the broader general topic heading of 'other.' Topics for this category are listed in Table

11. The entire sample selected 'identifying trouble signs in marriage', followed by 'how to build friendship in marriage', 'how to deal with partner's depression', and then 'sharing expectations around leisure activities' as being their predominant specific topic selections. It is interesting to note the differences between the male and female sub-samples. Males supported 'identifying trouble signs in marriage' as their first choice followed by, 'how to build friendship in marriage', 'sharing expectations around leisure activities', and 'how to deal with partner's depression', while females supported 'identifying trouble signs in marriage', followed by 'how to deal with partner's depression', 'how to build friendship in marriage', and 'sharing expectations around leisure activities'.

**Table 11**

**Specific Topic Needs on Other Issues**

Specific Other Issues Topics	Total Sample		Males		Females	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Identifying trouble signs in marriage	23	31.5	12	35.3	11	28.2
How to build friendship in marriage	14	19.2	9	26.5	5	12.8
How to deal with partner's depression	11	15.1	4	11.8	7	17.9
Sharing expectations around leisure activities	9	12.3	5	14.7	4	10.3
Improving self-esteem	5	6.8	1	2.9	4	10.3
Dealing with jealousy	4	5.5	1	2.9	3	7.7
Where to go when your marriage needs help	3	4.1	--	--	3	7.7
What to do when there is an affair	1	1.4	1	2.9	--	--
How to deal with a partner's use of alcohol/drugs	1	1.4	1	2.9	--	--
Learning to deal with a previous marriage or ex-spouse	--	--	--	--	--	--
Other	2	2.7	--	--	2	5.1

Note: "--" = 0 responses

Format

The dependent variable of format type consisted of measuring how much subjects liked seven different formats as a means of marriage preparation instruction. These formats included reading a book, completing a workbook with exercises, small group

discussions, lectures/classes, meeting with another married couple, counselling with a minister/rabbi, and counselling with a therapist. Each format type was measured on a five point Likert type scale with 1 being 'strongly like' and 5 being 'strongly dislike'.

As depicted in Table 12, the majority of responses hover around a neutral rating of 3. Small group discussions was the most preferred format type, followed by completing a workbook with exercises, counseling with a therapist, and meeting with a married couple. It is interesting to note that the three least preferred format choices (less than neutral in rating) of participants in this study are the formats that are often for marriage preparation programs. These consist of attending lectures or classes, reading a book, and counseling with a minister/rabbi.

**Table 12**  
**Preference for Different Formats**

Type of Format	Mean Rating	S.D.	N
Small group discussions	2.80	1.21	74
Complete a workbook with exercises	2.82	1.06	74
Counselling with a therapist	2.85	1.13	73
Meet with another married couple	2.89	1.15	74
Lectures or classes	3.02	0.96	74
Read a book	3.19	1.14	74
Counselling with a minister/rabbi	3.59	1.07	74

\* 1 = strongly like, 2 = like, 3 = neutral, 4 = dislike, 5 = strongly dislike

#### Format attributes

The dependent variable representing format attributes consisted of measuring how important subjects felt six different format qualities were. These format attributes and their associated ratings are listed in Table 13. Format types were measured on a four point Likert type scale with 1 being 'most important', 2 being 'very important', 3 being 'somewhat important', and 4 being 'not important at all'. Strong support was shown for the format being effective, followed by the format being interesting, protecting privacy, being inexpensive, not requiring lots of time, and providing the opportunity to meet other couples.

**Table 13****Format Attribute Importance**

<b>Format Attribute</b>	<b>Mean Rating*</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
Format is effective	1.65	.694	72
Format is interesting	1.82	.661	71
Format protects my privacy	2.18	.924	72
Format is inexpensive	2.42	.852	72
Format does not require lots of time	2.58	.852	72
Format provides opportunity to meet other couples	3.07	.893	72

\* 1 = most important, 2 = very important, 3 = somewhat important,  
4 = not at all important

**Referral Sources**

Referral sources measured how influential different sources would be in terms of participants' decision to attend a marriage preparation class/program. Each referral sources was measured on a five point Likert type scale with 1 being 'very influential' 2 being 'influential', 3 being 'unsure', 4 being 'not very influential', and 5 being 'not influential at all'. Table 14 shows the results for the entire sample. Results predominantly support word of mouth referrals where friends/relatives, counselors, the work place, and ministers/rabbis are more influential on the decision to participate in marriage preparation than media referrals such as bridal fairs, mailed brochures, television/radio, and newspapers. Significant differences ( $t(71) = 4.013, p = .000$ ) were found between the male ( $M = 3.34, SD = 1.16$ ) and female ( $M = 2.34, SD = .97$ ) sub-samples when it came to counsellors as a referral source for marriage preparation. These results indicate that female participants in this study support counsellors as a referral source for marriage preparation more than their male counterparts.

**Table 14****Influence of Referral Source**

<b>Information Source</b>	<b>Mean Likelihood*</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
Friend/Relative	2.07	1.04	74
Counsellor	2.82	1.17	73
Work place	3.22	1.15	74
Minister/Rabbi	3.23	1.30	74
Bridal fair	3.33	1.08	73
Mailed Brochure	3.84	.966	74
Television/Radio	3.93	.913	74
Newspaper	3.95	.890	74

\* 1= Very influential, 2 = Influential, 3 = Unsure, 4 = Not very influential, 5 = Not influential at all

Level of Delivery

Level of delivery measured the degree to which subjects would like to hear personal stories and experiences of the marriage preparation facilitator (less academic) and the degree to which subjects would like to hear factual materials/information based on scientific findings (more academic).

Personal stories

The dependent variable measuring the desire for personal stories had a possible range of 1 (strongly like) to 7 (strongly dislike), where higher scores represented a stronger dislike for hearing personal stories and experiences of the facilitator during formal marriage preparation class. Of the seventy-four responses to this question, the mean was 3.03 ( $SD = 1.58$ ), and the median 3 ('neutral'), with responses ranging between 1 and 7.

Factual information

Like the variable of personal stories, the variable measuring the desire for hearing factual information based on scientific research and findings about relationships had a possible range of 1 (strongly like) to 7 (strongly dislike). Overall responses for this variable ranged from 1 to 7, with a mean of 3.06 ( $SD = 1.48$ ) and a median of 3 ('neutral').

### Course Length

On average, the participants of this study felt that just under ten hours ( $M = 9.96$ ,  $SD = 8.578$ ) was a realistic number of hours to commit to participating in a marriage preparation program (range = 0 – 50 hours).

### Course Cost

Participants were asked to state the maximum amount that they would be willing to pay for formal marriage preparation. The average maximum amount that the entire sample was willing to spend was \$135.72. This figure represents the mean average from a range between \$0.00 and \$300.00.

### Course Time

The dependent variable of course time was measured by asking participants when the best time during the week would be for them to participate in a marriage preparation program. They had the option of choosing from week days, weeknights, weekend days, weekend nights, or a weekend retreat. Subjects in this sample overwhelmingly supported weeknights (56.9%) as their preferred time of the week for courses to be offered, followed by weekend days (18.06%), and then a weekend retreat (12.5%).

### Course Location

When it came to the most preferred location for formal marriage preparation to take place, participants could choose from one of six options. These options were: a church, a community center, a school, someone's home, an office, or 'other' (allowing them to list another location). Participants most often selected a community centre (34.72%) as their preferred location for a marriage preparation program. Having marriage preparation at someone's home (18.06%), and having it in office space (18.06%) tied for the second most preferred locations. It is interesting to note that churches (16.67%), which are currently the most common places for marriage preparation to take place, were rated as subjects' fourth preferred choice.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Discussion**

The goal of this study was to explore engaged individuals' perceptions of their marriage preparation needs. By closely examining the results of this research, valuable insights are gained into how premarital preparation programs can be designed and implemented for the purposes of attracting engaged individuals to participate in marriage preparation and to enhance their actual marriage preparation experiences. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings of this study, suggestions for the development of marriage preparation programs, and a discussion of general observations resulting from the research.

### **Content Needs**

#### **General Topics**

Participants predominantly rated communication as their most preferred general topic followed by: problem solving/conflict resolution, money and financial management, having children and parenting, and building friendship in marriage. Williams' (1992) findings were similar with communication also being the most desired general topic, followed by money/finances, conflict negotiation/problem solving, children, and religion. It is interesting to note that the top desired general topics have remained consistent in both studies with the exception of building friendship in marriage (this study) being chosen over religion in marriage (Williams, 1992). This is likely a result of lower church affiliation and participation rates in Canada (Bibby, 1995). Although topic areas were ranked differently, Silliman and Schumm (1989) found similar results in their examination of topic areas that premarital clients found interesting. Results in the current study indicated that parenting skills, resolving differences, and effective listening were the top three desired general topics followed by learning to forgive, strong family characteristics, avoiding divorce, money management, marital roles and expectations, stress management and sexuality.

Overall, results from this study support the findings of previous research concerning marriage preparation content needs of engaged individuals, along with general content that is offered in the majority of marriage preparation programs (Silliman & Schumm, 1999, 2000). This study, however, differs by illuminating participants'

overwhelming support for more information and skill building in the area of communication. Almost half (46.5%) of the sample reported communication as their most preferred general topic. This may be indicative of increasing trends toward companionate marriages where couples are seeking friendship, comradeship, and equity in their marital unions (Burgess & Locke, 1990; Farnden, 1990; Mace, 1975). Engaged individuals may be recognizing the importance of healthy communication skills in helping them to interact with their partners and build friendship in their everyday lives.

When considering the general content needs of premarital individuals in the design of marriage preparation programs, it is recommended that programs include increased information and skill building in the areas of communication, problem solving/conflict resolution, money and financial management, having children and parenting, and building friendship in marriage. To enhance the focus on communication skills, these skills can be taught at the beginning of the marriage preparation program and woven throughout other general and specific content areas.

#### Specific Topics

This exploratory study also builds upon previous research and programs by examining what specific topics engaged individuals want within each of the general topic areas. It is important to note that most programs offer skill-building in the areas of communication and problem-solving/conflict resolution and provide general discussions in other commonly offered topic areas (Bader et al., 1980; Glendenig & Wilson, 1972; Larson, 1989; Nickols, Fournier, & Nickols, 1986; Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992; Ridl y, Avery, Harrell, Leslie, & Dent, 1981; Ridley, Jorgensen, Morgan, & Avery, 1982; Silliman et al, 1992; Stahmann & Heibert, 1987; Williams, 1992; Zoost, 1973). Findings from this study support enhanced skill-building in many of the general topic areas that are offered, not just communication and problem-solving/conflict resolution. This information can be used to direct program designers and facilitators in allocating time and resources to specific topic areas within each general topic area.

In the general topic area of communication, participants reported that they specifically want to learn skills and gain information on 'learning to be an effective listener' and 'learning to express one's feelings'. As previously mentioned, it is interesting to note that participants equally selected both the encoding and decoding

components of the communication process (Gerbner, Holsti, Krippendorff, Paisley, & Stone, 1978). There was also a relatively high response rate to 'learning how to read my partner's non-verbal signals' which would certainly enhance any skill-building work done in the area of communication (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993).

In the area of problem-solving/conflict resolution, participants reported a strong desire to 'learn how to resolve differences', and 'learn how to deal with anger or silence'. Once again, these topics focus on skill based learning which requires a foundation in effective communication skills. 'How to make and plan a budget', 'sharing expectations on how money decisions will be made', and 'how to buy a house' were the most desired specific topics for the section on money and finances. When considering the general topic area of having children and parenting, subjects overwhelmingly reported that they wanted to 'share their expectations about raising and disciplining children', followed by gaining 'information on the effects children have on marriage', and 'sharing expectations about having children'.

Other general topic areas often included in marriage preparation programs include sexuality and intimacy, careers, household management and roles, religion, and family and friends. Although these general content areas were not highly supported by participants in this study, knowledge of their preferred specific topics is valuable to those developing programs that contain these topics areas. In the area of intimacy and sexuality, overwhelming support was given to 'learning how to keep romance alive in marriage' followed by 'learning how to show affection for one another'. 'Learning how to cope with stress from work' and 'sharing expectations on how career decisions will be made' were the most preferred specific topics for the section on careers. When it came to household management and roles, 'sharing expectations on household chores' and 'maintaining your personal identity within the relationship' were the most commonly desired specific topic areas that subjects wanted more information and skill development on. In the general topic area of religion in marriage, subjects reported that they want to learn information and skills around 'sharing expectations about religious practices' and 'what it means to have a Christian or other religious faith marriage'. When discussing family and friends, subjects reported that they want more information and skills on 'how to deal with in-laws and family' and 'blending two family traditions together'. Finally,

the general topic area that encompassed other commonly addressed issues in marriage preparation found that potential marriage preparation participants want more information on 'identifying trouble signs in marriage' and 'how to build friendship in marriage'.

Results from Williams' (1992) inquiry into the specific topics that engaged individuals want in marriage preparation were not examined by general topic area, but by preferred ranking. Results found that dealing with stress from work, the effect of children on marriage, how to keep romance alive in marriage, how to deal with anger or silence, learning how to resolve differences, and identifying trouble signs in marriage to be most desired (Williams, 1992). The study at hand supports these findings as being engaged individuals' preferred content needs in preparing for their marriages.

#### Recommendations Related to Course Content

1. Focus a significant amount of the course content on developing communication skills, and weave these skills through discussions and skill-building in the areas of problem solving/conflict resolution, money and financial management, having children and parenting, and building friendship in marriage.
2. Include enhanced skill-building in all of the general topic areas that are offered, not just in the communication and problem-solving/conflict resolution sections.
3. In the general topic area of communication, include skill-building on effective listening, expressing feelings, and reading non-verbal signals.
4. In the general topic area of problem-solving/conflict resolution, include skill-building on resolving differences, and dealing with anger or silence.
5. In the general topic area of money and finances, include information and skill-building on how to make and plan a budget, sharing expectations on how money decisions will be made, how to buy a house, and how to invest money.
6. When considering the general topic area of having children and parenting, include the opportunity for sharing expectations about raising and disciplining children, gaining information on the effects children have on marriage, and sharing expectations about having children.
7. When considering the general topic area of intimacy and sexuality, include information and skill-building on how to keep romance alive in marriage how to show affection.

8. When considering the general topic area of careers, include information and skill-building on how to cope with stress from work and sharing expectations on how career decisions will be made.
9. When considering the topic area of household management and roles, include information and skill-building on sharing expectations on household chores and maintaining your personal identity within the relationship.
10. When considering the topic area of religion in marriage, include information and skill-building around sharing expectations about religious practices and what it means to have a faith marriage.
11. When considering the topic area of family and friends, include information and skill-building on dealing with in-laws and family and how to blend two family traditions together.
12. When considering other topic areas, include information and skill-building on identifying trouble signs in marriage and how to build friendship in marriage.

### **Structural Needs**

#### **Program Formats**

Results of this study provide valuable information on engaged individuals' needs for the structure of marriage preparation programs. Participants were asked to identify how much they liked a variety of marriage preparation formats. Little variability was reported in their responses with the majority of formats being given close to a neutral rating. With this in mind, it is valuable to look at which format types were more preferred by participants of this study. Subjects reported small group discussions as their most favoured program format followed by workbooks/exercises, counselling with a therapist, meeting with a married couple, lectures/classes, reading a book, and then counselling with a minister/rabbi. It is interesting to note that these findings are opposite to current practice where marriage preparation usually consists of counseling with a minister/rabbi, attending lectures/classes, or reading pop literature on relationships (Silliman & Schumm, 1999, 2000). These findings indicate that it would be useful for those providing marriage preparation to consider other format options to increase participant recruitment and participation.

Previous research into preferred formats for marriage preparation has revealed varying results. In Williams' (1992) study, which provided the measure for this particular variable, the most preferred format for marriage preparation was counselling with a minister followed by weekend retreats, meeting with a married couple, small group discussions, counselling with a therapist, lecture/classes, reading a book, and completing a workbook/exercises. These results differed substantially from the current study where counselling with a minister/rabbi was participants' most preferred format in Williams' study and the least preferred format in the current study. Another difference was noted where workbooks and exercises were rated low by participants in Williams' study, yet they were the second preferred format for marriage preparation in the current study.

Another structural format of marriage preparation is the source of the information and skills. Silliman et al., (1992) found respondents rated their parents along with personal experience as their primary resources for quality information about marriage. Other resources, such as premarital counsellors, learning from experience, and learning from friends, were moderately ranked, and print and electronic media were reported to be the least valuable resource. Overall, the results from the Silliman et al. study showed that premarital individuals preferred client-centered, familiar sources of information that include opportunity for personal reflection and control of the program's agenda. When it came to attending formal marriage preparation classes, it was also noted that a combination of marriage preparation providers was preferred and although the majority of subjects reported themselves as active church-goers, results showed that participants more or equally desired the involvement or substitution of private teachers and facilitators to clergy. This study also found that young engaged individuals supported a therapist-couple format the most with less interest in programs where there were small groups, individual sessions with a therapist, large group settings, or both couple and individual counsellors. Participants reported that having a combination of approaches was the most favoured instructional format and that interactive discussions with questions and answers were highly valued as an approach that supported "how-to" skill development (Silliman et al., 1992).

Silliman and Schumm's (1995) follow-up study differed in that they found subjects preferred programs led by clergy. Similarities were found in the desire for a combination of professional, well-trained counsellors who respected their clients, and programs that involve one couple or small groups with combined teaching methods. Results from the study also emphasized the importance of focusing on format types that enhance awareness-building and skill-building.

Consistent findings on what engaged individuals' needs are in terms of a marriage preparation format have not been found. Results from this study can be used as an analysis of a Canadian sample where respondents tend to be older in age at first marriage and less religious in nature than their American counterparts (Bibby, 1995; The Vanier Institute of the Family, 2000).

#### Format Attributes

When it came to the variable of format attributes, findings of this study matched those of Williams' (1992) study. Subjects strongly indicated that 'the program being effective' was the most important format attribute; followed by 'the format is interesting', 'the format protects participant's privacy', 'the format is inexpensive', 'the format does not require lots of time', and 'the format provides an opportunity to meet other couples'. These findings support programs being effective and interesting as key objectives in the development of marriage preparation programs. It is worth noticing the contradictory results where the opportunity to meet other couples was the least important format attribute while results support small group discussions as the most preferred format attribute. This may provide a difficult situation for marriage preparation facilitators where they must draw out enough experience and personal information from program participants to provide an environment where couples can learn from one another, yet at the same time be cautious to protect privacy and not force friendships upon participants.

### Referral Sources

Findings about the influence of different referral sources on the decision to attend marriage preparation were similar to those of Williams (1992). The original examination found that personal sources of information such as friends/relatives, ministers, and counsellors were most likely to influence engaged individuals to participate in marriage preparation whereas advertising through the mass media (e.g. television/radio, brochures, newspapers) was less likely to be influential (Williams, 1992). The study at hand supports these results, with the exception of the influence that ministers/rabbis have on the decision to attend marriage preparation. Results support friends/relatives as the most influential followed by a counsellor, the workplace, a minister/rabbi, a bridal show, a brochure, the television/radio, and a newspaper. The findings on influential referral sources indicate that marriage preparation providers are strongly relying on family and friends and other word-of-mouth referrals, which is valuable information for the marketing and promotion of programs.

### Level of Delivery

The variable of level of delivery was constructed for the purposes of this study. Both personal stories and factual information were rated slightly higher than neutral, with personal stories being slightly more preferred. Results of this measure did not reveal many insights into the desired level of delivery that potential marriage preparation participants are looking for.

### Course Length

There have been varying reports on the number of hours that premarital individuals are willing to invest in a formal premarital preparation program. Respondents in the Silliman et al. (1992) study rated premarital training programs that were 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6 hours in length approximately equal. Programs that were over seven hours long were less desired; however they were still desired by those wanting to attend marriage preparation regardless of the time commitment. Silliman and Schumm (1995) found that programs less than four hours in duration were most favoured, and positive attitudes were found toward programs that were between five and twenty hours in length. In their recommendations for marriage preparation programs, Silliman and Schumm (1999) stated that the importance for training be at least 12-24 hours in length to offer an

effective program where skill development could take place. They suggested that it may be useful to initially have a 4 – 6 hour program that focuses on practical problem-solving skills and then allow couples to decide if they want to participate in further training.

Results from this study report a desire for longer programs than in previous research (Silliman et al., 1999; Silliman and Schumm, 1995) with the total sample reporting a desire for programs to be just under ten hours (9.96 hours) in duration.

#### Course Cost

Traditionally, studies in this field have found the amount individuals are willing to pay for formal marriage preparation programs to be relatively low. Silliman et al. (1992) found respondents were willing to pay the lowest amount possible with a greater interest in participating in programs if they were free. Silliman and Schumm (1995) found that programs that were free of charge or cost less than \$50 were most preferred with programs costing over \$100.00 being the least preferred. With this in mind, findings from this study suggest that participants are willing to pay higher amounts for formal marriage preparation than they have in past studies. The entire sample was willing to pay an average of almost \$136.00 (\$135.72). This is most likely reflective of a relatively older, educated sample with higher socio-economic levels.

#### Course Time

Subjects overwhelmingly reported weeknights as the preferred time to participate in marriage preparation classes/programs, with weekends and weekend retreats also being mildly supported. Although it is not documented in the literature, it appears that many formal marriage preparation programs are offered on weekends or in the form of a weekend retreat. Findings from this study may contradict current practice. This should be noted and considered in the development of future programs.

#### Course Location

When it came to the most preferred location for formal marriage preparation to take place, participants reported that a community centre is their preferred location, followed by, someone's home, and/or office space. It is interesting to note that churches, which are currently the most common places for marriage preparation to take place (Silliman & Schumm, 1999, 2000), were rated as subjects' fourth preferred location

choice. Once again findings from this study contradict current practice and should be noted and considered in the development of future programs.

#### Recommendations Related to Course Structure

1. When designing programs, keep in mind that individuals prefer small group discussions, followed by workbook/exercises, counselling with a therapist, meeting with a married couple, lectures/classes, reading a book, and then counselling with a minister/rabbi.
2. Ensure program effectiveness is a main objective of program design and implementation. Formats that are interesting and protect participant's privacy are also fundamental to program design, implementation, delivery, and evaluation.
3. Rely on word-of-mouth referrals and focus marketing and promotion of programs on personal referral sources such as friends/relatives, counsellors, workplaces, and minister/rabbis. Mass media advertising (brochures, television/radio, and newspapers) are less influential.
4. Keep programs ten hours in length or shorter. Shorter programs can be developed with the option for participants to complete more hours in specific topic areas if they desire.
5. Keep the program price below \$136.00 (\$135.72). Remind couples of what they are getting for their cost (e.g. Ten hour program at \$135.00 for two people equals \$6.75 per hour per person). This small preventative investment in their marriage is much cheaper than marriage counselling or hiring a divorce lawyer.
6. Offer marriage preparation programs on weeknights.
7. Offer marriage preparation programs in community centres.

#### General Observations

Several observations were made after analyzing the results of this study. One observation found several differences in the content needs of the male and female sub-samples. Traditional sex roles have supported men being responsible for financially supporting the family while women have been responsible for caring for the home and children (Schwartz & Scott, 1994). Results from this study support less influence of traditional sex role expectations with male respondents showing preference for several traditional female sex role topics and females showing preference for several traditional

male sex role topics. For example, on the variable of general topics, the male sub-sample showed greater support for wanting information and skill-building in the areas of communication and parenting and having children where as the female sub-sample showed greater support for information and skill-building in the areas of communication, problem solving/conflict resolution, and money and financial management. This observation is also reflected in the specific topic areas of money and financial management and household management and roles. In the area of money and financial management the female sub-sample supported the responses of the male sub-sample, however, they also reported wanting information on 'how to invest money'. In the area of household management and roles, it is interesting to note that while the male and female sub-samples both supported wanting more information on 'sharing expectations on household chores', the male sub-sample showed overwhelming support for this specific topic while the female sub-sample also supported 'maintaining their personal identity within the relationship'. This information can be used to encourage those developing and facilitating marriage preparation programs to consider the changing information needs of men and women in Canadian society at the turn of the twenty-first Century.

This change towards more companionate marriages is also reflected in subjects' overwhelming support for communication as a marriage preparation content need and the fact that learning skills and information on building friendship in marriage as a general topic need was also reported. Research has shown that a significant component of satisfying long-term relationships is having a strong friendship between partners. This friendship is based on how couples interact with one another, and the ways in which they communicate both verbally and non-verbally (Gottman & Silverman 1999). Perhaps the content needs of communication and building friendship in marriage can be combined to enhance one another and in turn used to teach and practice relationships skills in the areas of problem solving/conflict resolution, money and financial management, having children and parenting, sexuality and intimacy, etc.

Findings from this study suggest a decreased need for the influence and involvement of churches and religion in formal marriage preparation. Religion was reported as respondents ninth (out of ten) preferred general topic, receiving premarital

counselling with a minister was their least preferred format type (out of seven options), ministers and rabbis were the fourth (out of eight options) most influential referral source (after friends and relatives, counsellors, and the workplace), and churches were rated as the fourth (out of five options) preferred location (after a community center, office space, and somebody's home) to attend marriage preparation classes. These results present serious implications for the field of marriage preparation as churches and religious communities are often the primary supporters and promoters of formal marriage preparation programs.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusions

This chapter discusses the limitations and strengths/contributions of this study as well as implications for those who develop, implement, facilitate, and evaluate marriage preparation programs. Recommendations for further research are also made.

### Limitations

Several limitations to this study should be noted. By method of data collection, the results of this study are based on a convenience sample. Those individuals who decided to participate in this study may be seen as keen about planning and organizing their marriages because they have been found in places that encourage and support that behaviour. This may have presented a biased sample which does not represent the needs of those people who are more apprehensive about participating in marriage preparation programs.

Another limitation is reflected in the fact that the desired response rate for this study was not achieved, resulting in a lower number of responses to analyze. This may have resulted from a difficulty in getting people to participate in a study when their attention is focused on planning a wedding. Engaged individuals appear to be bombarded with so many commercial and emotional stimulants that participating in this study may have been low on their priority list, especially when they may also be avoiding participating in marriage preparation.

The fact that the questionnaire for this study was exploratory in nature may present difficulties in validity and reliability. This is, however, lessened by the lack of mediating and moderating variables where causation was not explored.

It was a goal of the researcher to collect a sample that would provide a diverse population of individuals. Although this goal was achieved with many of the demographic variables (sex, education level, income level, etc), variability in ethnicity and religion was minimal. Diversity within each of these variables may have provided additional insight into how programs could be developed and delivered to people of varying ethnic and religious backgrounds.

### **Strengths and Contributions**

This study presents useful insights into the marriage preparation needs of engaged individuals. With limited research available on the needs of potential marriage preparation participants, results from this study both support past research and point out areas of discrepancy that can be further explored. Either way, the findings provide a helpful addition to the field of marriage preparation and can assist program planners and promoters to design and market marriage preparation in a way that may attract participants and enhance the experience of engaged individuals who participate.

This Canadian sample provides insights into how marriage preparation programs can be designed and facilitated to meet the specific needs of engaged (British Columbian) Canadians. The results provide a useful addition to American resources that Canadian program developers, promoters, and facilitators often use. It also provides insights into the marriage preparation needs of older participants and those not necessarily wanting marriage preparation from religious institutions with religious perspectives.

In addition to the work of Silliman and Schumm (1989, 1995, 1999, 2000), Silliman et al. (1992), and Williams (1992), this research provides a useful and workable document that can be directly applied to the field of marriage preparation by program designers and facilitators. The usability of this research is enhanced by the listed recommendations that can be easily incorporated into the design and development of programs (see Appendix D).

### **Implications**

Several contradictions were found between the results of this study and current practice in the field of marriage preparation. Findings indicated that engaged individuals prefer small group discussions as their first format choice and workbooks/exercises as their second preferred choice. Many current forms of marriage preparation consist of counselling with a therapist, counselling with a minister/rabbi or a combination of lectures with exercises and small and large group discussions (Silliman & Schumm, 1999, 2000). This research may be an indication that traditional premarital counselling environments are not the best approach to marriage preparation, and that better formats may involve classes that mainly consist of small group discussions and exercises, small

support groups facilitated by an instructor, or a workbook/exercise book that couples complete on their own.

Contradictions were also found between the location that engaged individuals prefer for marriage preparation and where programs are usually held. The majority of marriage preparation programs are offered in church locations (Silliman & Schumm, 1999, 2000) and participants of this study reported that they would prefer to attend formal marriage preparation in community centres followed by an office and somebody's home. This research may be an indication that moving marriage preparation out of the churches and into more secular environments may result in increased participation rates by engaged couples.

Contradictions were also found between the day and time that participants want to participate in marriage preparation and when programs are usually held. It appears that many marriage preparation programs are held on weekends while the majority of respondents in this study reported they would prefer to attend marriage preparation classes on weeknight evenings. These findings indicate that offering marriage preparation courses on weeknights may result in higher participation rates as it is more convenient for engaged couples to attend.

Another implication for the field of marriage preparation is that comparable learning opportunities do not seem to be available between those who attend church and those who do not. It appears that more non-profit agencies and private counsellors are providing premarital education or counselling, yet many couples may not have access to these resources (money, location, knowledge). Addressing the premarital learning needs of non-church participants is often challenging to professionals and marriage educators. This would involve developing resources that are accessible to the general public, and making this group aware of the value of marriage preparation in the absence of a church organization which requires or advises their participation.

It is important to note that a large portion of the sample population in this study is cohabiting and these individuals may be at a different stage in their relationship development than those who do not live together. These couples have most likely already made significant joint decisions, and dealt with many practical matters. They also may be approaching marriage preparation with more insight into their relationships

as well as with more issues. It is important for marriage preparation providers to consider the varying needs of those couples who cohabit versus those who do not and either adjust programs accordingly or offer separate programs.

More work needs to be done on the promotion and marketing of not only specific marriage preparation programs, but the concept of preparing for marriage in general. It appears that many people are not familiar with marriage preparation and if they are, there is a strong chance that they have misconceptions about what it is. Results from this study show that individuals feel it is important to prepare for marriage, yet they are unsure of how to do so. New methods of promoting the importance of marriage preparation and where couples can go to find marriage preparation are strongly needed. Research indicates that the traditional promotion methods of television/radio, newspapers, brochures, and bridal shows are not as effective as personal sources (Silliman & Schumm, 1999). It is time that marriage preparation providers find new and exciting ways to promote their products. Some suggestions include marketing to family and friends so that they suggest/recommend couples take marriage preparation (family/friends could buy marriage preparation as an engagement or wedding gift), and to provide engaged couples with excellent marriage preparation experiences so that they recommend programs to their friends who are getting married. Couples who participate in marriage preparation can be given items (certificate of completion, refrigerator magnets, coffee mugs, booklets, etc) that will stimulate conversation about marriage preparation with their friends and family.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

With the lack of current research not only in the field of marriage preparation itself, but specifically on the needs of engaged individuals when it comes to preparing for their marriages, there are an endless supply of research studies waiting to be done. Building on the concept of this study, it would be interesting to compare the results with a moderator of participants' interest in learning about marriage relationships. More research is also needed on the specific needs of varying population groups such as cohabiters versus non-cohabiters, first marriages versus second marriages, religious backgrounds, religiosity, ethnicity, socio-economic background, and educational level.

It is interesting to note that findings from this study report engaged individuals rate preparing for their marriages as important, however, they are not very familiar with programs that exist. Perhaps one of the reasons contributing to low marriage preparation participation rates is related to the lack of knowledge and awareness of programs themselves. If this is the case, it is imperative that those offering marriage preparation programs find creative ways to not only market their specific program, but the concept of marriage preparation and what it consists of. Further research into effective marketing and promotional strategies for such programs is needed.

Results from previous studies (Silliman et al., 1992; Williams, 1992) and the current study did not provide conclusive evidence concerning engaged individuals' preferred formats for marriage preparation. Participants in this study rated all of the current formats for marriage preparation as neutral in liking. This indicates that a deeper exploration into the marriage preparation format needs of engaged individuals is warranted. Developing programs that are based on formats that potential participants will attend is essential for the future success of the field of marriage preparation.

The goal of this study was to explore engaged individuals' perceptions of their marriage preparation needs. Valuable insights were found on how premarital preparation programs can be designed and implemented for the purposes of attracting engaged individuals to participate in marriage preparation and to enhance their actual marriage preparation experiences. Designing programs that are based on the combination of scientific research, participants' needs, qualified program facilitators/counsellors, and effective marketing strategies and techniques can help encourage couples to participate in marriage preparation and provide them with relationship skills and information that will support them in achieving positive premarital growth experiences and long-term marital satisfaction.

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## APPENDIX A

# ENGAGED INDIVIDUALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR MARRIAGE PREPARATION NEEDS

**Part One** - A few questions about your relationship with your fiancé(e)

1. All things considered, how happy is your relationship compared to other people's relationships that you know? (please circle your answer)

Much happier			About the same	Definitely not as happy		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. What percentage of the time do you and your fiancée agree on issues? \_\_\_\_\_%

3. On average, how many times would you fight or have conflict in a month?  
\_\_\_\_\_ (number)

4. How important do you believe it is to spend time preparing for your marriage? (please circle your answer)

Not important at all				Somewhat important			Extremely important
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

5. I think my fiancée and I have some work to do on our relationship before we get married. (please circle your answer)

Strongly agree	Agree		Neutral	Disagree		Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. How familiar are you with marriage preparation programs? (please circle your answer)

Not familiar at all				Somewhat familiar		Extremely familiar
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Part 2** - A few questions about your marriage preparation wants and needs

7. Please indicate the top five topic areas that you would like more information on in regards to your relationship and then rank them from 1 (most important) to five (least important).

- \_\_\_\_\_ a) Communication
- \_\_\_\_\_ b) Problem-solving / conflict resolution
- \_\_\_\_\_ c) Sexuality and intimacy
- \_\_\_\_\_ d) Careers
- \_\_\_\_\_ e) Money and financial management
- \_\_\_\_\_ f) Household management and Roles
- \_\_\_\_\_ g) Religion
- \_\_\_\_\_ h) Having Children and Parenting
- \_\_\_\_\_ i) Family and friends
- \_\_\_\_\_ j) Building friendship in marriage
- \_\_\_\_\_ k) Other \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ l) Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. From each of the following areas (A, B, C, etc.), please indicate the top two specific topics or skills that would be most helpful to you. (1 = most helpful 2 = second most helpful)

## A) Communication

- \_\_\_\_\_ a) learning to be an effective listener
- \_\_\_\_\_ b) learning to be an effective speaker
- \_\_\_\_\_ c) learning to express one's feelings
- \_\_\_\_\_ d) learning how to read my partner's non-verbal signals
- \_\_\_\_\_ e) other \_\_\_\_\_

## B) Problem-Solving and Conflict Resolution Skills

- \_\_\_\_\_ a) learning how to resolve differences
- \_\_\_\_\_ b) learning problem solving skills
- \_\_\_\_\_ c) learning assertiveness skills
- \_\_\_\_\_ d) learning how to fight fairly
- \_\_\_\_\_ e) learning how to deal with anger or silence
- \_\_\_\_\_ f) what to do when there is violence
- \_\_\_\_\_ g) other \_\_\_\_\_

## C) Sexuality and Intimacy

- \_\_\_\_\_ a) general sex education
- \_\_\_\_\_ b) learning how to please my partner
- \_\_\_\_\_ c) learning how to deal with sexual difficulties
- \_\_\_\_\_ d) information and instruction on birth control
- \_\_\_\_\_ e) learning to talk to your spouse about sex
- \_\_\_\_\_ f) learning how to show affection for one another
- \_\_\_\_\_ g) learning how to keep romance alive in marriage
- \_\_\_\_\_ h) other \_\_\_\_\_

## D) Careers

- ☐ a) learning how to deal with both partners working
- ☐ b) learning how to cope with stress from work
- ☐ c) sharing expectations on how career decisions will be made
- ☐ d) other \_\_\_\_\_

## E) Money and Finances

- ☐ a) how to make and plan a budget
- ☐ b) sharing expectations on how money decisions will be made
- ☐ c) how to obtain and manage consumer credit
- ☐ d) information on taxes and insurance
- ☐ e) how to be a smart consumer
- ☐ f) how to buy a house
- ☐ g) how to write a will
- ☐ h) information on investing money
- ☐ i) other \_\_\_\_\_

## F) Household Management and Roles

- ☐ a) sharing expectations on household chores
- ☐ b) societal pressures and expectations of men and women
- ☐ c) maintaining your personal identity within the relationship
- ☐ d) other \_\_\_\_\_

## G) Religion and Marriage

- ☐ a) sharing expectations about religious practices
- ☐ b) learning to pray together
- ☐ c) sharing your religion with your children
- ☐ d) what it means to have a Christian (or other religious faith) marriage
- ☐ e) other \_\_\_\_\_

## H) Having Children and Parenting

- ☐ a) sharing expectations about having children
- ☐ b) sharing expectations about raising/disciplining children
- ☐ c) parenting skills
- ☐ d) being a step-parent
- ☐ e) information on pregnancy and childbirth
- ☐ f) information on the effects children have on marriage
- ☐ g) other \_\_\_\_\_

## I) Family and Friends

- ☐ a) how to deal with in-laws and family
- ☐ b) blending two family traditions together
- ☐ c) negotiating friendships as a married couple
- ☐ d) other \_\_\_\_\_

## J) Other Issues

- ☐ a) identifying trouble signs in marriage  
☐ b) where to go when your marriage needs help  
☐ c) dealing with jealousy  
☐ d) what to do when there is an affair  
☐ e) how to build friendship in marriage  
☐ f) sharing expectations around leisure activities  
☐ g) how to deal with partner's depression  
☐ h) how to deal with a partner's use of alcohol/drugs  
☐ i) learning to deal with a previous marriage or ex-spouse  
☐ j) improving self-esteem  
☐ k) other \_\_\_\_\_

9. Briefly describe what areas or skills would be important to you for a marriage preparation program to address.

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10. Please indicate the degree to which you would like or dislike each of the following formats as a means of marriage preparation. (Please circle your answer)

	Strongly Like	Like	Neutral	Dislike	Strongly Dislike
a) Read a book	1	2	3	4	5
b) Complete workbook with exercises	1	2	3	4	5
c) Small group discussions	1	2	3	4	5
d) Lectures or classes	1	2	3	4	5
e) Meet with another married couple	1	2	3	4	5
f) Counselling with a minister/rabbi	1	2	3	4	5
g) Counselling with a therapist	1	2	3	4	5

11. What is a realistic number of hours you would be willing to commit to participating in a marriage preparation program? \_\_\_\_\_ hours
12. What is the maximum number of hours you would be willing to commit to participating in a marriage preparation program? \_\_\_\_\_ hours
13. Please rate the importance of each of the following items in determining your preference for a marriage preparation format. (please circle your answers)

	Most Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not At All Important
a) Format is interesting	1	2	3	4
b) Format is effective	1	2	3	4
c) Format does not require lots of time	1	2	3	4
d) Format is inexpensive	1	2	3	4
e) Format protects my privacy	1	2	3	4
f) Format provides opportunity to meet other couples	1	2	3	4

14. How much would hearing from each of the following sources influence your decision to attend marriage preparation? (please circle your answers)

	Very influential	Influential	Unsure	Not very influential	Not influential at all
a) Friend/Relative	1	2	3	4	5
b) Work place	1	2	3	4	5
c) Minister/Rabbi	1	2	3	4	5
d) Television/Radio	1	2	3	4	5
e) Counsellor	1	2	3	4	5
f) Mailed brochure	1	2	3	4	5
g) Newspaper	1	2	3	4	5
h) Bridal fair	1	2	3	4	5

15. What is the maximum amount you would be willing to pay for a marriage preparation program? Remember that the cost of a program includes two people. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

16. Please indicate the degree to which you would like or dislike hearing personal stories and experiences of the marriage preparation facilitator. (Please circle your answer)

Strongly Like	Like		Neutral	Dislike		Strongly Dislike
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

17. Please indicate the degree to which you would like or dislike hearing factual materials based on scientific research and findings in a marriage preparation course.

Strongly Like	Like		Neutral	Dislike		Strongly Dislike
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

18. When would be the best time during the week for you to participate in a marriage preparation program?

- a) Week days
- b) Week nights
- c) Weekend days
- d) Weekend nights
- e) Weekend retreat
- f) Other \_\_\_\_\_

19. Where would you feel most comfortable participating in a marriage preparation program? (Please circle only one answer)

- a) A church (other place of worship)
- b) A community center
- c) A school
- d) Someone's home
- e) An office
- f) Other \_\_\_\_\_

20. Have you taken, are you presently taking, or do you plan to take marriage preparation classes/counselling with your fiancée? (Please circle your answer)

1. Yes                      2. No                      3. Undecided

21. Was/Is your participation in the premarital program voluntary or required? (Please circle your answer)

1. Voluntary                      2. Suggested                      3. Required

22. Of the items listed below, indicate the three factors that would be most important in your deciding not to participate in a marriage preparation program. (Please circle the three most relevant items)

1. Lack of time
2. Do not have any relationship problems
3. Do not think programs are as effective as counselling
4. Too expensive
5. Does not address topics of importance to me
6. Invasion of privacy
7. Heard others speak negatively about marriage preparation
8. Other \_\_\_\_\_

23. If a program were designed according to the responses you have given in this questionnaire, how likely is it that you would voluntarily participate in a marriage preparation program? (please circle your answer)

Very likely				Somewhat likely			Not likely at all
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

**Part 3** - A few questions about you

24. Gender (please circle)      1. Male      2. Female

25a. When were you born?      Month \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

25b. When was your partner born?      Month \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

26. What is your religious preference? (please circle the closest answer)

- |                       |               |                |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1. No religion        | 5. Moslem     | 9. Other _____ |
| 2. Catholic           | 6. Hindu      |                |
| 3. Jewish             | 7. Buddhist   |                |
| 4. Christian Orthodox | 8. Protestant |                |

27. How religious would you say you are? (Please circle your answer)

Extremely Religious		Neither Religious or Not Religious		Extremely Non-Religious
1	2	3	4	5

28. What is your current employment situation? (Please circle your answer)

- |                        |                           |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Employed full-time  | 4. Not currently employed |
| 2. Employed part-time  | 5. Retired                |
| 3. Full time homemaker |                           |

29. Are you currently in school? (Please circle your answer)

1. Yes, Full-time
2. Yes, Part-time
3. No

30. What is your highest level of education ever obtained? (Please circle your answer)

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. Less than a secondary (high) school diploma     | 5. Bachelor's degree |
| 2. Secondary (high) school graduation, certificate | 6. Master's degree   |
| 3. Trades certificate or diploma                   | 7. Earned Doctorate  |
| 4. Some college or university, but not complete    |                      |

31. Which of the following categories best describes your personal total income from all sources, before deductions during 1999? (Please circle your answer)

- |                      |                        |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. \$0 - 10,000      | 8. \$70,001 - 80,000   |
| 2. \$10,001 - 20,000 | 9. \$80,001 - 90,000   |
| 3. \$20,001 - 30,000 | 10. \$90,001 - 100,000 |
| 4. \$30,001 - 40,000 | 11. Above \$100,000    |
| 5. \$40,001 - 50,000 | 12. Don't Know         |
| 6. \$50,001 - 60,000 | 13. Refused            |
| 7. \$60,001 - 70,000 |                        |

32. Which of the following categories best describes your parents' (mother and father combined) total income from all sources, before deductions during 1999? (Please circle your answer)

- |                      |                        |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. \$0 - 10,000      | 8. \$70,001 - 80,000   |
| 2. \$10,001 - 20,000 | 9. \$80,001 - 90,000   |
| 3. \$20,001 - 30,000 | 10. \$90,001 - 100,000 |
| 4. \$30,001 - 40,000 | 11. Above \$100,001    |
| 5. \$40,001 - 50,000 | 12. Don't Know         |
| 6. \$50,001 - 60,000 | 13. Refused            |
| 7. \$60,001 - 70,000 |                        |

33. Are you a dependent of your parents? (please circle your answer) 1. Yes 2. No

34. Many Canadians identify with other cultures, besides being Canadian do you identify with any other culture or nation? (please circle your answer)

1. Yes, I identify myself as \_\_\_\_\_
2. No

35. How long have you been in a relationship with your partner?

Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_

36. How long is your total engagement from the time you got engaged to your wedding day? Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_

37. Do you currently live with your partner? (please circle your answer) 1. Yes 2. No

38. If Yes, how long have you lived with your partner? Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_

39. Is this your first marriage? (please circle your answer)

1. Yes
2. No, I have had \_\_\_\_\_ previous marriage(s)

40. Is this your partner's first marriage? (please circle your answer)

1. Yes
2. No, he/she has had \_\_\_\_\_ previous marriage(s)

41. Have you or your partner ever given birth to, fathered, or adopted any children in your lifetimes? (please circle your answer)

1. Yes, there are \_\_\_\_\_ (number) children
2. No

42. How many of your family members (parents, grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins, siblings, self) have been divorced? (please answer with a number) \_\_\_\_\_

THE END - Thank you for completing our study, your participation is greatly appreciated

## APPENDIX C

## Sample Characteristics

Independent Variables	Total Sample	Males	Females
Age (in years)	28.4	29.4	27.6
<b>Education</b>	64.8%	54.3%	74.4%
Less than a secondary school diploma	1.4% (n=1)	1.4% (n=1)	0% (n=0)
Secondary school graduation	10.8% (n=8)	14.3% (n=5)	7.7% (n=3)
Trades certificate or diploma	20.3% (n=15)	25.7% (n=9)	15.4% (n=6)
Some college or university	32.4% (n=24)	25.7% (n=9)	38.5% (n=15)
Bachelor's degree	32.4% (n=24)	28.6% (n=10)	35.9% (n=14)
Master's degree	2.7% (n=2)	2.9% (n=1)	2.9% (n=1)
Earned doctorate	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)
<b>Religion</b>			
Do not participate in a religion	37.8%	28.6%	46.2%
Participate in a religion	56.8%	65.8%	48.7%
<b>Religiosity</b>			
Non religious-extremely non religious	27.4%	29.4%	25.6%
Neutral	37.8%	29.4%	46.2%
Religious-extremely religious	32.9%	41.2%	25.7%
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
Identify only being Canadian	63.0%	54.3%	69.2%
Identify with another culture/ country as well	37.0%	42.9%	30.8%
<b>Cohabitation</b>	60.8%	60.0%	61.5%
<b>Average Annual Personal Income</b>	\$30,001 - \$40,000	\$30,001 - \$40,000	\$30,001 - \$40,000
<b>Average Annual Parental Income</b>	\$70,001 - \$80,000	\$60,001 - \$70,000	\$80,001 - \$90,000
<b>Relationship Length (in years)</b>	4.18	4.10	4.25
<b>Family Background (number of divorces)</b>	1.95	2.17	1.74
<b>Belief that Preparing for Marriage is Important (average)</b>	Important	Important	Important
<b>Familiarity with Marriage Preparation Program (average)</b>	Not really familiar	Not familiar at all	Somewhat familiar

## APPENDIX D

### **Recommendations Related to Course Content**

1. Focus a significant amount of the course content on developing communication skills, and weave these skills through discussions and skill building in the areas of problem solving/conflict resolution, money and financial management, having children and parenting, and building friendship in marriage.
2. Include enhanced skill-building in all of the general topic areas that are offered, not just in the communication and problem-solving/conflict resolution sections.
3. In the general topic area of communication, include skill-building on effective listening, expressing feelings, and reading non-verbal signals.
4. In the general topic area of problem-solving/conflict resolution, include skill-building on resolving differences, and dealing with anger or silence.
5. In the general topic area of money and finances, include information and skill building on how to make and plan a budget, sharing expectations on how money decisions will be made, how to buy a house, and how to invest money.
6. When considering the general topic area of having children and parenting, include the opportunity for sharing expectations about raising and disciplining children, gaining information on the effects children have on marriage, and sharing expectations about having children.
7. When considering the general topic area of intimacy and sexuality, include information and skill-building on how to keep romance alive in marriage how to show affection.
8. When considering the general topic area of careers, include information and skill-building on how to cope with stress from work and sharing expectations on how career decisions will be made.
9. When considering the topic area of household management and roles, include information and skill-building on sharing expectations on household chores and maintaining your personal identity within the relationship.

10. When considering the topic area of religion in marriage, include information and skill-building around sharing expectations about religious practices and what it means to have a faith marriage.
11. When considering the topic area of family and friends, include information and skill-building on dealing with in-laws and family and how to blend two family traditions together.
12. When considering other topic areas, include information and skill-building on identifying trouble signs in marriage and how to build friendship in marriage.

## APPENDIX E

### **Recommendations Related to Course Structure**

1. When designing programs, keep in mind that individuals prefer small group discussions, followed by workbook/exercises, counselling with a therapist, meeting with a married couple, lectures/classes, reading a book, and then counselling with a minister/rabbi.
2. Ensure program effectiveness is a main objective of program design and implementation. Formats that are interesting and protect participant's privacy are also fundamental to program design, implementation, delivery, and evaluation.
3. Rely on word-of-mouth referrals and focus marketing and promotion of programs on personal referral sources such as friends/relatives, counsellors, workplaces, and minister/rabbis. Mass media advertising (brochures, television/radio, and newspapers) are less influential.
4. Keep programs ten hours in length or shorter. Shorter programs can be developed with the option for participants to complete more hours in specific topic areas if they desire.
5. Keep the program price below \$136.00 (\$135.72). Remind couples of what they are getting for their cost (e.g. Ten hour program at \$135.00 for two people equals \$6.75 per hour per person). This small preventative investment in their marriage is much cheaper than marriage counselling or hiring a divorce lawyer.
6. Offer marriage preparation programs on weeknights.
7. Offer marriage preparation programs in community centres.