

## **Predicting Marital Success For Premarital Couple Types Based on PREPARE**

**Blaine J. Fowers, Kelly H. Montel, & David H. Olson**

**Recent studies have shown that group differences in marital stability and satisfaction can be predicted based on premarital relationship quality. There is also a growing literature indicating that there are distinct types of relationships, both premarital and developmentally over time. This study examined the relationship between the four premarital types (Vitalized, Harmonious, Traditional, and Conflicted) identified by Fowers and Olson (1992) and relationship outcome over a 3-year period with 393 couples. A substantial relationship was found, with conflicted couples being the most likely to separate or divorce. Vitalized couples had the highest levels of satisfaction, followed by Harmonious, Traditional, and Conflicted couples. Traditional couples were less likely to have divorced than Harmonious couples, even though Harmonious couples had higher premarital relationship satisfaction scores.**

Researchers have been interested in identifying factors predictive of successful marriages for decades. The pioneering work of Burgess and Wallin (1954) and Terman (1938) has been continued and expanded with increasingly sophisticated research. According to the U. S. Bureau of the Census (1992), 52% of all first marriages end in divorce. This high divorce rate continues to spur the search for predictors of marital stability and satisfaction. The professional response has included attempts to reduce both the frequency and difficulty of divorce through research, preventive, and remedial efforts.

Most marital and family therapists encounter the critical social problem of divorce in the context of offering therapeutic services for those suffering from marital discord

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*Blaine J. Fowers, PhD, is an Associate Professor, Department of Educational and Psychological Studies, P.O. Box 248065, University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL 33124.*

*Kelly H. Montel, PhD, NOVA/Southeastern Community Mental Health Center, 3301 College Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314.*

*David H. Olson, PhD, is a Professor, Department of Family Social Science, 290 McNeal Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55113.*

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and/or dissolution. This is clearly important, but it appears possible for us to be more proactive in preventing this distress for some couples and families rather than waiting to deal with the effects of divorce. Marriage and family therapists are uniquely positioned to offer their expertise in this arena.

The attempt to reduce the rate of divorce has given rise to numerous premarital counseling and educational programs, self-help readings, structured group counseling, and interpersonal training program (Fournier & Olson, 1986). Unfortunately, the majority of these programs have been developed without a firm basis in theory and research (Bagarozzi & Rauen, 1981; Fowers & Olson, 1986; Olson, 1990). There are several notable exceptions to this. Markman and his colleagues have developed a premarital intervention program (PREP) that builds directly on the results of their research (Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988). Guerney and his colleagues (Guerney & Guerney, 1988) have also developed a highly effective series of programs called Relationship Enhancement that are designed to improve communication skills in couples and families. The Couples Communication Program is another well-researched intervention system for couples (Miller, Miller, Nunnally, & Wackman, 1991).

There is a growing literature that has linked the quality of the premarital relationship to marital satisfaction and stability. Several studies have shown that relationship satisfaction declines in the first 2 to 3 years of marriage (Hutson, McHale, & Crouter, 1986; Kurdek, 1991; Markmen et al., 1988). Moreover, the degree to which the partners are willing to work to resolve relationship problems decreases during that time, particularly in distressed marriages (Hutson et al., 1986). Several studies have shown that group differences in marital stability and satisfaction can be predicted by the quality of couples' premarital relationships (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989; Markman, Ressick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993).

It has also become clear that marital satisfaction and stability are not synonymous (Fowers, 1990; Gottman, 1991; Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Johnson, White, Edwards & Booth, 1986). Although the majority of satisfactory marriages are stable, marital dissatisfaction does not always lead to marital instability (Johnson et al., 1986). Two recent studies (Gottman, 1991; Gottman & Levenson, 1992) found that marital satisfaction did not adequately predict separation or divorce among couples because many dissatisfied couples stayed married. These authors were able to predict group differences in divorce among dissatisfied couples by focusing on specific interaction styles of the husband and wife. These results suggest that there may be different premarital predictors of marital satisfaction and stability. Therefore, it is important to examine whether there are different premarital antecedents for couples who subsequently divorce, are dissatisfied with their marriages, or are satisfactorily married.

Evidence is also accumulating that there is substantial diversity in premarital relationships. Couples show marked differences in the level and pattern of relationship quality (Fowers & Olson, 1992), in their social network activities (Surra, 1985), and in the length and trajectory of their courtships (Cate, Huston, & Nesselroade, 1986; Surra, 1985). These results indicate that there are important differences among engaged

couples. Thus, premarital interventions may be both more effective and efficient if they are designed to match the needs of particular couples rather than approaching all couples in the same way.

A premarital typology could assist in such an endeavor by identifying couple types based on their relationship patterns. In this way, empirically based typologies of relationships can help to bridge the gap between theory, research, and practice by providing the basis for tailoring premarital interventions to fit the specific needs of these couples. Classification or cluster methods have several important advantages over standard aggregate analyses (Olson, 1981). First, they are couple centered rather than variable oriented. This allows a variety of relevant differences among couples to emerge rather than assuming that couples differ from each other only in the degree of their satisfaction or distress. Indeed, there appear to be important qualitative differences in the pattern of relationship quality among couples that have been captured in typological studies (Fitzpatrick, 1988; Fowers & Olson, 1992; Lavee & Olson, 1993; Olson & Fowers, 1993; Snyder & Smith, 1986). These important distinctions are obscured in aggregate analyses because they arise only when groups of similar couples are separated from each other. Second, typologies require a multivariate approach, which helps to address the complexity of dyadic relationships. Third, empirical typologies can provide direction for theory regarding the combinations of variables that are most relevant in understanding differences in how marriages are constituted.

There are three recently developed typologies of premarital couples derived with sophisticated cluster analytic methods. The first two involved retrospective accounts by newlyweds that were used to identify courtship patterns and investigate the process of mate selection and involvement with social networks (Cate et al., 1986; Surra, 1985). Although these studies provide very useful information about premarital relationships, the typologies were based on the length and pattern of courtship rather than the quality of the relationship. Moreover, these courtship patterns were not linked directly to subsequent marital satisfaction or stability. Thus, these studies are of limited usefulness from a divorce prevention perspective.

Fowers and Olson (1992) developed a third typology based on the premarital inventory PREPARE with a sample of over 5,000 engaged couples. The PREPARE inventory has 11 scales that assess the areas of premarital relationship quality found to be most important in an extensive review of the literature (Fournier & Olson, 1986). The typology was developed on the basis of couples' scores on these PREPARE scales (listed in the Instruments subsection). Fowers and Olson (1992) found four types of premarital couples which they titled *Vitalized, Harmonious, Traditional, and Conflicted*. The results of this study offer a promising beginning for developing premarital intervention programs that are tailored to couple types. A description of the four types follows.

*Vitalized couples* had a high degree of overall relationship satisfaction. Their PREPARE scores indicated a very high level of comfort with their ability to discuss feelings and resolve problems together. These couples reported satisfaction in how they relate to one another affectionally and sexually. They were also happy with how they

spend free time together and they reported agreement on financial and parenting matters as well. Vitalized couples saw religion as important to their marriages and indicated a strong preference for an egalitarian role pattern.

**Harmonious couples** had a moderate level of overall relationship quality. Their scores suggested that they were relatively satisfied with one another's personality and habits, felt understood by their partner, thought they could share feelings with one another, and were able to resolve differences with one another. Harmonious couples also felt comfortable with one another's friends and family. These couples tended to be somewhat unrealistic in their view of marriage and had not come to a consensus on child-related issues, however. They also indicated that religion was not an important part of their relationships.

**Traditional couples** had a PREPARE profile suggesting moderate dissatisfaction with interactional areas of their relationship. They reported some dissatisfaction with their partner's personal habits and reported some discomfort discussing feelings and dealing with conflict. Traditional couples had strengths in areas that involve decision making and future planning. These couples tended to be realistic in their view of marriage and saw religion as very important in their marriages. This couple type was the least likely to be marrying while the female was pregnant and among the least likely to have cohabited prior to marriage.

**Conflicted couples** scores showed distress on all of the PREPARE scales. They reported dissatisfaction with their partner's personality and habits. Problems existed in their ability to communicate and discuss problems in the relationship, as well as in the areas of leisure activities, their sexual relationship, and relating to one another's family and friends.

Although typologies of marriage can be very useful in both theory and practice, there are two major criticisms of typological studies. First, the results can be overly dependent on the sample because cluster analysis methods are best fit analyses. Second, the results of cluster analysis can differ depending on the specific classification methods used to derive the typology. There are four ways to deal with these issues (Olson & Fowers, 1993). First, classificatory analyses can be performed with multiple samples to determine which couple types are stable and reliable. Second, different methods of analysis can be used to avoid overdependence on a particular method. Third, cross-validation designs can support the validity of a given typology. Fourth, the validity of the cluster model can be assessed with external validity criteria to show that it has meaning beyond the measures used in its development.

Fowers and Olson (1992) addressed the validity of their typology in three ways. First, they randomly divided their sample into three groups, an exploratory analysis subsample, a derivation (primary analysis) subsample, and a validation subsample. Conducting separate analyses with the three subsamples was important because it reduced the extent to which the cluster analysis results were dependent on one particular subsample. Second, they used both hierarchical agglomerative and *k*-means cluster analysis methods to address the tendency for the results to be overly dependent on the method used. Third, they conducted a validation analysis with a hold-out sample. Their

validation of the cluster analysis was conducted by assigning couples in the validation sample to couple types determined in the derivation (primary) sample. The authors then conducted an assessment of the comparability of the findings with the derivation of validation samples and concluded that they were quite comparable. One weakness of the Fowers and Olson (1992) study was that their external validation was limited to demographic data. Although this tended to be confirmatory, the authors recognized that it was insufficient.

The purpose of this study was to conduct a more thorough evaluation of the external validity of their typology. The most appropriate test of a typology of premarital couples would involve a prospective examination of marital outcomes of the four couple types. It was expected that couples in the four types would have distinct outcomes over the first 2 to 3 years of their marriages.

The most important comparison was an in-depth examination of differences between Harmonious and Traditional couples. These couple types had similar levels of overall relationship satisfaction, but they differed in which areas of the relationship were strong. Therefore, the validity of the typology of engaged couples rests upon whether these two types have different relationship outcomes over time. Harmonious couples had strengths in areas of their relationships emphasizing satisfying dyadic processes (e.g., communication, sexual relationship), whereas Traditional couples' strengths were in more structural aspects of the relationship (e.g., children and parenting, family and friends) and in religion. Thus, Harmonious couples seem to place greater emphasis on relationship satisfaction and their interpersonal interactions whereas Traditional couples appear more likely to emphasize factors associated more with marital stability. Therefore, this study investigated whether the relative emphasis on communication and relationship satisfaction of the Harmonious couples resulted in greater marital satisfaction than would be found among Traditional couples. Marital stability was expected to be stronger among Traditional couples, given their emphasis on more structural aspects of the relationship and religion. The following specific hypotheses were proposed:

- 1. The highest percentage of divorced couples would be Conflicted couples.**
- 2. The highest percentage of satisfied couples would be in the Vitalized couple type.**
- 3. Traditional couples would be less likely to separate or divorce than Harmonious couples.**
- 4. Harmonious couples married at the follow-up would be more likely to be satisfied with their marriages than Traditional couples.**
- 5. Marital satisfaction among couples married at the follow-up was expected to range from highest to lowest in the following order: Vitalized, Harmonious, Traditional, and Conflicted couples.**

Confirmation of these hypotheses would provide external validation of the engaged couple typology and increase the confidence with which premarital interventions can be tailored to the needs of each couple type.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The sample for this study included 393 couples (786 individuals) who were part of two previous prospective studies predicting marital outcomes based on the PREPARE inventory (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989). The data for these two studies were based on two distinct sample of engaged couples.<sup>1</sup> The present study combined these two samples and all analyses of the data were conducted with this combined sample.

Participants in this study completed PREPARE with a clergy member or counselor 3-4 months before their marriage. They were followed up 2-3 years later. At the time they took the PREPARE inventory, the average age for men was 25.1 and for women 23.2. The vast majority of the sample had completed high school (95%), with 45% having attended some college and 26% completing at least a 4-year degree. The median income for the men was \$25,000 and for women it was \$12,500. The sample was primarily Caucasian (95%) and all belonged to a Christian religion.

### *Instruments*

PREPARE is a 125-item inventory designed to identify relationship strengths and work areas in 11 relationship areas: Realistic Expectations, Personality Issues, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Financial Management, Leisure Activities, Sexual Relationship, Children and Parenting, Family and Friends, Equalitarian Roles, and Religious Orientation (Olson, Fournier, & Druckman, 1987). Each of these scales has 10 items. In addition, the inventory has two family-of-origin scales assessing family cohesion and adaptability and an Idealistic Distortion scale. These scales have 5 items each. The family-of-origin scales were not included in the analyses because the dyadic relationship was the primary focus. Brief descriptions of the scales used in this study follow.

PREPARE's computer scoring produces individual and couple scores for the 11 relationship areas. The couple scores were used throughout this study. These scores are called positive couple agreement (PCA) scores because they measure the couple's agreement in describing their relationship in *positive* terms. The actual PCA score for each scale is the percentage of items for which both partners characterized that aspect of their relationship in positive terms. Thus, PCA scores range from 0 to 100%, depending on the number of items in the scale on which *both* partners described their relationship in positive terms.

The alpha reliabilities for the individual PREPARE scales ranged from .62 to .83 with a mean reliability to .74. Test-retest reliabilities over a 4-week period ranged from .64 to .93 with an average of .78 (Olson et al., 1987).<sup>2</sup>

PREPARE's concurrent validity has been supported by the extensive initial analyses conducted by Fournier (1979). PREPARE scales correlated in the expected direction with scales from the Inventory of Premarital Conflict (Olson, Druckman, & Fournier, 1978), Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1976), and Marital Adjustment Scale (Locke & Wallace, 1959). The inventory has also displayed substantial predictive validity in predicting marital success over a 3-year period in two separate studies (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989).

The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS) Scale is a 15-item scale that includes the Marital Satisfaction and Idealistic Distortion scales from the marital inventory ENRICH (Olson et al., 1987). The Marital Satisfaction scale is a 10-item Likert format measure of global marital satisfaction. It has an alpha coefficient of .81 and a 4-week test-retest reliability of .86 (Olson et al., 1987). Its criterion and construct validity have been supported in previous research (Fowers & Olson, 1993; Olson et al., 1987, 1989). The Idealistic Distortion scale is a measure of the degree to which the respondent characterizes the relationship in unrealistically positive terms. It is a 5-item Likert format version of the Marital Conventionalization Scale (Edmonds, 1967). It has an alpha coefficient of .92 and a 4-week test-retest reliability of .92 (Olson et al., 1987).

The Idealistic Distortion scale is used as a correction for the tendency to overreport marital satisfaction. An individual's EMS score is obtained by revising his or her Marital Satisfaction score downward based on the Idealistic Distortion score. The higher the Idealistic Distortion score (indicating a stronger tendency to describe the relationship in unrealistically positive terms), the greater the correction in the Marital Satisfaction score. Fowers and Olson (1993) described the complete procedure for deriving the EMS score.

### ***Procedure***

All of the participants completed PREPARE before marriage. Counselors and clergy who administered PREPARE were contacted to solicit their assistance in obtaining the sample for the follow-up. Fowers and Olson (1986) had the clergy identify couples who were married and living together, separated or divorced couples, and couples who canceled their marriage plans after completing PREPARE. Larsen & Olson (1989) asked the participating counselors to supply marital status information on all of the premarital couples to whom they had administered PREPARE in a given year. The counselor or clergy member provided information on the marital status of couples who had divorced, separated, or canceled their marriages. PREPARE scores for these couples were obtained from PREPARE/ENRICH, Inc. Couples who were married at the follow-up were asked by the counselors or clergy to participate in the follow-up, which involved completing the EMS. In all, 564 couples who were married at the time of the follow-up were asked to complete the follow-up questionnaire and 237 returned usable responses, which resulted in a 42% response rate.

PREPARE users identified 89 couples who had canceled their marriage plans after they completed the inventory. Another 67 couples were identified who separated or

divorced at the follow-up. Combined with the 237 married couples, the total sample comprised 393 couples.

The married couples who completed the EMS were divided into two groups using a median split to form married-satisfied and married-dissatisfied groups. The median EMS score was 54. Inclusion in the married-satisfied group meant that both members of the couple had scores above the median on the EMS. Similarly, the married-dissatisfied couples were those in which both partners had scores below the median on the EMS. Couples in which one partner had a score above the median and the other had a score below the median were not included in the categorical analyses of the outcome groups, following the procedures used by Fowers and Olson (1986) and Larsen and Olson (1989). This method of deriving categorical groups of married couples was used to insure that both partners in the married-satisfied and married-dissatisfied categories had marital satisfaction scores consistent with the group. This was necessary because the initial analyses were conducted at the dyadic level. Additional analyses were conducted at the individual level that included all of the respondents married at the follow-up.

Following the division of currently married couples into married-satisfied and married-dissatisfied groups, there were 328 couples in four exclusive relationship outcome categories: (a) 89 couples (27%) who canceled their marriages; (b) 67 separated or divorced couples (20%); (c) 77 couples (23%) who were married and living together, but dissatisfied; and (d) 95 couples (29%) who were satisfactorily married.

## RESULTS

The first step in the data analysis involved assigning couples to Fowers and Olson's (1992) premarital relationship types with a  $k$  means cluster analysis algorithm. The entire sample of couples was assigned based on the similarity of their PREPARE scores to the means PREPARE scores of the clusters previously derived by these authors. This involved only the assignment of the present sample to the typology; the original cluster structures were not altered. Following assignment, there were 114 Conflicted couples (29%), 90 Traditional couples (23%), 97 Harmonious couples (25%), and 92 Vitalized couples (23%). Figure 1 provides an illustration of the PREPARE PCA scores for the four couple types with this sample.

A contingency table was constructed based on each couple's membership in the four premarital clusters and the four relationship outcome groups at the follow-up. Cluster membership and follow-up status are both categorical variables and were analyzed with a log linear approach (Kennedy, 1992). A log linear logit analysis of the 4 X 4 contingency table indicated a substantial relationship between couple types and the relationship outcome categories ( $\chi^2(9, N = 328) = 62.49, p < .0001$ ). Table 1 presents this contingency table.

The information in the contingency table must be interpreted with caution due to the sampling methods. These data cannot be interpreted as a prediction of the likelihood that a given couple would be in one of the outcome groups 3 years after marriage. This is

because the sampling methods do not reflect actual rates of canceling marriage, separation, divorce, or remaining married in the general population. If this caveat is born in mind, it is quite useful to examine the relative proportions of couples from the four couple types *within* each of the relationship outcome categories.

**Table 1**  
**Contingency Table of Couple Membership in Premarital Couple Types and Follow-up Groups**

	Married Satisfied	Married Dissatisfied	Separated or Divorced	Canceled Marriage	Total
Vitalized	38 40%	15 20%	11 16%	11 12%	75 23%
Harmonious	30 32%	19 25%	16 24%	20 22%	85 26%
Traditional	17 18%	25 32%	8 12%	23 26%	73 22%
Conflicted	10 10%	18 23%	32 48%	35 40%	95 29%
Total	95	77	67	89	328

*Note.* Percentages are the column percentages.

Although the overall contingency table was quite illuminating, marital status was confounded with marital satisfaction. Consequently, post hoc analyses were conducted within marital status categories. The first analysis involved the 89 couples who had canceled their marriage plans after taking PREPARE. Conflicted couples were the most likely to have canceled their marriage plans, followed by Traditional, Harmonious, and Vitalized couples. Conditional odds provide a metric for comparing the likelihood of the relationship outcome across the four couple types (Kennedy, 1992). For example, conditional odds of 2.1 to 1 would indicate that the outcome is slightly more than twice as likely for one couple type as compared to another type. Since the Conflicted couples made up the greatest proportion of canceled marriages, the other three groups were contrasted with them. The conditional odds of a Conflicted couple canceling their marriage as compared to a Vitalized couple were 3.18 to 1. Conflicted couples were 1.52 times as likely to cancel their marriages as Traditional couples and 1.75 times as likely to be in the Conflicted type, followed by the Traditional, Harmonious, and Vitalized types.

A similar post hoc analysis was conducted for the likelihood that couples who were separated or divorced would have been in each of the couple types during engagement. Again, the Conflicted type had the greatest proportion of separated and divorced couples. In fact, nearly half (48%) of the couples in this outcome group were

Conflicted couples. Couples who had separated or divorced at follow-up were 4.0 times as likely to be Conflicted as Traditional, 2.0 times as likely to be Conflicted as Harmonious couples, and 2.91 times as likely to be Conflicted as Vitalized couples. Therefore, Traditional couples were the least likely to have separated or divorced, with a lower likelihood than Harmonious or Vitalized types.

A third comparison among couples married at the time of the follow-up is instructive. The likelihood of being in the satisfactorily married outcome group was quite variable across the four types. The conditional odds for having a satisfactory versus unsatisfactory marriage among the Vitalized couple group were 2.53 to 1. Harmonious couples were 1.58 times as likely to be in the satisfied group. The conditional odds of being in the satisfied group were .68 to 1 for Traditional couples, and .56 to 1 for Conflicted couples. Put another way, Traditional couples were 1.47 times as likely to fall into the dissatisfied group, and Conflicted couples were 1.80 times as likely to be dissatisfied as satisfied with their marriages.

Specific post hoc analyses were conducted to assess whether Traditional and Harmonious couples had different patterns of marital satisfaction and stability in early marriage. These analyses compared couples from the Harmonious and Traditional groups who had married (i.e., the divorced/separated, married-dissatisfied, and married-satisfied follow-up groups). In terms of marital stability, Harmonious couples were 2.0 times as likely to be in the separated or divorced group at the follow-up as the Traditional group.

Further comparisons of the subsequent marital satisfaction of the Harmonious and Traditional couples were also conducted. Post hoc analyses of a 2 (Harmonious versus Traditional) X 2 (married-satisfied versus married-dissatisfied) table can be enhanced by examining the ratio of conditional odds. The ratio of conditional odds expresses the likelihood of one relationship outcome versus another across *two* couple types. Thus, the differential likelihood of being in the satisfied versus dissatisfied groups for Harmonious and Traditional couples can be evaluated with the ratio of conditional odds. (This comparison across two of the outcome categories is acceptable because it was conducted within the category of couples who were married at the time of the follow-up.) The ratio of conditional odds was 2.32 to 1 for this comparison, which means that the proportion of Harmonious couples in the satisfied group was over twice as large as this proportion among Traditional couples. Yule's  $Q$  is a statistic that provides a metric of the strength of the relationship in a 2 X 2 contingency table that is easier to interpret than the ratio of conditional odds. It has a range of  $-1.00$  to  $1.00$ , with 0 indicating no relationship (Kennedy, 1992). Yule's  $Q$  for this comparison was .40 suggesting a moderate relationship between couple type and level of satisfaction at follow-up.

A final analysis was conducted in order to examine the subsequent marital satisfaction of those married at the time of follow-up. All of the participants married at the follow-up were included in this analysis in order to provide a comparison of the four couple types with the full range of marital satisfaction. This analysis was conducted at the individual level because the level of marital satisfaction differed across partners in some couples. It was expected that marital satisfaction would be highest among

individuals in Vitalized couples, followed by spouses in Harmonious, Traditional, and Conflicted couples. A one-way ANOVA with a linear trend analysis indicated that the EMS scores for the groups followed the expected linear pattern for both men ( $F(3,235) = 19.0, p < .0001$ ) and women ( $F(3,243) = 22.35, p < .0001$ ). As expected, Vitalized couples had the highest level of marital satisfaction, followed by Harmonious, Traditional, and Conflicted couples. See Table 2 for the means and standard deviations for the men's and women's marital satisfaction scores.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study offer clear support for the external validity of the premarital typology developed by Fowers and Olson (1992). The four couple types differed in their marital outcomes in the predicted manner. This allows greater confidence in the typology presented by these authors because the four couple types had differential relationship outcomes that were consistent with the cluster structure.

The findings of this study suggested that the four couple types differed in the likelihood that they had canceled their marriages. About 40% of the couples who canceled their marriages were Conflicted couples. Conflicted couples were more than three times as likely to have canceled their marriage plans as Vitalized couples. Feedback from those who administered PREPARE indicated that wedding plans were generally canceled due to relationship problems. On the whole, couples with lower overall relationship satisfaction prior to marriage were more likely to choose this course of action. This provides indirect evidence that identifying relationship difficulties through taking PREPARE may contribute to helping high-risk couples reconsider their marriage plans.

Conflicted couples also comprised nearly half the separated or divorced follow-up group. There were smaller proportions of Harmonious and Vitalized couples who had separated or divorced within the first 3 years of marriage. Traditional couples were the least likely to have separated or divorced. Although the proportions of Vitalized and Harmonious couples in this group are rather small, it is surprising that even a small percentage of couples who viewed their relationship in such positive terms during their engagement were separated or divorced within the first 3 years of marriage. Future research with engaged and newlywed couples could be profitably directed toward understanding why these relationships did not continue to be viable given the initially high level of premarital relationship satisfaction.

The results of the comparison of couple types and follow-up levels of marital satisfaction followed the expected pattern. There is a straightforward linear pattern in the marital satisfaction scores with the Vitalized group having the highest scores, followed by Harmonious, Traditional, and Conflicted couples. Thus, marital satisfaction follows a predictable pattern based on premarital couple type.

The distinction between the Traditional and Harmonious couple types was of particular interest because both couple groups showed moderate levels of overall

satisfaction with their relationships (Fowers & Olson, 1992). The differences between the two types were seen in the pattern of satisfaction. Premaritally, Harmonious couples had higher levels of satisfaction with their dyadic relationship whereas Traditional couples had more realistic expectations, more well-defined plans, and a greater commitment to religion. This contrast between the couple types appears to have continued through the follow-up period.

As hypothesized, Harmonious couples were twice as likely to have separated or divorced as Traditional couples. This seems consistent with the differences in the relationship strengths of the two couple types. Traditional couples seem to place greater importance on the more traditional and formal aspects of marriage; Harmonious couples appear to focus more on their interpersonal process and relationship satisfaction. Thus, Traditional couples may be less likely to separate or divorce than Harmonious couples for three reasons. First, they appear to be more realistic about marriage at the beginning (Fowers & Olson, 1992). Second, they may be less sensitive to the normal decline in relationship satisfaction in the early years of marriage (Huston et al., 1986; Kurdek, 1991; Markman, 1979, 1981).

Third, the differences between the two types in marital status and satisfaction at follow-up stages suggest that Traditional couples may place greater value on marital stability than on marital satisfaction. Separated or divorced couples were more than twice as likely to be Harmonious couples as Traditional couples. This was in spite of the fact that Harmonious couples were about one and a half times as likely to be above the median on marital satisfaction, whereas Traditional couples were about one and a half times as likely to be below the median. This indicated that Harmonious couples may be less tolerant of an unsatisfying relationship than Traditional couples.

Although the available data do not allow a clear test of whether Traditional couples value marital stability more than marital satisfaction, the pattern of results suggests this conclusion. This paradoxical combination of higher satisfaction and lower stability among Harmonious couples seems to reflect an important cultural pattern in the U.S. that places a very high premium on satisfactory marriages that appear to be simultaneously quite brittle (Fowers, 1993). Further research designed to replicate and investigate the foundations of this intriguing contrast between Harmonious and Traditional couples is needed.

The follow-up results with the Traditional couples were very similar to the Traditional couples in Fitzpatrick's (1988) typology, who placed a good deal of importance on marital stability and other conventional values about marriage. The similarities in these couple types are particularly significant because the methods used to develop these two typologies were quite different.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

### *Divorce Prevention*

This study provides additional evidence that group differences in marital distress and dissolution are relatively predictable on the basis of premarital relationship quality. We can say with some confidence that couples with the Conflicted pattern of PREPARE scores are much more likely to experience marital dissatisfaction and/or divorce than other couples. Divorce has become a critical social problem with serious consequences for the physical and mental well-being of spouses and children. Therefore, as our knowledge of the precursors of divorce has increased, so has our responsibility as professionals to become more involved in attempting to help couples prevent their own marital dissolution. Marriage and family therapists can not afford to focus solely on alleviating the discomfort of distressed couples or members of divorced families. It is important for us to work proactively to help couples build strong and lasting relationships.

There are a variety of ways in which marriage and family therapists can work proactively to help premarital and married couples. First, therapy can be seen as preventive as well as remedial. Marriage and family therapy is tertiary prevention because it helps to prevent current problems from becoming worse and helps to avoid future difficulties. Tertiary prevention is limited because marital distress has already created some significant negative impact, providing the impetus for marriage or family therapy.

Second, therapists can help to prevent future relationship difficulties with those who have experienced divorce. Helping ex-spouses and children to learn from the divorce is common therapeutic practice. This can be extended by helping members of divorced families to prepare for future relationships. This may include both learning from the difficulties experienced in the previous marriage and encouraging divorced individuals to participate in premarital preparation for their next relationship.

Third, the results of this study and its precursors (Fowers & Olson, 1986, 1992; Larsen & Olson, 1989) have made it clear that premarital couples at risk for divorce can be identified. This provides the opportunity for secondary prevention, in which early recognition of incipient distress can lead to the prevention of more serious difficulties later. The premarital inventory PREPARE can help couples to identify problematic areas in their relationship before the relationship deteriorates to the point of dissolution. The findings in this study suggest that it will be important to tailor the prevention program to couple types, which will be discussed more fully below. Marriage and family therapists have the expertise to offer both the assessment of premarital relationships and to help couples deal with the early difficulties they are facing in a way that will prevent them from becoming worse over time.

Fourth, therapists can participate in primary prevention through offering skill-building programs for both premarital and married couples. Primary prevention refers to actions taken prior to the onset of distress or to modify the precursors of that distress.

There are a number of high-quality couples enrichment programs currently available that can be used to help couples to develop and/or maintain high-quality relationships. Programs such as Growing Together (Hawley & Olson, in press), Relationship Enhancement (Guerney & Maxson, 1990), the Minnesota Couples Communication Program (Miller et al., 1991), and the Preparation and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) (Markman, Duncan, Storaasli, & Howes, 1987) have been systematically developed on the basis of outcome studies. Marriage and family therapists can offer these enrichment programs and encourage couples to understand the importance of working to develop a strong and lasting relationship.

Fifth, because the majority of couples are married by the clergy, marriage and family therapists can collaborate with clergy to provide these services to engaged couples. Most clergy members recognize their limitations in working with distressed couples and often seek referrals for them. In addition, working with clergy could provide therapists with the opportunity to offer both premarital programs and intensive premarital counseling for couples who need it.

Sixth, marriage and family therapists can become public advocates for increasing our efforts to reduce the frequency of divorces. Divorce and its effects are major social policy issues. Marriage and family therapists can advocate for preventive policies with government, business, civic, and religious institutions. For example, California requires premarital counseling for couples in which one or both partners are under 18.

### ***Differential Interventions Based on the Four Couples Types***

This study confirmed the practical importance of Fowers and Olson's (1992) typology of premarital couples in terms of subsequent relationship outcomes. The most important implication of this study for clinical practice is that it strengthens the case for tailoring premarital interventions for different couple types rather than offering the same intervention to all couples. The fact that there were both quantitative and qualitative differences in the relationship outcomes of the four couple types reinforces this conclusion.

If we want to help couples prevent divorce, we must devote our greatest efforts to identifying and intervening with Conflicted couples. These couples have pervasive difficulties in their relationship even before marriage. Most Conflicted couples will need significant assistance in order to prevent subsequent separation, divorce, and/or marital dissatisfaction. Therefore, improving our ability to identify couples at this level of risk is extremely important. Conflicted couples were the most likely to cancel their marriages, perhaps in recognition of the magnitude of their difficulties. This is not to say that all Conflicted couples should cancel their marriage plans. One of the purposes of this line of research is to identify and assist these couples to overcome the problems they are likely to have through early intervention. Although some research evidence is available that suggests premarital preparation programs can enhance marriage (e.g., Markman et al., 1987, 1988), further research is needed to investigate the feasibility of actually reducing the likelihood of divorce for Conflicted couples.

Helping Harmonious couples prevent marital dissolution calls for interventions designed to maintain the relatively high premarital relationship quality of these couples (Markman et al., 1988). In particular, Harmonious couples indicated deficits in realistic expectations of marriage and in discussing expectations in the areas of finances and parenting (Fowers & Olson, 1992). The surprising prevalence of separation and divorce in this couple type may be a result of unrealistic expectations and disillusionment when the realities of marriage sink in. Education about the numerous challenges of early marriage may help to diminish the stress of these experiences for Harmonious couples. These couples may be placing too much emphasis on relationship satisfaction, which tends to fluctuate and deteriorate somewhat in the early years of marriage (Huston et al., 1986; Kurdek, 1991; Markman et al., 1988). Increasing these couples' understanding of the vicissitudes of relationship satisfaction may help them to weather the inevitable ups and downs of marriage. In addition, interventions designed to help these couples to develop additional sources of support for the stability of their marriages beyond marital satisfaction may be important.

Although Traditional couples were the least likely to divorce, their satisfaction with the dyadic aspects of their relationship was relatively low both before and after marriage. This couple type might benefit from training in communication and conflict resolution skills, which they identified as relative weaknesses prior to marriage. Improvements in these areas may help to build on Traditional couples' strengths in the structural areas of the marriage and their apparent commitment to marriage. Their prospects for continued marital stability might be improved with enhanced communication and conflict resolution skills. These couples may be more receptive to and benefit most from this training in a pastoral setting because they reported very strong ties to their religion. Marriage and family therapists may be able to offer preventive interventions in collaboration with clergy.

Finally, these results confirm the conventional wisdom as well as recent research (Arond & Pauker, 1987) that the early years of marriage can be difficult. There are couples who have significant difficulties even among the most satisfied couple types. Therefore, it appears important for all couples to be aware of the normal difficulties in adjustment and declines in relationship satisfaction in early marriage (Huston et al., 1986; Kurdek, 1991; Markman et al., 1988). This study makes it clear, however, that the seriousness of the difficulties faced by couples in early marriage and the consequent negative relationship outcomes are different in the four couple types.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was purposive rather than representative. The couples were chosen based on their marital status at the follow-up. This means that no conclusions can be drawn from this study regarding the rates of canceling marriage, separation, or divorce in the early years of marriage (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989). Comparisons across couple types within the relationship outcome categories were quite instructive, but less can be said about comparisons across the marital status categories. Future research designed to follow a randomly chosen sample of couples over a similar period could allow the comparison of rates of separation, divorce, and remaining married across the four couple types. The second limitation was that most of the couples completing PREPARE did so at their

clergy's request as part of premarital requirements, which may have introduced a sample bias. This resulted in an overwhelmingly Caucasian and Christian sample. Generalizations to other populations are therefore not warranted. This study offers clear support for the external validity of Fowers and Olson's (1992) typology of engaged couples within this population. The four types had distinct marital outcomes that were related to predictions based on their relationship patterns. The relationship outcomes did not differ merely quantitatively, but also in the pattern of outcomes. This suggests that there may be important differences among engaged couples regarding their values and aspirations about their future marriages. The contrasting pattern of marital satisfaction and stability may reflect different ideals and approaches to what marriage is all about. Future research on the values and ideals that guide couples in their marriage could be very enlightening.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>There was no overlap between the present sample and the sample Fowers and Olson (1992) used to develop their typology of engaged couples.

<sup>2</sup>This study used the Positive Couple Agreement (PCA) scores to assign couples to the cluster model. Internal reliability cannot be computed on these scores because it is a simple percentage of items on a given scale on which the partners evaluate their relationship in a positive direction. Therefore, the individual scale score reliabilities are given as estimates of the reliability of the PCA scores. This appears to give reasonable assurance of the reliabilities of the PCA scores since they are derived from individual scale scores. In addition, PCA and individual scores were found to have a comparable level of predictive validity in a longitudinal study of marital success (Fowers, 1983).