Four Types of Premarital Couples:
An Empirical Typology Based on PREPARE

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This study identified 4 types of engaged couples from a sample of 5,030 couples, using the premarital inventory PREPARE. Profiles were derived using a 3-stage clustering analytic procedure, including an exploratory cluster analysis, a replication of the exploratory results, and a cross-validation analysis, all of which indicated that the 4-cluster solution was the best. The VITALIZED couples (28%) reported high scores on all dimensions. HARMONIOUS couples (27%) had moderately positive relationship quality. TRADITIONAL couples (23%) had moderately low intrarelationship scores but scored higher on scales assessing planning for marriage. CONFLICTED couples (22%) were characterized by pervasively low scores.

Although divorce rates have decreased somewhat from their peak in 1980, estimates indicate that 40% to 50% of all first marriages still end in divorce (National Center for Health Statistics, 1988). The professional response to the powerful familial and societal costs of this level of divorce has included preventive, ameliorative, and research efforts attempting to reduce both the frequency and difficulty of divorce.

Clinical and research efforts to prevent divorce have been strongly influenced by family development theory. A developmental view of the family emphasizes the importance of accomplishing stage-appropriate tasks as a basis for adequate current and future family functioning. This theory also indicated that normative transitions between stages are often difficult and by their very nature require adjustment and accommodation to new demands and circumstances. For these reasons, the transition from engagement to early marriage has

been seen as crucial to the early success of marriage (Duvall, 1971; Fournier & Olson, 1986; Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaalsi, 1988).

Premarital programs designed to prevent divorce were initially rather haphazard, atheoretical, and lacking in empirical foundation (Bagarozzi & Rauen, 1981; Olson, 1990). This situation has steadily improved based on systematic, longitudinal research on the predictors of marital dissatisfaction and dissolution (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989; Markman, 1979, 1981), the transition from engagement to early marriage (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986), and the effectiveness of premarital preparation in preventing marital discord and dissolution (Markman et al., 1988). These studies have strongly indicated that marital satisfaction and success can be predicted on the basis of the quality of the premarital relationship and that marriages can be enhanced and stabilized through premarital intervention.

Although premarital interventions appear to be an effective means of preventing early marital disruption, they are generally applied indiscriminantly to engaged couples. Because there is clearly a wide range of relationship quality among engaged couples (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989), it is reasonable to assume the premarital interventions would be more appropriate, effective, and cost-efficient if they were focused on the specific needs of a small number of identifiable types of engaged couples.

The purpose of this study is to develop an empirically based typology of engaged couples that can provide the basis for more specifically focused premarital interventions. This typology can assist professional in matching interventions to the specific issues of identifiable couple types. This will allow the development of several prevention programs designed with the specific issues of identifiable couples types. This will allow the development of several prevention programs designed with the specific needs of a particular group of couples in mind. Such an approach can better facilitate each couple's growth and development as well as promote the most efficient use of the limited resources available for prevention.

Most of the research to date on the crucial developmental stage of engagement has focused on variables rather than couples. Although this approach to studying couples is very useful in clarifying which variables are generally important in relationship development, it is not as helpful to the clinician who must focus on particular couples.

Olson (1981) suggested that typologies of marriage and the family have significant promise for bridging the gaps among theory, research, and practice because classification methods are couple centered rather than variable oriented. Another advantage is that typologies generally use a multivariate approach, which can more adequately capture the complexity of dyadic relationships than research focusing on one or two traditional dimensions of marriage (e.g., global satisfaction or power). Classificatory approaches to studying couples avoid the problems related to aggregating data from all couples and focus on the study of relevant differences between couples.

There have been numerous attempts to develop typologies of marriages. The majority of the early attempts were intuitively oriented and did not involve quantitative verification (e.g., Cuber & Haroff, 1965; Lederer & Jackson, 1968). Two early quantitative typologies used factor-analytic methods in developing four patterns of marriage with a small sample of newlywed couples (Goodrich, Ryder, & Rausch, 1968; Ryder, 1970). Fitzpatrick (1988) used factor loading based on her Relational Dimensions Instrument to identify four couple types with a large sample. Several other studies used more sophisticated cluster-analytic methods with large sample to develop marital typologies based on observational data (Gottman, 1979), the Inventory of Marital Conflict (Miller & Olson, 1990), the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Snyder & Smith, 1986), and the marital inventory ENRICH (Lavee & Olson, in press; Olson & Fowers, 1991).

Two typology studies of premarital couples reported the identification of distinct pathways to marriage (Cate, Huston, & Nesselroade, 1986; Surra, 1985). These investigations focused on the development of commitment and interdependence in premarital relationships over time. Surra (1985) identified four trajectories of commitment that also had distinct differences in interdependence within the couple and social involvement. Although these results are extremely useful for understanding relationship development, they do not provide the kind of information necessary to enhance premarital interventions. Moreover, these studies relied on retrospective accounts of relationship development and included only couples who were already married.

This study was designed to develop a typology of engaged couples based on the premarital inventory PREPARE (Olson, Fournier, & Druckman, 1987). It is hoped that this research will allow better prediction of marital satisfaction and success, help to focus premarital preparation, and provide additional information for a better understanding of the transition to marriage and the development of the marital relationship. Because previous typologies focused on already married couples, they are not as useful for early prediction of marital difficulties, directing preventive programs, or illuminating the differences in relationship styles for various couples. A further advantage of the present study is that the unique scoring system available with PREPARE will allow this research to focus on couples as the unit of analysis.

Method

Subjects

A national convenience sample of 5,030 couples who completed the PREPARE inventory before marriage were included in the study. Their scores were obtained from the PREPARE computer report. The mean age for men was 25.8 years, and for women, 24.1 years. The majority had some college education, and virtually all had finished high school. Partners had known each other an average of 33 months and planned to be married in 4.4 months. The majority were White and Christian.

Measure

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 et al., 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.

Idealistic Distortion. This scale is a modified version of the Edmonds Marital Conventionalization scale (Edmonds, 1967). It measures the tendency of the partners to answer questions in an unrealistically positive manner. It is a validity scale used to revise individual scale scores to correct for that bias.

Realistic Expectations. This scale assesses the extent to which the individual's expectations about love, commitment, and conflicts in the relationship are realistic.

Personality Issues. This scale examines and individual's satisfaction with his or her partner's habits and behaviors.

Communication. This scale is concerned with an individual's feelings and attitudes toward communication in the relationship. Items focus on the level of comfort felt by the respondent in sharing and receiving emotional and cognitive information from the partner.

Conflict Resolution. This scale assesses the partner's perception of the existence and resolution of conflict in the relationship. Items focus on how openly issues are recognized and resolved as well as the strategies used to end arguments.

Financial Management. This scale focuses on attitudes and concerns about the way economic issues are managed within the relationship. Items assess spending patterns and the manner in which financial decisions are made.

Leisure Activities. This scale assess preferences for spending free time. Items reflect social versus personal activities, shared versus individual preferences, and expectations about spending leisure time as a couple.

Sexual Relationship. This scale examines the partner's feelings about the affectional and sexual relationship. Items reflect attitudes about sexual issues, sexual behavior, birth control, and sexual fidelity.

Children and Parenting. This scale assesses attitudes and feeling about having and raising children. Items focus on decisions regarding discipline, goals for the children, and the impact of children on the couple's relationship.

Family and Friends. This scale assesses feelings and concerns about relationships with relatives, in-laws, and friends. Items reflect expectations for and comfort with spending time with family and friends.

Equalitarian Roles. This scale focuses on a individual's feelings and attitudes about various marital and family roles. Items reflect occupational, household, sex, and parental roles. Higher scores indicate a preference for more eqalitarian roles.

Religious Orientation. This scale examines the meaning of religious beliefs and practices within the relationship. Higher scores reflect greater importance for religion in the relationship.

Scoring. PREPARE's computer scoring produces a 12-page report that includes individual and couple scores for the 11 relationship areas. The report also includes a detailed summary of the couples' responses to each item to facilitate the interpretation of the results.

The couples 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 with respect to each scale. The actual PCA score is the percentage of items on a given scale on which the couple agree in characterizing 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 of .74. Test-retest reliabilities over a 4-week period range from .64 to .93, with an average of .78 (Olson et al., 1987). Although these reliability levels are lower than is desirable, the alpha levels are generally in the acceptable range for research purposes.[1] The reliability coefficients for all of the scales are available in Table 1.

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

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[1] This study used to PCA scores to compute 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 evaluated 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 to the reliabilities of the PCA scores because 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).

Analyses

The typology of engaged couples was developed in three stages. The PCA scores were used in all analyses so that the couple is the unit of analysis. First, an exploratory sample of 412 couples was randomly selected to seed structure of similarities. A hierarchical agglomerative cluster analysis was used to explore the "natural" number of clusters. This was followed by a series of *k*-means cluster analyses with relocation to further assess the goodness of fit by setting the number of clusters at several levels above and below the number indicated by the original analysis.

The second stage of the typology analysis involved randomly dividing the remaining sample into two groups. The first set of couples (n = 2,355 couples) was subjected to a hierarchical agglomerative cluster analysis to assess the fit of the number of clusters developed with the exploratory sample. This analysis produced initial seeds for the *k*-means cluster analysis, which was conducted with relocation and assigned couples to clusters. The couples were compared across clusters on various demographic variables to assess relevant differences between the groups.

The third stage of the analysis used the second large group of couples (n = 2,263 couples) as a cross-validation sample. Cross-validation is very important in cluster analysis because all cluster-analysis procedures maximize the distance between clusters based on the sample. This is analogous to the maximization of fit for regression analyses. The cross-validation was conducted by assigning the couples in the cross-validation sample to clusters using the cluster seeds developed with the primary sample. This allowed a comparison of the goodness of fit of the cluster solution for the two large samples.

Results

Exploratory Analysis

The exploratory structure seeking hierarchical agglomerative cluster analysis (n = 412 couples) was conducted using average linkage within groups with Euclidean distance for

Table 1

Internal and Test-Retest Reliability Coefficients for PREPARE Scales

Scale	Coefficient Alpha[a]	Test-Retest Reliability[b]
Realistic Expectations	.73	.82
Personality Issues	.77	.78
Communication	.78	.69
Conflict Resolution	.72	.76
Financial Management	.75	.81
Leisure Activities	.63	.79
Sexual Relationship	.67	.64
Children and Parenting	.62	.74
Family and Friends	.70	.73
Equalitarian Roles	.78	.83
Religious Orientation	.85	.93

[a] $N = 10,788$. [b] $N = 472$; 4-week retest interval.

Table 2

Pseudo-T^2 Values for Cluster Numbers in the Exploratory and Primary Samples

Exploratory sample		Primary sample	
Number of clusters	Pseudo-T^2	Number of clusters	Pseudo-T^2
8	12.64	8	80.70
7	18.28	7	7.47
6	6.18	6	3.93
5	23.60	5	9.96
4	4.29	4	3.01
3	40.71	3	232.21
2	30.03	2	232.36
1	129.53	1	754.99

computing either similarity of dissimilarity between subjects.[2] Because Euclidean measure is sensitive to the variables' units of measurement, the variables were standardized to avoid possible biasing effects of differences in variance across variables. The pseudo-T^2 statistic was used as the criterion for deciding how many clusters best fit the data (Cooper & Milligan, [2]1984; Milligan & Cooper, 1985). Pseudo-T^2 provides an indication of the appropriate number of clusters through local troughs in its value. This is seen by a small value of the pseudo-T^2 statistic for a given cluster level followed by a larger pseudo-T^2 value for the next cluster fusion. The four-cluster solution in this analysis had a pseudo-T^2 value of 4.29 followed by a value of 40.71 for a three-cluster solution. Thus, four clusters seemed to represent the data well in this procedure. Table 2 contains the results of the pseudo-T^2 analyses for the exploratory sample.

A series of k-means cluster analyses were conducted to further assess the appropriateness of a four-cluster solution. Cluster numbers were set at 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Larger numbers of clusters resulted in an unacceptable level of overlap in clusters, whereas smaller numbers resulted in the loss of substantive differences because of the combination of clusters.

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[2] Euclidean distance is the square root of the sum of the squared differences of all of the variables. This means that the distance between each pair of couples is derived by computing the differences between the scores on each scale for both couples. The differences are squared and summed, and the square root of the sum is the Euclidean distance. The distance between two clusters is based on average linkage. This procedure computes cluster differences as the average distance between all pairs of observations, one in each cluster. Each step of the hierarchical agglomerative cluster analysis combines the two clusters with the smallest distance between them. The pseudo-T^2 statistic was used to determine the number of clusters that best fit the data.

Primary-Sample Cluster Analysis

The second stage of the analysis began with a hierarchical agglomerative cluster analysis of the primary sample (n = 2,355 couples) with average linkage and Euclidean distance measure. The variables were again standardized. The pseudo-T^2 statistic once again indicated the appropriateness of a four-cluster solution with a value of 232.21 for three clusters. Table 2 presents the results of the pseudo-T^2 analysis of the primary sample.

A k-means cluster analysis was then conducted with the number of clusters set at four. The initial seeds for the clusters were predefined based on the means of the groups found in the agglomerative cluster results with this sample. Given these initials cluster centers, each subject is assigned to the group with the closest center. The analysis proceeded to recompute the center and reassign subjects iteratively to the newly formed clusters. All couples are classified in this analysis. The means and standard deviations of the PCA scores for the clusters are available in Table 3.
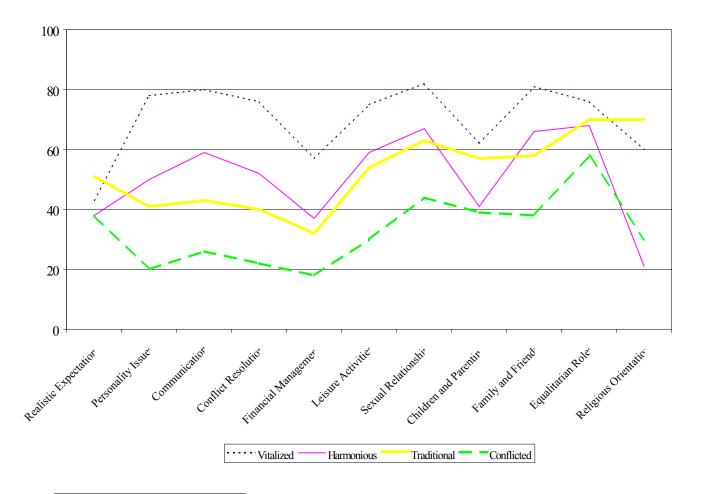
Cross-Validation of Premarital Types

The cross-validation of the cluster analysis was conducted with a separate sample of 2,263 couples. A k-means cluster analysis was conducted with the number of clusters set at four. Couples in the cross-validation sample were assigned to clusters in this analysis using the structure of the cluster analysis of the primary sample. There were no iterations involving recomputation of cluster means following subject assignment or relocation of subjects in the cross-validation. This provides an assessment of the cluster structure produced with the primary sample (in which cluster differences were maximized) with a second sample of couples. In other words, there is no increase in the data-dependent goodness of fit based on the characteristics of the cross-validation sample because the cluster structure is not modified in this procedure.

Two criteria can be used to assess the cross-validation: the pseudo-F statistic[3] and the approximate expected overall R^2 (Cooper & Milligan, 1984; Milligan & Cooper, 1985). These statistics can serve as an assessment of the cross-validation in much the same way that the stability of R^2 allows a test of the adequacy of cross-validations of regression analyses. The statistics were derived in both the cluster analysis of the primary sample and when the cross-validation couples were assigned to a cluster based on the primary-sample cluster structure. The smaller the decrease in these indicators of cluster model fit, the more robust the cluster structure.

The pseudo-F statistic for the primary sample was 448.58, and for the cross-validation, 418.34. The approximate expected overall R^2 was .17 for both the primary and cross-validation analyses. These results indicate that the four-cluster solution provided a good fit with the cross-validation sample and support that cluster structure as a [3] well-founded basis for a typology of engaged couples. A breakdown of the primary, cross-validation, and total samples into couple types is presented in Table 4 and illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. PREPARE Positive Couple Agreement score scale means for couple types in the validation sample.

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[3] The pseudo-*F* statistic is a measure of the separation among all the clusters. Higher values indicate greater separation. Comparable values indicate comparable overall separation. Hence, the very minor decrement in the pseudo-*F* statistic from the primary sample to the cross-validation sample indicates that the overall separation of the clusters in the cross-validation sample is quite comparable with the level of separation in the primary sample.

Table 3

PREPARE PCA Scale Means and Standard Deviations of the
Relationship Types in the Primary Sample

| | Relationship type | | | | | | | |
| | Vitalized | | Harmonious | | Traditional | | Conflicted | |
Scale	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Realistic Expectations	43.7	18.4	36.9	17.8	51.0	18.9	36.8	19.4
Personality Issues	75.6	16.5	51.7	18.8	41.3	19.5	20.3	16.1
Communication	79.4	14.7	57.6	17.7	43.2	18.5	25.4	17.9
Conflict Resolution	74.6	17.0	51.8	18.0	40.9	19.2	21.9	14.7
Financial Management	56.6	23.1	35.8	19.9	30.7	20.2	17.5	16.0
Leisure Activities	73.2	16.1	57.6	16.8	52.4	18.2	31.9	16.7
Sexual Relationship	81.8	15.1	69.1	20.3	64.4	20.5	45.4	20.4
Children and Parenting	62.9	20.0	41.1	19.2	54.8	19.3	38.4	18.6
Family and Friends	79.7	15.4	65.8	18.8	58.1	19.7	36.6	18.7
Equalitarian Roles	73.8	17.1	68.7	17.4	70.3	16.7	58.6	17.0
Religious Orientation	60.9	30.1	21.1	19.2	70.1	24.4	29.3	27.2

Note. PCA = positive couple agreement.

Primary-Sample Cluster Descriptions

The first group of couples was labeled *vitalized* and was composed of approximately 29% (*n* = 685) of the sample. Couples in this cluster are characterized by reports of high relationship quality on all 11 dimensions, hence the term *vitalized*. These couples have the highest overall relationship quality of any groups on all of the scales except Realistic Expectations and Religious Orientation.

The second group was called *harmonious* and contained 26% (*n* = 609) of the primary-sample couples. These couples reported moderate over-all relationship quality on PREPARE PCA scales, with lower scores on Realistic Expectation, Children and

Parenting, and Religious Orientation. This pattern of above-average scores on intrarelationship scales (e.g., Communication) and lower scores on scales involving less immediate considerations (e.g., Children and Parenting) appeared to highlight the emphasis on current internal harmony in these couples.

The third cluster, termed *traditional*, included 23% (n = 543) of the couples. The profile indicated moderately low scores on the intrarelationship scales including Personality Issues, Communication, and Conflict Resolution. This group had the highest scores of any group on the Realistic

Expectation and Religious Orientation scales and a relative peak on the Children and Parenting scale. This pattern has been termed traditional because it seemed to reflect emphases on more traditional couple strengths in combination with moderately low current relationship quality. These couples had relatively high PCA scores on the Equalitarian Role Scale, which is not usually considered traditional. Examination of the individual scores on this scale indicate that the higher PCA scores are more indicative of agreement about roles than an endorsement of purely egalitarian roles among these couples.

The last cluster, termed *conflicted*, was composed of 22% (*n* = 518) of the couples. This group was characterized by low scores across all 11 scales. These couples were labeled *conflicted* because they were planning to marry in spite of obvious relationship difficulties. Scores were particularly low in the intrarelational measures of Personality Issues, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Leisure Activities, and Sexual Relationship. In fact, the only relative elevations in this profile were in areas that require some projection on the part of the couple as to how they will interact in future roles (Realistic Expectations, Equalitarian Roles, Financial Management, Children and Parenting, and Religious Orientation). Figure 1 provides the PCA profiles of the four clusters.

Table 4

Group Size in the Primary, Cross-Validation, and Total Samples

Relationship Type	Primary sample		Cross-validation sample		Total sample	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Vitalized	685	29	594	26	1,279	28
Harmonious	609	26	640	28	1,249	27
Traditional	543	23	510	23	1,053	23
Conflicted	518	22	519	23	1,037	22
Total sample	2,355	100	2,263	100	4,618	100

Note. The exploratory sample was excluded.

Table 5
Chi-Square Analyses of Categorical Demographic Variables in the Primary Sample

Relationship type

Variable	Gender	Vitalized	Harmonious	Traditional	Conflicted	χ^2	*df*	N
Education (% with a college	Male	47.1	31.6	50.1	27.5	116.9**	15	2,251
degree)	Female	42.4	31.5	44.0	26.0	104.2**	15	2,287
	Male	44.9	33.5	42.7	24.7	102.5**	21	2,098
Occupation (% professional)	Female	41.5	31.4	44.4	29.7	95.6**	24	2,169
Income (% more than $20,000)	Male	54.3	43.8	46.5	35.1	70.8**	24	2,296
	Female	31.8	24.9	23.3	16.9	83.4**	24	2,231
% previously divorced	Male	5.2	4.7	5.1	8.3	32.7*	3	2,287
	Female	4.9	5.0	5.3	6.1	21.4	3	2,319
Parents' reaction to marriage	Male	74.9	65.4	66.0	48.7	102.9**	12	2,299
(% very positive)	Female	72.0	63.8	61.8	47.7	95.2**	12	2,321
Friends' reaction to marriage	Male	71.3	53.2	58.7	32.1	213.8**	12	2,313
(% very positive)	Female	80.6	70.9	74.3	52.9	138.9**	12	2,328
Population of current residence	Male	40.3	31.1	40.9	29.0	38.9**	15	2,247
(% in large cities)	Female	40.5	30.6	35.4	30.0	34.1*	15	2,264
% cohabiting		21.8	33.7	21.9	35.0	63.0**	9	2,335
% women pregnant		3.7	6.0	3.2	8.5	19.9**	3	2,336

p < .01. ** *p* < .001.

Demographic Comparison Between Primary-Sample Types

Differences between couple types in their demographical characteristics were also examined. One-way analyses of variance were conducted to examine age differences among the groups. The types differed on the ages of both men, $F(3, 2223) = 10.98$, $p < .001$, and women, $F(3, 2249) = 10.43$, $p < .001$. Post hoc Scheffe range tests revealed that both men and women in conflicted couples were younger than in any of the other groups.

The remaining demographic variables were categorical and were examined with chi-square analyses. In general, conflicted couples have significantly fewer resources than other groups. They tend to be younger, less educated, have lower income, and have occupations of lower status. Their marriage plans were not viewed as positively by parents and friends as other couples. In addition, these couples more often reported that the women was pregnant. Conflicted couples were also more frequently religiously and racially heterogamous (i.e., they were of different religious or racial groups). All of these demographic characteristics have been associated with lower marital satisfaction and stability in numerous studies.

In contrast, vitalized couples tended to have more resources in terms of higher education, higher status occupations, and more income. These couples were also more frequently religiously and racially homogamous (i.e., they were of the same religious or racial group). Harmonious couples were most similar to conflicted couples in background, whereas traditional couples were closest to those in the vitalized group in terms of demographics. Table 5 summarized the analyses of the demographic differences among the couple types.

Discussion

Description of Engaged-Couple Types

The results of this study indicated that engaged couples may be classified into four types based on the premarital inventory PREPARE. This cluster structure was developed through an initial exploratory stage, supported with further analyses of the primary sample and confirmed with a cross-validation.

Vitalized couples reported a high degree of overall relationship satisfaction. They 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 relate to one anther's family and friends. They reported agreement on financial and parenting matters as well. Vitalized couples indicated an interest in religious activity and a strong preference for egalitarian roles. They tended to be somewhat unrealistic in their expectations for marriage, however.

Harmonious couples were characterized by a moderate level of overall relationship quality. They tended to be 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. These couples were also satisfied with how they spend free time together and share affection, and they felt comfortable discussing sexual preferences and interests. Harmonious couples also felt comfortable with one another's friends and family. They tended to be somewhat unrealistic in their view of marriage and had not come to a consensus on child-related issues such as the number of children they wish to have or their parental roles. These couples did not tend to be religiously oriented.

Traditional couples had a profile indicating moderate dissatisfaction with interactional areas of their relationship but had strengths in areas that involve decision making and future planning. They tended to be somewhat unhappy with their partner's personal habits and were uncomfortable discussing feelings and dealing with conflict. Couples in this group were not entirely satisfied with how they spend their free time and how they relate sexually. These couples did tend to be realistic in their view of marriage and were quite religiously oriented. They have developed a consensus on the number of children they would like and on their roles as parents.

Conflicted couples indicated distress on all of the PREPARE scales. They reported dissatisfaction with their partner's personality and habits, their ability to communicate and discuss problems in their relationship, leisure activities, their sexual relationship, and how they relate to one another's family and friends. These couples did not tend to be religiously oriented but endorsed a more traditional role pattern than other couples. Although virtually all of their scores tended to be lower than the other groups, these couples had relative strengths in realistic expectations and in their consensus on children and parenting.

The results of the analyses of demographic variables can also add to the clinical picture. As mentioned, conflicted couples had significantly fewer resources than the other groups. They tended to be younger, be less educated, have lower income, and have occupations of lower status. Their marriage plans were not viewed as positively by parents and friends as other couples. In addition, these couples more often reported that the women was pregnant. Conflicted couples were also more frequently religiously and racially heterogamous. All of these demographic characteristics have been associated with lower marital satisfaction and stability in numerous studies.

In contrast, vitalized couples tended to have more resources in terms of higher education, higher status occupations, and more income. These couples were also more frequently religiously and racially homogamous. Harmonious couples were most similar to conflicted couples in background, whereas traditional couples were closest to those in the vitalized group in terms of demographics. It is not immediately clear what these group similarities signify.

Clinical Implications

There are no data regarding the specific prognoses of these four couple types at present. Yet the results of this study do suggest the value of developing specific approaches to premarital prevention based on the needs of different couples. The four premarital couple types that have been described may very well benefit from different forms of marital preparation. This contrast is clearest with the conflicted and vitalized types. It appears that vitalized couples are in a very good position to develop a satisfying and stable marriage. Two previous studies indicated that couples with their pattern of scores tend to be successful in early marriage (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989). Thus, these couples may not require a great deal of additional preparation.

Couples characterized as conflicted, on the other hand, appear to be at grave risk for marital discord and dissolution. This pattern of scores has been associated with early termination of marriage in previous studies (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989). Therefore, these couples may need more significant assistance if preventive efforts are to be successful. This may include communication and conflict skills training, more intensive relationship therapy, or even a reconsideration of their decision to marry.

More moderate assistance for couples in the harmonious and traditional groups may be appropriate. Harmonious couples indicated deficits in realistic expectations of marriage

and in discussing financial and parental expectations. They may benefit from educative programs targeted in these areas. In addition, some communication skills training may be offered as well to maintain premarital levels of relationship satisfaction into early marriage (Markman et al., 1988). Although traditional couples did not have severe relationship distress, these couples' relative difficulties focus clearly on personal habits, communication, and problem solving. This group of couples may be good candidates for communication and conflict-resolution training. Because of their high level of religious orientation, these couple may benefit most from such training in a pastoral setting. This communication training can build on their planfulness and realistic expectations of marriage.

Comparison With Previous Relationship
Satisfaction Typologies

There are a number of interesting similarities and differences between the results of this study and previous typologies of couples. Although Surra's (1985) study of premarital couples offers the greatest level of overlap in relationship stage, it is difficult to justify any direct comparisons between her four trajectories toward commitment and the four types of engaged couples identified in this study because there are no clear overlaps in the types of data collected in the two studies.

Two typologies of marital relationships may offer more productive comparisons (Olson & Fowers, 1991; Snyder & Smith, 1986). There are several interesting parallels. First, all three studies identified both highly satisfied and very dissatisfied groups of couples. The satisfied premarital couples in this study and the satisfied married couples in the Olson and Fowers study were labeled *vitalized,* whereas Snyder and Smith reported two clusters with high marital satisfaction (Types I and II). The two clusters in Snyder and Smith's research were differentiated by high and low scores on Marital Conventionalization. The Conventionalization scales in the PREPARE and ENRICH inventories are used as validity scales and were thus unavailable for comparison across clusters.

This study's conflicted couples seem to have substantial and widespread dissatisfaction in common with the devitalized married couples in Olson and Fowers's (1991) research and Types IV and V in the Snyder and Smith (1986) study. The two pervasively dissatisfied groups found by Snyder and Smith differed in the level of dissatisfaction they expressed with their children, however.

The traditional couples in this investigation had a profile similar to the cluster of married couples labeled traditional by Olson and Fowers (1991). These groups combined lower scores on scales assessing the couple relationship with higher scores on Children and Parenting and Religious Orientation scales.

The harmonious couples identified in this study had some similarities to two groups of couples Olson and Fowers (1991) labeled harmonious. The commonality between these profiles had to do with relatively high scores on scales measuring satisfaction with how the

partners relate to one another in combination with lower scores on the Children and Parenting scale. The harmonious couples in this study had much lower scores on the Religious Orientation scale than did the married couples in Olson and Fower's harmonious group.

Snyder and Smith (1986) identified a fifth cluster, but this group did not replicate well and is difficult to compare with the clusters in this study. Olson and Fowers (1991) also found five clusters, one of which was not clearly related to the present findings.

Research Implications

There are two general caveats with regard to this study. First, because comparable typology studies were conducted with married couples, the parallels indicated previously here must be made with caution. There are no data available at present to give any indication of whether engaged couples who fit the harmonious couples will go on to become harmonious couples following marriage, for example. The longitudinal studies conducted with PREPARE do indicate the likelihood of differential marital success with conflicted and vitalized couples, but these studies were not based on this typology and, therefore, offer only suggestive evidence regarding future marital success (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989). On the basis of the similarity of the scale scores of the couples in the previous studies and those in the vitalized and conflicted groups in this study, it could be hypothesized that conflicted premarital couples will tend to have a higher rate of separation and divorce than vitalized couples.

The extent to which premarital relationship types develop over time remains an interesting but unanswered question. Future research is needed to illuminate the trajectories of marital satisfaction and stability and to indicate what kinds of events and interactions auger for the development of different relationship types. Surra's (1985, 1987) work in this area provided a useful beginning that could be augmented by using relationship satisfaction and stability measures. Ongoing study of couple types at various stages of the marital life cycle could also assist in the understanding of marital development and enhance the usefulness of relationship classification.

The second caveat is that the present sample was a convenience rather than a representative sampling. Most of the couples who completed the PREPARE inventory did so at the behest of the clergy member who was to marry them. The sample is also predominantly White and Christian. Greater confidence in the findings of this research await replication with a more representative sample.

The results of this research have implications for the debate about whether relationship satisfaction is a unidimensional or multidimensional construct. There were four relationship types identified in this study. These four types appeared to represent three distinct levels of satisfaction with their relationship. The vitalized and conflicted couples formed two levels, and the harmonious and traditional couples had differing patterns but fairly similar overall levels of satisfaction. These different levels of satisfaction may seem

to represent a single dimension of the relationship, such as severity of conflict. The hypothesis that relationship satisfaction is unidimensional seems to require that the four groups have four distinct levels of satisfaction. This is not borne out in this study because the harmonious and traditional couples differ primarily in terms of their pattern of scores. Moreover, two scales did not follow a unidimensional pattern among the four groups of couples. These scales (Realistic Expectations and Religious Orientation) were important predictors of subsequent marital success in two previous studies (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989).

These findings support the use of a multidimensional approach to assessing premarital relationships. Couples were found to have differing combinations of satisfaction and distress with various facets of their relationships. The classification approach facilitates the recognition and understanding of relevant differences between couples while reducing the great variety of couple types to a manageable number that share common characteristics. The multidimensional approach used in this study could be expanded to include relationship dimensions beyond relationship satisfaction. For example, Fitzpatrick (1988) studied interdependence and ideology in addition to conflict styles.

The identification of four types of engaged couples using PREPARE enhances the understanding of this stage of dyadic relationships and can facilitate preventive efforts. The large sample size, cross-validation, and the use of the couple as a unit of analysis add to the degree of confidence in and relevance of this research.

These results can provide a starting point for the systematic development of preventive programs that focus on relevant differences between couple types. This study indicates the need to increase the sophistication of divorce-prevention strategies over currently available "one size fits all" approaches. Future studies are needed to examine the relative effectiveness of available programs with the couple types found in this research to shed light on this question. In addition, comparative outcome studies could be conducted with programs tailored to the needs of four types of engaged couples described here.

There was some (although quite limited) indication of the external validity of the typology based on the differences across the types on a number of background variables. Although the demographic differences between the groups are informative, external validation of the typology on such criteria as future marital success or observed interactional differences is very important. This external validation is a significant question to be addressed in future research.

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