

# **Latter-day Saint Couples' Experience as Newlyweds**

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### **Abstract**

While there is a growing body of knowledge on newlyweds and the transitions they go through, very little is known about the experience of newlyweds who are also members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). The purpose of this study was to gain a picture of the LDS newlywed experience through in-depth interviews. Seeking to understand the overall experience of LDS newlyweds, this study was conducted using a phenomenological perspective to explore how these couples' expectations of marriage correspond with their actual experience of marriage, how the LDS faith influenced the expectations and/or experience of marriage, and finally to uncover what external and internal factors helped or hindered their transition to marriage. In-depth interviews were conducted with six young LDS newlywed couples and were coded for themes. The main themes found include the pressure to marry, process of discovering sexual intimacy and an overall evaluation of expectations and experience. Implications for therapists and future research are indicated.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### Problem and Setting

Marriage has increasingly become the focus of academic research within the past fifty years. Much of this research has attempted to unearth the contributing factors of unsuccessful marriages (Bachand & Caron, 2001). There is a general consensus in the literature on the effects of an unsuccessful marriage and the negative impact it can have on families and children in particular, including declines in school performance, symptoms of depression for both parent and child, and more aggressive behavior among children (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). While the majority of this research has focused on the deficits of failed marriages, recently some researchers have embraced the idea of examining the characteristics of marriages that do not fail, but are considered long-term and stable (Bachand & Caron, 2001; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992). This research has shown that long-term and stable marriages seem to carry friendship and love as top priorities, in addition to partners having similar interests and backgrounds and maintaining a strong commitment to the marriage (Bachand & Caron, 2001). Additional research has shown that married individuals are generally in better physical health, emotionally happier, live longer than individuals who are not married (Bee & Boyd, 2003) and they enjoy more economic stability (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004).

While marriage is not the only lifestyle choice for Americans today, 90% of Americans will choose to marry by the age of thirty (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, & Kolata, 1994). Yet despite the suggested benefits of marriage and the vast majority of people choosing to marry, between half and two thirds of marriages within the United States will end in divorce, and nearly one third of those will fail within the first five years



(Carrere, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan, & Ruckstuhl, 2000). Those first years seem to be crucial as they are the building blocks of the marital foundation. Carrere et al (2000) suggest that newlyweds “may be very different from couples who have been married longer or who have become parents” because of this transitioning stage and “their patterns of interaction may be more open to influence and change” (p 44). However, the research on transition to marriage appears to be limited (Kurdek, 1998). Among the research conducted using newlywed samples, the focus tends to be on predicting marital interactions and marital stability across the span of the marriage (Bachand & Caron, 2001; Carrere et al., 2000; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Heaton, 1988). While this research has provided an understanding of the contributing factors of stable marriages, questions remain concerning the actual transition couples experience as they navigate their way into the first years of marriage. What were their expectations of marriage? How did those expectations differ from their actual experience? What influenced those expectations? What helped or hindered a smooth transition into marriage? This study seeks to begin to fill in this gap in the “transition to marriage” literature through in-depth interviews of newlywed couples.

The current study examined the expectations and actual experience of marriage with newlywed couples who are also members of The Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon). According to the National Council of Churches (2004), the LDS church is one of the fastest growing religious bodies in the world and is the fifth largest church in America. There are some characteristics members of the LDS faith have that set them apart from not only mainstream America but from other religions as well (e.g. the high priority of and high rates of chastity before marriage, low rates of

cohabitation, and the concept of eternal marriages) (Heaton, 1988; Heaton & Goodman, 1985). While most formal religions emphasize the importance of marriage, remaining chaste before marriage and refraining from cohabitating before marriage, studies have shown that Latter-day Saints have higher rates of marriage and lower rates of premarital sex and cohabitation than both Catholics and Protestants (Heaton, 1988; Heaton & Goodman, 1985). Yet, probably the most unique factor is the concept of eternal marriages. Distinct from marriage ceremonies which pronounce the husband and wife together until “death do you part”, eternal marriages remain intact in the post-mortal life. These eternal marriages take place within LDS temples, which differ from chapels where weekly worship services take place. To enter the temple and participate in this eternal marriage ceremony, one must be a member of the LDS faith, in good standing with the church through adherence to the high standards of LDS teachings. These standards include belief in Christ, observance of the “law of chastity” (i.e. remaining chaste until marriage and sexual fidelity after marriage), adherence to the “word of wisdom”, (i.e. emphasis on benefits of proper eating and physical and spiritual health, in addition to refraining from alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs), payment of a “full tithe” (i.e. 10% of income), and support of church leaders. While not all LDS marriages take place within the temple, it is the most encouraged type of marriage within LDS theology (Packer, 1980). From the oldest to the youngest members of the church, temple marriage is seen as the number one priority. With such importance placed on temple marriage, the question that begs to be asked is what happens after temple marriage? How do newlywed couples experience this new world of marriage? Because temple marriages are unique

only to members of the LDS faith, there is merit in studying their experience. This study seeks to begin to understand this experience.

### Significance

Despite the popular media's portrayal of the euphoric phase during courtship and the first years of marriage, research has consistently shown that marriage is not wholly made up of romance and idyllic love but a time to learn to communicate effectively, find ways to successfully resolve conflict, and find a balance between self and partnership (Carrere et al., 2000; Gottman et al., 1998; Veroff, Douvan, Orbuch, & Acitelli, 1998).

These changes may be especially poignant for members of the LDS faith that have never lived with a romantic partner before marriage. As marriage and family therapists it is important to be aware of and sensitive to an individual's or couple's beliefs and general background. Since The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the fifth largest religious body in the United States, it is increasingly likely that non-LDS therapists will be referred LDS clients. It is important to be aware of the unique aspects of this particular faith that may impact the marriages and overall family life of these clients.

This study seeks to facilitate an understanding of a specific segment of the LDS experience, namely the newlywed experience, aiming to assist LDS and non-LDS therapists and counselors alike in understanding the experience of these young couples.

Another reason studying the LDS newlywed experience is important is because there is little formal preparation for LDS couples as they plan to marry. Premarital classes do exist within the context of the church and are available through university institute classes, but, unlike the majority of other programs organized by the church, these classes are not uniform and part of the infrastructure of the church. There are also

Marriage Enrichment classes that run a 12-week course as an alternative to Sunday school, but it is dependant on the size of the ward (i.e. congregation) and the availability of teachers. Thus, there are segments of the LDS population who may never have access to these resources. The proposed study seeks to explore the experience of LDS newlywed couples with the hope of bringing to light struggles that may exist in forming a marriage, while informing future marital enrichment classes or more formal marriage preparation classes.

Finally, I plan to work with this population in the near future and I feel it is important to have a better and deeper understanding of this newlywed experience to inform my work.

### Rationale

In observing my LDS newlywed friends and sisters, I found that each couple voiced difficulties they were experiencing in their first two years of marriage. Some of the hurdles stemmed from getting comfortable with their sexuality while others seemed to stem from mourning the single life. Although none of these couples mentioned being unhappy with their new marriage, they were quick to point out the complexities of trying to make a marriage function, with no prior experience and little pragmatic advice. Although there is no research on religious newlywed couples, there is research available on religious couples in general. However, the majority of these studies focus on couples of Jewish and Christian faiths, with the Christians being comprised mostly of Protestants and Catholics (Sullivan, 2002). While the LDS church is considered Christian, the differences between mainstream Christianity and LDS theology warrant separate research. As stated earlier, one of the basic principles of LDS theology is that of eternal

marriage, rather than marriage which pronounces the husband and wife together until “death do you part”. Many people of various religious backgrounds believe that families will be together as part of an after-this-life experience, yet this concept is one of the chief precepts of LDS theology, which is not found as a main tenet of other religious doctrine. According to LDS beliefs, marriages that take place within LDS temples are eternal, meaning the marriage will be intact in the post-mortal life and the couple will continue to progress as individuals and as a married pair. Unlike LDS chapels, to enter into an LDS temple one must be a member of the LDS church, in good standing, and living the high standards prescribed by the church.

When not distinguishing between temple marriages and non-temple marriages, some studies suggest that the divorce rate among LDS members is only slightly lower than national average; yet when examining marriages that take place within an LDS temple, a 6% to 14% divorce rate emerges, which is significantly lower than the 45-50% national average (Heaton & Goodman, 1985; Mims, 1999). Furthermore, the LDS rate of divorce is significantly lower than the divorce rate among homogamous Catholic and Protestant couples (Heaton & Goodman, 1985; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993).

The low divorce rate among members of the LDS faith is not the only aspect of this religion that sets them apart from the trends of the nation. According to a national study published each year by Rutgers University, co-directed by Barbara Whitehead and David Popenoe, titled the State of our Unions (2004), “over half of all first marriages are preceded by living together, compared to virtually none 50 years ago” (p 21).

Cohabitation has become a popular alternative as either a prelude to marriage or an alternative to it and seems to be more common among those who are “less religious than

their peers, those who have been divorced, and those who have experienced parental divorce...” (p. 21). Yet, despite how common cohabitation has become, adherents to most formal religions receive counsel from church leadership to refrain from cohabitating before marriage (Heaton & Goodman, 1985; Waite, 2000). The chief reasons that most formal religions discourage cohabitation seem to be because the privileges that accompany marriage (i.e. sexual intimacy, child bearing and rearing, etc) are regarded as sacred and should be kept within the bonds of a formal union. LDS theology emphasizes that marriage and the creation of a family is sacred, one of the most important foundations of a successful society and one of the main purposes of this life. In a document titled *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* (1995), the presidency of the LDS church set forth the following:

“The family is ordained of God. Marriage between a man and a woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity.”

Church leadership throughout the world often quote this proclamation on the family, as it succinctly describes the tenets of the LDS faith on marriage and family (for examples, see the official LDS church magazine, *The Ensign*, at [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org)). Results from a study conducted by Heaton and Goodman (1985), found that Latter-day Saints are the least likely group to cohabit before marriage; only 8.2% of LDS couples cohabit compared with 20-40% of other religious groups and nearly 45% of non-religious couples.

In addition to proscribing cohabitation before marriage, LDS theology also sets forth the concept that sexual intercourse is a sacred power, designed for the expression of

love between husband and wife and for the creation of children. While this concept is not unique to the LDS faith, only 20% of Americans wait to have sex until they are married (Rostosky, Regnerus, & Wright, 2003). Statistics from a tri-state high school survey showed that 17 percent of the LDS teenagers reported having premarital sex, compared to 48 percent of Catholics, 51 percent claiming no religious affiliation, and 67 percent of Protestants (Miller, McCoy, Olsen, & Wallace, 1985). Clearly not all LDS members wait to have sex until they are married, but this evidence suggests that chastity until marriage is more common among LDS members than is generally the case for Catholics and Protestants, and for those not affiliated with any religion. The difference between active and inactive LDS members is also striking. Heaton (1988) analyzed data from The National Survey of Young Women (1971) and found that 23 percent of inactive members of the LDS church reported that they had premarital intercourse compared with only three percent of active members. While the statistics on chastity before marriage in the LDS temple are not available, an individual preparing for a temple marriage attends two separate interviews by church leadership to determine worthiness to enter into the temple; and generally, those who are worthy to enter into the temple have been living the high standards of the church for at least one year.

As mentioned above, LDS members view marriage and the creation of a family as central to the purpose of this life. According to Rutgers University's annual report from The National Marriage Project's State of Our Unions (2004), there is a growing trend of American men not associating marriage with passage into adulthood nor is marriage closely tied to creating a family. This report further states that extended bachelorhood is considered the norm as there are other appealing alternatives to marriage, with

contemporary social lifestyle offering a wide variety of “social outlets and sexual opportunities” for unmarried males (p.13). This is almost the polar opposite from the teachings of the LDS faith. While pressing the importance of gaining an education or vocational training, men are encouraged to make finding a mate a priority, and not to extend their bachelorhood longer than necessary (Benson, 1988).

Finally, the national trend of declining fertility rates and the “loss of child centeredness” (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004) further separates Latter-day Saints from national averages. As mentioned previously, one of the main tenets of the LDS faith is that of getting married in the temple and bringing children into that union. Heaton (1988) reports fertility rates of Latter-day Saints to be higher than that of the national average, and suggests that this trend will continue.

Combine all of these factors and it becomes clear that members of the LDS faith can be very different from mainstream America and national trends of thought on marriage. The proposed study seeks to begin filling in the gaps of LDS research in general and more specifically to begin to understand the unique aspects of LDS newlywed life.

### Theoretical Framework

I chose phenomenology as the theoretical framework to guide this study. One of the main objectives of this approach is to describe and understand the experience of the participants through exploration of the meaning behind relationships and everyday life events (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996). From a phenomenological perspective the researcher explores the underlying meaning attached to the decisions or actions of the participants. According to Boss et al, understanding the complexities of the phenomena



will assist therapist and researcher alike to “act with greater awareness and consciousness—to be more thoughtful...” (p. 91). As discussed previously, there is a paucity of literature on the LDS newlywed experience. By using the phenomenological lens, the proposed study hopes to begin to fill the gap in the research and begin to understand this experience.

Phenomenology is shaped by several philosophical assumptions. One of the first assumptions of this approach is that the researcher becomes part of the phenomena studied. Phenomenologists suggest that objectivity is unattainable and truth is relative, and thus the beliefs and value system of the researcher will influence the questions the researcher asks. Boss et al (1996) posit that acknowledging this inevitable bias in research is more important than the actual beliefs and values themselves. As an LDS woman who has been married four years at the start of this study, it is important for me to be aware of my own beliefs and biases about LDS newlywed couples. Boss et al (1996) suggests that it is a necessity for the researcher to continually be reflective and questioning one’s own process when it comes to the queries of the study, and it is preferable to have someone assist the researcher in doing this. My advisor, who is not a member of the LDS faith, and who has been married 35 years, provided an outside perspective in reviewing the transcripts with me.

Another way phenomenology guided this study is through the important concept that participants are the experts of their own experience. The questions of the study will allow the participants the freedom to define the phenomena as they experience it without being pathologized by the researcher. Although the researcher begins with a hunch about the phenomena, phenomenologists try to refrain from placing labels on their participants

and acknowledge that it is the participants that have the answers to the research questions, and not the researcher.

In addition to the importance of the participants being the experts of their own experience, it is critical that the data collection take place within the participants own environment, in other words, their own homes if possible. Boss et al. (1996) assert that bringing the participants into a lab or other contrived environment risks the possibility of losing crucial pieces to the phenomena.

Furthermore, in using the phenomenological approach, it is important to “listen to and observe...the ‘family world’ as a whole” (Boss et al., 1996, p. 87). The researcher must study what he or she claims to be studying. This study examined newlywed couples, and therefore must study both partners. Studying only half of the couple will illustrate only part of the phenomena, both partners must participate in order to gain a deeper and richer understanding of their experience as newlyweds.

Overall, phenomenology provides an appropriate structure for the proposed study, which involves an in-depth exploration into the interpersonal and systemic processes of LDS newlywed couples. As phenomenology guides this study, it is the hope of this researcher to begin to understand the unique experience of these newlywed couples.

#### Statement of Purpose:

While there is a growing body of knowledge on newlyweds and the transitions they go through, we know very little about the experience of LDS newlyweds and how their expectations may impact their experience. The purpose of this study is to add to the limited literature on LDS newlyweds.

Using a qualitative research method, this study aims to gain a descriptive picture of the LDS newlywed experience and how the LDS culture and belief system influences their new marriage. Seeking to understand the overall experience of LDS newlyweds, this study was conducted using a phenomenological perspective, allowing for a rich and descriptive analysis of their experience. The key research questions that were addressed by this study were:

- How do the expectations of marriage correspond with the actual experience of marriage? (gender roles, sexual roles, division of labor, finances, etc) in these common areas?
- How does the LDS faith influence the expectations and/or experience of marriage?
- What are the external and internal factors that help or hinder the transition to marriage?

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

In this chapter, I will examine research related to three key topics: marriage, newlyweds, and Latter-day Saints. Within the section on marital research I will discuss the components of strong and stable marriages, issues of religiosity and spirituality, as well as areas of agreement and disagreement experienced by married couples. The newlywed section will examine studies that include predictors of marital stability and/or divorce in newlywed samples, a brief look at social network transformation during the transition to marriage, and literature looking at the relationship between expectations of marriage and/or partner and marital satisfaction and quality. In the final section, I will discuss relevant research on the LDS population, including a brief look at the differences that exist between LDS members and other religious groups. In addition, I will take a look at the research related to gender roles within the LDS church.

### **Marriage Research**

The marriage statistics in the United States seem grim with between half and two thirds of marriages ending in divorce, and nearly one third of those failing within the first five years (Carrere et al., 2000). For the past fifty years, many researchers have studied marriage and the factors that contribute to unsuccessful marriages (for a review see White, 1990), as well as the impact failed marriages have on society (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). While there is a continued need to be concerned about the stability and longevity of marriages within America, there is some hope. According to Rutgers University's annual The State of our Unions report (2004), since the 1970's the general trend in the number of couples who would rate their marriage as "very happy" has been declining, yet the past decade has shown that "this trend has swung in a positive

direction” (p 16). With this existing positive trend it is important that researchers identify what makes those marriages “very happy”, in addition to what contributes to make some marriages stable and long-term. The majority of studies on marriage have looked at the risk factors related to divorce; yet, as with the increase in “very happy” marriages, there has been an increase of research that examines the characteristics of successful and stable marriages (Bachand & Caron, 2001). While identifying risk factors for divorce is important, it should not be assumed that the opposite of those risk factors are protective factors for marriage. This section will examine the characteristics of strong marriages and the key components in building and sustaining those relationships.

### Components of Strong Marriages

The increase in research on long-term marriages and why they last has provided some clarity as to what makes some marriages successful. For example, Bachand and Caron (2001) conducted in-depth interviews with 15 self-reported happy couples, married 35 years or more to learn what made these marriages successful. While the couples offered a wide variety of contributing factors to their happy marriages, there were three main elements that emerged from within those responses: friendship between spouses, love, and common interests and background.

These three factors—friendship, love, and shared interests—were also found in other studies. For example, Fenell (1993) asked 147 couples, married 20 years or more, to rank in order the top ten characteristics they believed to be the most important in their long-term marriage. These couples reported that a lifetime commitment to their marriage was the number one important factor. Other factors this sample included as most important to the longevity of their marriages were (in order of importance): loyalty to

spouse, strong moral values, respect for spouse as best friend, commitment to sexual fidelity, desire to be a good parent, faith in God and spiritual commitment, desire to please spouse, and finally a willingness to forgive and be forgiven.

In a different approach to finding what makes some marriages stable, Heaton (2002) analyzed data from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth. The participants of this survey were 10, 847 women between the ages of 14 and 45. He found that women who are more educated, marry at an older age, and have a spouse with the same religious affiliation are more likely to be in stable marriages. Among all of the variables in Heaton's study, age at marriage was the most influential in the decline of marital dissolution. Heaton suggests age at marriage has a positive relationship with marital stability—that is to say if the number of marriages instituted at younger ages continues to decline, marital instability will continue to decrease. In addition to age at marriage, Heaton found that religious homogamy (i.e. couples with the same religious background) was also an important contributing factor to stable marriages. Interestingly, Bachand and Caron (2001) and Fenell (1993) also found that religion was among the contributing factors for stable marriages.

In summary, the research suggests that the main components of strong marriages include love, friendship, and shared interests. Additional factors seem to include strong commitment to the marriage, mutual respect and shared religious beliefs. The following section will focus primarily on religiosity within married couples and the role it plays in the relationship.

### Religion and Spirituality

According to a Gallup Poll from September 2003, nearly 60% of Americans report that religion is “very important” to them in their lives and almost 40% attend worship services on a weekly basis. From these statistics, it is fitting that researchers have studied how religiosity influences marriages and families. For example, Booth et al (1995) conducted a longitudinal study using two waves of data collection, one from 1988 and again 1992. This study examined a thousand married couples to determine how the quality of the marriage was influenced by religious involvement. They did not find strong support for the idea that increased religious activities, whether public or private, improved the quality of the marriages of these couples. However, they did find that activity in religious meetings did decrease the “probability of contemplating divorce” (p 298). In a smaller study by Kaslow and Robison (1996), 31% of the 57 participating married couples reported that religious beliefs were a main contributing factor for remaining married; additionally, almost two-thirds of this sample identified having similar religious beliefs as an essential ingredient to a satisfying marriage.

In an attempt to capture the meaning that religion plays in a marriage, and not just whether the couple were of a common religion, Mahoney, et al. (1999) examined not only the couple’s religious homogamy and each individual’s religiousness, but also the behavioral aspects of the couple’s religious life (e.g. praying together, praying for each other, attending religious classes, worship services, etc.) and the extent to which the couple viewed their marriage as sacred. Their findings suggest that, for these couples, joint religious activities and the perception that their marriage has a spiritual dimension is positively correlated to global marital adjustment as well as personal benefits derived from the marriage.

While the findings are somewhat mixed on the actual role religion plays in marriage, overall, these articles suggest that religious activities and shared religious values is, at the very least, a component of some stable and happy marriages. Another aspect of the religion and marriage topic is how religion is defined. Most of the articles mentioned above use religion alone (e.g. Booth et al, 1995, Kaslow and Robison, 1996) without specifically making reference to spirituality, or they use the two terms synonymously (e.g. Fenell, 1993, Mahoney et al., 1999); yet an argument has emerged from some of the literature concerning the definitions of spirituality and religion. For example, Anthony (1993) distinguished between different levels of spirituality and how they related to marital functioning and satisfaction.

1. Intrinsic: People who internalize their religion, who endeavor to live their faith on a daily, consistent basis;
2. Extrinsic: People who use religion to gain social recognition, status, or prestige;

Anthony (1993), using a sample of 400 married couples from four major Protestant denominations, found that couples with the most intrinsic levels of spirituality reported the highest levels of marital adjustment and satisfaction, and couples who identified their spirituality as extrinsically motivated reported the lowest levels of marital adjustment. Interestingly, religious homogamy was not associated with marital satisfaction in this study, as it was in other studies (e.g. Mahoney et al, 1999). One explanation may be that couples who are intrinsically motivated to live out their beliefs do not need to belong to the same religious organization because they have a level of agreement on how their beliefs should be lived.



Overall, these studies suggest that whatever we call it—religiosity, spirituality, or religion—it appears to have an association with higher levels of marital satisfaction and adjustment. Religion is one of the myriad issues a couple faces as they merge their lives together. The following section will explore other areas within the lifespan of a marriage that are most commonly cited as problematic.

#### Areas of disagreement and agreement within a marriage

It is safe to say that the majority of couples will experience some level of disagreement and difficulty throughout the course of their marriage. As mentioned previously, there has been a growing body of literature on the reasons American couples have such a high rate of marital dissolution. Researchers have also examined areas that are problematic to couples, but not necessarily predictors of divorce. This section will focus on those problematic areas that are common to most couples. First, I will briefly examine two competing theories used to describe problems across the lifespan of marriage: the developmental theory of the “marital life cycle” and the systemic notion of homeostasis. Then, I will compare several studies with cross-sectional and longitudinal designs to examine the most common problems couples face.

The first theory is based on the developmental premise of the “marital life cycle” and how couples at varying stages of their marriage may experience a set of different problems. Nichols and Pace-Nichols (1993) set forth four stages of the marital life cycle as follows: (1) The Beginning: Mating and Marriage; (2) the Early Years: Expanding the Base; (3) the Middle Years: Affirmation and Preparation; and (4) The Later Years: Consolidation and Celebration. Each stage is set with certain tasks to complete but because the stages are unique, each set of problems may be different. The core tasks for

each stage include: commitment, caring, communication, conflict/compromise, and contract. Conversely, the systemic notion of homeostasis suggests that regardless of what stage of development a couple is experiencing, they will have a “consistent pattern of problems throughout their marriage” (Miller, Yorgason, Sandberg, & White, 2003). Miller et al. (2003) used both of these theories to guide their study. A clinical sample of 160 couples, ranging in length of marriage from one to twenty years, was asked to complete two questionnaires separately; one to identify the primary problem that brought them into therapy and the second questionnaire was to identify other problem areas in their marriage. The results identified communication difficulties as the number one reason these couples were coming to therapy. Communication problems did not seem to dissipate with more experience; since each group, from newlyweds (3-years or less) to the more seasoned marriages (10-years or more), identified communication as one of the most common and steady problems for couples at the various stages in their relationship. Additionally, financial matters, decision making, and emotional intimacy were also problem areas for many of these couples. These results seem to support the homeostasis theory, which posits that problems remain constant through the different stages of the marital cycle. To better understand if certain problems are steady throughout a marriage or if they change depending on the developmental stage a couple is in, we will take a look at two longitudinal studies.

Using the family developmental theory (e.g. getting married, becoming parents, empty nest, and retirement) Storaasli and Markman (1990) conducted a longitudinal study with 131 couples who were either engaged (65%) or planning to get married (35%). Data were collected from these couples at six separate times spanning from pre-marriage

to early parenthood years and categorized into pre-marriage, early marriage, and early parenthood groups. The findings of this study suggest that problems do change throughout the development of the relationship as three major problem areas were identified: communication, sex, and recreation. These problems showed significant increases in intensity from pre-marriage to early parenting. Furthermore, as the couples had more time together, there was a significant decrease in what the authors termed “exterior” problems that affect couples during the early time they are forming their union, such as boundary setting with relatives, balancing time between family and friends, and religious differences. Whereas, when couples begin to feel more secure in their relationship, their attention seems to shift towards “internal” problems, or problems within the relationship, such as issues surrounding sex. Contrary to the findings of Miller et al. (2003), these results support the family developmental theory and suggest that couples in different stages of their development have certain demands and tasks pertaining to that stage that increase the likelihood for particular problems. One interesting finding was that while the intensity surrounding money decreased throughout the different stages, it nonetheless remained an intense and stable problem for the majority of the couples.

Taking Storaasli and Markman’s (1990) study one step further, Huston, Houts, Caughlin, Smith, and George, (2001) conducted a longitudinal study examining the predictors of marital distress using a newlywed sample across the span of 13 to 14 years. This study used three separate models to try and predict newlywed couples that end up distressed and/or divorced. These authors hypothesized several different models to describe the process of how and when problems begin to infect a marriage. The first

model is The Disillusionment Model. As is evident by its name, this model suggests that during courtship individuals tend to romanticize and exaggerate their partners' good qualities and create an idealized portrait of them—with both partners assisting to perpetuate the myth by maintaining their best behavior. These idealizations may be difficult to uphold once a couple has been married because they begin to see the real person underneath the illusions they created. And as disillusionment begins to creep its way into the marriage (e.g. losses of love and affection, ambivalent feelings toward partner and marriage, etc.), couples should become distressed and thus may decide to end the marriage.

The second model this study used was the Emergent Distress Model (EDM). This, like the disillusionment model, suggests that newlywed couples begin marriage blissfully happy and affectionate. However, unlike the disillusionment model, EDM proposes that while newlyweds will experience a decline in those exaggerated feelings of love and affection, the declines are normative and will not be predictive of troubled marriages; but rather the increase of negativity among spouses will be the determining factor.

Finally, the third model was The Enduring Dynamics Model. This model, like the homeostasis theory, suggests that the initial problems couples struggle with in courtship will be persistent and follow them through to the marriage and beyond. Soliciting their sample through marriage license records, Huston et al. (2001) recruited 168 couples for the initial phase of their 13 year study. Using a variety of tests and interview questions to determine marital happiness, love for one another, and ambivalence, data were collected at two months of marriage, one and two years of marriage, and then a follow-up phase

after couples had been married 13 and 14 years. At the follow-up, 105 couples were still married. Couples who were still married were placed into one of two groups: stably married happy or stably married unhappy. The couples that were divorced were placed into three different categories: quickly divorced (divorced within two years of marriage), divorced-early (between 2 and 7 years), and finally, divorced-later (7 years or longer).

The results for those couples that remained married seemed to show support for the enduring dynamic theory. For example, couples that were still together at the 13 year follow-up, and had experienced conflict during courtship, experienced the same level of conflict throughout their marriage. Conversely, couples that showed strong marital bonds during their newlywed years also showed strong bonds at the 13 year follow-up. What about for those who were divorced? Comparing couples that divorced two or more years after being married with the couples that remained together; it was found that the divorced couples viewed their spouses as less responsive and they became more ambivalent about their marriages over time. These findings suggest that disillusionment was a factor of divorce for these couples.

The authors propose that an important aspect of their study was the value of not only looking at the inability of divorced couples to cope with conflict, but also the positive elements that exist within relationships and examining whether or not they remain intact or diminish over time.

While there appears to be some disagreement in the literature as to whether problems exist during certain stages of marriage or if a couple's problems remain consistent throughout the life of the marriage, there does seem to be some consensus as to the most commonly experienced type of problems; namely, communication, money, and

difficulties surrounding sex. The next section will focus on the specific developmental stage of the early years of a marriage, namely the newlywed period. I will first examine several studies that have used newlywed samples and then explore the research on the expectations of marriage and how they sometimes differ from the actual experience of marriage.

### **Newlywed Period and Expectations**

As stated previously, some researchers have come to believe that couples experience different developmental tasks depending on the stage in which they currently reside as a couple. Newlywed couples are unique in that they do not have the benefit of hindsight and the experience that comes with many years of trying to make a marriage work, as do those couples in the previous section on strong and stable marriages; yet there are several topics in which researchers have turned to newlywed couples to further their understanding of relationships. In this section I take a brief look at the merging social networks of newlyweds, as that is a proposed developmental task newlyweds must successfully complete. I will also examine several studies exploring the expectations of partners as they enter a marriage matched against the actual experience of being married, and what happens when expectations are not met. But first, let us take a look at the impact of unifying separate social worlds.

#### **Social Networks**

When two individuals decide to marry, they are also bringing with them a whole host of friends and relatives. This can often be a source of contention among newlyweds as they attempt to balance their relationship with the demands of their friends and family. With a sample of 347 newlyweds, Kearns and Leonard (2004) examined couples'

network interdependence and marital quality. The authors set out to determine how couples change their level of interdependence on social networks over the course of the first two years of marriage; in addition, they examined how that interdependence influences marital quality. The couples were assessed at three separate times, when applying for a marriage license, and first and second anniversaries. Their findings suggest that husbands' and wives' friend and family networks are clearly changed by marriage; they become more interdependent through overlapping activities with family and friends. Not only did the networks become more interdependent but they were also significantly related to better marital adjustment. The authors suggest that a major task of newlyweds is to form a family and friendship network that incorporates one's spouse as part of that system; if this meshing of the two worlds is not accomplished, the relationship could become damaged. As mentioned in the section on areas of agreement and disagreement among married couples, amount of time spent with family and friends is sometimes mentioned as a problem for couples (Storaasli & Markman, 1990).

In addition to social networks cited as potential problems for newlywed couples, unmet expectations can also be detrimental. As the results from Huston et al. (2001) on predictors of divorce suggest, when partners come into a relationship with idealized versions of their partner, or of how marriage should go in general, disillusionment can creep in when those expectations are unmet. These unmet expectations can be destructive to a couple's relationship. In the concluding section on newlywed research, the impact expectations have on a marriage will be examined.

Expectations: Met and unmet

The final topic of discussion on newlywed research, and marriage in general, is the effect unmet standards and expectations has on couple's well-being. There seem to be two conflicting theories on how expectations affect the outcome of any given situation. While some argue that positive expectations will encourage and bring about positive results, there are those who contend the opposite—that unrealistic expectations can be very destructive to a relationship, more specifically when those expectations are not upheld (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Larson, 1992; Vangelisti & Alexander, 2002). Larson (1992) suggests that the myth surrounding “the One and Only” perfect partner is an important variable in the dissolution of so many marriages in the United States. He posits that individuals who have unrealistic beliefs—defined as “thoughts or expectations that are irrational”—about mate selection “are more likely to experience indecision, frustration, and disappointment” (p. 242-243). Through an extensive literature review on mate selection and pre-marital counseling, Larson explored the nine most commonly held unrealistic beliefs about choosing a partner. He further suggested that if one can change his or her own unrealistic beliefs than he or she would be able to alleviate those symptoms mentioned above (e.g. indecision, frustration, disappointment), thus leading them to more satisfying courtships and more realistic choices in a mate. These unrealistic beliefs, along with realistic alternatives, include:

1. *The “One and Only” Belief:* there is only one right person in the world for each person to marry. *Realistic alternative:* There are several individuals to whom a person could be happily married.
2. *The Perfect Partner Belief:* Until a person finds the perfect person to marry, they should not be satisfied. *Realistic alternative:* No one is perfect and people change over time.
3. *The Perfect Self Belief:* A person should feel totally competent as a future spouse before they decide to get married. *Realistic alternative:* A person should feel competent to be a spouse, but most people feel some anxiety about their competence.



4. *The Perfect Relationship Belief*: A couple should prove their relationship will work before getting married. *Realistic alternative*: There is no way to prove a marriage will work before getting married. Marriage is different from dating or cohabitating, thus prolonged engagements and living together are poor predictors of marital success.
5. *The Try Harder Belief*: A person can be happy with anyone they choose to marry if they try hard enough (this is the opposite of the perfect partner belief). *Realistic alternative*: It takes two mature and well-adjusted individuals to make a marriage work, so one needs to be reasonably sensitive and selective in the choice of a mate.
6. *The Love is Enough Belief*: Being in love with someone is sufficient reason to marry that person. Marriage based emotion rather than reason is dangerous. *Realistic alternative*: Although romantic love is important, especially in the early stage of a relationship, other factors are equally or more important to marital satisfaction and should be considered before marriage.
7. *The Cohabitation Belief*: Cohabitation before marriage will improve a couple's chances of being happily married. Looking at it like a "trial marriage", those who cohabit are often disappointed because it usually does not improve marital success. *Realistic alternative*: Cohabitation may help us get to know each other better but will not serve as a trial marriage or increase our chances of being happily married.
8. *The Opposites Complement Each Other Belief*: A person should choose someone to marry whose personal characteristics are opposite their own. *Realistic alternative*: A person should choose someone to marry whose personal characteristics are similar to their own.
9. *The "Choosing Should be Easy" Belief*: Choosing a mate should be easy. This belief often relieves individuals of responsibility for failure of relationships and responsibility for taking action to help a relationship flourish. *Realistic alternative*: Choosing a mate is not easy; hence it should be carefully thought-out. (p. 244-249).

While these myths or unrealistic beliefs about partner selection are intended for therapists and counselors to assist clients in challenging some of their beliefs in premarital stages, they may also be indicated for married persons as well (Larson, 1992).

In addition to these unrealistic beliefs about the partner, there are other studies that have examined expectations about the marital relationship itself. For example, Epstein and Eidelson (1981), using a clinical sample, hypothesized that clients who hold unrealistic ideals about what marriage is like (e.g. trouble-free, easy, etc.) "...would have

(a) lower expectation of success in therapy, (b) less desire to improve the marriage, (c) reduced preference for marital versus individually oriented therapy, and finally (d) lower overall satisfaction with the marriage” (p. 14). The 47 married couples involved in the study had been married an average of 7 years (from 1 to 38) and their mean score on the Marital Adjustment Scale (MAT; Locke and Wallace, 1959) indicated the distressed nature of the majority of the couples, in addition to their participation in therapy as an indicator of problems within the marriage. The findings suggest that unrealistic beliefs held by individuals in marital therapy are related to their expectations and goals for therapy, as well as their levels of marital satisfaction. In other words, individuals who scored higher on the unrealistic beliefs measure also rated the chances for success in therapy to be lower, had a stronger preference for individual therapy over marital therapy, had less desire to improve rather than terminate their relationships, and had lower marital satisfaction than those who scored lower on the unrealistic beliefs measures. The authors suggest that “the unrealistic beliefs representing low tolerance for conflict are important in understanding clients’ possible avoidance of conjoint marital therapy, where conflictual exchanges between spouses commonly occur” (p. 20).

Additionally, the authors suggest that clinicians should be aware of the need to attend to, and devise interventions for, both clients’ unrealistic beliefs. However, the authors caution on the generalizability of their findings to non-clinical couples. They advise that “...knowledge of unrealistic beliefs has utility in a clinical population, but it remains to be seen whether such beliefs are associated with non-clinical couples’ experiences of their relationship” (p. 21).

Heeding the need to make these findings applicable to non-clinical couples, Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, and Burnett (1996c) solicited 108 couples from the U.S. census data to participate in their study examining the relationship between community couples' expectations of relationships and marriage and marital quality. The couples were asked to fill out a battery of tests and questionnaires regarding expectations within the marriage (e.g. "When my partner and I disagree on some child rearing decision, each of us should try to get the other to agree with our point of view". "Only one of us should have the final say on decisions we make about money"; p. 77).

In an effort to account for gender differences, the data for husbands and wives were analyzed separately. The findings were surprising: individuals who held extreme standards scored higher on the marital quality assessment. According to the authors, this finding is contrary to what most cognitive behavioral therapists believe about extreme beliefs and marital functioning. These findings suggest that community couples are able to handle the discrepancy between partners' beliefs in a way that is satisfactory to both parties. Overall, this study found that extreme beliefs are not as dangerous as one might think.

In a similar study, Baucom, et al. (1996a) found that an important variable is the degree to which the standards are unmet in a relationship, as well as how an individual responds to unmet standards that ultimately influences the relationship. These findings are similar to the Gottman et al.'s (2002) findings that couples will inevitably experience conflict, but it is how they deal with that conflict that determines overall marital adjustment and satisfaction.

To conclude, the research reviewed suggests that newlyweds may potentially have trouble merging their individual social networks (Kearns & Leonard, 2004). Additionally, expectations, if high and unrealistic, of one's spouse and how the marriage itself should look, can be an underlying source of conflict (Baucom et al., 1996a; Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, & Burnett, 1996b).

In the final section of this review of literature, I will explore the research that has been conducted on members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), focusing primarily on marriage.

### **LDS Marriage Research**

According to the National Council of Churches (2004), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the fifth largest religious body in the United States. Married couples of this growing church have been singled out in several studies as having some unique differences when compared to other religious married couples. This final section of the literature will include a look at marriage and divorce within the LDS church, age at first marriage and its role in predicting marital stability, religiosity among LDS and its implications, and finally a brief look at gender roles within the LDS marriages.

### **Marriage and Divorce**

Religious groups in general are widely known for their emphasis on marriage and the family. Some studies have shown that the members of the LDS church may be different even when compared to other religious organizations. For example, in a study analyzing data from National Survey of Families and Households (Heaton and Goodman, 1985) there is a higher percentage of marriages among LDS members (97%) than among Catholics (88%-91%, for males and females respectively) and Protestants (95%).

Additionally, Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) analyzed data from a more recent National Survey of Families and Households and concluded that when compared to other homogamous marriages (e.g. Catholics, Protestants, no religious affiliation) LDS marriages had significantly fewer number of marital dissolutions. However, dissolution rates increased significantly when one spouse was LDS and the other was not, but this was not true for other inter-faith marriages. Consistent with the review on predictors of marital stability, shared religious beliefs and values appear to increase marital adjustment (Bachand & Caron, 2001).

Yet, caution should be taken when interpreting these results for all LDS couples. Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) did not distinguish between temple marriages and non-temple marriages. When accounting for the type of marriage, a different picture emerges. For example, Heaton (1988) examined the results of a recent national survey and found that for those married in an LDS temple, the divorce rate was 6% and 7%, for males and females respectively; while for LDS members not married in the temple, the divorce rate is 28% for women and 33% for men. In a review of LDS “vital statistics, Heaton (1991) found that 45% of LDS marriages take place within the temple. However, these studies do not account for marriages that take place outside of the temple first, but then are solemnized later within the temple. The divorce statistics mentioned previously indicate that there is a difference between marriages within chapels and LDS temples. Whether that lower rate is due to the eternal nature of the commitment made in the temple, or for some other reason, is not entirely clear.

From the divorce statistics, it is clear that LDS couples are not immune from the problems that plague many marriages. In a study conducted with LDS counselors, who

were members of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists, a list of 29 possible areas of disagreement were provided for the counselors to approximate how often they saw these problems occur in LDS newlywed couples (Stahmann & Adams, 1997). Six main problem areas were identified as occurring at least 50% of the time. These areas included: unrealistic expectations of marriage or spouse (71%), communication (69%), money management/finances (58%), decision making/problem solving (54%), power struggles (53%), and finally, sex (50%). These problem areas do not seem to differ from the disagreements non-LDS couples face (e.g. Miller et al. 2003).

In conclusion, these studies seem to suggest that while not every marriage in the LDS faith takes place in a temple, there is a notable decrease in the divorce rate of those couples who do marry in the temple, whether LDS or non-LDS. The next section briefly addresses the seemingly contradictory findings of age at first marriage as a predictor of divorce and LDS averages of age at first marriage.

#### Age at first marriage

There is a commonly held belief that LDS couples tend to marry much younger than the national average age at first marriage. Heaton, Goodman, and Holman, (1994) found, from data from the National Survey of Families and Households, that the average age at first marriage for LDS individuals was 22 and 21 for males and females, respectively. The average age for the nation is 27 and 25 for males and females, respectively (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004). Additionally, it was shown previously that age is a strong predictor of marital stability (Heaton, 2002), indicating that the older one is at first marriage, the more likely that marriage will last. As mentioned above, LDS marriages have a significantly lower dissolution rates. What accounts for this

discrepancy? There is little research available to unearth the possible reasons behind this difference. It could be due to the emphasis church leadership place on the commitment level required to enter into a temple marriage, but further research is needed to truly understand this aspect of the LDS population more fully. The next section will focus on studies that have examined the relationship between religiosity and LDS members.

### Religiosity among LDS and its implications

As mentioned above, some research suggests that the difference between divorce statistics among differing LDS members could be due to levels of religiosity. For example, Heaton and Goodman (1985) reported from a national survey, LDS couples who attended church regularly had divorce rates of 10% to 15% for men and women, respectively. Yet for those that did not attend church regularly, they found the divorce rate to be higher, 21% to 26%, for males and females, respectively. In a random sample of 1,384 LDS members who subscribe to the main LDS monthly publication, Duke and Johnson (1998), examined levels of religiosity across the lifespan. They looked at religiosity both extrinsically (e.g. public devotion expressed through church attendance and fulfillment of church duties, living the “beatitudes”, and services rendered to others), and intrinsically (e.g. personal prayer, relationship to God, testimony and knowledge of the gospel, etc). The authors averaged the scores on the different scales of religiosity and used this as an indicator of “global religiosity” (p. 330) for this sample. For newlywed men in this sample, the religious devotion doubled from 20% to 40% claiming to be highly religious.

For the men, being newly married was marked with the most significant period of growth in their levels of religious commitment. The women also experienced a growth in

religiosity during this period, but it was not as drastic as for the men, with 39% to 43% female respondents reporting high global religiosity. An interesting finding is that while the men had such a high increase on the global religiosity scale, when those scores were looked at individually, the intrinsic aspects of their beliefs increased but not their church attendance. Surprisingly, both male and female newlywed respondents experienced significant decreases in church attendance. Yet as with the males, newly married females' showed a dramatic increase in intrinsic spirituality dimensions when compared to the single women respondents. It is not known if the respondents to this study were married in the temple or not. The overall spirituality increases overtime and through the passage of different stages in life. However, there was a decline in both extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity after the birth of the first child for both men and women, although the decrease was more dramatic for men on the intrinsic dimensions.

In a recent dissertation on temple marriages, Youngberg (2003) interviewed 5 couples for a qualitative study to further understand the meaning of being married in the temple. He found that commitment to the marriage and to the religion were among the most common themes cited for these couples. This does not sound much different than what previous research tells us about stability in marriage (Bachand & Caron, 2001; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992; Kaslow & Robison, 1996) but the these couples expressed the importance of their strong belief concerning the eternal nature of their relationship and the security and joy that it brings to them.

In a study conducted by Thomas (1988), 780 LDS men and women, all married in an LDS temple, were asked to complete surveys on marital satisfaction and their overall well-being. The results found a significant relationship between temple marriage and



marital satisfaction, in addition to adult well-being. One possible explanation given by Campbell and Campbell (1976) is that the high standards that must be adhered to before a couple can be married in the temple are likely to generate a more harmonious and satisfactory marital relationship.

These studies suggest a connection between high levels of religiosity and a strong commitment to marriage among these LDS samples. However, a definitive statement concerning the exact relationship is difficult to ascertain. As with other areas of LDS research, more studies are needed for a deeper analysis of what is happening in these marriages that may account for their differences.

The last section of this review of the LDS literature will examine the common theme of gender roles, specifically within the LDS culture.

### Gender roles

It is a widely held belief that LDS couples hold a more traditional view of marriage when compared to other couples in the United States. In an article titled *The Four C's of the Mormon Family: Chastity, Conjugality, Children, and Chauvinism*, Heaton (1988) reviews some of the empirical research that has been conducted with special attention placed on two different aspects of chauvinism, namely, "the division of labor between husband and wife, and attribution of authority in the home" (p. 113). He further suggests that "a division of labor is not necessarily chauvinistic; but in contemporary society it often turns out that way. Labor force participation provides control over economic resources, prestige and opportunities for advancement which are often lacking in the homemaking role" (p. 113). For example, in a comparison of LDS members from Utah and a national sample from the General Social Survey, participants

were asked to agree or disagree to the following statements: (a) A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works. Seventeen percent (17%) of the LDS sample disagreed, while 32% of the national sample disagreed. (b) It is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself. Seventy-three (74%) of the LDS sample agreed with placing a husband's career over the wife's is important, compared to 59% of the national sample.

One flaw with this comparison is that Utah LDS members do not represent the whole of the LDS church, considering that over half of the membership resides outside of the United States. Additionally, the participants were given three choices to respond: agree, disagree, or not sure. The "agree" and "not sure" categories were combined in this comparison. Thus it would be interesting to compare the actual numbers of respondents who "agree" and those who are "not sure". Moreover, they did not break the sample down into male and female respondents; it would be interesting to know if the women or men were the majority in those responses.

It would not be surprising if the findings of these studies place LDS members higher on the traditional roles scale than other national samples, and even other religious groups. The ideal family constellation according to the leadership of the LDS church is as quoted in *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* (1995):

Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. "Children are an heritage of the Lord" (Psalms 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens

wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

In addition to this joint effort of mothers and father being responsible for their children's growth, church leadership further states:

By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.

In a review of previous studies, Thomas (1983) discussed the relationship between increased religiosity and an increase in egalitarian decision-making patterns among LDS couples. It may be that as individuals gain more intrinsically motivated reasons for being religious and for following the precepts of the LDS church, their behaviors come closer to the above definition of decision-making, where: "fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners."

To further understand role definitions and actual performance, Bahr (1983) analyzed a statewide survey of Utah LDS, Catholics, and Protestants, and "other" religions not otherwise specified. Bahr suggests that there is more of a contrast between LDS members and their attitude about family roles than in their actual behavior within those roles. In addition, while LDS members reported being less tolerant of nontraditional role definitions, they did not differ from Catholics or Protestants in the way labor was divided among spouses.

In conclusion, there appears to be some notable differences between the LDS and the national average in rates of divorce (Heaton, 1988) and age at first marriage (Heaton et al., 1994; Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004). Both are consistently lower than the national average. In conjunction with previous research on the relationship between and marital stability (Bachand & Caron, 2001; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992; Kaslow & Robison, 1996), LDS couples married in an LDS temple show high levels of religiosity and high scores of marital satisfaction (Thomas, 1988). Finally, LDS couples seem to have gender roles more strict in definition than in actual performance (Bahr, 1983; Thomas, 1983).

## Chapter Three: Methods

### Introduction and Study Design

While research on marriage and religion has increased in recent past, there is still little we know about the experience of LDS newlywed couples. This study was designed to fill in the gap in understanding this experience and what, if any, are the struggles that may be unique to these LDS couples. The use of qualitative methods was intended to produce a rich and vivid portrait of the participants' experience as they begin a new life with one another. The exploratory nature of a phenomenological approach allows for each participant's interview to inform the next, thus as certain topics and themes emerge, they can be investigated in more depth in future interviews. This iterative process is most appropriate for a subject in which relatively little is known.

### Participants and Recruitment

Six LDS couples were recruited through fliers placed in local (Maryland and Northern Virginia) LDS chapels and through the snowball method (See Appendix I). Interested couples were contacted by the researcher via phone or e-mail to schedule a time and place for the interview. An informal screening process took place upon initial contact with the researcher, to determine eligibility to participate in the study. The eligibility criteria were as follows:

1. The couple have been married at least 6 months but no more than 2 years
2. The couple were married within an LDS temple
3. The current marriage is the first marriage for both partners

## Measures

Along with an informed consent, participants were given two questionnaires to fill out separately, a demographics questionnaire and the Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959).

### *Demographics Questionnaire*

Participants completed a demographics questionnaire developed specifically for this study (see Appendix III). Among the usual demographic questions (i.e. race, gender, occupation) this form asked for information about participants' highest level of education completed, completion of full-time LDS mission, and length of time participants knew each other before getting married (including length of engagement). These questions help provide the necessary background information for this study.

### *Marital Adjustment Test*

In addition to the demographics questionnaire, participants were asked to complete the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT, Locke & Wallace, 1959) (see Appendix IV). This 15-item tool is used as an overall assessment of global happiness within the marriage and marital adjustment. This test has high internal reliability (.90) and in a recent study to determine if the MAT is still relevant for use today, test-retest reliability scores were between .82 and .84 for men and women, respectively (Freeston & Plechaty, 1997). For the purposes of this study, the MAT provides an overall assessment of marital satisfaction, in addition to identifying areas of disagreement for the couple. The MAT was completed before the interview began to help the couple to think about those areas in which there may be some disagreement and this in turn, may have helped them talk about those issues during the interview.

### Interview Questions

The interview questions (See Appendix V) were used as a guide to assist me during the interview process. Keeping in line with the phenomenological framework, the interviews were somewhat iterative; hence, slight changes were made to the questions, which assisted me in exploring new and relevant information that emerged during the interviews.

### Procedures

Once couples were screened and met requirements for participation in the study, interviews were conducted with both partners present and in their own home. Keeping in tune with phenomenology as the theoretical framework for this study, interviewing participants in their own environment added important pieces to the overall picture of the participants' newlywed experience. When meeting in the couple's home was not possible, the interview took place in a location that was agreeable to both the couple and the researcher. The couple was asked to read and sign an informed consent form (see Appendix II), which explained the purpose of the study, how the participants will potentially be affected, and issues of confidentiality. The couple was then asked to fill out a demographics questionnaire and the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) separately. They were informed that their answers on the MAT would be kept confidential at all times throughout the study.

The semi-structured interview was audio taped and took the form of an open discussion, thus promoting the free expression of the full range of their experience. A pilot interview was conducted to determine the length of the interview. The average length of the interview was 90 minutes.

## Data Analysis

Using an open-coding method, the interviews were analyzed to identify the overarching categories and themes that emerge throughout the interviews. The first interview was transcribed and coded before the second interview took place. Rafuls and Moon (1996) suggest that as patterns and categories surface from within the data, they should be “systematically looped back into the collection of data and analyzed further for their interrelationships and meaning” (p. 65), thus keeping the data collection and analysis process iterative. In other words, the patterns and themes that emerged from the first interview informed, at least to some extent, the direction of, and questions asked in, the second interview. Boss et al. (1996) explain that the main function of phenomenological research is to “understand the experience of the participants” and that “data analysis and data collection go hand in hand in phenomenological inquiry” (p 96). They go on to suggest that while analyzing the data, it is important to have interaction between “one participant’s stories and another’s, and from one family’s theme’s to another’s, all the while looking for meanings that connect and meanings that differentiate; the only rule of data analysis is to remain vitally connected to the individual and the family conversations and stories” (p 97). This method ensured that every couple’s voice was heard as they told their stories of being newlyweds.

Because I am LDS and have recently been a newlywed, I employed two methods to keep my own experience and bias in check. The first method was to have a supervisor cross-code the interviews with me. This supervisor was not LDS and had a different perspective on that piece of the study. It is possible that some information that arose from the interviews I would have taken for granted as part of the norm or strictly part of



the LDS culture; whereas, someone not of the LDS faith had a different perspective and assisted in pointing out areas of intrigue that informed future interviews. In addition to cross coding, I kept a journal throughout the data collection and analysis process to maintain awareness of my own emotions, biases and impressions as I interviewed the couples. Through awareness of my own process concerning being an LDS newlywed, I attempted to allow the data to speak for itself and allow these couples to define their own experience.

## Chapter Four: Results

The goal of this thesis was to begin to understand the expectations of marriage among LDS newlywed couples and the factors that influenced their expectations. More importantly, how did their expectations relate to their actual experience of being married? As the couples began to share their stories, several important themes emerged. But in order to better understand the themes explored later in this chapter, we must first meet the participants.

### Getting To Know the Participants

The sample consisted of six LDS newlywed couples mostly from the Northern Virginia and Maryland area. The sample was fairly homogeneous. All participants were Caucasian and each couple had at least one partner attending college at the time of the interview. All but one couple had experienced life as a college student in Utah. At the time of the interview, one couple had moved out of the Utah area to attend graduate school, two couples were still attending college at a Church sponsored school, and two couples had transferred from a Church sponsored university to other schools to finish up their degrees. The average age for the men was 25.6 years and 24.1 years for the women. The average length of marriage at the time of the interview was one year and four months, ranging from 7 months to exactly 2 years. Each male participant served a two-year mission for the LDS church before they were married, while none of the women participants had served a mission. More detailed information on the demographics of these couples can be found in Table 1. Each participant was also administered the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT, Lock and Wallace, 1959). The MAT is a compilation of issues commonly cited as problem areas for many couples. The couples were asked to

fill the test out separately without conferring with their partner. The test was administered this way to provide each individual the opportunity to be as honest as possible and address any potential issues that they may not have otherwise addressed in front of their spouse. Eight of the 15 items on the test are rated on a six-point Likert Scale, from “Always Agree” to “Always Disagree”. While there were no significant differences between the men and women on any issue, it is interesting to note that the average scores for women on overall adjustment is higher in each couple. The normalized data for the eight problem areas for the men and women are displayed in Figure 1. The MAT asks six additional questions regarding: 1) how disagreements are resolved; 2) how many outside interests the couple engages in together; 3) how they like to spend their leisure time; 4) if they wished they had never married; 5) if they were to live life over again, would they marry the same person; and finally, 6) do they ever confide in their mate. The results to these questions can be found in Table 2, displaying the question and the number of respondents for each answer. On the topic of how disagreements are resolved, all the women participants and four of the males reported that there was a mutual give and take, with the remaining two males reporting that they are the ones to usually give in to disagreements. Three men and only one woman reported that they “Rarely” wish they had never married, while the other half of the men and five of the women reported that they “Never” wish they had not married. Interestingly, each of the twelve participants reported that if they were to live life over again, they would marry the same person again. Overall, each individual scored considerably above the cut off of 85 for happily married couples (see Table 1).

Table 1

Couple ID	Gender	Age	Education	Marital Adjustment Test Score <sup>a</sup>	Length of Friendship Before Engagement	Length of Engagement	Length of Marriage
Adam	Male	24	College Student	117	10 months	4 months	1 year 9 months
Amy	Female	24	High School	138			
Bailey	Male	25	College Student	115	1 year 4 months	5 months	2 years
Becka	Female	23	B.A.	135			
Chad	Male	28	Law Student	114	1.5 years	2.5 months	7 months
Chloe	Female	28	Law Student	131			
Dustin	Male	25	College Student	122	5 years	5 weeks	1 year 5 months
Debbie	Female	23	B.S.	155			
Ethan	Male	26	College Student	129	5 years	5 months	1 year 11 months
Esther	Female	25	High School	130			
Grant	Male	26	Master's Student	154	10 months	6 months	8.5 months
Gail	Female	22	Some college	143			

<sup>a</sup> - cutoff score for happily married individuals is 85

Figure 1

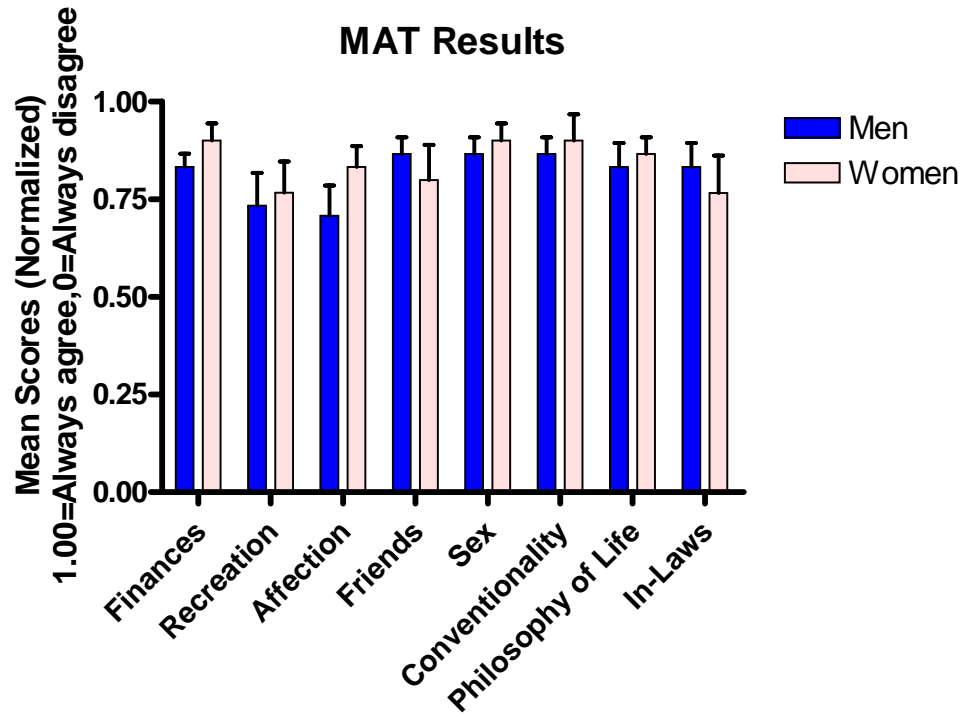


Table 2

Question	# of Men	# of Women	Total
Resolve disagreements			
Husband gives in	2	0	2
Wife gives in	0	0	0
Mutual give and take	4	6	10
Total	6	6	12
<hr/>			
Engage in outside interests			
All	2	2	4
Some	4	4	8
Very few	0	0	0
None	0	0	0
Total	6	6	12
<hr/>			
In leisure time, I prefer to be:			
On the go	3	2	5
Stay at home	3	4	7
Total	6	6	12
My mate prefers to be:			
On the go	2	2	4
Stay at home	4	4	8
Total	6	6	12
<hr/>			
Do you ever wish you did not marry?			
Frequently	0	0	0
Occasionally	0	0	0
Rarely	3	1	4
Never	3	5	8
Total	6	6	12

Table 2, cont.

Question	# of Men	# of Women	Total
Live life over again, would you:			
Marry same person	6	6	12
Marry different person	0	0	0
Not marry at all	0	0	0
Total	6	6	12
Confide in your mate:			
Almost never	0	0	0
Rarely	0	0	0
In most things	5	0	5
In everything	1	6	7
Total	6	6	12

The phenomenology framework, as described in Chapter 1, suggests that in order to truly understand an individual's experience, we must hear them tell their stories in their own words. Many themes emerged as I listened to these six couples describe their expectations of marriage, the factors that influenced their expectations and their actual experience as newlyweds. These couples spoke of beginning their lives together and the process of creating their homes. As they described this experience, a fitting metaphor began to take shape within my mind: I saw a house with different levels and many bedrooms representing the categories and themes that emerged for these young couples. To assist me in organizing the many themes, I will use the house metaphor throughout this chapter. The newlywed house is comprised of five floors and an attic. As we walk through this house we will visit six levels: 1) Expectations of Marriage; 2) Dating/Engagement Highlights and Struggles floor; 3) The Marriage Experience; 4) Sexuality; 5) Overall Evaluation of Expectations and Experience; and finally 6) Advice these couples offered, as they are the experts of their own experience. Each floor of the house is broken down into separate rooms representing the key themes that materialized from the participants' stories. The names of the participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

### **First Floor: Expectations of Marriage**

We will begin our walk through of this home on the 'expectations of marriage' level. This floor represents the foundation for the rest of the house and is separated into three main rooms: 1) Not if but when; 2) The full spectrum of expectations; and 3) Factors influencing expectations. Our first stop will be the 'Not if but when' room, where we will hear two main themes. The first is the expectation that each person would



marry at some point in their lives. The second theme, Pressure to marry, emerged primarily for those individuals who were experiencing, or had experienced life at a Church sponsored school in Utah.

#### Not if but when

All of the couples shared the belief that it was not a matter of “if” they would marry, but “when” they would marry. To many of them, marriage was part of the standard progression of life. Ethan stated his views succinctly.

Ethan: Well, it’s just another step in life. It’s like going to college, having kids...just something that you do.

While all of these couples agreed that marriage was just another step in life, some of them admitted to not giving much thought about the day to day interactions of married couples. Ethan put it this way.

Ethan: I didn’t really think about marriage. I saw my parents, I knew my parents were married in the temple, but in all honesty, I didn’t really think about it very much.

#### Pressure to marry

While discussing the expectation that they would all eventually marry, the theme of cultural expectations and the pressure to marry emerged from within some of their stories. For example, Chloe, who was 27-years-old when she married Chad, shared her experience of this pressure.

Chloe: I would agree [that] it wasn’t a matter of if, just when [I would marry]... when I was like 19 I felt a lot of pressure to be married and I wanted to be married

and then I said why am I so upset about this? I'm 19. I don't want to be married at 19.

Chad, Chloe's husband, also experienced some pressure, and described it this way.

Chad: There was pressure [to get married]. For me...I think friends were a big factor, I think that's where most of the pressure comes from anyways, you know, all the other people in the ward and all your friends wind up...getting married.

Both Chad and Chloe go on to describe the factors they believe helped to inoculate them against this pressure to get married.

Chad: I had roommates and really good friends and people I had known for quite a while and we were all at the stage in our mid-20's and you know all still single. And then being in law school was a factor as well...a lot of my friends were older and I associated with enough older people, you know people who got married older and people who had it work and had it be successful...

Chloe: If we didn't have such good friends that were our same age...I think it would have been harder ...because some of the girls that I am friends with...the people they had gone to high school and college with all got married really young and...so I think they felt [the pressure] more. But I always had friends that were single and were great friends and we always had a great time together and so for me it was like I just don't believe that none of us are going to be married just because we got out of undergrad not being married...

Chad: Yeah, and like somehow you're not doing the right thing by being single this long...

Debbie also felt the pressure to get married at a young age as she saw all of her friends getting married. She explains her views of the pressure to get married this way.

Debbie: ...Maybe it's just because the world is so much promoting...don't get married and so when you get to [Church sponsored school] they want to remind you...that you should get married, but I felt like after four years it had gotten too much...when you see an 18-year-old girl, who barely knows who she is, get married... it just plays with your mind a little...I mean I talked to my roommates and that's what the girls did and that's all they talked about...

The pressure to marry seems to be stronger in Utah, where there is a higher concentration of members of the LDS faith. More specifically, the pressure seems to be strongest if one is attending college in Utah, as most of these couples either were currently or had been attending school. Ethan, originally from Virginia, describes his experience of going to a Utah college like this.

Ethan: I came to the conclusion on my own, that if I don't do X, Y, and Z, like go on a mission and do the "proper" man thing in the image of The Church, then I wasn't going to be married...in the temple...because I was out [in Utah] on my own when I was 19 and a lot of girls were just like, oh you're 19, when are you going to go on a mission? And I didn't want to go on a mission at that time in my life and I was like, ah whatever, and it was a totally different attitude, whereas [in Virginia], there was less pressure. Out there it was just the expectation...the girls wanted returned missionaries, someone who was going on a mission and going to [Church sponsored school]...

While some couples talked about this pressure to get married, there were also thoughts that the answer to resolving the pressure issue might be found in the middle ground.

Debbie put it this way.

Debbie: I wish there was more of a compromise...more of a subtle influence of family life and not so much every talk, talk about marriage... it was all good advice but I think it puts undue pressure on you.

Even as these couples' attempted to explain the issue of pressure and how it affected them, there was some difficulty in fully describing the effects this pressure has. But it is clear that the majority of these couples agree that this pressure exists and it seems to be stronger in Utah, where the majority of the couples attended college.

#### The full spectrum of expectations

The full spectrum of expectations room on this floor covers three main themes for these couples as they spoke about their actual expectations of marriage: idealized, hard work, and bound for failure. As we read, it becomes clear that these couples had very different ideas of what marriage might entail.

#### *Idealized*

Several of the women expressed idealized views of marriage. Amy, who married Adam when she was 22-years-old put it this way.

Amy: I think I always thought it would be a time in my life when I would shine the most...I thought it would all just be fun and games, [laughs]. You would be with your best friend; there would be someone who would be constantly with me, all the time. I just thought that would be easy, because they would know you, and they would know my personality and everything and they could understand why I

say the things I do, and just that thought was very relieving. I wouldn't have to try so hard.

In addition to the women that expressed idealized expectations, several of the men also reported having unrealistic views of marriage.

Adam: I did have the idea that marriage might be...fantastic, kind of like the movies, passionate, the Cinderella stories...I would have to say that I had in my mind that basically after my mission I would meet with someone across the hall, our eyes would meet and you would fall in love and eventually get married to that person. And everyday would be like oh I am so in love and be overcome with emotions, and sweaty palms!

Grant: I always had a pretty idealistic idea of marriage...the husband and the wife and the kids and...having their "special pew" at church, you know, the kind of all-American family dad who plays with his kids...

### *It will take work*

While there were participants that seemed to hold an idealized version of marriage, there were others that expected marriage might be a little different from the fairy tale and require some work. Chloe put it this way.

Chloe: I thought that ...he would be gone a lot and I would be doing a lot of the work without him, um, and it would be good but not necessarily perfect...I thought it would be pretty good as long as I found somebody that was willing to talk things over and you know, just sort of share your life.

In addition to Chloe, Dustin expressed a simple and realistic idea of what marriage might entail. He put it this way.

Dustin: I expected it to be a lot of work and sacrifice and service for one another. These individuals seemed to have a realistic view of marriage and expected that there would be some work involved.

### *Bound for failure*

There were also participants on the other end of the spectrum of expectations and believed that marriage was bound for failure. Gail put it this way.

Gail: I was not sure that there was the opposite side of the spectrum. I guess when I was growing up I kind of thought marriage was like doomed...I just thought that marriage would be this constant fight. Like someone trying to assert domination over someone else. That's kind of what I thought and kind of afraid of finding a guy who would want to do that too...

While everyone had expectations of how they envisioned marriage would be, whether it would be blissful with no arguments or more like Gail's version of continuous conflict, each couple also spoke of the things that influenced their expectations. As we finish our tour of this first floor, we will visit the third and final room, Factors influencing expectations.

### Factors influencing expectations

Throughout the interviewing process three main themes emerged regarding factors that influenced these couples' expectations of marriage: family—both positive and negative examples, The Church, friends, and finally the media. We will first examine familial factors.

### *Family*

Every couple shared that among the most important influential factors of their expectations of marriage was their family. Half of the women mentioned that their families were not positive influences on their views of marriage. Yet despite this, they were able to extract from their family aspects of what they did not want and form ideas of what they desired in a relationship.

Chloe: I think I've viewed my grandparents and my parents as more imbalanced, than what I wanted, so I always thought I would be really lucky if I found somebody that it...was more of an equal situation.

Gail: My parents haven't slept in the same room for like 20 years or something, it's been forever...I guess I always knew that I wasn't going to fall prey to that, I wasn't going to settle for somebody who was going to treat me like that.

But for Esther, watching her parents' relationship gave her hope that she would find someone who would treat her the way her father treated her mother, she put it this way.

Esther: I think seeing the way my parents interact with each other, just how my dad cared for my mom so much and he would...stop and do something for her, if he knew she was having a bad day at work, he would try to make it better for her before she got home. ...Still to this day [they] still hug and kiss in front of us and they don't care...and that's what I wanted...I wanted somebody who...loved me like my dad loved my mom...

Two of the men mentioned their families as an example of what they did not want but Grant remained optimistic that he could one day create his own version of a happy family.

Grant: I think I never wanted to have the situation that I had, with one parent...not a part of any kind of church and the other pretty strong and active and... I think I always wanted to overcompensate for that and be the perfect dad. The rest of the men seemed to have both the influence of their families and the influence of The Church lumped into one category, as described by Dustin.

Dustin: I think a lot of just being brought up in The Church and my parents and they always said the way you really grow to love someone is through service and scriptures teach that by serving others you get to know the Lord, and so I think that a successful marriage has a lot of service going on. The influence of the LDS faith on these couples' expectations and ideas of marriage was complex. This next section attempts to make sense of exactly how the LDS faith influenced these couples.

### Church

It is not surprising that the LDS faith was mentioned as a major contributor among the influences of expectations about marriage. This theme can be separated into three separate sub-themes: The Young Women's program, serving a two-year mission for the women and men, respectively; and receiving mixed messages.

#### *The Young Women's program*

For the wives in this sample, one of the biggest influences seems to be the Young Women's program in The Church. This program is designed to teach adolescent girls, ages 12 to 17, about personal worth and spiritual growth. The Young Women's program was mentioned by the majority of the females as a major influence on their views of marriage. Gail put it this way.



Gail: ...the Young Women's program, they're always talking about temple marriage, it seems like every week. Temple marriage, temple marriage, temple marriage, so you know, it gets you starting to think about it and you know it's important...plus a strong doctrine in The Church is eternal families...

Debbie is currently serving as the Young Women's President in her ward and she explains what she is trying to instill in the 16 and 17-year-old adolescent girls she teaches.

Debbie: Personally, I think they need to know who they are, have a strong testimony and to have faith that everything works out... just being independent...not independent enough that you don't want to get married, but independent enough that you love yourself and that it's okay to be alone for however long it's necessary. I just think that means so much more when you finally get married then it's because you truly want to be at one with someone versus I *need* someone to love me and I *need* someone to make me feel accepted.

Walking that balance of seeking to be independent and not having to be in a relationship while still being open to the idea of marriage seems to be the goal Debbie is trying to teach. However, she admits that she did not find that balance during her time spent in the Young Women's program, but it came later while she was in college. The Church also has a program for adolescent males, but this did not emerge as an influence for these men. Ethan explained it this way.

Ethan: I don't think the Young Men's [program] pushes anything marriage wise. Like, I just taught a lesson to the young men a couple weeks ago and they didn't really care, and that's how I was too, I mean I didn't really think twice about it...

*Serving a two-year mission*

While none of the men attributed their experience in the Young Men's program as very influential towards their expectations of marriage, a unique theme did surface, which was not present for the women. It appears that serving a two year mission for The Church influenced their expectations of what marriage would like, while also providing some practical experience. Every husband commented on his experience as a missionary and Ethan sums it up like this.

Ethan: I think they push you a lot on the mission. That it is a good preparation for marriage because you're put with a companion that you're not allowed to choose, and you guys get tried, [experience] all kinds of trials...spiritually related and other trials as well, but you have to work it out, and it's preparation for marriage. Instead, like growing up, when you're dating, if you're not getting along with a girl you'd stop dating her...where in the mission...when you get in an argument you can't just go, alright I want a new companion, I'm not going to hang out with you anymore. Because you're not getting out of it with that person...you have to give it 100%. That's how it is with marriage, we're together...all the time, and so like in the mission you're taught how to either explain yourself better, or just back down and say okay you're right, let's do it that way. I think that helped because both of my parents are really stubborn, so learning how to back down on the mission helped out a lot...

The mission experience taught these young men how to live with another person, how to resolve conflict, and to make important decisions with another person to whom you are committed.

While the Young Women's program seemed to be a catalyst for the women to strive for a temple marriage, it appears that the experience of going on a two-year mission gave these young men practical experience as preparation for marriage that the women did not have through the Young Women's program.

*Mixed messages*

Chloe, who at the time of the interview was in her third year of law school, experienced church influences in a different way. For her, the messages she was being taught by church leaders was not exactly how it was being interpreted by some young LDS men she dated. She explained it this way.

Chloe: I would certainly say The Church influences your view of marriage ...it's not so much that that's what The Church is teaching but how it's passed down to the members...[for example] it would be, well, a girl shouldn't be going to graduate school, because if she is then...I don't know that she would be willing to give up her career, and...I don't want that. I want somebody who will stay at home. But they didn't want for you to be doing anything else, and then not realizing that they are not just going to stay at home *right* now. I figured you listen to what the actual teaching is and not some person's interpretation of the same teaching... consider [the] teaching...that they would rather have a mother in the home, and so I accept that principle, but I don't accept that means while I'm single and of college age, I shouldn't be going to school...and I should just be home...this is just an example of where they were interpreting that you can only go to a certain point in your education but beyond that point you shouldn't go,

because that means your not really focused on what The Church is teaching and I don't think that's true, I think there's a lot more room...to decide...

For Chloe, the principle that mothers should be in the home caring for their children took on a dogmatic interpretation with some of the young men she dated. She was confident enough within herself to make her own decisions about marriage and pursuing a graduate degree without being affected by these interpretations. In addition to the variety of ways The Church influenced these couples, many of the women cited that their friends also influenced their expectations of marriage, as this next section reveals.

### *Social Networks*

Esther, like many of the women experienced with their families, found that some of her friends were negative influences and showed her what she didn't want.

Esther: Friends who have gotten married or friends who have gotten divorced, I think "Man I don't want to go through that, that's a very, very hard thing". When I decided to get married, I didn't want to have to end up getting a divorce and having to go through that again, if I was going to get married again. So, I really [thought] about it...

Gail's friends were a positive influence for her when her parents' relationship did not meet her standards of a successful marriage.

Gail: I had two next door neighbors who were also LDS and their daughters [were] my age, both of them, and I spent all my time over there. I mean these families had great relationships and they were very close and very loving and so you know I guess that taught me that it can be good. So I guess it helped me to hold out hope...

### The media

The media was found to be a factor influencing a couple of the participants in what they expected of marriage, but it was not always in a positive way. Becka explained it like this.

Becka: Well, for me I think it was polar in my head. It was either going to be perfect or it was just going to be awful and obviously I wouldn't marry anyone that you would assume that it would just awful but I don't think I ever thought of the big scary things that would be difficult or um, irritating or anything like that. You know it's just like the movies, either it's happily ever after or it's everyone wants...to get out of it, so, it was kind of polar.

Chloe felt that the media's portrayal of marriage did not pertain to her, she described it this way.

Chloe: Well...mostly I ignored [the media], it didn't really register. I guess there's always an influence of how other people define marriages...but it was something that I ignored because I didn't think most of the time it was portrayed marriage well or right.

Both Becka and Chloe seemed to think that the media's portrayal of marriage was not accurate, but it seemed to affect Becka more in how she viewed marriage overall.

In general, the strongest influences on these couples' expectations for marriage were their families, whether positive or negative examples, The Church, their friends, and the media. How did these expectations play out in the relationship once these couples moved their relationship from just dating to engagement and then to marriage? We will now

explore the second level of the house where we will hear about the dating and engagement phase of these relationships.

### **Second Floor: Dating/engagement highlights/struggles**

The couples described their dating and engagement experience in a variety of ways, yet three main rooms began to take shape on this floor: getting to know each other, experiencing struggles, and highlights.

#### **Getting to know each other**

One of the main features in this room is the importance these couples' placed on experiencing a variety of different situations and witnessing how the other person reacted. For example, Becca experienced the death of a very close friend at the beginning of her relationship with Bailey. She explains how this helped to deepen their love and understanding of one another.

Becca: Yeah, we experienced a lot of... adverse things because that was when we first started seriously dating when my friend passed away and actually that was a really good thing because...he was the one that was there to take care of me, and to comfort me and to help me through it and it was really the day after we started officially dating seriously that that happened. And it was just...really neat...it could have caused a lot of problems, but for us we took it as a good thing and ran with it because...it drew us so much closer together really...

For Chad and Chloe seeing each other everyday during a stressful graduate degree program helped them to get to know each other in a more intimate way.

Chad: I...think we both kind of figured out that after a year and a half and being in law school we have seen each other at our best and our worst and so...you kind

of get an idea of how they react when they're stressed out and overworked and...kind of the full range of emotions or situations...

Witnessing how each partner responded under a variety of situations allowed these couples to make informed choices about their future spouse. They were aware how each other would react when stressed, happy, sad, or angry. While some of the aforementioned issues could be considered struggles (e.g. death of a close friend), these couples viewed them as opportunities to get to know one another better.

### Struggles

The theme of struggles was woven in and out of all the stories. As mentioned above, some of these struggles brought the couples closer together. In this room, we will examine several primary struggles for these couples: being apart, making a commitment, learning to communicate, and finally overcoming problems.

### Being Apart

The majority of the couples experienced some type of separation during their dating phase and with some hindsight, they feel it helped bring them closer together. For example, while Debbie was finishing up her last year of college at a Church sponsored school Dustin left Utah to attend school in Virginia, where he grew up. Debbie and Dustin knew each other from their high school days and stayed in contact throughout the years. Debbie describes how being separated numerous times helped their relationship.

Debbie: What stands out was that year of separation of really deciding that we really could do it under any circumstances. We could be together [or] separated; we could be good friends while he was on his mission and not be serious and we could still be serious and then learn how to meet each other's needs far apart and

so I think we had a good test of what it would be like under any condition almost... it was good that we could emotionally connect even if we weren't in each other's presence.

The separations that occurred for the majority of these couples also led to an examination of where they wanted to take the relationship, and feelings of frustration and confusion ensued.

### *Making a Commitment*

Earlier, Debbie described aspects of their separation that had a positive influence on their relationship. Yet as she describes what it was like during those real moments of uncertainty, she paints a slightly different portrait of her experience.

Debbie: I told him I never wanted to see him again...and so he left...it went on like that for six months and I was ready to commit and he wasn't...it was hard for me certainly. Because I wanted him to want to be with me but at the same time I didn't want to force him. So, every thought possible came into my mind you know, so he doesn't like me, I'm not the right one for him...

Debbie was not alone in her frustration and second guessing herself. Gail describes her frustration with Grant as she waited for him to decide where he wanted to go with the relationship.

Gail: I was just frustrated because, he kept on saying he was going to go to the Temple and pray about it and fast about it and you know try and get an answer...and I was like, okay, get an answer, go to the temple and so you can get an answer...he just kept not doing that. And I was like what is he doing? ...I was confused...does he not want to get married? And I was frustrated. Especially if



you can't see somebody everyday...when you were used to that constant companionship...it was pretty hard...I knew he was the one that I wanted to marry...I just knew it and with him not knowing, to me that was hard.

Part of the experience of making the decision to marry involved learning to communicate about difficult topics.

### Learning to Communicate

Another theme that emerged from these couples' stories is that of learning to how to communicate with one another. Adam explains how this was pretty difficult in the beginning for him and Amy.

Adam: We really tried to communicate, tried to talk to each other, get to know each other...trying to learn the different ways to get to know each other...communication was a big thing in the beginning...I didn't know how to talk to her well. And I don't think she knew how to talk to me well. Yet we kept dating!

Amy: Communication was a big thing to me too. Like when we were dating he would just talk and...sometimes I would just say, "What have I gotten myself into?!" and I just tuned it out, and I was like I can't just do that. You can't just tune somebody out that you really want to be with...

The communication tools these couples were attempting to hone were useful as they faced some challenging problems early on in their relationships. This next section of the Struggles room focuses on overcoming problems.

### Overcoming Problems

All the couples mentioned that at some point in the dating or engagement phase of the relationship, issues arose that needed to be dealt with. Some issues were smaller than others, but each couple expressed the need to struggle through the potential problems. For example, Adam shared that he was worried about Amy's tendency to put her trust in other relationships before their relationship. In this next excerpt they describe how they experienced that process of working through the problem.

Adam: Here's a struggle that happened...even before we got married. To have Amy trust in me, and then relying on our decisions, because there were a lot of times when she would rely on her aunt...

Amy: ...Just making that transfer from [my aunt] to where I would talk to her everyday and then over to him where as like, I just met you, you're not talking to me the way [my aunt] was...that was tricky in the beginning

Adam: That was really hard...it was frustrating because I knew that was like a potential down fall...even two weeks before we got married I said if you don't stop doing this, it's off.

Amy: When I actually did things that were against my aunt and with him she did freak out a little bit. But we would talk through it and everything would be fine, so it was a big transition...I had to be real open with how I feel and why I am feeling this way with everyone. And that's different for me too because I was so introverted and I didn't like sharing my feelings. But I was like there is no way this is going to work if we don't start talking about those things and remaining real open.

Bailey and Becka also experienced a difficult time. Coupled with the difficulties of being separated, Becka found out it might be difficult for her to have children.

Becka: There were some [struggles] we haven't talked about yet, like we when found out that it might be hard for us to have kids, that was a huge one...that was before we got engaged

Bailey: Yeah, that was a lot of tension for me and at that point I already had a ring and I knew I was going to propose to her...

Becka: And then I drop this bomb on him...I was diagnosed with PCOS [polycystic ovarian syndrome]

Bailey: I mean family is so important I just really had to step back and think about it and ... after thinking about it...I was sure it was the right thing that I wanted to do...but that was something difficult...

Becka: ...It caused some tension between us...this is something huge and we're not even...engaged yet...and it was hard to tell him. We were like, well we'll just both go home and think about it and Bailey wanted to talk to some people on the phone and just kind of think it through himself. And that was really hard. And then I go home thinking, "Oh my gosh now he doesn't want to marry me" and you know we were able to talk about it...I think for a while it kind of lingered around because that is such a huge thing...

Some of these couples had very real and difficult problems to confront early on in their relationships: periods of separation, making the decision to marry, and learning how to communicate with one another are among the most prominent challenges these couples faced. Additionally, each couple experienced unique kinds of problems as Becka and

Bailey have just described. Yet, even with these big struggles, the majority of the couples were quick to share the highlights of being engaged as well. The Highlights room is the third and final room on the Dating/Engagement floor.

### Highlights

The majority of the couples shared highlights of their engagement period. Two main themes emerged as each couple talked about this stage of their relationship: time spent together and getting to know the family.

### *Time spent together*

Every couple mentioned that one of the biggest highlights of being engaged was the time they were able to spend together. For example, Chloe and Chad were in law school all day together and found even that to be enjoyable.

Chloe: ... it was just fun... we would be at school ALL day, at the library, and we were just always together...but it was really fun...when one of us would go and talk to the other one in the library...

### *Getting to know the family*

In addition to mentioning the time spent enjoying one another, some of the couples reported that it was important, as well as a highlight of their dating and engagement period, for their partner to meet his or her family. For example, Becka put it this way.

Becka: I think some of the other highlights were getting to know each other's families... I went down to Las Vegas a couple of times, you know to meet his family and he flew out to Maryland to meet my family before we got engaged...those were some of the best times because you love this person so

much and you want to share that with your family so, we made it goal to spend as much time with our family as we can, with both of them...I think it turned out good!

Overall, the dating and engagement period for these young couples was one of simple pleasures coupled with facing some big issues (e.g. difficulties communicating, prolonged separation). Most of the couples were hopeful that the things they took pleasure in while dating would also exist for them once they were married. As we glance around the second floor of the newlywed house one last time we see that these couples learned a great deal about each other through experiencing a wide variety of situations, drew strength from some of the struggles they faced, and found pleasure in everyday activities with one another.

### **Third Floor: The Marriage Experience**

Listening to these couples speak of their time as married partners, two main rooms began to take shape on this floor: struggles and highlights. We will first take a look at the struggles these couples faced.

#### **Struggles**

The majority of these couples expressed that there were some areas of disagreement with which they were currently struggling or had struggled with in the past: finances, problems with in-laws, managing time together, and division of labor.

#### **Finances**

Many of the couples shared the same philosophy on finances, but several couples also mentioned that finding the balance took some getting used to. For example, Gail and

Grant experienced financial strains, yet they explore how they might do it differently next time to avoid having further tensions surrounding this issue.

Gail: Money [has been a struggle].

Grant: Yeah...the past couple of times I have gotten stern with her because...I won't be really specific, and say we have this much left in our account to last this long. I don't say that. I'm like Gail, can you not spend anything for the next week, or can you just try to...only [buy] the necessities for the rest of the week. Or sometimes she'll spend a lot and then we'll get overdraft charges...

Gail:...When we overdraw our account...we weren't really aware or whatever. I remember one time...I just had to buy food, and...he was like yeah, can you just try to keep it under fifty dollars, and I was like oh okay, sure whatever and I spent like 58 or something like that and he was like how much was it? And I told him and he was like you're going to overdraw us! And I was like well if you would have told me we only have this much, I wouldn't have spent 58! So just like being more specific...

Grant: yeah, and just trying to set limits...

Gail: ...if I would have tried harder to keep it under, and if he would have been more specific, we could have resolved [it].

Grant: I try to do that more now

Gail: and I try to check the account more often...

Even though finances have been an issue for several of the couples, these couples were able to talk it through and find solutions that work for them. Just as with finances, a few of the couples revealed that dealing with the in-laws can be a challenge.

### In-Laws

Half of the couples mentioned that difficulties have surfaced regarding their in-laws. Yet, what seems to be keeping this potentially sensitive subject from becoming a truly divisive issue is each partner's ability to see the other person's point of view. For Ethan and Esther this issue of in-laws has lead both of them to think more introspectively about themselves, as they realize that they each have tendencies of their parents that sometimes become problematic, as this next excerpt reveals.

Ethan: ...I was going to say a tension would be your mom

Esther: My mom and Ethan...I would say they...

Ethan: ...tolerate each other

Esther: They tolerate each other

Ethan: But there are just some things she does that just drive me nuts

Esther: And there are some things you do that drive her crazy

Ethan: Yeah...that has been an area of contention sometimes but we have gotten better at that too, I have learned to just keep my mouth shut...

Esther: I know that Ethan is like his dad in certain aspects and he knows that I am like my mom in certain aspects.

Ethan: It's pretty ironic... [laughing]

Esther: Yeah, [we] try and control those certain aspects...my mom is a wonderful person I think she did a great job of raising us [while] also working but there's just certain things about her that I know I do, that I wish I didn't.

Ethan: Same thing with my dad. I can watch myself become more tense and more aggressive but I determined a long time ago that I control that so and I try to control that.

Esther: Yeah, and we both know that we're working on it.

Esther and Ethan have come to an agreement that there are characteristics of their parents that they deem undesirable. Each has become aware of the tendency to behave in those certain ways and they have been able to create a dialogue surrounding a potentially very hot subject.

Adam and Amy were living with Adam's parents at the time of the interview. In this next excerpt, Amy describes how this living arrangement can sometimes get to her.

Amy: ...Sometimes I think for me personally, living in this house with his parents, and everything is theirs, and it's kind of like I am trying to make myself work in the whole situation they have. We did live in an apartment for a year before we moved here, and that was nice. And it was my kitchen and my food that I buy and cook and then like here I have had all my stuff packed up in six boxes in the garage. And it's kind of like having to adjust...I haven't gone grocery shopping or done the dishes since last January. And sometimes it just hits me and I think "I have got to get out of here; I just can't do this anymore."

While Amy struggled with these thoughts of feeling restless to get out of his parents' house, she was also quick to report the flip side of this living arrangement.

Amy: And then I look at the big picture again and then I will be doing dishes everyday! And I will look back and say "Why can't I go back to my parents!"



However, on the Marital Adjustment Test (Locke and Wallace, 1957), Amy reported that she and Adam ‘frequently disagree’ about ways to handle in-law issues and Adam reported that they ‘almost always agree’. It would appear that Amy has diluted some of the difficulty she is experiencing by living with his parents and Adam is not fully aware of her struggle.

### Managing Time

Another theme that emerged for the majority of the couples was the issue of managing time spent together. Four of the males in this sample were pursuing a bachelor’s degree at the time of the interview, while the other two males were pursuing graduate degrees. Half of the females in this sample had already received bachelor’s degrees, with one currently working toward a law degree, while the other half decided work to support their husbands through school. Additionally, each couple had callings in their respective wards that also consumed large amounts of time. With so many factors pressing in on them, it was not surprising that several couples mentioned that while any time spent together was a highlight, it could also be a struggle to find a balance. For example, Becka and Bailey did not go into marriage thinking that they would have a lot of time together, but Becka explains how this lack of time together can be difficult.

Becka: For me, most of the struggle is that we don’t spend much time together. I mean, [with] me working and he is going to school, and having a calling, and taking classes on my own and stuff, we don’t see each other very much...and so, sometimes you feel neglected or that we just don’t spend enough time together. And that’s been hard to get used to.

Whether talking about highlights or struggles, the issue of spending time together surfaced and re-surfaced throughout the whole interview. One issue that was specifically mentioned as a struggle was the issue of how to divide up household chores and duties.

### Division of Labor

As these couples spoke of coming together as a married pair, most of them commented on how they have divided up the labor. Ethan and Esther discussed how they have been able to work through this issue by trying to empathize with what the other person might be experiencing.

Esther: I feel like sometimes I might be more laid back and kind of lazy sometimes and he's like working, going to school, and comes home and wants to clean and do things and I'm like, it will be here tomorrow, we can just relax for a minute? And I think that might be a tension...but we talked about that and I try to be more active on those certain things...

Ethan: And I try to be more passive. Like if she wants to lay on the couch and watch TV while I'm doing something that's totally fine, because she works all day just like I do. She might be tired or something...or if she's done something else that I haven't seen, I might be at work and then get an attitude like, "Why isn't she working?" But then I got to realize, okay before this I might have been watching TV and she might have been upstairs cleaning the bathroom and I didn't realize that or she made the bed this morning and I didn't think about that so...just realizing that I'm not perfect.

Overall the participants experienced struggles that seem typical for most married couples: difficulty with finances, managing their time together, issues with their in-laws, as well as

division of labor problems. We move now to the second room on this floor and explore some of the highlights of marriage for these young couples.

### Highlights

For the majority of these couples, some highlights as married partners seemed to mirror those experienced during the engagement phase of their relationship. The main highlight themes are as follows: simple pleasures, someone to confide in, and free to be yourself.

### Simple pleasures

When asked specifically about the highlights of being married, most couples shared their thoughts about the simple things that bring them pleasure, as Bailey and Becca explain.

Bailey: I would say that...one of the highlights for me would be the simple little things like her coming home and seeing her smile...just being able to know that she's by my side when we go to bed...just a lot of the simple things that I enjoy the most and that I always have her to talk to.

### Someone to confide in

Becca: That's the biggest [highlight] for me, that you have this person that you married and will spend forever with and the level of trust for me...just knowing that he's committed enough to marry me forever really helped me to open up...so it's been so nice to have someone there that I can tell everything to, and all the problems that I face, the first person that I want to talk to is Bailey or if something really good happens, the first person is Bailey. But before with the bad things I don't want to make him think you're a basket case before you get married, and

even though you still trust him...for me it totally changed and that level of trust increased and it became more comfortable to share some of the harder things I was feeling...beyond just the happy ones...so, you know that's been really nice. And it's probably hard for him! But it's nice for me!

While the main theme here for Becka is that her level of trust increased once they got married and she was able to open up to Bailey and talk to him about difficult things, an underlying theme is feeling free to show him all sides of her, the good and bad. This next theme explores how some of these couples found that marriage is easier than dating and it allows for a certain level of freedom to truly show their partner all sides of their personality—even the goofy ones.

#### *Free to be yourself*

Several of the couples also expressed feelings that being married is far better than dating and the comfort of being able to be themselves around someone is refreshing.

Ethan explained it this way.

Ethan: [Being married is] so much easier than dating. I joke around with her, I don't know what I would do if I had to date again...I still work to impress her and I still treat her the same way I did when we were engaged, like I still tell her she's beautiful and everything but like when we were dating I dressed so much nicer...now it's just like I can wear jeans and t-shirt...

Esther: Yeah, and like look at me, I have these overalls on and...I don't have to put make up on and he still tells me I'm beautiful but, it's just [easier].

More specifically, several of couples noted that they really enjoy being goofy around one another, as Esther and Ethan explain.

Esther: I don't know, just like certain things we say to each other, is also a big highlight...

Ethan: ...Don't tell her names! [laughing]

Esther: No, I'm not giving up the names! No, just like, things we call each other...

Ethan: Yeah, nicknames

Esther: ...I can leave a message at work and it can be the dorkiest thing and he's just like, yeah that's great!

These highlights are similar to the ones they described during their engagement (e.g. finding pleasure in simple activities, spending time together). One of the highlights that emerged for many of the couples was the issue of being able to spend the night together. The issue of sexuality emerged throughout the interviewing process. Because there were many sub-themes that surfaced within this topic, it warrants a separate "floor" in the newlywed house in order to fully explore these couples' experience of sexuality.

#### **Fourth Floor: Sexuality**

As mentioned in Chapter One, a strong doctrine of The Church is to only have sexual relations within the bonds of marriage. These couples expressed many ideas about the issue of sexuality and this doctrinal teaching. I have categorized their responses into two separate themes: challenges and highlights. We will first explore the 'challenges' room and look at the different issues these couples faced as they were getting used to their new-found sexuality.

#### **Challenges**

There were several challenges that surfaced as these couples commented on the issue of sexuality: 1) remaining chaste before marriage; 2) feelings of confusion relating to Church doctrine and trying to strike a balance; 3) sex is not as easy as it is portrayed in the media; and 4) sex can be uncomfortable and somewhat painful for the women. But first, let us look at what it was like for these couples to resist the temptation to have sex before marriage and the role chastity played in length of engagement.

### *Remaining chaste before marriage*

An interesting theme emerged when these couples were discussing the length of their engagements. It appeared that for some who were engaged for longer than several months, it was anticipated that it would be harder for them to remain chaste during that time. Adam and Amy were engaged for four months and they encountered some turbulent winds during that time, and Amy attributed part of those troubles to deciding to wait to have sex until they were married.

Amy: I think a lot of it too had to do with like...a sexual frustration...you know it's coming, you both physically want each other, and...[we thought] why did we set the date for March?! And that just adds a whole other dimension to it, to the whole process... (to) the whole period of being engaged.

Ethan and Esther were engaged for five months and Ethan explains how this was perceived by some members of The Church.

Ethan: ...Everyone in The Church thought that engagement was too long

Esther: Yeah, five months, oh that's way too long

Ethan: ...It's dangerous.

When asked why five months would be considered “dangerous” Ethan responded this way.

Ethan: Well obviously because of sexual relations outside of marriage...

Esther: Well, because we wanted to get married in the temple and it's so a no-no to do anything and [there are] temptations and if you're going to get married in the temple you have to be clean. That's why everyone in The Church was like five months! That's way too long!

It is interesting to note that Ethan and Esther shared they had both been sexually active with other people prior to their relationship. They shared that they had taken the necessary steps to be worthy to marry within the temple and they were committed in their decision to remain sexually chaste until their marriage, as they explain in this next excerpt.

Ethan: ...And during our engagement...the whole time I was like, no it's not worth it so we're not going to do it...it's not an option...We're not having sex prior to getting married

Esther: I knew he wanted to get married in the temple...I think that he also knew that...I really, really wanted to get married in the temple...and get sealed and I think we both just realized for a small amount of time...

Ethan: Yeah for a few minutes of enjoyment it screws up you for...

Esther: Forever...yeah, and we talked about this before...if we had had sex before we got married either we would have gotten married and it would have gone bad, or we wouldn't have gotten married period.

Ethan: ... I had already decided that we would not have gotten married...I decided that on my own because I was just like, I wouldn't have wanted to...

Esther: Right.

Ethan: I would have lost respect in her and in myself as well...

Esther: I think we would have been ashamed of each other...

They then describe how they were able to withstand the desires to have sex before they were married.

Ethan: I think going to the temple as much as we did...helped us keep our head on straight...

Esther: [It] helped us...because obviously.

Ethan: ...you can't be messing around and go to the temple the next day [laughing].

It is clear that for some of these couples, sexual temptation before marriage was an issue. For Ethan and Esther it was something they were able to talk about at great length and had tools to help them remain committed to marrying in the temple (i.e. attending the temple) and for Amy and Adam it was something mentioned in passing. As these couples shared their thoughts and values surrounding sexual intimacy, the issue of Church doctrine surfaced.

#### *Confusion relating to Church teachings*

As these couples broached the subject of sexuality, there seemed to be some confusion and a desire to strike a balance between how to inform Latter-day Saints about sex while still impressing the importance of remaining chaste. For example, Debbie shared how her roommates would tell her “terror” stories of their first sexual experience



and she believes that this fear is in part related to how people within The Church perceive sex.

Debbie: [My roommates] had the stupidest stories I'd ever heard, like...they had terror stories of how they couldn't be intimate on their wedding night or things like that and...it didn't have any effect on me...But...I thought more about it after our wedding night where I thought how did they have any problems? It was so natural and easy... I was always more open about sex, it wasn't something that I was afraid of and I thought it was perfectly natural. Whereas, I think it's interesting that so many girls are so scared of sex. I kind of think it's because we say "no sex before marriage" and we don't talk about how beautiful it is and how it's divine and all the good things that have been said in [Church] talks but...if you can just bring that out [more]...

Debbie was not the only wife to mention that women within The Church may need additional assistance when it comes to sexuality.

Gail included: I think a lot of girls, especially need to hear it from a religious leader that it's okay to have sex after your married. You've been taught your whole life it's something evil and bad and wrong...outside of marriage, but...I think that a lot of people internalize that message of it being bad and they just need to like have it reinforced that like it's okay, it's good, it's wonderful after marriage...

As mentioned previously, Esther and Ethan offer a unique perspective on sexuality than the rest of the sample. Both had been sexually active prior to their relationship and were open with one another about their prior experiences. By the time they met again after

high school, both had been through the temple and had current temple recommends, meaning they were not sexually active at the time they began their relationship. Yet, their prior experiences of having sex before being married offers a glimpse into how it shaped their views of sexuality during marriage, as this next excerpt explains.

Ethan: I think for us we understood that [sex] was more hyped than it actually is prior to being engaged...but I think that if The Church can make—I don't know how they'd do that appropriately—but explain that...it is more hyped than it actually is...and to understand that it's not worth it...at all,

Esther: It isn't...all it is, is that it feels good but.

Ethan: But it's just sex...

Esther: ...I think the reason we say that it's just sex, and it's a satisfaction type thing because we already knew how it was...I've even thought about it because when I was preparing to go to the temple, I was taking temple prep classes, they can only tell you so much about the temple...and...it's kind of like sex, you can't really explain [it]...

Ethan: Yeah [laughing] you can't really explain it to someone who hasn't gone through the temple or had sex...

Esther: Yeah, I think that's why they just say, don't do it...because they can't explain that it's just a momentary satisfaction...

They also go on to explain the seemingly difficult transition some couples may go through from being told not to have sex their whole lives and then having the opportunity to do so with everyone's blessing.

Esther: Yeah and it's so funny because you're whole life you're like, no, no, no, no...

Ethan: And then suddenly

Esther: Okay after a half an hour, you're married now... [laughing]

Ethan: And you can go ahead and do it...

Esther: It's like this is kind of weird, like I can go home with you and it's okay because we signed a piece of paper...

Ethan: Granted it's a sealing and a priesthood ordinance...but...at the same time it would an interesting topic for [The Church] to address prior to getting married. But that wasn't really a problem for us...

Esther: yeah, so...you get married at the temple and you have the reception later or the next day whatever and everyone's like "I know what you did last night".

Ethan: And everyone jokes around with you...well, I don't see that happening at my non-member friends' receptions...you know, my best friend...they were already living together...

Esther: ... [There's] just the assumption that they are already having sex...

It is interesting that even though Esther and Ethan had already had sex with other people, they were still very aware of how difficult it might be for other individuals who were virgins when they married to make that transition from being told to never have sex, to suddenly have all of that change. Both Gail and Debbie mentioned that difficult transition as well. Another aspect of becoming sexually active for these couples was the discrepancy between the media's portrayal of sex and reality.

*Not as easy as it looks*

Many of the couples shared their experiences of how the media influenced their expectations of sex and the feelings that ensued when their expectations were not met.

Dustin put it this way.

Dustin: I think [the media] probably influenced me some just because you see all the Don Juan type guys and that's what every guy wants to be, to be like a good lover or whatever but I realized it takes practice...[I thought] it would always be perfect and wonderful... and it's not like that all the time... I did have to learn that I couldn't be perfect at it... there were a few times where we had to talk about and come to an understanding that...

Debbie: ...For women it's much harder [to reach an orgasm] and so for him, he couldn't understand that and it was something that we had to talk about and I had to reassure him that everything he was doing was fine but that just statistically and the way the body is for females it is just harder.

Additionally, when asked about what surprised them about marriage, Grant and Gail discussed that the sexual intimacy was surprising in some ways, as they explain in the following excerpt:

Grant: Well, I think the precision that sex takes [was a surprise]...there's a lot of precision

Gail: ...It's just different than you expect it to be...

Grant: Yeah

Gail: You expect it to be like the movies...

Grant: Yeah you do

Grant goes on to explain where he got his ideas about sexual intimacy.

Grant: My dad is sort of a perv [laughing] like he said things all the time...and his friends were kind of perverts too...not like they were total perverts, but sex isn't taboo at all.

Gail: Just very open

Grant: Yeah, and so...that kind of helped me form my opinion...I thought I've heard everything and I know everything and...really...practice is what it takes...it's not just knowing things, you need to do them! I thought oh yeah, I totally know what I'm doing [laughing]

Gail: It's like learning to play the piano! [laughing]

Grant: There you go! Yeah, there's no conceptualizing, it's all...like it's...

Gail: Applied...

Grant: Yeah, very applied! The learning curve is applied... It just takes some getting used to I guess...it's something, you know everyone goes through...I think it's a work in progress too though...like I think...we've been married 8 ½ months and we're still kind of...

Gail: ...working on things and improving ...

Grant: Yeah...I think that's an area we can definitely improve in...but it was one of the shocks of being married...

These couples talked about not expecting to have sex be something they had to “practice” or learn. They expected that sex would go smoothly and be perfect every time.

Additionally, some of the women mentioned that sex for them was uncomfortable at first.

*Uncomfortable and not “liking” sex*

Chloe shared what being intimate was like for her when she and Chad were first married, eight months previously.

Chloe: I think more for me personally it was uncomfortable in the beginning. And also like I was, I just didn't have much energy for things so it was more like I don't have energy for this...well, and it just wasn't fun. It was more painful. I mean so, so initially it took a lot of energy to do that because you know I've kind of got to gear up and just be committed so that later it will be better.

Gail agreed with Chloe to some extent, she put it this way.

Gail: Yeah, that's just what my surprise was...you know when we were newly married, you know I was like, I don't think I like this! [laughing]

Chloe was the only wife to mention being on birth control and experiencing some negative side effects. She reported crying a lot and feeling down and not having any energy for normal daily tasks and that affected how she viewed sexual intimacy.

Chloe: And just because I was so tired, that was more of like my negative attitude but that wasn't something that I talked about...I just dealt [with it], it was just something that I just decided well I'm not going to let that affect me...and so...I don't know sometimes, I really worry that I really put [sex] off too much for you but...

Chad: No...

While Chad had very little to say about their sexual intimacy, it was clear from Chloe's exchange that it was something she was still trying to sort out.

In conclusion, whether the woman is coming to discover whether or not she "likes" being sexually intimate with her husband, or the man is realizing that he does not

know all there is to know about sex, it would appear that working out the mechanics of being sexually intimate is a factor for the majority of these young LDS couples. What stands out for some of these couples is their willingness to be open about the difficulties new-found sexuality can introduce and the humility to say they have room for improvement. As we move onto the second room on the Sexuality floor, we will examine the highlights these couples shared.

### Highlights

Two main highlights emerged regarding marriage in general with a specific sexuality overtone. First, spending the night together and second, simply being able to make love.

As mentioned previously, when these young couples were asked about specific highlights of being married, the majority of them mentioned that being able to spend the night together was one of the biggest highlights, as the following excerpts describe.

Grant: And I really like when we go to bed, just laying there and talking. That's really fun and sometimes that's the highlight of my day.

Gail: Just waking up in the morning and having him there...

Bailey: Just being able to know that she's by my side when we go to bed...

Esther: Well, we get to live together

Ethan: I don't have to go home!

Esther: Yeah, he doesn't have to go home!

The transition from being engaged, where these couples were not spending the night together, to being married and having the chance to wake up with one another appears to have a big impact on their experience of being married. Adam and Amy took

this one step further and said one of the biggest highlights of being married, was not only just spending the night together, but becoming sexually intimate.

Adam: Being able to make love...

Amy: Yeah! I was just going to say that too

Adam: Yeah, that's...definitely a highlight.

Overall these couples gave us a glimpse into their intimate lives with one another and shared some of the struggles (e.g. confusion regarding Church teachings) and highlights (e.g. sleeping side by side) of being sexually active. As we move up to the fifth floor of the newlywed house, we will examine the overall experience of being married.

### **Fifth Floor: Overall Evaluation of Experience of Marriage**

Each couple was asked about how their expectations matched up with their experience of marriage. Three themes emerged when the participants described how their experience of being married has compared to their expectations: 1) many of the participants agreed that marriage was better than they expected; 2) marriage was different than expected; and finally 3) interesting contradictions between stated expectations of marriage and their following experience. This concept was difficult even for the participants to articulate. But before we get to the contradictions, we will first examine what these couples had to say about their experience of marriage being better than they had anticipated.

#### **Better than expected**



Many of the participants commented that for the time they had been married, their expectations had been surpassed. Even Amy, whose expectation was that being a wife was going to be the best time of her life and fairly easy, put it this way.

Amy: ...I do feel like I am much better at being married than I ever was in high school and that whole social scene there...I am a lot better as a companion. And he's pretty easy to get along with...I would say it's what I expected, if not better...

Debbie agreed with Amy.

Debbie: well, I think it's better than what I expected...it's certainly far better than I could have ever imagined...

There were other participants who agreed with Debbie and Amy, and then there were those who agreed that marriage was different than they had expected.

#### Different than expected

Several participants mentioned that marriage was different than they had expected. They described that this difference was the merging of their expectations of the mundane activities of daily living. Esther and Ethan put it this way.

Esther: In my family you did certain things a certain way, we cook different things and...I think I thought, oh we're going to do it this way because this is how we do it in my family...I think he probably thought well, this is how we do it in our family so this is how we do it. And so that's when we were like we have to compromise and have to decide we can do things our way. Not how other...

Ethan: Yeah, not how other people do it... we have to realize that we're our own couple and it's best to look at other couples and get ideas but we still have to make the decision.

For Esther and Ethan they have been able to acknowledge that they each have their own expectations of how things should go and have agreed that they need to come up with a compromise that is good for both of them. For Becka, the difference was that she did not think about some of the smaller things.

Becka: For me [the difference] was mostly the daily things, what we're going to have for dinner, etcetera. When we were single we were both so different. It wasn't that it was different than I thought; it was that I didn't think about it at all before. You know? Cleaning the house and just weird little stuff that I didn't think about kind of was surprising.

When asked if his expectations differed from his experience, Bailey put it this way.

Bailey: A lot of it is you think that you're always going to agree about everything but you don't...so that's a difference. I thought it would be easier than it is...I think it's more...just being naïve about certain problems in life that other people have, and a lot of problems that I ... have never encountered before and it's just been interesting and a different experience in itself.

Bailey and Becka shared that they had sought therapy for Becka's onset of what she termed "self-esteem issues" shortly after they were married. Bailey accompanied her to therapy to learn how to be helpful to her as she was struggling with these problems.

Bailey went on to say that he expected there to be problems, but he did not expect that the

problems would be ones with which he was not familiar. That seemed to be the biggest discrepancy between his expectations and experience of being married.

In general, these couples experienced some discrepancy between their expectations and their actual experience. It seems that for some of them, not having thought about the daily aspects of marriage (e.g. how you are going to cook certain foods, how to clean the house) accounts for the biggest difference between their experience and expectations. The final room on the marriage experience floor of the newlywed house concerns some intriguing contradictions that surfaced for several of the participants when asked about how their expectations compared to their experience.

### Contradictions

As we explored the first floor of the newlywed house we heard from many of the participants that had exceedingly high expectations for marriage. For example, Grant, in his description of what he expected marriage to be like described the perfect family, with the “all-American family dad” playing with his kids. Yet when asked a second time about his expectations and they how compare to his experience, he put it this way.

Grant: I expected there to be problems, like even little things I expected to be a problem...I expected it to be harder than it is...I expected there to be more problems.

Later he added this to his description of his expectations.

Grant: ...I hoped that it would kind of be like what it is with us now...I think I'm pretty much there... it's everything I hoped it would be. [Marriage is] you get along, you have fun together, and you have just as much fun hanging out together as you do going out and doing a big dog and pony show...

It seems that for Grant there was the hope that marriage would be as smooth as it has been and he and Gail are striving for that ideal, but the fact that it has been as easy as it has been for them seems somewhat surprising to him. Gail had this to say about her expectations and experience.

Gail: I expected it to be really hard. I mean yes and no. I mean I knew Grant and I know how we act together so I didn't really expect us to have a hard time but at the same time I expected there to be more conflict I guess like more...just figuring out how to do things coming from different families and trying to come up with our own version but we really haven't had any problems with that...I mean just from seeing my sister's relationships, I expected there to be a lot of fighting...but there hasn't been so I'm happy. So I feel good about it.

Gail pointed out that from what she saw with her own family, she expected there to be a lot of fighting. She remained hopeful that she would have a different kind of marriage, making her own version of what a good marriage looks like, but there were still some doubts about having marriage go as smoothly as it has gone for the two of them.

In summary, these couples fell into three categories when describing their overall experience of marriage and how it compared to their expectations. Some felt that marriage had been better than they expected it to be, while others felt that there were some differences—mostly about the daily aspects of marriage; and finally there were some that offered interesting contradictions between stated expectations and the actual evaluation of their experience.

As we climb into the attic of the newlywed house we will examine some of the advice these young couples had to offer.

## **The Attic: Advice**

The final level on the tour of the newlywed house is the attic. As the experts of their own experience, these LDS newlywed couples were asked to offer advice to three distinct groups and the attic is divided into sections as follows: Advice to LDS couples engaged to be married in the temple, advice to LDS Church leaders involved with engaged/newlywed couples, and finally advice to LDS and non-LDS therapists. We will begin in the advice to engaged couples room.

### Advice to engaged couples

Every couple offered advice to other LDS couples who were engaged to be married in the temple. Some of it was humorous, while other advice was practical and somewhat sage for couples who have only been married a short amount of time. Attending the temple often, remaining chaste, communicating about potentially difficult topics, and finally acknowledging that nobody is perfect, were the most prominent themes.

### Temple attendance

Ethan and Esther had this to say about preparing for a temple marriage.

Ethan: Go to the temple often. I would suggest if they're engaged, if the girl or guy has not gone through the temple, to go...months before the day of their marriage... get accustomed to going to the temple,

Esther: It's a lot to take in...The majority of the time the male has gone through because most have been on missions...but...all three of my sisters-in-law they all went in just a few days before they got married and where I had gone six or seven months prior...so I got used to it...I knew what to expect...

Ethan: You can focus more on the actual sealing process...and you can focus on what the sealer is saying because it's very interesting...I'm glad we could focus on that and not on the other stuff...

Esther and Ethan previously shared that going to the temple also helped them to remain chaste during their engagement.

### Remaining Chaste

When prompted if there was any other advice Esther and Ethan wanted to give engaged couples, they added.

Ethan: Don't have sex!

Esther: Yep, it's not worth it

Ethan: Nope.

Amy also advised that couples talk about the potential difficulties remaining chaste during the engagement period. She put it this way.

Amy: Especially if you waited [to have sex] for what 22, 25 years...there's a lot of pressure...so to be able to address that I think is really important. Like to understand that's why things might be tricky near the end of the engagement or whatever...and just that everybody is weird!

Amy's advice was to communicate specifically about potential sexual frustration and its effects on each individual. Many other couples also suggested that engaged couples should learn to communicate about the big issues that will impact them as a married couple.

### Communicate about the big issues

Several of the couples talked about the importance of communicating about the big issues, even the scary issues that might be deal breakers. Gail put it like this.

Gail: ...If there is a topic that you feel uncomfortable talking about, talk about it.

...I just think that they just need to talk about things they are uncomfortable talking about.

Additionally, several of the couples talked about the importance of not believing that problems experienced during the dating/engagement period would dissolve once a couple is actually married. Becca put it like this.

Becca: I think being open, if there's something that bothers you right now it's not going to go away when you get married, you need to step up and say this is something that's important to me or this is something that bothers

Many of these couples mentioned that an important piece of their relationship was getting to know each other under a variety of different situations and they suggested that other couples do the same. Bailey and Becca put it like this.

Bailey: I would say that the most important thing is to be around that person and see how they act under different stress levels...

Becca: Yep, under all different situations...

Bailey: You know, three weeks is not long enough to see what will happen if there is extreme stress or a happy moment...

Clearly these couples feel that open communication is among one of the most important aspects of a relationship. They also seem to have a realistic view that there are going to be problems and individuals should not expect that once they are married, all the problems in the relationship will disappear.

### *Nobody is perfect*

Additionally, some participants suggested that realizing nobody is perfect is a crucial factor in preparing for marriage. Bailey and Grant expressed it this way.

Bailey: And don't expect it to be perfect because it's not...and the other person is not perfect...

Grant: ...I think one thing that has really helped me is thinking that both people ...bring their own set of problems, and it's just...how compatible [are your] set of problems, because everybody has a set of problems...and not expecting your partner to be perfect...

In general, these couples offered important advice. Some of the advice was directed specifically at LDS engaged couples, such as attending the temple together often, and remaining chaste; while other advice seems more universal (e.g. learning to communicate about important issues and realizing that each person comes with his or her own set of problems).

In addition to giving engaged couples advice, these six couples also offered advice to LDS church leaders who are involved in the interviewing process when a couple is preparing to be married in the temple.

### Advice to Church leaders

When these couples were asked about specific advice they would offer to Church leaders in contact with engaged LDS couples, the majority of them were quick to respond. Several main themes emerged from their advice. First, they suggest not pushing marriage blindly; second, the need to assist couples in their decision to marry;



third, a brief exploration of unhelpful experiences; and finally, the need to strengthen the existing marriage preparation program.

*Do not blindly push marriage*

As we toured the first floor, Expectations of marriage, of the newlywed house, we heard from many of the participants about the pressure to marry. When asked about advice they would have for leaders of The Church, many had answers on the tips of their tongues regarding this pressure and the general message from The Church. Chad said it this way.

Chad: Again I really want to say...don't just blindly push marriage, and say Oh this is good because you two are planning to get married...I think keep pushing marriage, but don't just push it for its own sake, I mean really push marriage to the right person, for the right reasons...

Chloe agreed with Chad and added this.

Chloe: Or like mission presidents...[who say] okay your first priority is to get married when you get home...well that's great but maybe the first priority is to marry somebody you'll be happy with when you get home. You know? So, I think starting early in the process...

Chloe attempts to add some clarification to this complex issue and broke it down into two separate problems The Church faces.

Chloe: Well I think that they're dealing with two different areas of concern, like pushing marriage so that people understand the importance of it and then [there are] those people...that are scared...to put themselves out there and take the risk...Then you have the people that aren't really scared at all ...so I think in

sense trying to address it like...don't be afraid, this is something you want...take the risk and date and put yourself out there...I think that's more of what [The Church is] trying to address...[and] then address the different problem [with] the person [who is not scared at all]; [make sure] you're finding the right person and you're using the appropriate methods of considering things...

Several of the couples felt the same as Chad and Chloe that The Church needs to increase awareness of what marriage entails, not just "blindly pushing" marriage. So what happens when two people decide to get married? These couples had advice for that too.

*Help make the decision to marry*

Several of these young LDS newlyweds had advice for Church leaders on how to assist couples in making the decision to get married. Chad put it this way.

Chad: ...I mean recognize that it's more than just a marriage and that all problems aren't going to [get] worked through necessarily...but really just help them make [an] informed and conscious decision and help them recognize what they're heading into. And help them evaluate the relationship...

Esther has a unique point of view on the subject, as she explains below.

Esther: I was engaged to somebody else, and...I worked really hard to try and make things work with the other guy...I would have done anything to make that marriage work if... I think after a while I just wanted to get married; I didn't really think about how it was going to be in the long run...I think it would have been very difficult.

I then asked Esther if she thought it might have been helpful during that time to have a church leader ask about their relationship as she was making that decision to marry this other young man. She responded this way.

Esther: I think so. Because...you trust them ... I just think that it would have been helpful for us to have talked to someone. Someone to sit us down and say, look, here are some things that you need to look at.

Becka commented on how it might not be as easy as that for church leaders.

Becka: Well, it's complicated because you don't want to undermine, you know if they feel prompted by the Spirit and have that confirmation, you don't want to undermine that at all. But at the same time...try to give them a reality check, and I am not positive how they should do that...I mean when you're engaged you're totally on top of the world and it would be good to give them a good dose of reality like Have you thought about this?...it's hard because you don't want that be The Church's responsibility...

Chad added another dimension to the problem single's ward bishops may face.

Chad: ...But sometimes it's hard for a bishop, especially in a student ward, to say you know what? Maybe you two shouldn't be getting married. Because...the expectation is that they are there to facilitate people getting married...I know a couple...and watching their engagement...it's like watching a train wreck getting ready to happen...it's such an ugly relationship...and no one seems to be [willing to help]...

The issue seems to be complicated for the participants, as well as for The Church leaders.

The participants are asking for a balance between helping them make the decision to

marry and helping young adults recognize when problems need to be addressed within a relationship, while recognizing that people have the freedom to marry whomever they want.

Unhelpful advice and comments

A couple of the participants offered experiences that they did not find helpful when asked about advice they would give to bishops and other church leaders dealing with engaged couples. Adam, after describing his distressing time during the engagement period, was quick to respond when asked what advice he would offer. This is what he had to say.

Adam: Oh man... our stake president knew Amy...pretty well...and [they had] a good relationship. And it just seemed like everyone was talking about how good Amy was, and it might have been a little selfish of me but no one ever said anything nice about me...

Amy: Except to congratulate him, oh you're really lucky to have found Amy.

Adam: Oh yeah, You're really lucky, and I'm like, and I was already struggling...and I just felt like no one was giving me any credit at all, and so the Stake President was like you better take good care of her, like almost condemning me and I was like ahhhh, when did I become a bad guy? [laughs]...so make sure you boost everyone up

Amy: Yeah, if you're going to boost one, make sure you boost the other.

Gail and Grant also shared an experience that was not helpful.

Grant: One thing that kind of made me mad was a member of her stake presidency who just like pounded it into her, like I hope you're ready for your toughest year of your life, this is going to be so hard...it's like jeez...

Gail: It was awful, I mean I got out of the meeting and I called Grant and I was laughing like...Yeah, this guy is crazy, he's telling me this is going to be the hardest year of my life...you know, that's not helpful...I didn't need that.

Whether it is boosting both individuals up and offering encouragement to both partners, or refraining from overstressing the potential difficulties of the first year, these participants advise that bishops and stake presidents be cautious in what they say to young couples.

*Strengthen existing marriage preparation program*

The majority of the couples agreed that something else is needed to assist engaged couples who are preparing to be married in the temple. As these couples explored what might be helpful, most spoke of enhancing the existing program with a more realistic view of what marriage is like. Marriage preparation classes are available in some areas of The Church through institute classes and regular Sunday meetings, as well as a variety of different classes available through Church sponsored schools, where the majority of this sample attended college. Becka and Bailey offered the following experience of a marriage preparation class through their Sunday meetings.

Becka: We did go to this marriage prep class...in our singles ward...I mean the teacher obviously had never been married...he was talking about conflict and what abuse does in marriages, and so he took this little teapot and put it in a

sock...and said if you yell at your wife or if you hit your wife, and he it and whacked it against the wall...

Bailey: And he was like this is your wife...

Becka: ...He knew us and he knew we were engaged and he was like if this happens, this is what your relationship will be like, and he whacked it against the wall. I was a person who had relational and trust issues as a teenager and I was like [gasps]...it seriously almost freaked me out, and then I realized how funny it was...it was a teapot in a sock!! [laughing]...you know it was just not helpful...it's one of those things that we joked about, but at the time it was like I don't want my marriage to be a broken teapot in a sock! [laughing]...Despite how funny it was, it [was] scary, what if this, what if that? Even though Bailey is the nicest human being alive, it did put a little doubt there, so that wasn't helpful....

When asked specifically what would have been more helpful, Becka answered this way

Becka: Well, almost like this interview, so, what are your expectations? ...what do you expect? ...[having] those classes not taught by singles in your ward, but pull married couples, even a young married couple from another ward, that could at least talk to you about what it's really like. Not what the manual says it should be like, because obviously that's what we all want, but what it is like...the challenges that newlywed couples face...

Bailey agreed with Becka and added what he thought to be a crucial element of a marriage preparation class.

Bailey: ...A class on communication, how to be open...that would be very helpful. Because I think that is probably one of the biggest problems with

marriage and why they go bad is because people just don't know how to communicate, even though they both want the best for each other, it doesn't come out that way. How to really communicate.

Becka: exactly...something more realistic

Grant also expressed the need for this type of class.

Grant: ...My brother married a Catholic and they have to go through pre-marriage counseling, so I think that should be a necessity. I think that is something that needs to be done... [with] some couples, it's like they almost need to be forced to talk about certain things. Issues need to come out.

Overall, these participants agreed that something more is needed within The Church to assist young couples in making the lifetime—and eternal—commitment to marry. A class, which represents a realistic view of what marriage is about, what potential pitfalls may be, and how to discern if this is the right person at the right time seems to be what most of these couples found lacking when it came to how The Church was involved in helping them prepare to marry.

In addition to advice for engaged couples and church leaders, the participants were also asked what they thought therapists should know about LDS newlywed couples. This final section is the advice they offered.

#### Advice to therapists

While only one couple shared they had been to therapy before, each couple was asked what they thought it would be important for therapists to know about young LDS newlywed couples married in the temple. The advice they offered can be divided into two sections: 1) advice to non-LDS therapists and 2) advice to LDS therapists.

### *Non-LDS therapists*

As the couples shared their advice on what non-LDS therapists should know, there distinct themes emerged. First, knowledge about eternal nature of temple marriages; second, understanding of issues surrounding chastity before marriage; and third, being aware of how a convert to The Church might have a different experience than lifetime members.

#### *Nature of temple marriage*

The majority of the participants agreed that non-LDS therapists should understand the basic tenets of the LDS faith—especially the concept of eternal marriage. Becka put is this way.

Becka: I guess they would have to understand the nature of LDS marriage. It's in a temple forever and our belief is that...you're married for eternity...

Chad offered another point of view that might be helpful for non-LDS therapists to understand about eternal marriage.

Chad: I think understanding, either for better or for worse, there's often times going to be a...heightened level of commitment between the two [people]...maybe it's the couple that really can work things out and you know and it's a good thing that they are going to be willing to put in the effort and work to do that and make it work and maybe you can ask more of them and they would be willing to do that. But then on the other hand you know maybe they are in a really ugly, bad situation and it's just best that they get out of it...[but it may be harder because] of their spirituality and who they are as a person can be very connected to their marital status...



Overall, these couples expressed the importance for non-LDS therapists to recognize an LDS couple's belief that their marriage is eternal, and have an awareness of how that belief might factor into how they approach problems within their marriage.

*Awareness of commitment to chastity*

An interesting theme that emerged from the majority of the couples was the importance of non-LDS therapists being aware of issues surrounding chastity. When asked specifically what he would want a therapist to know about him, Adam put this way.

Adam: I think the chastity thing. I mean, they should probably be aware of that because they might just automatically think that they had already been sleeping together...

Ethan and Esther, who shared that they had both been sexually active with other partners before they began their relationship, agreed that the expectation that most young LDS couples have not had sex was something important for therapists to understand.

Ethan: To know that they probably didn't live together before they got married...

Esther: And ideally they didn't have sex before they got married...

Ethan: To know that it's probably going to be a slower transition for most LDS newlyweds as they get married...1/2 an hour and then there you go, you can have sex...that can be pretty hard. I think a therapist should know that.

Grant and Gail also advised that non-LDS therapists should be aware that the typical young LDS couple may be struggling with the issue of sexuality.

Grant: ...Expect that they're going to be clueless [about sex]...even if they think they know, they really probably don't... they will not have any idea about sex!  
[laughing] Not just *might* not, they *will* not!

Gail: ... to bring that up and have them talk about it and maybe...

Most of the couples felt strongly that the concept of chastity was an important aspect of the LDS beliefs that therapists should be aware of.

*Awareness of the convert experience*

While none of the couples in this sample were converts to The Church, Ethan and Esther raised the topic of what it might be like for these individuals to go through a temple marriage and why this aspect of a couple's marriage would be important for a therapist to understand.

Ethan: Also, I think [therapists] should be aware of what it might be like for converts. Like my parents, our parents have had a huge effect on us in terms of eternal marriage, but for converts...

Esther: Their parents might not be members and so the transition for them might be more complicated...especially if [their parents] didn't get to go to the temple...

In summary, these couples offered advice to non-LDS therapists suggesting that they be aware of the central belief that temple marriages are eternal, that young LDS newlywed couples will most likely have not have experienced being sexually intimate at the time of marriage and the difficulty this new experience might present, and finally an awareness of how converts to The Church might experience newlywed life slightly differently than lifetime members.

*LDS therapists*

While most of the participants offered advice to non-LDS therapists, there were a couple individuals who made suggestions specifically geared towards LDS therapists. Bailey and

Becka offered a unique position concerning therapy, as they were the only couple to share that they had seen a therapist. Bailey offered this advice.

Bailey: I would say, one of the things I have found when getting help from other people, often times it is helpful not to just get an LDS perspective about things, but to hear sort of a worldly view of it...

Becka: Because...no one likes to be told that they are not good members of The Church because they are not doing this or that...or in some way they are not faithful enough to overcome this problem...it has nothing to do with your faith it has to do with your relationship with the two of you as humans and not as...Church members...we've had a couple of experiences like that. It almost makes you feel guilty because you're having problems.

When I asked Becka and Bailey what they specifically found unhelpful, Becka shared her experience.

Becka: ...someone actually told me to read a chapter of scripture and I was like, you know what, I've read that through a thousand times...I am reading my scriptures. It's not a lack of faith, there's something seriously wrong with me...so, that wasn't helpful at all...[also] that saying "Satan will drag us down with the littlest things", which is totally true and scripturally true, but...if you're trying to get help, I don't think that saying Satan is working on dragging you down hell, by making you fight or whatever...really made me feel more guilty than anything...and no one wants to feel guilty for going to therapy. That's something that we have actually talked a lot about but...I think bringing the gospel into it is important...more so about the hope and how important it is to go

to therapy because you want to be a family forever and you don't want anything to ruin that but not to make them feel guilty, obviously that wouldn't be the intention... because...we're all aspiring to be really good people and doing what the Lord wants, but we're also all human.

Bailey: Exactly, they are there for therapy not Sunday school.

Dustin, who admits to never have been to a therapist, offers a different point of view from Bailey and Becka.

Dustin: ...Emphasize the gospel ...if the counselor is LDS...it might be that the temptation to just not pressure or force the gospel because you don't want to make people think they're going to Sunday school or something like that. I think the gospel has an answer to everything and a lot of times the counselor's job is to help somebody see something from a different perspective. But you always want to make sure that perspective is the gospel perspective.

Clearly, there are differing viewpoints on the helpfulness of incorporating spirituality and LDS gospel principles into therapy. For Becka and Bailey, the way it was introduced to them was not helpful at all, but for Dustin, he believes it would be most beneficial to have a gospel lens through which to conduct therapy.

To summarize this tour, we began by exploring the expectations of marriage for these young couples; these expectations comprise the foundation for the rest of the house. As we climbed up to the second level, we heard stories about the dating and engagement period of their relationships and heard how some couples had to face serious problems and learn how to work through struggles early on. Next, we visited the marriage experience floor and listened as these couples shared the areas in which they disagree as

well as the highlight of simply being together. The fourth level offered a glimpse into how these couples viewed and experienced sexuality. On the fifth floor, we examined the overall expectations of marriage and compared it to the actual experience of marriage and we found some found marriage to be better than expected, while others expressed that it was just different than they anticipated. Finally, we reached the attic, where we heard these couples offer advice to engaged LDS couples, Church leaders, and therapists.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

### Overview

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of what young LDS newlywed couples expect of marriage and examine those expectations in light of their actual experience of marriage during the first two years. I also wanted to explore what influenced their expectations, what struggles they experienced during this time of transition to being married, as well as what were some of the highlights and struggles of being newlyweds. One of the basic assumptions of the phenomenological theoretical framework is the self of the researcher and becoming part of the phenomena being studied. Because I am an LDS woman and have been married four years at the time of the study, my perspective and experience is woven throughout this study. While I tried to allow the participants' experience speak for itself, inevitably, my own views and beliefs are interconnected with those of the participants. I interviewed six LDS newlywed couples; married for the first time, ranging from six to 24 months in length. In this chapter, I will discuss the main themes that emerged from the interviews: the pressure to marry, main expectations versus experience of marriage, areas of disagreement, and sexual intimacy, and offer my ideas on why these themes emerged. I will also look at important clinical implications as well as limitations and areas of future research.

### Pressure to Marry

In the process of talking about their expectations, these couples shared the most influential factors that helped shape their views on marriage to offer a more comprehensive view of how they developed their expectations. All of the couples reported that they knew they would eventually marry—marriage was just another part of

life's journey. The piece that was missing was the "when" and to "whom". While none of them considered the possibility that they might not get married, the theme of pressure to get married seemed to be somewhat pervasive for these couples, especially for those that attended school in Utah. It is possible that due to the large concentration of LDS members in Utah, the expectations and cultural influences are greater than for those living in other areas of the United States. Further research is needed to truly understand this feature of the LDS newlywed phenomenon. Furthermore, it seemed the participants struggled in even defining how the pressure to get married affected them. For some, the pressure was almost tangible, while for others it existed but after some personal growth and maturation, it did not affect them as deeply. One male interviewee mentioned that there was a feeling of not being as faithful, or as good of a member of The Church if one reaches a certain age and is not married. While not all couples described the feeling that one is perhaps not being as faithful as he or she should be if they are not married at a young age, it appeared more as an underlying assumption that seeped through their stories of feeling pressure.

This concept of pressure was more common among the female participants than their male partners. While some of the men commented on this pressure, it was clearly more of an issue for the women. This may be due to the emphasis the Young Women's program placed on obtaining a temple marriage, which the majority of the women shared as a chief contributing factor that influenced their expectations of marriage. The Young Women's program provided these women with a goal—temple marriage—but did not seem to assist them in a practical way. One woman mentioned making a list of the qualities of their future husband and while this got them thinking about what they wanted

in a spouse, it provided little in terms of practical experience. While the men did not seem to gain the same perspective on marriage through the Young Men's program, they did share that their two-year mission experience was a main factor in helping them to prepare for marriage. It was during their two-year service that they learned how to work with a companion, resolve conflict, and experience difficult trials both physically and spiritually. It seems these young men, through their mission experience, were offered a glimpse of what a marriage goes through over the course of its lifetime. It is also possible the mission experience made them more ready for the day in and day out aspect of marriage of sharing space, resolving conflict, and learning how to make joint decisions. While this is just one theme for these couples, future research is needed to fully understand the impact of serving a two-year mission has on a young couple.

While the theme of pressure was evident, there was also a cry for balance from among these participants—not wanting the importance of marriage to be lost on LDS young adults, but not pushing it so hard that people succumb to the pressure and marry for inappropriate and/or immature reasons (i.e. because all my friends are married, I should be married too). There is a dearth of research on the cultural expectations to marry within the LDS population. Future research is needed to better understand this phenomenon of feeling cultural pressure to marry.

### Overall Expectations and Experience

Each participant shared his or her expectation of what they envisioned marriage to be; and their views covered the full spectrum, from the fairy tale to inevitable disaster. The current research on expectations is divided on whether positive expectations produce positive outcomes, or if positive expectations foster false hope and disappointment when



those expectations are unmet (McNulty & Karney, 2004). Several of these couples shared that marriage was better than they had expected, even for those participants who held the highest expectations. Prior research indicates that when partners compare the outcome of a given situation for which they hold expectations, and their standards are exceeded, they will be satisfied with their partner and the relationship (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). The converse, however, is also true. A partner will be dissatisfied if their experience is compared to their expectation and is found lacking. So how is it that for some of these partners, whose expectations of marriage were incredibly high, were able to claim they were happily married and that marriage exceeded their expectations even though there were unexpected disagreements and problems? It is possible that they did not feel comfortable going into further detail about their disagreements and their unmet expectations. Yet, their scores on the Marital Adjustment Test indicate that these were happily married couples, who disagreed on certain issues, but still scored well above the cut-off for happily married couples.

Another factor might be that although the expectations were not fully met, they were able to find solutions to their problems together and work through their disagreements. Previous research (Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, and Burnett, 1996; Gottman, 1998) supports this notion that it is not the problem that causes a marriage to crumble; it is the inability to find a way to talk about the problem that can be most detrimental. It seems that most of the couples had previously talked about the problem areas discussed in the interview (e.g. finances, ways of handling in-laws) and they had already created their own narrative of how they viewed these problems and how they wished to resolve them conjointly. The ability to maneuver through unmet expectations

and create a joint story about their lives, especially at this early stage in their marriage, speaks to the strength these young couples possess.

Also associated with these expectations were realistic ideas that no one is perfect and everyone comes to the table with a different set of problems; as one of the participants proposed the true question ought to be: Are those problems compatible? As Larson (1992) described in the nine relationship myths, individuals who hold extreme positions on finding a mate (e.g. the one and only partner belief, the perfect partner belief, etc) will have difficulty finding the happiness they seek. Most of these couples did not talk about believing they had found the one and only perfect partner, but that they found someone with whom they wanted to share the rest of their lives, someone with whom they were compatible. However, there was one participant who experienced some of those myths when she was engaged to another man. With some hindsight and introspection, she shared that she would have worked hard and would have done anything to make the marriage work; even though she knew in her heart she was unhappy. Thus, it would appear that she fell into the “try harder” myth, which suggests that any two people can make a marriage work if they just try hard enough. During the interview, it was clear she and her partner had discussed certain aspects of their relationship and were very open with one another. Perhaps that experience of failed expectations allowed her to view marriage in a more realistic light.

Another participant was not surprised when there were problems, he had expected that; the real surprise came when he was confronted with problems that were new to him, problems he had never even thought of before (e.g. his wife’s self-image problems). Yet, as previously mentioned, the research indicates (e.g. Gottman, 1998) that when a couple

finds themselves in “gridlock” about certain problems, it is how they are able to talk about the problem, not whether or not they experience a problem, that determines the effect the problem will have on the relationship. That seemed to be the case for this couple as well. They were not only able to talk about the problem amongst themselves, but they also sought therapy to assist them in understanding one another and so the husband could know how to be more helpful.

### Components of Strong Marriages and Areas of Disagreement

Additional themes that cropped up throughout the interviews were components of strong marriages. The most obvious is their shared religious background, considering they were all LDS and holding current temple recommends, meaning they are adhering to the high standards of the LDS church. This corresponds with the available research on the components of strong marriages that found having similar religious values and beliefs increase the stability and longevity of marriage (Kalsow and Robison, 1996). The other themes that emerged throughout all the interviews were that of friendship, love for one another, and sharing some common interests. Interestingly, these are also themes the literature describes as main components to strong marriages (e.g. Bachand and Caron, 2001; Kaslow and Hammerschmidt, 1992). By being in their homes and hearing these six couples share their stories, it was clear that they had many of the important factors the research discusses, and some characteristics that are more intangible, that comprise a strong marriage. While each couple reported that they were happily married and marriage in general had been better than they expected, they were not free from problems. Additionally, their problems did not differ greatly from those of other couples. The available research suggests that the following areas of disagreement are not

uncommon among most married couples: communication, finances, sexual intimacy, division of labor, issues surrounding in-laws, and how to spend recreational time together (Miller et al., 2003; Storaasli & Markman, 1990). These young LDS newlywed couples were not immune to any of these issues. However, most of the research indicates that communication is the number one problem among couples; and a surprising aspect of these findings is that communication was addressed by only two of the couples as a problem in the beginning of their relationship. The strength from these couples comes from being able to talk about certain sensitive subjects and this theme weaved in and out of almost every story.

#### Process of Discovering Sexual Intimacy

The research is mixed on the processes couples experience as they grow together; whether the problems in a relationship are static, from engagement to marriage, or whether new problems will develop as a couple enters different stages of their marital life (Nichols & Pace-Nichols, 1993; Miller et al., 2003). As these interviews offer merely a snapshot of these couples' lives together, it is difficult to ascertain to which category they would belong. However, some of the couples shared that they were experiencing new problems they had not encountered before, different from even during the engagement period. The most striking area of potential problems for these couples was their new-found sexual intimacy experience.

Little research has been conducted on sexuality within the LDS population, but this study unearthed some factors of sexuality that may be unique among these LDS newlywed couples. The available research suggests that only 20% of Americans choose to wait to have sex until marriage (Rostosky et al., 2003). The converse appears to be true

for members of the LDS faith. Heaton (1988) found that 23% of inactive members and 3% of active members chose to have sex before marriage, a large difference from the national average. With the majority of members choosing to wait to have sex before marriage, it would seem plausible that this new found sexuality may present some problems. Stahmann and Adams (1997) found that when given a list of potential problems that come up during treatment, LDS counselors reported that sexual problems occur 50% of the time with LDS couples entering their first marriage. It was found, however, that these problems were not truly problems, but frustrations that come with developing a healthy sexual relationship. In my study, five of the six couples decided to wait to have sex until they were married, and experienced what the majority of people experience as they are becoming sexually active; the difference was these couples experienced it with only one partner and perhaps a little later in life than many other couples.

An underlying theme throughout the interviews when discussing sexuality was the influence of the media on their expectations of what being sexually intimate would be like. Even for those that had believed they understood and were well-versed in matters of sexuality, as well-versed as one can be without actually experiencing it, found sex to be very different than what they had expected. One of the male participants commented on being surprised with how much “precision” it took and that it was still “a work in progress”. That was not what he had expected; yet, this was something he and his wife were able to talk through, have a sense of humor about, and discuss openly. It was refreshing to have some of the couples feel so comfortable discussing the topic of sex with a complete stranger. When setting out to conduct these interviews, I had a hunch

that this new experience of becoming sexually intimate may present some problems for these couples, but I did not anticipate that they would be so generous with such a personal and, what is considered in LDS terminology, sacred subject. Perhaps their openness is because we are from the same generation and they would have been more reticent with an older interviewer, or it is plausible they simply felt comfortable talking about all aspects of their married lives. Of course there were some couples that quickly moved on when the subject of sexual intimacy was broached; briefly commenting that it was not a problem. But overall, these couples allowed us into the most intimate part of their relationship to better understand their full experience of being newlyweds.

Additionally, there were some participants who commented on how it would be important for Church leaders to help members understand some basics about sex and that sexual intimacy is a beautiful and important part of a loving marital relationship; but they all became somewhat stumped about how The Church would actually accomplish this. I believe one possible reason these couples struggled with how The Church would address the pragmatics of being sexually intimate stems from the importance LDS doctrine places on teachings within the home, by parents. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of parents to help their children understand both aspects of sexual intimacy: first, it is sacred and should be expressed within the bonds of marriage, and second, it is an important part of any marital relationship and is sanctified by God, and as such should not be feared, but embraced. Open discussions—not just one, but many—about sexual intimacy seems to be needed. One participant mentioned that on the night before her wedding, her mother asked if there was anything she wanted to know about sex. She commented that she had little respect for what her mother had to say, considering her mother and father had slept

in separate bedrooms for over 20 years. It was clear to me that some of these couples were very comfortable talking about sex and thus might be able to broach the subject of sexuality with their children more openly than their parents had. It seems important, then, for Church leadership to openly encourage parents to have this discussion with their children, to help them to know how to talk about sexuality without abdicating the responsibility to The Church or to the media, which is where many of the participants formed their expectations of sex.

The couple that remained chaste with one another while they were engaged but had been sexually intimate with other partners, most likely needed to discover their sexuality with one another, just as the other couples did. This was the only couple that spoke of sexual intimacy as just a physical pleasure, and while it was important to them, it was “just sex”. They also spoke to some extent about having sex before they were married as something that was “not worth it” and that it could “mess you up forever”.

Further research is needed to fully understand the impact of growing up with the belief that sexual intimacy is something appropriate only within the bonds of marriage but then choosing not to wait; and then how that choice may later impact their views of sexual intimacy once they do marry. Available research suggests that while most faiths teach the doctrine of remaining chaste before marriage, members of the LDS faith have lower rates of premarital sex than Catholics or Protestants (Heaton, 1988). Is the impact of becoming sexually active before marriage different for those who belong to the LDS faith than for those who belong to other faiths with the same belief of chastity before marriage? It seems that this couple had a realistic view of sex in the sense that sex in real life is not as perfect and idyllic as it is portrayed in the media. Yet, there was also an

underlying sentiment surrounding sex that is difficult to quantify but was clearly not present with the other couples. It is possible that while their prior experiences of being sexually intimate were physically pleasurable, there may have been feelings of remorse or guilt attached to not remaining chaste until marriage. Further research is needed to fully understand this phenomenon.

### Clinical Implications for Therapists

It is important for all mental health professionals to be aware of, and even familiar with, the various backgrounds from which their clients come. As mentioned previously, it is becoming increasingly possible that non-LDS therapists will at some point in their careers find themselves sitting across from an LDS individual or family. Clinicians should be aware of the doctrine that LDS couples who have been married in an LDS temple hold the belief that their marriage is eternal. It would do clinicians well to ask about this aspect of their clients' marriage and understand how the couple views that commitment. As with any client whose background is different from that of the therapist, a respectful and curious attitude is most helpful in learning about cultural expectations and beliefs. There are many stereotypes and labels that are placed on members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and rather than taking those stereotypes at face value, it is imperative that clinicians remain curious and thoughtful when getting to know their clients. Additionally, as mentioned in chapter four, it is important for therapists to know that most LDS newlywed couples will not have had experience with being sexually intimate. While it may be difficult for them to talk about, being sexually active brings a whole new world of experience to them and it would be important for



clinicians to at least be aware that this might be something with which they might be struggling.

Furthermore, an important implication for LDS therapists is to maintain awareness that while they may have fundamental understanding of the LDS faith, it does not necessarily mean the couple desires to have that be the focus of treatment. It seems important for LDS therapists to check in with their LDS clients to determine how much or how little they would like the gospel interwoven into their treatment. As one couple stated, “they are in therapy, not Sunday School”. It would also be important for LDS therapists to be clear about their role as therapists and not as spiritual advisors at the same time being flexible and respectful with their clients’ wishes to use gospel related interventions (e.g. a scripture that might be helpful, asking if the couple is praying together on a daily basis, etc).

#### Implications for Church Leaders

It seems that one of the most important implications of this study is directed at LDS church leaders. There is a cry from these couples for a more realistic and pragmatic program to help prepare young adults for what is the biggest commitment of their lives. As one past president of the LDS church put it, “Marriage is perhaps the most vital of all the decisions and has the most far-reaching effects, for it has to do not only with immediate happiness, but eternal joy as well. It affects not only the two people involved, but their families and particularly their children and their children’s children down through the generations” (Kimball, 1976). With such an emphasis on the importance of marriage it would make sense that there is some formal preparation involved to help newly married couples address some potential pitfalls and arm them with research-proven

techniques that can assist struggling married couples. There are marital enrichment classes and even marriage preparation classes within the church and on college campuses nation-wide that address certain aspects of making oneself worthy of being a good companion. Yet, the main issue that seems to stand out for these couples is that the content of these classes was not as helpful as it might have been (e.g. using a teapot in a sock to illustrate the disastrous effects of abuse in a marriage). While it is difficult to fully understand what marriage is like without having experienced it, a marriage preparation class could provide a place where engaged couples can address the weightier matters of their relationship (e.g. philosophies about finances, basic assumptions about child-rearing, and division of labor issues, etc.). It would also be helpful to have relationship questionnaires that have been developed specifically for the purpose of helping couples address important issues (for examples, see <http://www.relate-institute.org> ).

Moreover, some of the couples were not aware that marriage preparation classes existed within The Church and did not receive encouragement from church leaders to attend such classes. Thus, there is a need for a well-publicized, comprehensive class based on scholarly research while integrating counsel from prominent church leaders, which is then encouraged by bishops and stake presidents as they interview couples preparing for temple marriages.

### Limitations and Future Research

This thesis was designed to offer a look into the lives of six LDS newlywed couples and attempt to begin to understand how their expectations were similar or different from their experiences. As such, this study viewed expectations retrospectively.

While appropriate and useful for this study, a retrospective examination of what one thought of a given situation before it happened can be clouded by having experienced that situation. It would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study with LDS youth in late adolescence and determine their expectations of marriage and follow them through to marriage to gain a more in-depth understanding of how their expectations of marriage correspond to their actual experience. Taking the longitudinal research one step further, it would be interesting to follow newlywed couples through 10 years or more of marriage to examine their experience against their expectations. This length of time would take the researcher through other important developmental phases of the marital life cycle (e.g. transition into parenthood, etc.) that are important parts of a relationship.

This study was an exploratory study that interviewed couples together. It would be beneficial to interview each partner separately. It is possible that in interviewing the couples conjointly they were not as comfortable in speaking out about unmet expectations as they might have been had they been interviewed separately.

As these couples were all young and attending college at the time of the interview, it would be interesting to examine older couples married for the first time. Additionally, it would be interesting to compare LDS newlyweds and couples who participated in covenant marriages, to examine the differences and similarities between their expectations and experiences.

Finally, the sample in this study was very homogenous—all couples were white, five of the six had experienced life as a student in Utah, at least one partner in each couple was still in college, and all had been members of The Church their whole lives; thus these results are not generalizable to the entire membership of the LDS church. In

order to more fully understand the LDS newlywed experience, future research needs to look at LDS couples who are non-Caucasian, older at first time of marriage, and perhaps converts to The Church in varying parts of the United States.

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[www.gwu.edu/~ccps/rcq/issues/10-1.pdf](http://www.gwu.edu/~ccps/rcq/issues/10-1.pdf)

# NEWLYWED COUPLES NEEDED!



Were you recently married in an LDS temple?

Would you like to share your experience of newlywed life with others?

We are looking for couples who have been sealed in an LDS temple, married 6-24 months, and have desire to discuss life as newlyweds!

If you match the above criteria, you may be eligible to participate in a graduate research study focusing on the LDS newlywed experience.

For more information please call 410-340-9591 or e-mail: [newlywedresearch@vt.edu](mailto:newlywedresearch@vt.edu)

## Appendix II

### **Informed Consent for Research Project**

**Project Title:** Latter-Day Saint Newlyweds: A Qualitative Study of How Newlyweds of LDS Faith Experience Their First Years of Marriage.

**Researchers:** Meagan C. Alder, M.S. Candidate, Department of Human Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
Sandra M. Stith, Professor, Department of Human Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

**What is the purpose of this study?** The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of LDS couples who are making the transition into marriage. There is a lack of research on this transition, in particular with LDS couples, and this study will aim to provide therapists with an understanding of how some LDS newlywed couples experience this transition.

**What will I be asked to do?** Initially, you will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire with demographic information and another brief questionnaire about your marital relationship. It is expected that both of these forms will not take longer than 15 minutes to complete. After completing the questionnaires the interview process will begin. The interview will be conducted with you and your partner present. You will be asked about your experience as a newlywed couple and the elements that helped you during this transition. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience in a mutually agreed upon location. The face-to-face interviews will be audio-taped to make sure we understand exactly what was said. You may be contacted after completing your interview for a brief follow-up interview; this may be either by phone or in person. Any follow-up requests are purely voluntary and you may decline further participation at your discretion.

**Are there any risks to me?** The researchers anticipate that this study will be low risk due to the precautions that will be taken to ensure that your information will be kept confidential. In an effort to really understand all the facets of your experience, the interview will include some questions about potentially emotional subjects; however you may decline to answer any question at any time. If any portion of the interview process raises concerns for either partner, a list of local counseling services will be provided upon request.

**Are there any benefits to me?** As a result of participating in this study you may feel empowered and a feel a sense of satisfaction because you have contributed to an important study that will benefit society. In addition, you may find it enjoyable to share you experience as a newlywed with your partner.

Are my responses confidential? Every effort will be made to keep all information you provide in the strictest of confidence. Your responses will be kept locked for the duration

of the project and access will only be allowed to the researchers above or to authorized research assistants. After the study has been completed, your name and any other identifying information will not be reported in any publications or presentations.

However, if you are dangerous to yourself or others, or if there is a suspicion of child or elder abuse, mental health professionals have a legal and ethical responsibility to report that information to the appropriate authorities with or without your consent.

**Will I be compensated for my participation?**

**Do I have the freedom to withdraw?** You have the right to refuse to participate at any time during this study. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions at any time.

**If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact:**

Meagan C. Alder, B.A., Principal Researcher  
703-538-8393, [malder@vt.edu](mailto:malder@vt.edu)

Sandra M. Stith, Ph.D., Principal Researcher  
703-538-8462, [sstith@vt.edu](mailto:ssith@vt.edu)

**Participant's Permission:**

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research project. I have read and understand the Informed Consent and the conditions of this project. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project by signing my name on the line below. I realize that although I choose to participate right now, I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without any penalty.

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix III

Demographics Questionnaire

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest Level of Education Completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you served a full-time LDS mission?: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been married? \_\_\_\_\_

How long were you engaged? \_\_\_\_\_

How long did you know each other before you got engaged? \_\_\_\_\_

How old were you when you got married? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix IV

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Circle One: Male Female

### Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test

Check the dot on the scale line which best describes the degree of happiness, everything considered, of your present marriage. The middle point "happy" represents the degree of happiness which most people get from marriage, and the scale gradually ranges on one side to those few who are very unhappy in marriage, and on the other, to those few who experience extreme joy or felicity in marriage.

•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Very UnHappy					Happy	Perfectly Happy
State the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your mate on the following items. Please check each column.						
	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occa- sionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
_____ Handling Family Finances						
_____ Matters of Recreation						
_____ Demonstrations of Affection						
_____ Friends						
_____ Sex relations						
_____ Conventionality (right, good, or proper conduct)						
_____ Philosophy of Life						
_____ Ways of dealing with in-laws						

**Check one:**

- When disagreements arise, they usually result in: (a) husband giving in \_\_\_\_\_ (b) wife giving in \_\_\_\_\_  
 ( c ) agreement by mutual give and take \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together? (a) All of them \_\_\_\_\_ (b) some of them \_\_\_\_\_  
 ( c ) very few of them (d) none of them \_\_\_\_\_
- In leisure time do you generally prefer: (a) to be "on the go" \_\_\_\_\_ (b) to stay at home \_\_\_\_\_ ?  
 Does your mate generally prefer: (a) to be "on the go" \_\_\_\_\_ (b) to stay at home \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- Do you ever wish you had not married? (a) Frequently \_\_\_\_\_ (b) occasionally \_\_\_\_\_ ( c ) rarely \_\_\_\_\_  
 (d) never \_\_\_\_\_
- If you had your life to live over again, do you think you would: (a) marry the same person \_\_\_\_\_ (b) marry a  
 different person \_\_\_\_\_ ( c ) not marry at all \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- Do you ever confide in your mate: (a) almost never \_\_\_\_\_ (b) rarely \_\_\_\_\_ ( c ) in most things \_\_\_\_\_ (d) in  
 everything \_\_\_\_\_ ?

## Appendix V

### Interview Questions

When you think back to when you first met what do you remember? What stands out? What were some of the highlights? What were some of the tensions?

Growing up, how did you view marriage? What did you think marriage would be like? What were your expectations of marriage? What influenced these expectations (e.g. parents, friends, church, the media)? In what ways has the LDS faith influenced your expectations of marriage?

Sometimes couples find the experience of being marriage different from what they expected. What were some of things that surprised you about being married?

Tell me about some of the highlights of being married. Tell me about some of the struggles you have faced together. The research on marriage shows that most couples struggle with some main issues including, decisions about finances, how to spend recreational time, demonstrating affection, how to balance friends and family, sexual relations, philosophy of life, and how to deal with issues surrounding in-laws.

In addition to what you have mentioned, are any of these areas been a struggle for you? In what ways has your experience of some of these common issues differed from the expectations you had before you were married?

What do you think helped prepare you for marriage? What resources were available to you as you were preparing to get married (either within the Church, or outside of the Church)? What did you find helpful about those resources? What did you find unhelpful? What do you wish was available to you but was not available?

Because you have been married (x) months, you have some hindsight about what it is like to be engaged, what advice would you give to engaged LDS couples? What do you wish you would have known then that you know now?

What advice would you give to church leaders who interview couples as they prepare to marry in the temple?

What advice would you give to non-LDS therapists who are working with LDS newlywed couples?